#2

Knock!

An Adventure Gaming Bric-a-brac

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

by **Skullfungus**

The Merry Mushmen

present:

An Adventure Gaming Bric-à-brac

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Knock!

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d6 MAGICAL TOMES

1. *The Strong Survive: Training Regimen for Fighting-Men.* Follow the instructions therein, training 12 hours a day for 30 days and get a permanent +1 to Strength, or 13 if your score was 12 or less. **2.** *Intelligent Magic: Avneccjak's Recipe to Inscribing Spell Scrolls.* Study for d12 hours and memorize the wizard's spell secretly stored in its pages. Storing a new spell requires the ability to cast it and 100 GP per spell level worth of inks. **3.** *Wisdom of the Ancients, As Gathered by Goergh the Godless.* The prayers contained in this codex give the reader 5% chance per level of divine intervention. It doesn't guarantee which deity will respond though. **4.** *Dexterous Dissidents & Devious Demagogues.* After learning the techniques in this tome, which takes a total of 100 hours, the reader can attempt to convince someone of anything once a day (save allowed). **5.** *The Fifth Constitution of the Dwarven Empire, Revised and Amended.* Studying all seven of these scrolls (2d6 hours each) dulls the mind. The reader gets a permanent +2 to saves against charms and illusions. **6.** *The Neo-Skaldic School of Charismatic Miracles, A Manifesto.* A character devoting their life to the principles revealed in this book becomes one of the legendary musical spellcasters known as bards.

by **Eric Nieudan**

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KNOCK! IS BACK!

It feels like we were putting together our first issue just a few weeks ago, yet as I'm typing this we are about to send number two to the printer's. I suppose that, next to the two years we spent assembling the first one, these past six months felt like the blink of an eye. Maybe this is because I am just a three-dimensional meatsack stuck in a linear time continuum?
Or maybe I just need sleep.

Let me first thank you, our backers and readers. Once again, we are humbled by the amount of interest and support you give us. It feels like our little niche of the hobby is growing every day. Merci beaucoup ! We are proud to be part of the great takeover of adventure games with you.

So we come to you with another thick brick of a bric-à-brac. Among other things, we have some hexcrawls and exploration related pieces. You could almost call this our Expert Set… But don't fear, we don't plan to stop at Immortals! We've only just scratched the surface. There are metric tons of great content out there — some that has stuck with us over the years, some we may have read but failed to put to use, and a lot we've never even seen. And of course, we will keep asking our favourite designers to come up with new stuff.

So find a comfortable seat aboard, this cruise is just starting.

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 **Arnold K.** Art: **Tim Molloy**

When writing his (excellent) adventure Lair of the Lamb*, Arnold compiled this (also excellent) advice for game masters and players in OSR games. We thought it needed to live in printed form within our pages. - Olivier

Advice for DMs

Meaningful Choices

Give the players as many meaningful choices as you can. This means a choice where:
• The negative outcome is known (at least approximately).
• The positive outcome is known (at least approximately).
 • The odds are known (at least approximately).
• The outcomes affect the game (they are not trivial).
• The player is also free to choose not to choose (they can walk away).
Shoot for at least four of the five. Similarly, try to avoid giving players meaningless choices. *"Do you go down identical tunnel A or identical tunnel B?"* And respect their decisions. If the players choose to avoid the ogre encounter, don't reskin the ogres as half-giants and put the encounter in front of them again. Conversely, if they find a way to easily kill the ogres in the first round, respect their ingenuity and allow the ogres to die (don't give the ogres more HP on the fly, or re-insert the encounter later). We want players to feel ownership of the results of their choices. *"I did this."* For the same reason, players roll as many of the dice as possible. (The DM rolls as few as possible.)

Information

Part of giving the players meaningful choices is giving them the information they need to make their decisions. They need to know what the risks and the rewards are for any decision (at least approximately).
Don't hide information behind rolls-just give it to your players. When in doubt, give them more information. It is more important to inform your players than it is to find justifications for how the characters would know things.

Impact

You must allow your players' actions to change, build, and destroy your world.
You are not a tour guide nor a train conductor. You are the manager of a very dangerous wildlife reserve. If your players choose to organize the leopards into a militia, tell them where they can find boots. If your players choose to burn down the forest, let your setting burn. Let their decisions matter. (There is nothing wrong with scripted events or fluff encounters; just be cognizant of what they are.)

Lethality

Players in breezy games will sometimes drink random potions just to see the result, because they know that nothing truly terrible will happen. This isn't that kind of game. Sometimes the strange bottle contains poison, and sometimes it kills you without a saving throw. Don't drink poison.
The sooner that players learn this expectation, the sooner they will thrive. Playing multiple characters helps players learn this lesson without a tutorial section. Do not go easy on them--if your kindness teaches them that their characters will not die even when they probably should, your kindness has become a cruelty, since it creates expectations that

will be shattered much later (and more painfully). The dungeon is not an unthinking meat grinder. The dungeon is a test, where wrong answers are penalized. Skilled players will be able to navigate the dungeon without any deaths, while fools will TPK in the first few rooms.

Combat is a little different, since the chaos of d20 rolls means that the weaker party sometimes triumphs — which is why risk-averse players should also be combat-averse players.

Fair Deaths

Players should die, but they should die as the result of bad choices.

A player that dies shouldn't feel angry at the injustice of it all. Ideally, they should sigh, shrug, smile, and say, *"Yeah, I kinda figured that might happen."*

Bad: *"You walk into the room. Rocks fall. Everyone roll a Dex save or take damage."*

Good: *"The sagging ceiling seems to be held up by a spear."*

A player that dies in the first room would have good reason to feel bitter. A player who dies in the second will only have themselves to blame. Fair deaths result from meaningful choices.

Keep Track

Every action in the dungeon has a cost. Searching the bone pile takes precious time. Torches will burn down. There is the chance that a random encounter might occur. Searching the bone pile is a bit like a shop where items are purchased with torchlight and blood.

You cannot have a meaningful campaign unless strict time measures are kept. The same applies to torches and rations.

Hit Points (or the number of peasants) is another resource. HP can be thought of as the character's risk budget. You spend HP on risky actions. Characters with more HP can do more things because they can afford to take more risks. A low-HP group is a miserable thing, crawling past the wonders of the underworld, unable to afford a taste.

Allow Failure

Your players will die: sometimes heroically, sometimes embarrassingly. Resist the temptation to save them. This is one of the hardest things for groups to adjust to (which is why it's so important to set expectations early).

Allow PCs to flee combat, but never fudge the dice. After all, they chose to stay and fight.

Your players will not find all the secret areas. Resist the temptation to drop hints. Finding secret areas is one of the things that separates good players from novices. Not that there's anything wrong with participation trophies, but there needs to be a trophy for excellence, too.

After the session, resist the temptation to tell players about all of the things that they missed. Those secrets must be purchased through cleverness and bravery, or not at all.

Allow Success

There must be rewards commensurate with the dangers. Allow players opportunities to feel powerful. They will sidestep your traps and one-shot your bosses; celebrate these moments with them.

They will want to make their characters cool. Let them go buy the swordcane that they want. The dungeon made the survivors rich–let them throw a party.

Allow Players to Pick their Genre

You cannot enforce morality on your players if they want to play as murderhobos. Similarly, a horror game is impossible if the players keep

making Monty Python jokes. You can nudge in a direction (after all, the DM is a player, too) but you cannot require. If you write up courtly intrigues but your players only want to kick down doors and kill things, either (a) have an open conversation about your goals for this game, or (b) give them the kind of game that they want.

Never Fudge the Dice Better yet, roll them out in the open.

If you are adjusting the difficulty on the fly, then it's no different than wrestling with your dad. A mock struggle, followed by a fictional triumph. You might as well not roll dice at all. It might still tell a good story, but how shallow must that victory feel, knowing that was never any other outcome. If a combat is too easy for the players, the monsters will flee or surrender (use the Morale rules). If the combat is too difficult, the players can always run away (use the Pursuit rules). Learning to flee a losing battle is something that many groups struggle with, which is why that is the first lesson taught in the Lair of the Lamb.

Advice for Players

Think in Terms of the Dungeon Level

A dungeon is a single, interlocking mechanism. Opening paths creates loops that you can retreat down. Monsters roam from room to room. Noticing a blank spot on the map allows you to infer the location of a secret room. Answers to a puzzle are found in a different room. Think globally, rather than locally.
Keep an eye on that map.

Learn Everything You Can

In the beginning, the dungeon is unknown, and peasants will die because they didn't recognize its perils. But eventually the dungeon will be maps and the mechanisms tamed. You will turn the traps against your enemies. At this point, the dungeon is no longer the wolf beyond the firelight, it is the tame dog at your side, another tool in your backpack. Yet, the only thing that you have gained is knowledge.
Information is a precious resource that can be leveraged to gain an advantage in nearly every situation. Your DM has been instructed to give you plenty of information in every situation, but you can always ask for more. Try to ask a question in every room. The more you know about the dungeon, the better you can use it to be clever.

Be Clever

Fuck your Int score. Always be as clever as you can. You are not wrestling with your dad; the dungeon will kill you if you let it.
The solutions are not on your character sheet. You do not have class abilities that you can rely on in every situation. Look at your inventory, look at the map, look at the other players.
"Can I fill the pit with enough bones so that Akina can climb out?"

"Can I use my Butchery skill to help stabilize Goren?"
"Can I use the brightness juice to blind her?"
None of these three questions are covered by the rules, yet they are all indisputably good ideas. A good DM will find a way to reward good ideas.

Similarly, many of the puzzles in the dungeon are open-ended. They have multiple solutions that the DM has imagined, and many other solutions that they haven't. Keep throwing ideas at them—eventually something will stick.

Treat the NPCs Like People

Think about what the monsters want. Every sentient thing has a set of wants and fears, even if it's as simple as "food" and "light".

Likewise, no NPC has an entirely rigid response. Enemies can become friends. Friends can turn against you. Not because it's scripted or because it makes dramatic sense, but because of how you treated them, and how well you fit into their wants and fears.

There are no social skills. You'll have to figure out what they want by asking them the old-fashioned way.

Avoid Combat

Unless you know you are going to win, of course. The best combats are the ones that you have already won before they start, whether through trap, trick, poison, or fire. Never rely on the dice—they will always betray you in the end. You may spend more time choosing and planning battles than actually fighting. This is good. And remember that running away is always an option. And if combat is unavoidable, at least try to fall back to a more defensible position.

Focus on the Dungeon

Right now, the real focus is the byzantine machine at the heart of the world: the dungeon itself. Quickly learn its moods and anatomies. Keep a mind on your goals: water first, escape last.

Look for Secrets

There are many secret areas and items to discover in a dungeon. Finding them will give you useful tools (and level-ups). All of them will improve your chance of survival.

You must balance your hunt for the exit with your search for resources. It is not easy to find a balance between these two things, and yet the best players will find a way.

by **Chris McDowall**

CHEAP TRICKS

There's a lot of good GM advice out there at the high end. How to ensure the players are engaged, that they have agency, that your world feels alive. Really lofty stuff. These are the cheap little tricks down in the lower decks, the little things that can grease the wheels of your game if things start to stall. **The salt of the RPG earth.** They aren't going to win any awards as groundbreaking RPG theory, but I find it useful to keep some of them on-hand when running a game. Cheap is not used here to mean unfair. Rather quick and easy things you can use without any forward planning.

CHEAP FEELGOOD TRICKS

Sometimes you just want to revel in the good times. Maybe you need a touch of relief after a tough situation or just want to reward the players for doing something really well.

• **Amplify their competence:** When they do something well in an area the character should be competent in, make sure you really show how well they do it.

• **Show how their planning paid off:** If they put a careful plan in place and don't leave any loose threads, you don't always have to throw a spanner in the works. Let them revel in their master-plan going off without a hitch. Of course there will be challenges that follow, but reward them for their planning and put them in a strong position to move forward.

• **Shine a spotlight on a past good deed:** If they did something good a while back,

show how it's paying off for them now. Think of strong relationships they've built and let them reap the benefits, or show how somebody they've previously helped is now flourishing.

• **Have the NPCs remember them:** Everybody wants to be remembered. Have NPCs ask about something from their last conversation. You might know the answer, but the NPC doesn't, and it gives the players an opportunity to relive a positive moment in brief.

CHEAP FAILURE TRICKS

On the other hand, sometimes the players willingly put themselves in a situation ripe for consequences. These aren't things you should throw in without warning, but negative outcomes that should feel like the natural consequence of the players taking a risk and failing.

• **Show the collateral damage:** Maybe they do what they wanted to do, but at the cost of hurting somebody else or damaging a valuable resource.

• **Start a ticking time-bomb:** Immediate consequences are fine, but I like to set up for worse consequences and start a ticking clock... literally.

• **Exploit the flaws in people and gear:** Put the blame for the failure squarely on a piece of gear or an allied NPC, pinning it down on a weakness that the players knew about.

• **Put somebody inconvenient in their way:** Think of the person that the players would least like to see in the present situation and put them right there. This could be an old adversary, an inconvenient witness, or a

friend that's now in the line of fire.

• **Cut a connection:** You might avoid consequences yourself, but one of your allies or resources is now completely cut off. It won't be permanent, but you're going to have to operate without them for a while.

• **Leave a loose thread hanging:** One of my favourites. Have things stay fine for now, but maybe you owe somebody bad a favour, or you left behind a trail that leads an enemy back to you. Do you risk leaving it, or waste valuable time going back to clean up after yourself?

CHEAP HUMOUR TRICKS

Not every game benefits from humour. For more traditional D&D I like the idea that the game acts as the straight-man to the players, who will inevitably find certain situations funny. But for Bastionland I have some dark and absurd humour baked into the setting, so sometimes it's fun to lean into that. Humour is one of the hardest areas to apply universal cheap tricks to, but these have worked for me in the past.

• **Establish a genre trope before subverting it:** Set up an expectation and then subvert it. This is a building-block of comedy. Maybe you're waiting to meet with a private detective in a smoky bar, soft jazz music is playing, the lights are dim and then... think of the least likely person to stroll to the table and announce themselves as a detective. Or maybe they've got the classic look, but their behaviour is utterly against type. Rather than hard-boiled they're more soft-poached.

• **Have somebody treat a situation with a totally inappropriate tone:** Somebody treating a trivial matter with the utmost gravitas, or somebody being jovially unconcerned about their house burning to the ground.

• **Indulge in a silly amount of detail:** In Bastion this is often done through bureaucracy. I don't want to sit my players down and actually make them complete paperwork, but I like to show a window into that side of the city. This is a tricky balance, and if you mess it up you might bore your players, but sincerely describing every detail of the meticulously prepared afternoon tea spread can also double as the perfect setup to having the ceiling collapse in and smash it to pieces.

• **Have the world drag the players down to its level:** Put them in a position where they need to impress somebody that they wouldn't normally give the time of day to. Your only hope of chasing a new lead on the lost treasure of the narrow-boat-graveyard is to attend a meeting of the Fellows for the Discussion of Tug, Barge, and Other Civic Waterway Vessels and put up with the personalities within.

CHEAP HORROR TRICKS

Humour and horror are a often more similar than they might seem. These are tricks are mainly focused on building tension and creeping players out rather than causing sudden shocks.

• **Keep things in shadow:** Use vague descriptions of your horrific elements and let their fear fill in the blanks. The bucket is filled with wet meat. The face beneath the robe looks like gnarled wood. Then before they can ask too many questions...

• **Cut off mid-sentence:** The wardrobe is covered in cobwebs. You slowly crack it open and you feel the air get cold around you. You smell rotten wood and see...

• **Don't give them time to look properly:** Somebody is approaching from the other direction. Are you going to stick around to examine this wardrobe or find somewhere to hide? Maybe you'll just throw the doors open?

• **Have an NPC massively overreact or underreact:** A widow that seems somewhat chirpy about the recent death of her husband in a mine collapse. The shopkeeper yelling till they're hoarse at the pigeon that won't stop perching on his sign, tears streaking down their face.

• **Place something unusual next to something very mundane:** The classic severed hand in the toy-box or untouched flute of sparkling wine in the middle of a pub levelled by an artillery barrage.

• **Equipment glitching out:** More of a sci-fi thing, but we have electric devices in Bastion now. From the basic flickering lamps to record-players stuck on a looped phrase or radio static that sounds like screaming.

• **Give them the opportunity to escape at a cost:** Put the doorway right there, the light beckoning them back to safety, but they can only take it if they leave something behind.

Knight errant GENERATOR

As much as some of the source material to our dungeonverses is ripe with those chainmail clad hoboes, they don't seem to show up a lot in our games. Let's remedy that.

I Roll one die of each d4-d12 and three d20s to generate a knight. The knight's HP is equal to all the even numbers you roll added together, and the attack bonus is the first even number you roll. Assume AC is equivalent to plate + shield. Have one or two knights pre-generated as random encounter rolls.

II Heraldry,

A - d4 Metal
1. Argent (silver) field, coloured charge*
2. Coloured field, argent charge*
3. Or (gold) field, coloured charge*
4. Coloured field, or charge*

B - d6 Colour
1. Azure (blue)
2. Ermine (white with black spots)
3. Gules (red)
4. Purpure (purple)
5. Sable (black)
6. Vert (green)

C - d8 Charge *
(roll on D, E, F, G, H, I)
1. Ordinary (D)
2. Two ordinaries
3. Beast (E)
4. Two beasts (E)
5. Bird (F)
6. Sea creature (G)
7. Plant (H)
8. Object (I)

D - d10 Ordinaries **
1. Chief
2. Bend
3. Fess
4. Pale
5. Chevron
6. Saltire
7. Cross
8. Cross botonny
9. Cross crosslet
10. Cross flory

E - d10 Beasts
1. Lion 2. Wolf 3. Bear 4. Boar 5. Horse 6. Bull 7. Hart 8. Hound 9. Hind 10. Fox

F - d10 Birds
1. Eagle 2. Martlet 3. Peacock 4. Pelican 5. Swan 6. Cock 7. Crane 8. Dove 9. Duck 10. Goose

G - d10 Sea Creatures
1. Pike 2. Perch 3. Salmon 4. Squid 5. Octopus 6. Dolphin 7. Cod 8. Eel 9. Whale 10. Seashell

H - d10 Plants
1. Fleur-de-lys 2. Rose 3. Trefoil 4. Thistle 5. Grapevine 6. Oak 7. Pine 8. Pine-cone 9. Aspen 10. Willow

I - d10 Objects
1. Sun 2. Crescent 3. Moon 4. Star 5. Key 6. Constellation 7. Ship 8. Tower 9. Crown 10. Clarion

* Charge: symbol

** Look up what these mean or just announce them to the players whose characters probably know what they are

This generator is from *The Yellow Book of Brechewold*, an upcoming setting for fantasy roleplaying games featuring a chaotic magic school and screwed up Arthuriana. For more, visit iceandruin.blogspot.com.

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III Characteristics

I - d12 Fighting Style

1. Uses shield to steamroll opponents
2. Only fights from horseback
3. Stoic and defensive with greatsword
4. Graceful duelist with sword and dagger
5. Uses long flail to toy with opponents
6. Berserker with two handaxes
7. Jumps around with crossbow
8. Bruiser with huge warhammer or battleaxe
9. Hidden weapons all over body
10. Claims sword has a mind of its own
11. Only fights in by-the-book jousts or duels
12. Invents ever more elaborate reasons not to fight

L - d20 Name: Sir...

1. Lionell
2. Bors
3. Kay
4. Tristram
5. Gareth
6. Bedivere
7. Bleoberis (woman in disguise, true name Elaine)
8. Lucan
9. Palomedes
10. Lamorak
11. Pelleas
12. Ector
13. Dagonet
14. Degore (woman in disguise, true name Laudine)
15. Brunor
16. Alymere
17. Uwaine
18. Aglovale (woman in disguise, true name Viviane)
19. Fergus
20. Morganore

J - d20 Quirk

1. Dour, joyless
2. Pompous, thinks everyone is a fan
3. Droll, always amused
4. Monomaniacal about quest
5. Jaded, disillusioned
6. Adheres to chivalry to the letter
7. Generous and rare champion of the oppressed
8. Insufferable warrior-poet
9. Quick to take offence
10. Boisterous bully
11. Ambitious schemer
12. Tight-lipped and suspicious, always considering worst-case scenarios
13. Sarcastic to hide insecurity
14. Mirthful, spontaneously bursts into song
15. Constantly complains, especially of ill-fitting armour or undergarments
16. Believes quest is beneath him
17. Easily bribed or otherwise distracted by mead
18. Is aghast at people less educated and well off than he
19. Plays trombone (which he invented) to ease the stress of battle
20. Hears whispers that others do not

K - d20 Quest

1. Save maiden from controlling father
2. Test self discipline and resistance to temptation
3. Seek holy relic
4. Slay a giant or other eater of Christians /good honest folk
5. Track a beast entangled with family history
6. Save lost, enchanted love
7. Win the heart of a cold fairy princess
8. Deliver dying wishes of king or queen to relative
9. Search for lost heir to a throne
10. Rescue noble baby stolen by fairies
11. Protect last child of a murdered royal family
12. Duel old rival
13. Capture and return villain to face trial
14. Seek advice from old hermit
15. Hide the child of a lady's affair from her wrathful husband
16. Recover the Mourning Veil (an artifact that charms all fairy species) for a noble.
17. Forge a sword with the iron hearts of trolls in the magic forge Belcher deep in Brechewold's dungeons
18. Kidnap a student from Brechewold to serve as vizier of a fairy court
19. Gain entry to the Smoking Mountain, the possible resting place of King Arthur
20. Find cure for a dying maiden

by **Phillip Loe**

playing dice with death

While the old-school gamer does not seek out Death, they will inevitably make her acquaintance. Death is what gives the game spice and meaning. Without the possibility of death, there are no stakes—and without stakes, there is no game. After the players have dealt with death and its messy consequences, the referee must decide: at what level does the player's next character start? Why not live dangerously and make a little wager with the player? Here is a little mini-game you can offer players after their characters have died for a chance of starting at a higher level.

The rules

After you have finished rolling stats and chosen your character class, roll 2d6 and mark the total. Keep rolling and marking totals until you either choose to stop or you roll the same total twice. If you choose to stop, add up all your totals and you start the game with the sum of all the totals x200 experience points. (In practice, this produces characters of level 4-ish in B/X. Increase or decrease the modifier if you want higher- or lower-level starting characters). If you rolled the same total twice, you start at level 1, but you gain a boon as compensation. Check the table for your class under the last total you rolled (the one that you rolled twice). Elves can choose the fighter table or the magic-user table.

Let's use this system to make a new character. I'm going to reenter the game with a new fighter. My first roll is a 4. I can do better so I keep rolling and get an 8. Not daunted, I keep rolling and get an 11 and then a 10. If I stopped here, my gross total is 33, so I would start the game with 6,600 points. A level 3 fighter—not bad at all. My hubris gets the better of me though, and I roll again hoping to push myself to level 4. Blue skies be cursed, I roll a 4! Since I've already rolled a 4, I lose all my points and I start at level 1. I do get a boon, though. Since my last roll was a 4, I look up the fourth entry on the Fighter table below. I gain +1 to my Strength and Constitution, a decent compensation.

Fighter or Dwarf

2 - Your eyes are like an owl's. You can see the smallest movement, even in the dark.

3 - When you were a child, a fairy taught you how to cast a random 1st level magic-user spell once per day.

4 - Gain +1 Strength and Constitution.

5 - Through sheer force of will, you can bear extraordinary amounts of pain. At any time, you can choose to permanently reduce your Constitution by 1 to gain 1d12 HP.

6 - You have a poet's heart. In town, you can spend 150 sp on writing supplies (mostly alcohol) and spend a week writing a poem to gain 300 xp or a retainer at +1 morale (a fan of your work).

7 - Choose one of the following vows:
• Never to eat of the flesh of animals
• Never to cut your hair
• Spend one hour each day immediately after dawn in quiet meditation
• Chastity, poverty, and abstinence from alcohol
As long as you maintain your vow, gain +1 to attack and damage against any evil creature. You also gain ½ attack per round (attack an extra time every other round). You permanently lose these boons if your vows are broken for any reason.

8 - You simply don't believe in ghosts, magic, or other such childish nonsense. You gain a +2 to save against any magical effect and deal damage as normal to any creature that is normally only damaged by magic items. You cannot use magical items.

9 - You sometimes fly into an uncontrollable rage. The first time you are damaged in combat, make a Wisdom check. If you fail, gain +2 to your to-hit rolls and your AC increases by one, but you must make an attack roll for the next d10 rounds—even attacking allies if they are the only targets available!

10 - While others spent their youths carousing, you studied the blade. If you spend an hour carefully examining a weapon you can identify when it was made, any historically significant owners the sword had, and any magical effects of the weapon as per the Identify spell.

11 - One of your ancestors was a demon. When your character inevitably dies, you instead become a terrible flame demon for 2d10 rounds before being dragged to hell [HD 8, HP 40, AC 5, THAC0 15, Att#3, Terrible flaming sword d12]

12 - You never sleep.

thief, halfling or gnome

2 - You were once a great thief until you lost your shadow in a game of dice. If you can locate and regain your shadow, gain 10,000 xp.

3 - You have befriended a cat that visits you from time to time. Feed them, and they will utter one sentence worth of information relevant to your quest.

4 - After years without shoes, your feet are calloused and strong. The first 50 pounds you carry don't count towards encumbrance. You don't need to wear shoes.

5 - You've learned to cook a great mushroom stew. If you are in a forest, you may spend two hours in the search for mushrooms and wild ramps. Make a Wisdom check. On a success, you locate the mushrooms. The stew is so good that it restores 1d8 HP, but only when eaten hot.

6 - Gain +1 Charisma and Dexterity

7 - Your middle toe is exceptionally long. Those in the know recognize this as «thief's toe." Gain a +3 to reaction rolls with criminal types of folk.

8 - You have the option of taking a magpie as a retainer using the normal follower rules. The magpie requires payment in shiny things. The shiny things must be stolen. The magpie understands you and obeys orders.

9 - Gain a trusty green cloak with many pockets. There's a 2 in 6 chance of finding any small, mundane object within one of its pockets. It takes one round to search your pockets.

10 - Gain a very loyal dog.

11 - Gain a lucky pawn chess piece. You will never lose a game of chess as long as you use this chess piece as one of your pawns. The pawn is not actually magical and does not have this effect if used by any other person.

12 - Walls just make sense to you. If you stare at a wood, plaster, or stone wall up to 10 feet thick for 1d6 uninterrupted hours, you can pass through it.

Magic user or Elf

2 - Gain a familiar cat (gain an extra 1st-level spell slot) or raven (the raven can fly to any known location and deliver a message one sentence long in an eerie croaking voice. You can see through the raven's eyes). If your familiar dies, you die.

3 - Roll a second character. Every night, roll a save vs. magic. On a failure, you wake up as this second character. Your two characters have no memory of each other. The two characters share experience points and equipment.

4 - You keep all your memories in marbles that you store in a small pouch on your waist. If anyone swallows any of these marbles, they remember that memory as if it was their own.

5 - You can speak to goats. You have cloven feet and horns. (You can headbutt with your horns for 1d6 damage.)

6 - Your blood is thick and black. If anyone drinks it they gain 1d8 HP, but you lose 1d4 HP.

7 - Gain a third eye on your forehead. Once per day, you can open the eye to automatically save against an illusion, see in the dark for one turn, or determine if an NPC is lying or telling the truth.

8 - You always float about a half inch above the ground..

9 - You have an uncanny ability to find rare books. You can always tell in which direction to find the most expensive book in a 6-mile radius.

10 - You can't die... or perhaps you have just forgotten how. You are so old that you've forgotten most of your once-great magic. You cannot die unless you reach -20 HP (you still fall unconscious at 0 HP). Your Strength is reduced to 3.

11 - Instead of a spellbook, you write your spells on your skin in elaborate tattoos. Gain an extra spell at level one and every time you level up.

12 - You are three inches tall and were born from a flower. Your AC is improved by two, but you only gain 1 HP per level and cannot use weapons.

Cleric, paladin or druid

2 - Your god smiles on you. If you pass a saving throw, all other characters who had to make the same saving throw automatically succeed. If you roll a 1 when attempting a saving throw, you can re-roll it.

3 - You always glow with holy light as long as you have at least one spell slot remaining.

4 - If you witness anyone being wounded, you can choose to take the damage yourself instead, as long as the person being wounded worships the same god as yourself.

5 - You can speak to birds.

6 - You are a dissident whose beliefs are deemed heretical by the majority of your religion. You know one random 2nd-level magic-user spell that you can cast once per day.

7 - Gain +1 to Wisdom and Constitution.

8 - You believe that piousness comes from poverty. +1 to your Wisdom score if you are not carrying any money or treasure. Gain a further +2 to your Wisdom score if you have fasted for over a week (possibly incurring penalties).

9 - Every now and then, Death comes to you and asks to play a game of chess. Death will only come to you at night when you are alone in a room with a mirror. Make an Intelligence check. On a success, you can ask Death three questions, restore a person to life, or cure any disease. On a failure, your character dies. If you have the time and inclination, you could choose to play an actual game of chess against the referee instead of rolling.

10 - You can turn evil humans as you would undead if you have witnessed them performing an evil act.

11 - You find falsehood abhorrent. You can never lie. Anyone within 10' of you must make a save vs. magic to lie.

12 - Although you are only a child, your god seems to have chosen you for some special purpose. You can cast an extra first level cleric spell per day. Your Strength and Constitution are reduced to a maximum of 8. If you can determine and fulfil the destiny set for you by your god, gain 10,000 xp.

by **Anne Hunter** Art: **Erik Svetoft**

There are three ways I think about information in RPGs.
It can be landmark, or hidden, or it can be secret.

Hidden, Secret

Landmark information is automatic and free. Players hear landmark information the first time without asking. If they ask, they can be reminded of it freely. Learning landmark information doesn't take up any fictional time and doesn't pose any risks.

In a hexcrawl, the keyed encounter is a landmark, but so is the type of terrain. In a dungeon, the main content of the room is free information, but also the shape of the room and its dimensions. Players don't have to ask to be told these things. Being told these things creates a context where players can ask meaningful questions. It starts the new turn, sets the stage where the next act will take place. If your game includes read-aloud text, that's landmark information.

An ordinary exit door is an example of a landmark. The judge tells the players the door is there during the initial description of the room. Later, if a player asks, the judge can describe the door in detail again as though the character is glancing across the room or recalling it from memory.
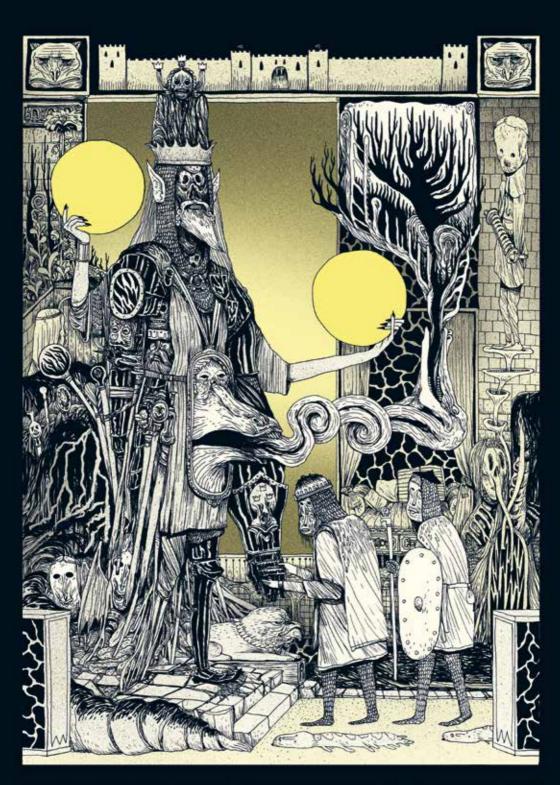
Hidden information isn't automatic, players have to ask to learn it. It isn't free, there's some fictional cost to be paid to learn it. However, unlike secret information there's no chance of failure. If a player asks the question and pays the cost they will learn the hidden information.

Landmark information is free because the characters can learn it from a distance by looking at the surface of a thing. Hidden information is more expensive because it's more intimate. To learn it, a PC must be close enough to touch the thing, interact with it directly. Landmark information is received passively. Hidden information is obtained actively.

There are two costs to learn hidden information. The first cost is time. A turn passes, a clock moves one tick, wandering monsters are checked for, the encounter dice is rolled.

The second cost is risk. What's hidden might not be beneficial. It might be a hazard, an ambush, a trap. Discovering what's hidden doesn't always mean being harmed, but it does always mean making yourself vulnerable to harm. There's no way to learn what's hidden without taking risks..

The contents of every treasure chest, every cabinet, every closet and every safe is hidden information. Everything under or behind or inside is hidden. Seeking out hidden information is one of the goals of this game. Our characters don't simply glance at the most obvious features of each room before moving on to the next. They explore.

A door concealed behind a curtain is an example of something hidden. The curtains themselves are a landmark, but the judge only announces their presence and not what's behind. To find the door, a player must ask what's behind the curtains, must spend the time and place their character at risk to push them aside.

I think the existence of a secret should be hidden information. I think players should be able to prove there is a secret by asking a question and taking a risk. Actually learning the secret should require rolling the dice, but discovering that there is a secret there to be learned should not be a secret unto itself.

One thing that's useful about this hierarchy is that it helps me think about how players should learn information. You discover hidden information by examining landmarks. You learn secrets by examining hidden information.

There is one comfort for players whose judges make the existence of a secret also a secret. A player can always suspect the existence of secret information, even if their character can't prove it. This is what some judges mean when they talk about «player skill».

> «...One thing that's useful about this **hierarchy** is that it helps me think about how players should learn information. You discover hidden information by examining landmarks. You learn secrets by examining hidden information...»

Secret information has no guarantees at all. Players have to ask for secret information, and there's a chance the judge will continue to withhold it anyway. To learn secret information, players must roll the dice and win. That extra risk, not just of injury but of failure, makes secret information more costly than hidden.

Judges disagree about whether players can even learn the existence of secret information. Some think proving the existence of a secret and revealing the information should be accomplished as a single step - if you can't reveal the information, then you can't know if there even is a secret there to be revealed. Others think proving there's a secret and learning what the secret is are two separate steps, requiring two different skills.

An example of a secret is a bookshelf that rotates to reveal a doorway when a particular combination of books are tilted at specific angles. The bookshelf is a landmark. The existence of the device is hidden, but any character who inspects it closely will notice there's no gap between the bookshelf and the wall, that the floor is scratched and scuffed in a half-circle in front of it. How to open the door, however, is a secret. It's not enough to spend time trying to activate it. There's a chance the characters will try but still fail.

There are two benefits to thinking about information this way. Thinking about the difference between landmarks and hidden information helps write better descriptions. Thinking about the difference between hidden information and secrets helps decide how to resolve player actions.

The difference between landmark and hidden information isn't just the difference between what you say when

players first enter a room and what they have to ask you to find out. It's also the difference between information that's free and information that comes at a cost.

You don't have to give a detailed description of everything the characters can see when they first enter a room. In fact, you probably shouldn't. It's better if your initial description is short and evocative, if it sets the mood and lists the items available to investigate, and then gets out of the way. That doesn't mean all the other information is hidden. For many items on that list, your additional description should be free and as detailed as your players would like. But some things might be hidden, and you should know which information is free and which takes time and risk to learn.

There are times when information shouldn't be free. When it's shadowy and dark, perhaps all that characters see are the shape and size of objects. Perhaps then more information should be hidden and risky. Think of those moments in children's books when you realize the «intruder» is just a hat atop a coat-rack, or the «monster» is just a pile of clothes in a chair. Those moments hardly ever happen in games, but they might add a certain feeling of wonder and mystery to the experience of exploring in the dark. Having some information require extra effort makes that information stand out. Its very difficulty highlights it, makes it dear.

Not everything that isn't a landmark should be a secret. Some things can simply be hidden. Having to explicitly ask to look closer is already a barrier to discovery.

The difference between hidden and secret information is that hidden information only requires getting close and spending time on the task. Secret information requires something more, something extra. Ideally, it requires applying a skill that can't - or can't easily - be modelled by player description. In my example of a secret door earlier, if it only took one tilted book to rotate the bookshelf instead of a combination the door would only be hidden, not secret. All that takes is time, and there's no chance of failure. But to guess a combination takes too much time, and there's plenty of opportunity to guess wrong. So roll the dice instead.

If all a search requires is time, and the characters have enough time, then what they're searching for is simply hidden, and they can find it without needing to roll the dice. Checking all the burial niches in a funerary crypt, digging up a grave, breaking down a bricked-over doorway - these all take time, and sometimes make noise, but they require no special skill, pose no risk of making a mistake.

Some information becomes secret because there's not enough time to look for it. A methodical all-day search might be certain to uncover your prize - but to find it in a single exploration turn requires luck or insight or skill. It requires rolling the dice. For there to be not enough time, there has to be some kind of time pressure, some reason the characters can't spend all day. Remember, for the players, the search takes the same amount of real world time whether the characters spend 10 minutes or 10 hours of game time.

There can also be not enough time because of the skill required to make the search. Not all problems have easy solutions. Trying to solve them by trial-and-error might require, not hours, but years, centuries. Knowing how to solve a problem like that quickly is a skill. It's special knowledge that not everyone possesses. And even if a character has the right skill, there's still a chance that they'll fail. So roll the dice. Roll the dice, because the alternative is to make the players try to act out their characters' searches. Roll the dice, because while the characters might have all day, the players don't, and their time, your time, is worth more than trying to imagine and explain the correct search procedure.

by **Gavin Norman** - Art: **Michael Sheppard**

Carousing for Spellbook Nerds

This article presents some alternative carousing rules in the vein of Jeff Rients' famed "Party like it's 999" rules for characters who prefer libraries and laboratories to taverns and gambling dens.

Here are the rules:

When in their home base, an arcane spell caster may choose to spend a night burning the midnight oil — poring over their collection of forbidden tomes, trying out that experimental magic circle they invented a while back, tinkering with alchemical admixtures, and so on.

The character may spend as many gold pieces as they like; they gain an equal number of experience points.

There is also a chance that something unexpected occurs. **The default chance is 50%**, but the DM may adjust this as desired or as circumstances suggest. If the chance comes up, the DM should roll 1d30 and consult the **Magical Research Results table**. The player should not be directly informed of the results — they should only discover what's happened through play.

Basic / Advanced spell learning: A number of table results indicate that the character learns the formula for a new spell. If using Advanced-style spell learning rules, this spell may be added to the character's spell book immediately (subject to the normal chance for learning a new spell).

If using Basic-style spell learning rules, the character may choose to add this spell to their spell book next time they gain an experience level and are able to learn a new spell of this level.

Magical Research Results - d30

1 You discover the formula for a new spell of the highest level you can cast. To finish the research you must sacrifice just one thing (1d4): 1. a human, 2. a finger, 3. an eye, 4. a magic item.

2 A magical being starts following you around (1d6): 1. an imp, 2. a faerie, 3. a tiny elemental, 4. something invisible, 5. an automaton, 6. a shadow. You have no idea what it wants.

3 Disaster! You manage to spill acid / wine / herbal brew on one of your spell books. A randomly chosen spell is rendered unreadable. (It may be pieced back together at a cost of 500gp and 1 week per level of the spell.)

4 You discover the formula for a randomly selected 1st- or 2nd-level spell. However the formula is actually defective and when cast manifests a completely different result (random each time).

5 All spells you cast in the next session have a 10% chance of backfiring.

6 You gain the ability to see magical energies for the duration of the next session.

7 You accidentally cast a randomly chosen spell you know on yourself.

8 You come across some pages in a musty tome which describe (1d6): 1. the location of a magical treasure, 2. the location of a magical portal, 3. the secret command words for a magic item, 4. the formula for a bizarre and rare spell, 5. a method of gaining power over a certain type of supernatural being, 6. a journey to another world.

9 A magical experiment backfires and you lose part of your sensory abilities for the next session (1d6): 1. sight, 2. hearing, 3. taste and smell, 4. pain, 5. touch, 6. temperature.

10 You gain a strange magical empathy for the next session (1d6): 1. detect undead, 2. detect lies, 3. know direction, 4. read emotions, 5. detect danger, 6. overwhelming sensitivity to negative emotions.

11 You make contact with (1d6): 1. a skilled alchemist, 2. a sage, 3. a secret magical organisation, 4. someone who wants to be your apprentice, 5. a thief who claims to know the location of a valuable magical tome or item, 6. a spy within a magical guild or society.

12 Your dreams are particularly vivid (1d6): 1. you begin to question whether they are more real than your waking life, 2. you are haunted by a figment which emerges from your dreams, 3. you experience a prophetic dream, 4. your dreams are projected to others around you, 5. you dream that you die, 6. you dream of a great treasure.

13 While experimenting with summoning magic you accidentally call forth (1d6): 1. a devil, 2. a demon, 3. a hag, 4. a xorn, 5. an elemental, 6. a shadow.

14 An astrological alignment allows you to (1d6): 1. create a temporary magic weapon (+1, lasts one session), 2. create a permanent minor magical household item, 3. scry on someone powerful, 4. increase your INT, WIS or CHA by 1d4 for the next session, 5. memorize one extra spell of the highest level you can cast next session, 6. memorize a random spell of one level above the maximum level you can cast.

15 You enter into a dialogue with an extra-dimensional entity of unknown origin (1d6): 1. make a WIS check or lose 1 WIS, 2. you learn a secret, 3. you learn a secret which turns out to be a lie, 4. you are haunted by the whisperings of the entity (save vs spells at the end of every session to end), 5. you become obsessed with contacting the entity again, 6. your sanity is somewhat unhinged (save vs spells or gain a random mental disorder).

16 Your research is being spied on! (1d4) 1. you catch the spy, 2. you notice the spy, who flees, 3. you have a sinister feeling of being watched, 4. you are told that someone suspicious was lurking.

17 You become unusually attractive to (1d6): 1. metal (-2 penalty to AC against most weapons), 2. insects, 3. birds, 4. spirits, 5. members of the opposite sex, 6. bad weather.

18 For the next 2d6 days, people (1d6): 1. start to ignore you, 2. whisper about you, 3. are always staring at you, 4. want to be your friend, 5. avoid you, 6. are overcome with melancholy in your presence.

19 Unbeknownst to you, a magical curse is accidentally imbued on one of your possessions (randomly chosen) (1d6): 1. the item attracts missile attacks (-1 penalty to AC), 2. the item cannot leave your person, 3. the item becomes invisible, 4. the item attracts thieves, 5. the item hides itself, especially when you need it, 6. the item keeps appearing in your companions' backpacks.

20 You develop a single dose of a potion. The only trouble is you have no idea what it does! (Its effect is determined randomly.)

21 Your research has stepped unknowingly on someone else's toes. You receive a warning or veiled threat from (1d6): 1. a rival magic-user, 2. a noble, 3. a priest, 4. a sinister cabal, 5. a trade guild, 6. a supernatural being (fey, demon, devil, dragon, etc.).

22 A magical experiment affects your appearance for 1d4 sessions (1d6): 1. your eyes turn black, 2. your skin changes colour, 3. your hair turns white or silver, 4. your hair floats, 5. you become semi-transparent, 6. your shadow disappears.

23 An intruder enters your home / laboratory (1d6): 1. everything is disturbed – someone was looking for something (nothing stolen), 2. a valuable item is stolen, 3. a page from one of your spell books is gone (lose a random spell), 4. a cryptic note is left behind, 5. nothing is missing, but you notice a subtle rearrangement of items which alerts your suspicion, 6. a map or sigil is drawn somewhere conspicuous.

24 You manage to memorize a randomly selected spell of the level above your normal maximum. Unfortunately you can't remember how you did it.

25 A magical entity grants you protection, apparently without expectations. Next session you (1d6): 1. gain 1d8 hit points, 2. gain a +1d6 AC bonus, 3. gain a +2 bonus to saving throws, 4. automatically make one save, 5. automatically avoid one successful attack, 6. avoid detection once.

26 During the next session, every spell you cast has a 25% chance of remaining in your memory, able to be cast again.

27 While you are memorizing spells, something weird happens. A randomly chosen spell is altered (1d4): 1. the spell takes on a strange sentience and can cast itself when it sees fit, 2. the spell doubles in potency (duration, damage, range, etc. as appropriate), 3. the spell is entangled with another – casting either will trigger both, 4. the spell is stuck – make an INT check when casting or it remains in your mind, uncast.

28 You gain the ability, for the next 1d4 sessions, to sense the magical patterns in other magic-users' minds – you can tell what spells they have memorized.

29 A dimensional morphic effect envelops you (1d8): 1. your appearance changes permanently, 2. you become 1d10 years older or younger, 3. two of your ability scores are swapped permanently, 4. viewed from the right angle you take on a disturbing aspect, 5. you can go ethereal for the next session, 6. you are temporarily polymorphed into a randomly chosen creature (lasts one session), 7. you change sex for 1d100 days, 8. you become slightly larger or smaller.

30 You are struck with a greed for magic. During the next session (1d4): 1. you can detect magic items within 30', 2. you cannot bear to see others using magic items and will try to take them for yourself, 3. you try to steal spells off any magic-user you come across, 4. you suspect everyone around you of trying to steal your magical items or your spell book.

by **Stefan Mijucic**

Mandaloo's magic longstix

The great enchanter Mandaloo travels from far away lands, bringing many peculiar items with him.
Some are for sale and some are obtained upon successful quest completion. His collection of goods is astonishingly diverse, ranging from fire serum (a liquid that ignites anything it touches) to witty roses, the never-dying flower that changes its scent depending on its owner. Among the most peculiar is an item known as Mandaloo's Magic Longstix.

When found, the Magic Longstix is 1d4 feet long. Though it is shaped like a typical wooden stick, it is weightless since it is fashioned from a unique magical material. The Magic Longstix deals 1d4 damage in melee and each time a humanoid creature is slain by it, the artifact grows 1d4 feet in length. It glows brightly with a color of its owner's choice and as such can be seen from long distances. It can only harm flesh, and passes through any kind of walls and materials without tearing and damaging them. However the artifact itself is hungry for death: for each day that passes without the Longstix killing any humanoid it shrinks by **1d4 feet. After shrinking to less than 1 feet, it disappears forever.**

The origin of the Magic Longstix is unknown, and it may have some side-effects.

Roll **2d6**:

2-3: After serving a half-century sentence in the Philosopher's Jail, Mandaloo found the Magic Longstix among the possessions he was given back upon release. Starved for so long in a stasis box, the Magic Longstix needs to kill two humanoids a day in order to sustain its size.

4-5: After slaying a couple of zombies, Mandaloo found a glowing item behind one of the gravestones, which turned out to be Magic Longstix. The wielder can sense undead creatures within 30 feet. When the Magic Longstix senses an undead creature, it shivers and shakes in fear.

6-7: Mandaloo found the artifact stuck in the rotting body of a druid who had been killed in her grove. The Magic Longstix grows an additional 2 feet each time it slays a humanoid, but does 1d3 damage instead of 1d4.

8-9: After spending the night fishing for artifacts on the coast of the Enchanted Sea, Mandaloo woke up late in the morning to find the Magic Longstix washed on the beach. It is said that an infamous pirate lost the weapon and wants it back before it disappears.

10-11: After a great battle in the lava desert, Mandaloo stumbled upon a dead body holding theMagic Longstix. This cost Mandaloo his hand. Because of this, the bearer of the Magic Longstix takes 1d4 - 1 burning damage each day no humanoid is slain, but adds an additional 1d4 to the weapon's damage.

12: After an epic adventures in the sky-mines of Kalucia, one of the sky-miners gave Mandaloo the Magic Longstix as a display of gratitude. Its owner can levitate at will up to a height equal to the weapon's current length.

by **James Holloway**

Mansions of the Dead: historical inspiration for fantasy...

TOMBS

A lot of dungeons were originally tombs. It makes sense: the buzz surrounding the discovery of KV-62, the tomb of Tutankhamun, influenced a lot of the interwar pulp fiction that D&D drew on. Even before that, dangerous tombs were a literary staple, from Icelandic sagas to Gothic romances. Real-life tombs are seldom (although not never) as elaborate as their fantasy counterparts, but there's still a lot of good inspiration from them to use in your game tombs. Here are a few examples.

James was kind enough to give us a polyhedral friendly number of examples. I had to number them in case you want to add some randomness to your tomb building. -Eric

1. Secondary burials

A lot of prehistoric burial mounds have later burials around or even in them. People seem to have understood these sites as places of power or holiness. The ancient tomb of a long-lost civilisation could have much later graves around it or inserted into it. In some cases, being buried in such a place could be an honour, but other cultures saw these as sinister, liminal spots, suitable for the burial of executed criminals or other undesirables.
• The malefic influence of whatever is buried in the tomb is awakening the secondary burials as undead.
• The burials are a cover for offerings to the thing buried in the tomb – or have inadvertently functioned in this way.
• Generations of grave digging have weakened the tomb's upper structures, creating additional entrances.

2. Exotic imports

The tomb of the dwarven king should be full of dwarven artefacts, sure, but not only. Whether acquired by trade or given as diplomatic gifts, foreign items could be signs of high status. The Sutton Hoo burial from eastern England contains artefacts from Frankia and the Mediterranean; Tutankhamun's meteoric iron dagger was probably an import. Want to put a space elf dimensional blade in the tomb of a gnomish high priest? Go for it.

3. Tomb police

Cultures that bury treasure with their dead have to deal with treasure-hunters. Egypt in the 16th century BC had a police force dedicated to protecting necropolises (and other royal property, too, but that's boring). They were originally a nomadic tribe who provided these services as part of their deal with Egypt, but as they grew in power and prestige more and more Egyptians served as officers and leaders.

• As crooked as the robbers they hunt, the tomb police enrich themselves with the spoils of the tombs and blame it on thieves.
• The last paladins of a dwindling order live as hermits among the tombs with only the dead and their ancient blades for company.
• Commoners sacrificed during the funeral serve their lord in death as tomb police - with official approval.

4. Tomb robbers

If you bury your dead with gold, silver, or magic weapons, you can't be surprised when you get tomb robbers. In some places, tomb robbers may simply be locals reclaiming the rich gifts that etiquette demands they leave with their dead but which they can't really afford to part with. In more "civilised" societies, tomb robbers can form organised gangs. Such organisations might not be thrilled with the idea of a party of newcomers deciding to jump their claim.

• Tomb robbing is a religious duty, enjoined on those devotees of the thief god who have mastered stealing from the living.
• Tomb robbing in this necropolis is a new phenomenon. Although the locals hold the tombs in superstitious awe, natural disaster or economic stress has forced them to this extremity.
• Though they may be thieves and cut-throats, the tomb robbers are not a bad lot; they are very worried about a party of their comrades who have not returned from its expedition.

5. The inexplicable

I spent years studying a group of burials from early medieval England (and Scotland, France and Denmark) in which bodies were laid on a layer of charcoal. Do I have some ideas about what it all meant? Absolutely. Could I prove any of them conclusively? Probably not. Adding a seemingly incongruous or meaningless element is a great way to remind players that they're dealing with the product of a culture very removed from their own, one that they can never fully understand.

• Most of the sarcophagi contain actual skeletons, but every now and again one contains an artificial stone skeleton, each individual bone carefully carved and polished.
• At the centre of the complex is what was once evidently a residential space, with luxurious quarters surrounding a courtyard garden. Who lived here among the dead, and what happened to them in the end?
• Beautiful effigies adorn the lids of the caskets. On one, though, the effigy is in the form of a demon with glaring eyes and wicked tusks. There does not seem to be anything unusual about the skeleton within.

6. Partial burial

In cultures that practice excarnation (the removal of flesh by decomposition, scavenging or human action), bodies are often reburied as bundles of bones rather than articulated skeletons. In the middle ages it wasn't uncommon for the wealthy to have their hearts or intestines buried in separate churches from the rest of their bodies.

• Reanimation goes disastrously wrong; undead hearts and guts flop and slither across the floor.
• A curse cannot be broken unless a heart buried in one tomb is reunited with the body in another.
• A vow to undertake a pilgrimage in life can be satisfied in death by taking their heart to the pilgrimage destination, thus averting the gods' anger.

by **Cacklecharm** Art: **Gustave Doré**

[12^ Sorcerer-Corpse
Hazards

You've killed the sorcerer. The evil witch lies dead at your feet. Now you're going to loot the corpse, except something still manages to kill you. It could be a trap or a final posthumous curse laid by the wizard in spite, or it could just be a natural result of the sorcerer's vile meddling with their own body. Roll on the table for what hazard awaits within the wizard's body, which usually only activates if they are looted or if one attempts to burn them (cremating wizards is common practice so they can't come back from the dead). Apprentice wizards only have a 1-in-6 chance of having a booby-trapped body, regular wizards always have one, archmages and sorcerer lords may have two or more.

[1^ The sorcerer's mouth suddenly spews a cloud of black-green smoke. The smoke deals 2d6 damage per round you breathe it in, with no save if you were the one to touch the corpse. Every 1 on the dice deals 1 damage and also permanently reduces your maximum hit points by 1. The smoke clears in one round if outside and one exploration turn in an enclosed space.

The mouth and throat of the sorcerer is stained bright green all the way down to the lungs. Both lungs are bloated and leathery, with extra gas sacs growing like pustules on the sides. This sorcerer was probably trying to acclimate themselves to an arcane atmosphere.

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[2^ A tinny screeching is coming from the sorcerer's ears. Years worth of conversations come billowing out on top of each other, building the volume to a crescendo. Every round, roll a wandering encounter check. Those with sensitive ears, like elves, must cover their ears with their hands and can't do anything else. Every round, magic items in the party's possession have a 1-in-6 chance to fire off as a magic word or phrase is replayed.

The noise ends after one exploration turn for a normally aged (old) wizard, but may last for an hour or more for a truly ancient spellcaster. A character can muffle the noise by stuffing the earholes shut or covering the dead corpse's head with pillows and blankets.

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[3^ One of the sorcerer's hands shoots up and tries to grab and claw at the looter. It's not a zombie, the limb if just trashing wildly. If it manages to scratch the target (attack roll at +2), the hand becomes inanimate again. The character's hand however will try to scratch arcane symbols into nearby objects when they sleep. When they are awake the hand compulsively touches, opens, and clutches spell books or arcane artifacts (saving throw to resist). The hand is trying to spread knowledge of magic through esoteric diagrams you don't want to understand.

If the sorcerer's hand is cut off while it is flailing, it turns into a 1 HD monster: a mass of extradimensional tentacles puppeteering the wizard's hand. If the sorcerer's hand is severed after it has already scratched somebody, the tentacles are dead and they slide out like a snail boiled in its shell.

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[4^ The sorcerer's body lies still, until the moment something burning or red hot touches it. It poofs into

white powder which ignites and explodes after one round as a 4d6 damage fireball. Those who have survived this booby trap attest to the fact that the wizard's body smells like bread, as the white powder is in fact very fine flour.

It is possible to grind the wizard into flour and bake it into bread. Eating this bread makes any normal human sick, but gives wizards an easy feeling of nostalgia and comfort. One can make 30 wizard rations from a bread-wizard corpse.

[5^ The wizard's wide-open eyes retain a shimmering quality after death, as though staring right at their murderers. Touch one of the eyeballs, cover the face with a cloth, or try to close the eyelids, and the eyeballs explode and squirt metal-burning acid causing 4d4 acid damage on a failed save. The acid burns through anything except stone and has a 1-in-6 chance to ruin armor .

Acid in the eyes is a very common enhancement sorcerers make to themselves. Injection of the acid causes early blindness, cataracts, and hallucinations, as well as the "sunken in" look that the eyes of many magic users share. The acid has the beneficial property of "melting" any malignant text or trapped runes: the image is burned away within the wizard's eye before it reaches their brain. This is required surgery for any sorcerer who wishes to read books by paranoid and possessive magicians.

[6^ As you examine the corpse, you see several lumps under the skin around the wizard's body, hinting at internal tumors. The lungs start to change color, shift, and smell quite strangely as they mutate postmortem. The tumors are changing into metals, which the sorcerer was harvesting every night before bed.

After one turn, the sorcerer's body doubles in weight as some of the lumps turn to iron and lead. After two turns, humidity causes a burning, stinging cloud to form from the sorcerer's body, as the lithium in their body reacts and explodes violently. After three turns, one can fish through the wizard's corpse to find 1d3 gold nuggets worth 300 GP each.

[7^ As the final blow hits the sorcerer, their body releases a cloud of spores. These spores only infect dead things; any meat carried or corpses nearby are infected. The sorcerer's corpse and all affected flesh sprouts mushroom heads –

they grow from tiny buds to four inch long fruiting bodies in a matter of minutes. After one turn these spore heads release spores, once again infecting all nearby dead things and continuing the chain of infection.

After one hour any flesh hosting the mushroom spores turns into putrid slime, pooling together and flowing like water. This attracts all manner of filthy creatures. Slimes generate from the pool of liquid: 1d6 HD worth of slimes per human sized corpse (or one slime for a small amount of meat). If this mushrooming phenomena happened on the site of a great battle or within a large coven of sorcerers, the surrounding countryside would be enveloped by slimes. Sorcerers tend to know the arcane words that can control these mindless creatures, hence infecting oneself with these mushroom spores is a useful method to take back territory even after they die.

[8^ The corpse has holes along the arms: small nooks which are tiny nestboxes for even tinier sparrows. The bright-blue birds chirp and fly away the moment they are uncovered (by stripping the body or rolling up their sleeves looking for tattoomantic spells). For the next three days the weather in the surrounding area becomes stormy and unpredictable, local wildlife acts strangely, and cats wander far away from the farms they are supposed to be ratting. It's as if nature itself is trying to kill these birds as fast as possible to ensure they do not establish a foothold or create nests outside of the sorcerer's body.

These birds have flammable feathers. If they are incinerated alive under the darkness of a new moon, they produce ashes containing magical energy useful for several arcane practices. The sorcerer's coven (or the sorcerer themselves if their death was planned) will want to be the one to capture the birds.

[9^ The moment the sorcerer dies, all light sources grow dimmer. Light spells and lanterns become like torches, torches become candles, candles glow like fireflies.

The ability to reduce light is commonly associated with attempts to preserve the physical body after death – light speeds up the decomposition by attracting flies and insects. Lesser magicians have this adaptation to serve as better undead servants, while powerful sorcerers retain it so they may raise themselves from the dead in a better looking state.

[10]^ The weapon used to kill the magician is now magnetically attracted to it. Only someone with a Strength of 18 or higher can pull it out of the body. Every round the blade is kept away from the body, the magnetic force gets stronger and stronger, eventually becoming strong enough to pull the sword out of its scabbard or even bend the blade if it is held strongly enough. If the weapon is in contact with the corpse for at least one exploration turn, the magnetic effect wears off.

The purpose of this enchantment is to catch returning arrows or boomerang-style weapons so the user can be disarmed or the weapon identified. Mostly given to sorcerers who work as low ranking guards for higher powered ones, this enchantment is hard to remove so most of those who ascend through the ranks end up keeping it.

[11]^ After the sorcerer dies, the party feels a faint rumbling in the ground. After 1d3 rounds, they explode with iron swords, daggers, arrows, and magic weapons. Anyone nearby takes three attacks from three random weapons. The to-hit roll is made like a fighter of the deceased sorcerer's level.

Naturally, many wizards are packrats that steal whatever magical gear they can, even if they can't make good use of it with their weak arms. After death the spells keeping these weapons in an extradimensional cache cease to function, and the tools of destruction return to the mortal plane with explosive results.

[12]^ The body disintegrates. Anyone touching it at the moment of death (such as with a melee attack), must save or take 3d6 damage from the disintegration field.

Some sorcerers don't want to be brought back.

by **EricNieudan** - Art: **Letty Wilson**

Will You Seek Érynie's Mirror?

She comes often, swooping down on ashen wings, at any time of the day or night. She drinks. Sometimes she dives and disappears in the Mirror's depths for days on end. When observed, she minds the bearing of her head while stalking on the mossy rocks. Lonesome Érynie resents company but enjoys an audience.

- d10 reasons to seek Érynie's Mirror -

1. A rope braided from Érynie's hair will raise someone from the dead when fastened around their neck. But if it is removed or if Érynie dies, the magic fades in a day. *2*. Érynie is looking for heroes to steal the devil's mask (see p. 146) and find its rightful bearer. - *3*. The Mirror is said to foretell the greatest achievement of one who shows themselves naked to it. - *4*. Érynie is a weaver of strange, powerful spells. She will teach each one to a worthy student. - *5*. The Mirror's waters prolong life and cure diseases. They lose their powers if carried in a container for but an instant. *6*. Érynie knows the past and future, although she doesn't know which is which. *7*. The Mirror is a doorway into Einyré, an underwater realm of wicked pleasures and untold riches. - *8*. Érynie is the last of her divine bloodline. A drop of her blood could solve many an arcane mystery. - *9*. Érynie ignores the veils between worlds. For a price, she will fly you where you need to go. -*10*. The Queen Mother of Harpies is a stubborn old hag, but she listens to Érynie's counsel.

- d8 places to find the Mirror -

1. At the bottom of a tomb under a lake inside a cave.- *2*. In a field, guarded by a hundred onyx knights. - *3*. Deep in the Watching Woods. - *4*. In a garden within the walls of the Dread Necropolis. - *5*. On an island that was once a living city. - *6*. At the End of the Worlds. - *7*. In your dreams, after you smoke Deathmist Lotus. *8*. In a secret valley, far inside Icefire Tribe territory.

- d6 things Érynie wants -

1. Her wayward cubs. They are easy to recognise but scattered among lion prides and vulture nests. One is the Golden Tyrant's pet. - *2*. All of her sisters' eyes, fashioned into an electrum necklace. - *3*. The formula to Zaratazarat's endless conjurations (which the bumbling mage doesn't understand himself). - *4*. The dungeon's master's (see p. 146) promise to find her a suitable mate. -*5*. A statuette of great power, holding the secret of universal creation. - *6*. A meeting with Irai the Divine Sculptor, who alone could immortalise Érynie's beauty.

- d4 powers Érynie commands -

1. Control all tears within her sight (even the ones you haven't shed yet). - *2*. Reverse the passage of seasons for 1d12 months. - *3*. Grow metallic flowers from steel weapons and armour. - *4*. Curse you with the murdering hatred of all cats everywhere.

by **Graphite Prime** (text & art)

STRANGE THINGS HAPPEN WHEN YOU SLEEP IN DUNGEONS

CLOSE TO DEATH... OUT OF SPELLS... OUT OF PO-
TIONS. THREE LEVELS DOWN AND 10 HOURS FROM
THE FRONT. THERE'S NO WAY OUT TONIGHT. THIS
PLACE IS ALIVE WITH THE DEAD. GOING INTO THAT
CRYPT WAS A BAD IDEA. SHOULD HAVE KNOWN...
THOSE THAT REMAIN CAN REST HERE. SEEMS
SAFE ENOUGH... THE DOOR BARS FROM THE IN-
SIDE. IT'S COLD AND DAMP; A MIXTURE OF MUD,
BLOOD, AND STONE. WE TRY TO SLEEP IN THE DAR-
KEST OF DARKS, HAUNTED BY SOUNDS THAT WOULD
FRIGHTEN EVEN THE GODS, BLINKING IN AND OUT OF
NIGHTMARES, REGRETTING OUR DECISION TO DES-
CEND. WHEN MORNING COMES IT IS STILL NIGHT...
SLEEPING IN DUNGEONS WOULD SUCK.
SO LET'S MAKE IT SUCK IN AN INTERESTING WAY!

This is about quality of sleep. You need to determine every character's sleep save value, which depends of the hit points they have remaining when falling asleep.
- **less than 1/4 of maximum HP:** sleep save 15
- **between 1/4 and 1/2 of maximum HP:** sleep save 10
- **more than 1/2 of maximum HP:** sleep save 5

Every player rolls a d20 against their sleep save value. If they succeed (rolling the sleep save value or more) they rest well and gain the normal healing benefits. If they fail their save, they are haunted by restlessness, or something strange happens, but they still get their healing. If they roll 1 or 2, something strange happens and they DO NOT recover any hit points.

Roll 1d20 below for **Restless Sleep & Strange Events**:

RESTLESS SLEEP & STRANGE EVENTS

1. SLEEP-WALKER: Whether you've ever sleepwalked before or not doesn't matter, you did last night. You wake up the next morning 1d4+1 rooms away to the (1d4) 1--North, 2--South, 3--East, 4--West. Good luck.

2. INFECTION: Some cut or wound you received earlier has become infected. You were tossing and turning and sweating all night. In the morning you feel like crap and suffer disadvantage on all saving throws for the next 4d6 hours.

3. BUG IN YOUR EAR: You awaken to the thunderous sound of an insect buzzing inside your ear canal. Your loudly scream in pain and madness. Until the bug is removed, check for wandering monsters every 1d4 rounds. You will have to get creative to solve this one...

4. SEDUCED BY A SUCCUBUS: During the night you were visited by a succubus and will continue to be haunted by her every night until you make two consecutive savings throws vs. paralysis (1 save per night). Failing a save means you lose 1d4 hit points instead of recovering anything overnight. If you manage to make the first two saves in a row, the succubus is exorcised and you gain 2 points of Charisma. There's just... something about you.

5. GREMLINS: You dreamt of weird little goblins crawling all over you, giggling and snorting, poking and prodding. Soon after waking up, you realize your favorite weapon (or spell-book) is gone. Unbeknownst to the PC, the item is hidden in a secret alcove somewhere in the dungeon. There is a 1-in-6 chance that it is located in any room the character enters.

6. THIEF: You wake to discover a prized item of yours is now in the possession of one of your companions who insists it is theirs. They must save vs. spells to willingly give it back, otherwise they protect it as if it's their prized possession... in fact, they dreamed that you were trying to steal it from them. If you're a Thief the situation is reversed: whether you remember it or not, you're the one who took the item.

7. VISIONS OF THE REAPER: During the night you wake up to the bone-chilling vision of the Grim Reaper standing over one of your companions (randomly chosen). That PC now has disadvantage on their next 2d4 death saves (or they die if they reach 1 HP if the game doesn't use death saves).

8. YOUR FUTURE CORPSE: Your rotting corpse visits you in your dreams and warns you never to leave this room. You are convinced this was real (and maybe it was). In the morning, you are shaking with fear and have to save vs. petrification to leave the room. If forced to leave, you will resist and scream maniacally, forcing a check for wandering monsters every time.

9. END OF THE ROAD: In the morning, your companions awaken to discover your corpse with an expression of indescribable terror locked on your face. (The referee should allow you to roll twice instead of just killing your character off.)

10. REVELATION: You dream of the exact location of a marvellous treasure located somewhere in this dungeon. The referee must let you read the entire contents listed under that room. And you thought you were leaving the dungeon...

11. FALSE REVELATION: Your dreams reveal that your heart's desire is in danger 2d6 rooms from here (a room you haven't been in yet.) Your friends may have other plans, but that's where you're going… and nothing will stop you. Unfortunately, the room already contains something else…

12. SABOTAGE: You don't remember doing it, but you gathered up all the party's rations (including the water) and smeared them all over the walls in a nihilistic fit of utter frustration. They know it was you because your clothes are full of bread crumbs and sausage grease.

13. PRETERNATURALLY TIRED: You will sleep for 1d4+1 more days after which you will rise completely cured of all wounds and ailments. Until then, you sleep no matter what.

14. MURDERER: If you have henchmen or NPCs with you, one the most experienced of them is found dead in the morning from stab wounds. You killed him. You know this. You vaguely remember the act and the cryptic voices that commanded you. The room has become haunted and this will happen again every night the party sleeps here. If there are no henchmen or NPCs, another PC (randomly determined) wakes up to you holding a dagger to their throat. You have to save vs. spells to resist the urge to kill. If you fail, roll initiative…

15. CARELESS MISTAKE: You get up and unlock the door or tear down whatever barricades the party set up. Roll for wandering monsters. If something shows up, it gets the benefit of surprise. If there is no encounter, the party will surely ponder why the door is wide open.

16. TONGUES: Everyone is roused by the sound of you speaking in tongues. It lasts 1d3 exploration turns. Magic-users can make a language roll (or save vs. spells with advantage) to recognize the language. It turns out that you are revealing something useful about the dungeon (referee's choice, but it should be actually helpful). However, everyone is so unnerved by this experience that they all have to save vs. paralysis or fail to recover any hit points from their night's rest.

17. INSOMNIA: You didn't sleep a wink. You're exhausted and have disadvantage on all attack rolls for the next 4d6 hours if you're a spellcaster, your targets have advantage on their saving throws.

18. RODENTS: You wake up to rodents nibbling on your fingers, toes, or ears. You kill them easily enough, but now you have to save vs. poison (disease). If infected, you're beyond useless, unable to move, and need to save every day. Two failures in a row equals death, two successes means recovery.

19. OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE: Your soul left your body and went on a little astral journey through the dungeon. The referee must hand you the complete map of the dungeon and let you view it for a number of seconds equal to 3d6 + your level. You're exhausted and recover no hit points, but, you can make a sleep save to know the contents and secrets of any room before you enter it for the entire next day, beyond which, this knowledge fades. The referee's gonna love you…

20. DOUBLE NIGHTMARE: (The referee rolls some dice as if checking for wandering monsters.) A huge spider (8 HD, AC: as plate, 2d6 bite/ save vs. poison or die), stalks into the room. Play the fight out as normal. The spider keeps targeting you and just as you roll a poison save, you wake up! Everyone is sleeping peacefully and all is well… until the room begins filling with black water! Your companions don't wake up and if you get close enough to shake them, you notice they're skeletons! You're the first person to wake up from this group nightmare. You heal as many hit points as there were people sleeping that night. Everyone else gets nothing.
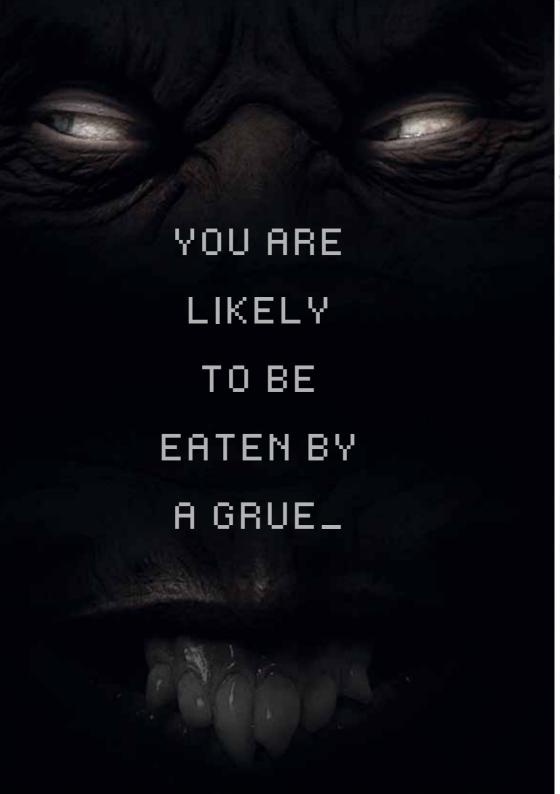
Have the players do the rolling, but as a referee, you must keep the contents of this list secret, because spoilers. You probably don't want to overuse this idea. Maybe once per dungeon.

Watches

Players usually set watches at night. For the purposes of this, watches don't matter. These events are mysterious and can happen in the blink of an eye. People on watch are notorious for nodding off, if even for a moment, and they never admit it (seriously!) «It didn't happen on my watch!»

YOU ARE
LIKELY
TO BE
EATEN BY
A GRUE_

by **Josh McCrowell** - Art: **Nobboc**

Running out of Light in a Dungeon Crawl

"I have also literally never heard of a game session where the characters actually ended up trapped in the dark, truly unable to see anything for the rest of their delve... I would rather end the session right there, send my friends home, and never run a game of D&D again rather than risk having that happen more than once."
Anne, DIY & Dragons

Waving a torch through the inky blackness of the subterranean cave is one of the quintessential dungeon crawling experiences. Moreover, resource management is one of the fun parts of OSR-type games. Whether or not to press on or head back to the surface because you're low on torches should be a meaningful, fun choice. However, if your players run out of torches and are left in the darkness, what would you do? It would be tedious to narrate an experience without light ad nauseam. If a party runs out of all light sources in a dark dungeon—not a torch or a lamp to their name—each player must roll to see if they become lost in the dark. Play is resumed on the surface, with surviving characters allowed to continue adventuring. It's pitch dark. Can you find your way back to the surface? **Roll 1d12**

1-5 > You are eaten by a grue_

6 > You are lost in the underworld. The referee places you on the random encounter table. You may re-enter play if you are encountered (found)_

7 > You make it back to the surface, but only after making solemn oaths to forsake the adventuring life. You retire and become an NPC_

8 > You are captured. The referee chooses an appropriate monster in the area based on their random encounter table. Escaping party members know your general location and the type of monster that took you_

9 > You are held for ransom by the royal family of the cannibal troglodytes. It takes 1000 gold times your character level to buy your freedom_

10 > You scramble back to the surface all but naked, shivering. You lose all of your equipment, but are otherwise unscathed_

11 > You limp back to the surface nursing a grievous wound. Roll on your Death and Dismemberment table (or let the referee decide). You carry this new wound from your lost time in the underworld_

12 > You make it back to the surface, mostly unscathed but raving about the twelve different flavors of darkness_

by **Cacklecharm** Art: **Didier Balicevic**

I don't think that goblins should cast the same spell as people. That's dumb. What kind of goblin knows *sleep* or *magic missile*? They don't. They're fucking goblins. If your PCs run into a shitty low-level goblin spellcaster, roll 1d8 on this table to determine the spell they know. No, goblins don't know more than one spell. You may be thinking of powerful wizards, like kobolds or something.

8 Goblin WARLOCK SPELLS

1 Repulse 1st level

This spell is the opposite of *charm person*. It works much the same way: the caster becomes instantly offensive to the eyes, ears, and noses of everyone around. Their voice is shrill and annoying, their face becomes ugly and their warts highlighted, and their bodily odour is amplified to noxious levels. Goblin witches often wear masks or hoods to hide their face before they cast their spell, revealing its effects with a dramatic flair.

Hirelings must make a morale check to attack (in melee) or loot the warlock.

2 Inflamed Mucus - 1st level

The goblin version of a weak offensive spell. Uniquely, it can be used in a grapple. There's no incantation or somatic components — the caster sneezes and a large amount of burning snot is forced out of their nose. It can light flammable things on fire, usually the ends of torches or wads of cloth goblins use as projectiles on occasion. Also, goblin fire arrows.

If you're grappling a shaman and they cast this, you must save or drop them from the surprise of getting snotted on and set on fire. The snot on its own deals 1d2 damage.

3 Flying Shadow - 1st level

This is a curse cast by goblins, and one of the only reasons their magic is feared. This spell creates a shadow that flies towards the target's face. If the target succeeds on a save, their vision is darkened as though everything around them is dark and shadowy, but they can still see dimly. They get a -2 penalty to hit with melee attacks, and -4 to hit with ranged attacks. If the target fails on their save, they are blinded for 1d2 exploration turns.

4 Maggotmail - 1st level

This defensive spell has a range of about a stone's throw. A swarm of maggots appears either out of a nearby pile of trash or from underneath the target's clothing and they bite each other into some form of interlinked, squishy armour rings.

The target of this spell gains +4 to their armor class until they have been hit three times (maggots are all squished) or they are hit with a torch or other source of fire damage (the fire scares away the maggots). It takes one round for the armor to form when this spell is cast, so the target may well die before the maggots create their barrier. In which case, the maggots just start eating the corpse instead.

5 Ice Touch - 1st level

The most powerful offensive spell known to the average warlock. The goblin touches the target with a hand as cold as ice (requiring a successful melee attack). The victim takes 1d6+1 damage. Killing with this spell creates corpses particularly suitable for raising as undead. *Ice touch* was probably stolen from a necromancer.

6 Acid Piss - 1st level

This spell grants the shaman a full bladder of acid to pee out. The "acid" isn't dangerous to living things and can't be used as an attack. It's a slow-acting thing more effective against the inanimate. The goblin can use this spell like a wizard's mark, peeing a frowning face on the floor of a dungeon room to mark their territory. It can also be used to escape from ropes or cages. Obviously, this spell is a little more useful for boy goblins than girl goblins.

7 Count - 1st level

Goblins aren't good with math. This spell counts a large number of similarly sized objects, or does basic arithmetic on something they can see. The result is returned inside the goblin's mind. For example, a goblin could cast this on a camp of sleeping adventurers to see how many there are, since they're not smart enough to count the boots and divide by two (but it still won't count the rogue that sneaked up behind him on his watch). Also commonly used by goblins to see how much treasure is going to be stolen from them by bigger, meaner monsters.

8 Bravado - 1st level

Goblins are cowardly creatures. This spell helps with that, and it is a staple in any large-scale goblin attack. The shaman must use a drum to cast this spell, which is traditionally made of human skin. As they bang the drum, they howl a shrill war song, and the goblins are inspired to put aside their cowardice for a moment. All goblins who hear the song gain +1 to their morale checks.

by: **Vagabundork**

I SEARCH THE BOOKSHELF!
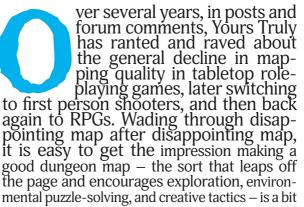
GOOD ADVENTURERS KNOW THAT BODIES AREN'T THE ONLY SOURCE OF LOOT. FURNITURE IS A GOOD ONE TOO. BOOKSHELVES ARE NO EXCEPTION. ALL MANNER OF BOOKS AND DOCUMENTS CAN BE FOUND HIDDEN IN ANY PERSONAL LIBRARY. AND EVEN AMONG THE PAGES OF PENNY DREADFULS AND SENSATIONAL MAGAZINES, SECRETS AND VALUABLE INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED.

D20 RANDOM BOOKS & MAGAZINES

1. CRIMINALS & PUNISHERS. Legal advice and combat tactics. While you possess this, all your attacks with a hand weapon deal one extra point of damage.

2. THE TREASURE ISLAND. Folded map with instructions to find a desert island and the pirate treasure hidden there. Problem: the island has been inhabited for over a century by now.

3. ANCIENT SORCERIES. Sorcery treaty. WIL save (or 1-in-6 chance modified by INT) and you can learn one, and only one, 1st level spell from another game (or class). You can use that spell once per day.

4. JEKYLL'S APOTHECARY FORMULAE. How to create a potion that permanently adds 1 point to STR. A second dose kills you. One potion can be made in a week at the cost of 5,000g.

5. FIGARO IN BASTION. Social magazine containing information about the rich (i.e. hook for adventures to loot mansions or abduct young heirs.)

Note: This table was made with Into the Odd in mind, but I have added some suggestions when necessary for classic D&D.

6. THE MYSTERIES OF BASTION. Sensational stories: roll on the general rumours table of your campaign world, or come up with something dramatic.

7. SWINEY TOAD. The picaresque adventures of a cute pig/frog hybrid. Whatever the situation, you can always attempt a fancy move or action inspired by Swiney's adventures (enhanced attack, two attacks in a single round, or even automatic success in a risky action.)

8. VARNEY THE WEREBAT. An essay about vampires. When fighting vampires and similar weirdos, roll the damage dice twice and use the best result.

9. THE BASTION CONSTITUTION. Never been read, full of spores. Suffer d6 STR damage (or lose 3d6 hit points).

10. FORTUNE HUNTERS OF THE DEEP COUNTRY. Travelogue describing life in the Deep Country.

11. DYING SPEECHES AND BLOODY MURDERS. Stories of criminals and their last words on the gallows. A dedicated reader can find clues to their hidden booties.

12. BASTION MEDICAL JOURNAL. News on medical science. It contains a section of ads you can order remedies and other elixirs from, as well as discount coupons.

13. THE MYSTERIES OF VERBENA HOUSE. After reading it, the owner can pick locks with the best result of two rolls. It also contains the address of a flagellation brothel called «The Man».

14. REVOLTING CRIME. Yellow press. In contains detailed instruction to make bombs to throw at coppers and town hall windows. You can make d4 bombs in a single day, granted you don't do anything else that day. One bomb costs 15s.

15. NEW ENGLAND CANAAN. An Arcanum (or magic item). The owner can convert Puritans (i.e. those she sees as Puritans) into crustaceans. Then crush them (or eat them to heal d10 hp or d4 STR). The target can resist with a WIL save (or save vs. magic.)

16. MATERIA MEDICA. When you possess this book, and read it, your party heals completely in only 4 days.

17. HERMETICA. Time to read: 20 weeks minus half your WIL (or INT). One month after you finish reading the book, you can create alchemy rings (see below). One ring costs 5,000g in chemical compounds.

18. MONSIEUR DE PHOCAS. Doesn't have any effect but it's a goddamn good book.

19. ALWAYS RUNNING. Read it and you'll increase DEX and WIL (or INT) by one point permanently. Only works once.

20. THE ALCHEMIST. You can read this book in only d4 days. After it, your WIL (or INT) is permanently decreased by 1.

★ ALCHEMY RINGS – You can use a ring to transmute something into something else, but not living beings (if you try, it becomes a random monster). Both the material and the result must be equivalent in mass and density. You can transmute a large stone into a knife, a tree into a table or a dagger into a pencil. When in doubt, ask your Referee. With their approval, you can use the ring in unusual ways, but you must make a WIL save (or save vs. magic); if you fail, the ring loses its power, becoming worthless.

Over several years, in posts and forum comments, Yours Truly has ranted and raved about the general decline in mapping quality in tabletop role-playing games, later switching to first person shooters, and then back again to RPGs. Wading through disappointing map after disappointing map, it is easy to get the impression making a good dungeon map – the sort that leaps off the page and encourages exploration, environmental puzzle-solving, and creative tactics – is a bit of a lost art. Many dungeons are in fact not dungeons at all; rather, they are illustrations depicting something like a dungeon map but offering none of the dungeoneering experience due to their limitations. It becomes all the more important, then, to highlight the good stuff: maps with the right scope, complexity, and structure.

The Anatomy of a Dungeon Map

Good structure[1] is especially tricky since many promising maps conceal a rather banal layout under visual frills as well as twists and turns which do not, in fact, do anything – they are visual noise masking linear corridors and the occasional, vestigial side branch you can visit before returning to the main one-way rollercoaster ride. Good structure is still more of an art than an exact science, but it is generally agreed that some structural features are better suited to "map flow" than others by encouraging meaningful decisions[2], environmental interaction, and emergent gameplay:

• nonlinearity, aided by branching and looping elements;

• three-dimensional environments with verticality, interesting interconnections between dungeon levels, and a variety of terrain (c.f. "jacquaysing")[3];

• relative openness, counterbalanced by occasional bottlenecks usually referred to as "pinch points" or "choke points", and maintaining significant barriers to make navigation a challenge.

Not every dungeon has to have these features to be a good dungeon (and keying is the second half of the puzzle), but generally they help. Furthermore, the prin-

ciples apply to tabletop games and FPS games in different ways. Thus, *Ultima Underworld*, classic *Quake* levels, or *Thief's Down in the Bonehoard* embody these principles differently than *Caverns of Thracia*, *Tegel Manor*, or *Tomb of Abysthor.*

The Winter Tombs

This article looks at good design through the example of *The Winter Tombs*, a free dungeon level by Dyson Logos[4]. This will also be released as a dungeon by Jim Pinto, but for now we will restrict ourselves to the map. This is a particularly good test case since it is a map that has a pleasing complexity without obfuscating analysis and its structural elements are easy to identify and discuss.

I produced a line graph to showcase the map's structure. So, what lies beyond the cross-hatching?

The Winter Tombs is a single-level dungeon map with a tomb/caverns theme. The closest analogy is Judges Guild's classic *Sunstone Caverns*[5], a semi-keyed dungeon from their second campaign instalment. Like Sunstone Caverns, this one is densely (although a bit less densely) mapped to provide a large playing area in one map.

The first element that leaps before the eyes

is **the selection of ways in**: right from the start, the explorers can choose among four tomb entrances and two cave mouths. One of the tombs is a dead-end: a simple but pleasing trick. Others are connected to the dungeon in ways that integrate cavern and tomb elements, with signs of environmental degradation and blockage to complicate navigation. The way the characters choose to enter and exit through will have a meaningful effect on how expeditions develop. Nevertheless, there is no initial difficulty selection, at least no outwards sign that makes one or more entrances harder to discover or access. (As a counter-example, consider the lower level back door to *In Search of the Unknown!*) Notably, there are not many outright **exits**. They are in the distant reaches of the map near the octagons and in the upper right corner. If this dungeon has lower levels, it will take a lot of initial effort to reach them – the overall permeability is quite low until secure routes are identified and firmly established!
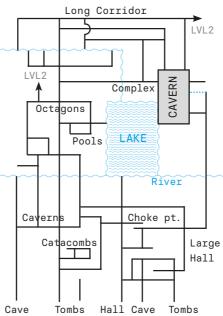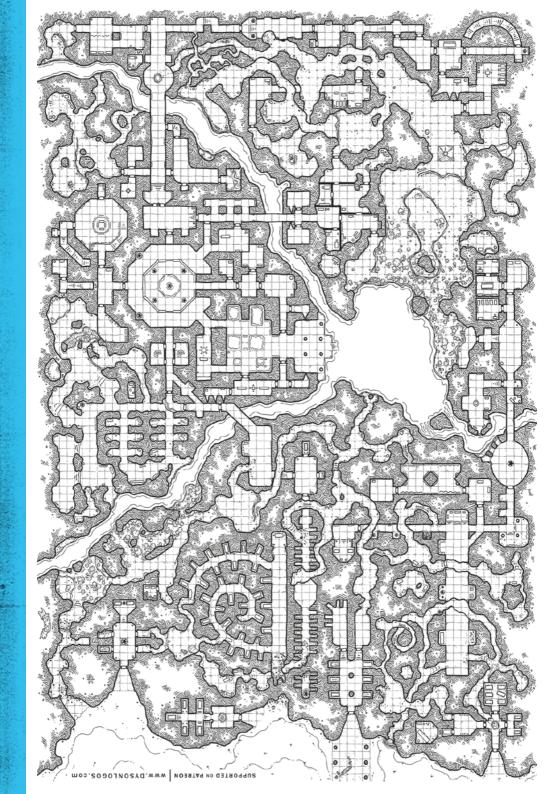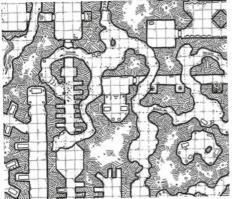
Choke points and tricky bridges

Of course, many elements which appear complicated on a first look are essentially

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Figure labels:

Long Corridor — LVL2 — LVL2 — Complex — CAVERN — Octagons — Pools — LAKE — River — Caverns — Choke pt. — Catacombs — Large Hall — Cave — Tombs — Hall Cave — Tombs
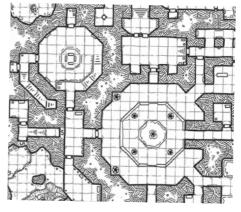
straight lines – a labyrinthine set of cata-combs in the lower middle is a simple loop, impressive halls are essentially fancy cor-ridors (bottom right), and many of the twist-ing cavern passages are simple "bridging" connections. However, the map uses these **bridging pieces** in a shrewd and diso-rienting manner, via over- and underpasses, slopes, and loops which reverse the direc-tion of progression, diverting expeditions towards unplanned dungeon rooms. This is an underutilised navigation trick, and one which can be used well to draw the company into a danger zone. We can identify one of the dungeon's main **choke points** in the bottom middle: a cave with four exits (one a dead end) is one of the main points linking multiple sub-sections. It is easy to reach from what looks like the "main" entrance, and it allows access to many further points of importance. He who rules the choke point rules the dungeon!

Two main structuring elements are also easy to see. These are the level's waterways and a very large set of caverns. These play a different role. Water blocks or impedes mo-vement, and conceals invisible monsters in the deeps. Hence, the rivers and the lake are **barriers**. The east and south-west river branches separate the map into its southern and northern sections, while the north-west branch further subdivides the northern part into two sections, almost as if they were separate sub-levels (I would certain-ly be tempted to design the key this way). There are multiple places where the rivers are crossed by bridges, and more where it would be fordable to an ambitious group. We can call these environmental challen-ges limited barriers. The lake is something that would probably be impassable at first, but become a potentially good way to ac-cess the rest of the level once the charac-ters return with a canoe, build a raft, and neutralise whatever threat might inhabit the lake. Ironically, the easiest access to the lake (right from the "main entrance") is bound to be completely useless on the first visit, aside from offering a tantalising glimpse of things to come!

A case of two octagons
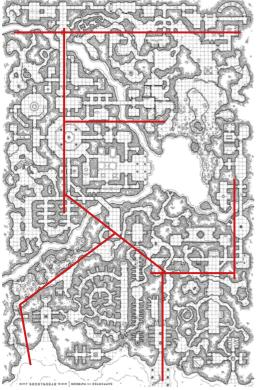
The caverns are not barriers: they repre-sent a **nexus point**. Although similar to choke points, nexus points are rela-tively open structural elements which usually offer multiple ways of traversal and collect multiple routes departing in various directions. You can see another one on the opposite side: the larger oc-tagonal room with its five main exits (the north-east one does not really count as

a full one). This is also a piece of **dramatic architecture** which stands out from the lower-level dungeon texture: it is YUGE, regular, and perfect for a complex set-piece encounter. Of course, sometimes, appearances are misleading: the other octagon just off to the north-west does not actually do anything in the context of the map – it is a linear route to a lower level. Also, nexus points may start off as choke points, ruled by a nastier monster or puzzle before being cleared and used to the explorers' benefit.

Dungeon Highways

This map has one more interesting feature that may not be noticeable first, but which has a strong bearing on its flow. This is the presence of long corridors linking distant corners of the dungeon-- and once you

look for them, you will find a bunch. We might call them **accelerators**, since clearing them allows fast travel through the dungeon. The clearest accelerators are found in the distant reaches of the level, including one which just "caps" the whole thing with a sequence connecting everything to everything. Once you get there, you can choose a way back just as freely as you could at the beginning, a dark "mirror image" of the dungeon's multiple entrances! Others include the corridors bisecting the octagons, and the corridor to the right going from the entrance areas all the way to the cavern. As the company finds the accelerators, they will prove very valuable in subsequent expeditions, getting them past the entrance areas and into the depths of it!

So, this is what a good dungeon level looks like. It walks the right balance between openness and navigation challenges, it has a good sense of progression, it is structured in fun ways that suggest both exploration puzzles and exploration solutions, and overall it has a pleasing complexity that takes effort to figure out, but does not descend into unpleasant pixel-bitching and the exploration of dull, featureless mazes.

1- https://www.knights-n-knaves.com/phpbb3/viewtopic.php?p=116644
2 - https://ravencrowking.blogspot.com/2011/06/c-is-for-choices-context-and_06.html
3 - https://thealexandrian.net/wordpress/13085/roleplaying-games/jaquaying-the-dungeon
4 - https://dysonlogos.blog/2020/05/19/the-winter-tombs-combined/
5 - https://thealexandrian.net/wordpress/13085/roleplaying-games/jaquaying-the-dungeon

by **Dyson Logos** Art **Vladimir Chebakov**

UNTIMELY UNDEAD

In a recent discussion about level draining undead in Labyrinth Lord, several DMs and players indicated that **they would rather kill a character than have them level drained.** And in SOME cases I understand (although personally I have no real problem with level draining undead). But you see, **I love wights. I like vampires and wraiths and spectres also.** So what do you do to replace the venerable wight if you don't use level-draining?

Give it some other scary power to even out the odds (especially since they are already cleric turning fodder). Roll (or choose) on the following table once for every two hit dice of the undead (rounding up). You can also just create new undead by upping the hit dice of the wight (and decreasing its AC by 1 point for every 3 hit dice you give it). The other upside? Since it's not relying on its level draining touch attack, you can kit your undead menace out with a cool weapon or two.

1. Track Life Once it has met you, it can track you without fail. Even across the planes if need be. The only way to break the trail is to die and be brought back to life.

2. Dimension Door as per the spell, 3/day.

3. Special Senses Detects magic, life and invisibility at will.

4. Magical Ability casts spells as a magic user, caster level of half the undead's hit dice.

5 Weakening Blow the undead's blows drain 1 point of Strength or Constitution (choose or roll which) like a Shadow's.

7. Clerical Ability casts spells as a cleric, caster level of half the undead's hit dice.

6. Animate Dead as per the spell, 2/day.

9. Withering Touch touch causes plants to wither and other living things to rot. Deals 2d4 damage to creatures.

8 . Darkness as the reverse of *light*, at will.

10. Striking Aura the palpable aura of fear freezes all those when encountering the undead or be

11. Paralyzing Strike the undead's blows paralyze as a ghoul (although elves are not immune).

12. Unnatural Might +2 to hit and damage.

13. Massive Claws. unarmed attacks deal an extra die of damage or 1d8 damage if it doesn't have such an attack.

14. Diseased attacks transmit mummy rot (see the mummy's description).

15. Putrefying Aura all food and drink within 20' is rotted and destroyed – magical food and drink get their owner's save versus poison.

16. Vampiric Drain damage dealt by the undead in melee heals it an equivalent amount.

17. Soul Eater creatures slain by the undead cannot be raised or resurrected. The undead gains 1 HD for 24 hours, and permanently gains 1 hit point.

18. Curse of the Fallen

undead casts *curse* 3/day (typically opening a battle with such a curse).

19. Soul Wrench

the undead's blows are deadly. The target gets a save versus death.

20. Wail of the Haunted

once per turn the undead can howl or wail. Living creatures within 60 feet must save versus paralysis or run in fear.

21. Wail of Mourning

once per hour the undead can howl or wail. Living creatures within 30 feet must save versus death or die.

22. All But Invisible

cannot be detected except by touch and feel. Cannot be detected by magic, psionics, sound, scent, etc.

23. Limited Flight

60' (20') movement rate. Seems to walk through the air.

24. Breath of Decay

once per turn the undead can make a breath weapon attack (typically a magical "blast" of decay, but sometimes shards of bone, or regurgitated black evil, or even fire or gas, or something thematically appropriate) in a 15' cloud in front of it that deals 1d6 damage per 2 hit dice of the undead.

who see the undead. Save versus paralysis paralyzed for 1d6+1 rounds.

25. Immortal

unless destroyed by a cleric's turn undead attempt, disintegrated, or burned and the ashes mixed with holy water, this undead will reform in 2d12 hours after being slain.

26. Charm Gaze

gaze attack acts as a *charm monster* spell.

27. Regeneration

the undead regenerates 3 hit points per round except from holy damage. It ceases regenerating if destroyed.

28. Faithless

turned by clerics as if the undead had 3 hit dice more than it has.

29. Hollow

when struck down, the undead splits open producing an *insect plague* as the spell as well as a 10' radius cloud of poisonous gas (to which the undead insects are immune).

30. Arcane Devourer

attacks drain one spell from a spellcaster's prepared spells (starting with highest level spells, specific spell chosen randomly). If the undead successfully saves against a spell cast upon it, the caster of the spell also loses another spell as if struck by the undead.

by **Cacklecharm** Art: **Gustave Doré**

Monster 'n' Modifiers

If you want to spruce up your random monster encounters, roll a d20 on this table. Make sure to mention how these monsters look different or unique to those of their ilk. So if you roll a [6] for Trolls, they are now "Jewelled Trolls".

Unless otherwise stated, the bonus is for every member of the pack of monsters encountered.

1 Bewitched. Commanded by a powerful sorcerer or witch. They may carry symbols of the witch's power, like wicker men, or have sticks or bones wrapped in their hair or fur. Scorched symbols around the lips or eyes to bind them to the sorcerer is also common.
The first time these monsters fail their morale check they are stunned for one round as the witch's dark magic takes over their minds and behavior. Then, they continue fighting.

2 Infested. These monsters are physical hosts for horrible little creatures. Flesh eating maggots, swarms of killer wasps, spider eggs bursting from every wound. The creatures show signs of infestation and may even be suicidal. If these monsters are intelligent, they probably are willing hosts belonging to an evil cult.
Upon death each monster releases 1d4 swarmers. These are 1 HD bugs with weak attacks and minor, if any, abilities like weak poisons or buzzing flight that temporarily deafens.

3 Empowered. The monsters are magically charged, exemplars of their kind, blessed by the dark gods, or maybe they drank from the spring of life. They may have a glowing aura, or seem especially large and beautiful for whatever kind of thing they are.
All monsters in this group have +1 HD, +1 chance to hit, and their spells are cast as though they are one level higher. They're no joke.
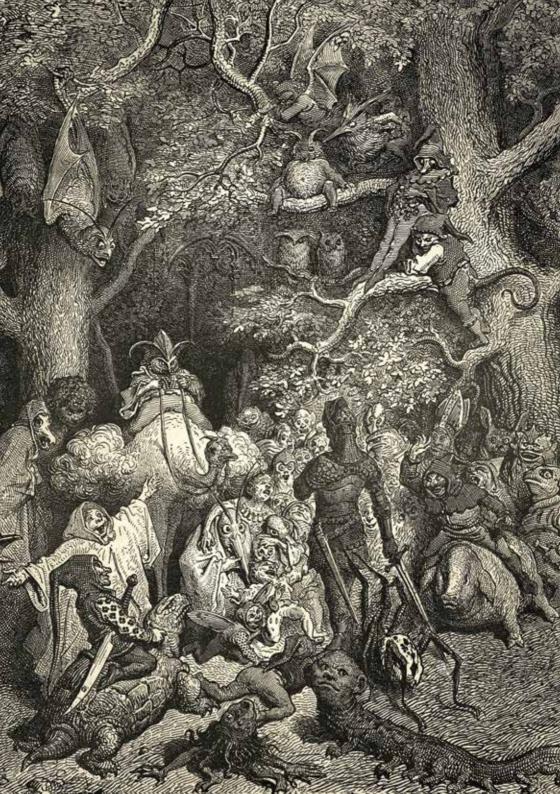
4 Toxic. These creatures are half digested or fused with horrible corrosive acids which seep from their clammy skin. They may be unfinished alchemical creations, unless they were summoned from one of the lower realms.
Immune to acid damage. Corrode armor when they roll a 20 to hit and corrode weapons on a 1 when attacked.

5 Cornered. They've been backed into a corner. Not necessarily literally. They may be starving, hiding from the law, or infected with rabies; anything that makes a human or beast desperate.
Add +1 to their morale score. They deal +2 damage on a hit. Roll hit dice one size smaller for their hit points.

6 **Jewelled.** These creatures are studded with all sorts of jewels and gems. Sentient creatures are heavily pierced and covered in gold or silver body paint. Unintelligent monsters have jewels embedded or growing in their skin naturally.
These monsters get +2 to all saves and AC. Triple the result when they are looted.

7 **Draining.** These monsters are in a lesser state of undead-hood or are energy sinkholes. Perhaps they've been contaminated or sucked dry by beings from beyond. If these creatures are undead, consider increasing their hit dice by one.
Immune to negative energy and death spells. Save or have a level drained if they roll max damage. You can turn them as undead of their HD.

8 **Holy.** Someone or something has blessed these creatures. Perhaps they are the servants of an arrogant godling, or sanctified by a high priest. Evil creatures may be rewarded if they perform many sins, and good or neutral creatures for their role in per-petuating the cycle of rebirth.
Increase maximum hit points by 3. One monster may heal another for 2d6 hit points once per day. Which monster? The holiest one, of course.

9 **Illusionary.** These monsters are either totally illusionary or living qualia. They give no outward signs of being illusions, other than how suddenly they appear when encountered.
They are fictional and can only be hurt by magic weapons. If a character suspects the monsters aren't real, they can save to disbelieve and realize all damage and spells from the illusionary creatures were imaginary.

10 **Prehistoric.** Animals have larger fangs and tusks, shaggier coats, and a more aggressive demeanor. Intelligent creatures fight with primitive weapons and look like forgotten, thawed ancestors to their kind.
They shrug off the first mind-affecting spell that hits them. Also, they are physically stronger and can run and jump 50% higher and faster.

11 **Emblazoned.** The monsters glow with an orange internal fire which feels warm but does not burn. However odd it may look for creatures of their type, they are glowing with a fiery emanation of their regal inner passion.
Monsters get +1 morale and resistance to fire. You cannot surprise them, but they can't surprise you either.

12 **Arcane.** These creatures are tied to aetheric energies, showing runic green, purple, or blue sigils on their skin or clothes.
The group can cast a spell (with a spell level equal to half their HD or less). It can be cast by the group's leader (i.e. the strongest monster), or exist as a passive effect.

13 **Sneaky.** These monsters are concealed somehow, or part of an order dedicated to stealth and assassination. Unintelligent monsters may be shadowy, made of mist, or partially transparent.
These monsters have a 3-in-6 chance to surprise, plus any surprise bonus they already have. Also +2 AC against ranged attacks.

14

Brutal. Covered in blood, claw marks and scars, and armed with jagged weapons or claws, these monsters look exceptionally violent. They always desecrate the bodies of their victims, however odd it may look.
Monsters have a critical strike. On an attack roll of 20, they deal double damage. If characters manage to escape from them, they tear into themselves (1d4 damage) or kill one of their own in a fit of rage.

15

Misty. These creatures are made of gray mist. They have a clear outline: the fur on the bears, the armor of the orcs is clearly visible but the form inside is vague and undefined.
Once per encounter, they can act out of character for their level of intelligence or expected tactics (wild animals attacking the wizards in the back first). Alternatively, one monster's location or state is changed at the end of a round. e.g.: grappled monster is inexplicably free at the end of the round and up and fighting with no rolls made.

16

Chilling. The ice-cold bodies of these monsters give off a chilly mist. Their eyes are bright blue . Animals have pure white fur whether they are arctic in origin or not.
Chilling. Monsters have +1 AC and are resistant to cold and ice. When fleeing, a magical wind deals 1d4 damage to characters who give chase.

17

Gorgonic. These monsters have glowing snake eyes and a petrifying power. They may be partially reptilian or have snakes for hair or tails. If the creatures have normal skin, it is at least partially scaly. If the creature is already a reptile, their power might not be as obvious but they need the glowing eyes, and maybe a toga.
Once per encounter, the creatures can use a petrifying gaze instead of their regular attacks (save to avoid). A target is turned into stone for 1d3 rounds per saving throw failed. The monsters are resistant to poison.

18

Mockery. These monsters don't look real, as if they are made of plush fabric or perhaps the product of some eldritch taxidermy process. They are mockeries of the real monster (as seen in *Bastionland*). They may still have marks on their feet or behind the ear that show ownership. They are less aggressive and more childish than the monsters they replicate. Intelligent monster mockeries are more terrifying: they'll tell a silly joke as they gut you.
Monsters are immune to blunt, bashing, or fall damage. They take double damage from fire. Reaction is rolled at +1, and attempts to escape their cuddly grapple is at -2.

19

Crystalline. The monsters are made of crystal. They mime the shape of a creature but have smooth crystal skin and shimmer with the slightest bit of light. They don't breathe, and appear as motionless statues until provoked.
Halve the hit points. Only harmed by bludgeoning weapons. Elemental attacks deal minimum damage .

20

Aberrant. These creatures reek of The Other. They don't act as they should, as though their bodies are inhabited by an alien intelligence. Four-legged animals may roll around on their backs at the same speed they would run, humanoids may do a handstand while holding weapons with their feet, and so on.
On a successful hit targets lose one point of Wisdom as if their sanity is being harmed. Hirelings must make a morale check or flee.

by **Sarah Grove**

D60 POINTLESS ITEMS

A LIST OF 60 ITEMS TO SIMULTANEOUSLY AMUSE AND DISAPPOINT YOUR PLAYERS WITH. NO REFUNDS GIVEN.

1
A small glass bottle engraved "I wish for this" containing hundreds of dandelion seeds. Instructions say blowing each seed one by one from the end of your finger will grant one wish (it doesn't).

2
half a coconut shell with the worst insult you can imagine painted inside it. It changes each time you look at it. Good for when you are lost for words.

3
A pair of fingerless gloves that grant cold and heat resistance to the wearer. They also make your nails a deep shade of purple, dotted with stars and galaxies.

4
A pen that writes a random curse word at the end of every sentence.

5
A pencil that only writes insults.

6
A pen that writes a random compliment about a person you know at the end of every sentence.

7
A painted tiefling skull with tiny carnivorous plants growing in the eye sockets. Attracts stray flies. Good for housekeeping and looks edgy.

8
Ceramic teeth veneers. When worn over your own teeth make you pronounce Rs with a roll.

9
Two paint brushes that when held will paint a perfect picture of anything you concentrate on. The picture only lasts for 2 minutes once completed.

10
A locket that magically contains pictures of someone you love (even if they are dead or a complete secret).

11
An invisible ball gown that makes swishy noises as you walk (but it doesn't make you invisible).

12
A piece of clay that magically transforms into a likeness of your face when you hold and look at it, can be fired to make a permanent decoration or passed around at parties to impress and entertain.

13
A brooch that makes (small) cats like you and give you snuggles.

14
A silver dog whistle that attracts any dogs within a 5-mile radius.

15
An alabaster framed painting of a wizard who says "You're doing it wrong" whenever you perform magic in front of it. If someone casts detect magic they shout "OF COURSE I'M MAGIC! I'M A WIZARD! IDIOT!"

16
A conch shell. When put to the ear you hear a beautiful voice singing a song that means something to you.

17
A wooden carved statue of a fox that growls whenever someone approaches it.

18
An unremarkable looking hand bell that shouts "DING DONG!" instead of ringing.

19
A fancy leather-bound journal that converts your words to pictures.

20
A candle that lights and extinguishes itself when you clap.

21
A birdcage that refuses to keep birds captive. Opens its doors and tells them to flee when you aren't looking.

22
Box of paranoia. A locked box which makes sounds the recipient is familiar with. It makes them worry it contains a magic item, curse or creature they fear. Once opened it is discovered to be empty. Spells to identify or detect magic do not work. It is seemingly indestructible. If the owner tries to get rid of it without having opened it, the box magically reappears the next day.

23
A dust cover for books. Magically changes size and appearance to fit the book it is placed on. Also changes the last 10 pages of the book to a new ending/conclusion. If used on a spell book, the last spell in it is replaced by a random spell.

24
A top hat with a tiny minibar in it. Roll 1d12 for the number of miniature bottles it contains and 1d8 for their contents. Once each bottle is finished they can be refilled with any liquid. 1 – Rum; 2 – Whiskey; 3 – Fireball; 4 – Mead; 5 – Cider; 6 – Goodberry wine; 7 – Gin; 8 – Stout.

25
A bottle of perfume which gives one pump of any scent you imagine while holding it.

26
Speckled blue eggs. If eaten you grow a blue beak on your face which lasts for 1 hour – you can talk as usual, and also sing like a bird.

27
Yak yarn. Itchy and uncomfortable when knitted into garments. Nobody likes it, but they are immune to normal cold while wearing them.

28
Macarons in pastel colours, dusted with a sugar coating. They taste delicious, and they make you speak in iambic pentameter for one hour.

29
Sugar butterflies made and sold by the confectioners of Cadence Parva. When eaten you levitate for one minute

30
Purple lemons. Turns your lips purple and double their size for one day, but also makes you immune to acid.

31
Mead. When drinking, save or be compelled to go find the bees that made the honey used to make it and protect them with your life! (Lasts 1d6 days.)

32
Chocolate cake. The sticky fudge coating is impossible to wipe off your fingers or mouth for an hour. Climbing and lifting made much easier due to extra purchase.

33
Tube of pigment which animates the image you paint for an hour. Enough paint for one 3ft x 3ft painting.

36
Cupid's Arrow.Bears your name. When shot into the sky it travels until it finds your soul- mate. If they survive being hit by the arrow circumstances around them change and lead them to you. Eventually. Be patient.

34
A hand mirror that tells you are the fairest of them all – it isn't lying. And somehow the former fairest-of-them-all is aware you took their place and looking up competitively priced assassins guilds.

35
Tiny instrument. A matchbox-sized version of an instrument. If you are nimble enough to play it, the volume is twice as loud as the regular sized version of the instrument.

37
A toasting fork that pulls away from the fire and immediately cools when your food is cooked. Perfect every time.

38
A ring that looks like a small crown. When placed on the head of a creature, it turns them into a tiny frog with a crown.

39
A hood which magically fixes your hair. Just pull it up, then down – BAM!

40
A small tin painted with the words "Flea Circus". Inside a tiny big top complete with tightrope, tiny tin lions, a unicycle, and a wheel of death with minuscule daggers. Fleas are not included, but if you provide some and train them daily for 1d6 months, 3-in-6 chance of distracting anyone who you show the box to.

41
Edible flowers with a gum-like consistency. When eaten a twinkling flower crown appears on your head and lights you from above. It disappears when you take it off.

42
Thread produced by fire silkworm. Looks clear with a fire burning inside it. Can be used to sew, embroider or weave into a fabric which looks like moving fire. Looks cool, but has no magic properties.

43
A tall hat made from glass with colourful fish swimming inside it. Weighs almost nothing when placed on your head. Fish need regular water changes and feeding. It won't look as good with dead fish floating in it. Unless you're into that sort of thing, of course.

44
A flute carved out a human humerus. When played, a ghostly singing voice accompanies the tune you play.

45
Containment jar. When opened, sucks in and miniaturises the creature who opened it or a creature it is aimed at (save allowed). When the lid is screwed on the prisoner inside can survive indefinitely without air or sustenance. The lid needs to be unscrewed and the jar tipped upside down to free the creature.

46
Waxed parchment with the words "CHEESE IS IMPORTANT!" printed over it. Will keep your cheese in perfect condition forever. Whenever you want to take the cheese out, the parchment asks what you want to do with it. If it is satisfied, it lets you unwrap the cheese. Otherwise, the message changes to "NOT TODAY, MORON."

47
A mouth guard to protect teeth from direct blows during combat. Also whitens and straightens as it's worn, so your victory yell at the end of the fight will really dazzle.

49
Heels of hulk. Can subtly grow up to 3 inches without affecting balance in order to make you taller than the person standing next to you. Doesn't work in combat, only in social situations where size matters and only lasts for the duration you are close to someone.

50
A steel razor blade that makes an "Ooooh!" noise as it glides over the contours of the skin. It will also say "Careful now!" if it hits a dry patch or thinks you're about to nick yourself.

51
A chalice which separates the flavours of a liquid into layers. As you drink you are able to identify each flavour and perhaps each component of the liquid.

48
A pot of lip salve that grants resistance to cold and hot temperatures, but also makes your lips lilac, prismatic, plump and fabulous for eight hours (5 uses).

52
A pot of lightly scented moisturising cream with a whipped consistency. When applied to the face the pot calls out *"Darling! You don't need me! You're fabulous already! Oh go on then, do it you minx!"*.

53
A small bottle of a very potent smelling potion. When sniffed, it momentarily burns the insides of your nostrils and makes your eyes water slightly. For the rest of the day you are guaranteed to be booger-free.

54
A hairbrush which changes your hair colour to anything you want as long as you are able to accurately describe it out loud. The colour is applied stroke by stroke and you have to speak the colour description on each stroke. (Great for highlights.)

55
A hair-tie made from twisted leather. Tie up your hair quickly, it will adjust itself and neaten up even the worst bird's nest of hair in 5 seconds. Great to use during combat when you just don't have the time to deal with fly-aways. Man-buns are a speciality.

56
Prestidigitation wipes – for those missing the cantrip. An oilskin pouch containing pieces of muslin fabric soaked in an oil-based solution. Give your armour, clothing, skin a rub down and have all impurities and dirt removed. No wet or sticky residue left behind. Also leaves you with a light scent of sandalwood. If the wipe isn't placed back in the oilskin immediately after the rub down it explodes with illusory confetti and glitter. Useful for making a grand entrance.

57
Inspirational face paint. Have an artist paint a design of your choice onto your face before giving a performance. The face paint animates on your face, complete with a mini light show. The quality of your performance determines the duration of the effect, from an hour (*You don't really need it, art is your bag baby!*) to a month (*Oh honey, you really need to work on your technique and confidence, I'm going to stick around and help you*).

58
Weapon oil with the words *"My sword is bigger than yours"* on its label. Rub it onto anything to make it appear larger. Spend five minutes rubbing for a 10% enlargement or 20 minutes for a 25% enlargement. The effect is illusory but magnificent. Lasts 1d6 hours.

59
Facial massage stones. Three small, round polished stones. Place them on the forehead and say either "Soothe", "Relax", "Invigorate" or "Circulate" (this one is for an all over glow to your skin). The stones move around your head and face and massage you according to your need.

60
Self cleaning underwear. Must be removed and hung to air with plenty of space. Does not work if left on the ground. After a minimum of one hour airing, they feel freshly laundered and silky, even if they are not silk.

by **Anne Hunter**

RANDOM RIVAL ADVENTURING PARTIES

RIVAL ADVENTURING PARTIES USUALLY HAVE A LEADER PLUS 1D6 ADDITIONAL MEMBERS.

1. Handsome but romantically oblivious young man, followed by an entourage of exceptionally talented young women in a variety of military and school uniforms. They are obviously in love with him. The women consider any female PCs or retainers to be dangerous rivals for the young man's affection. Some might develop competing crushes on a high-Charisma male PC or retainer. Despite his general cluelessness, the young man is an unbelievably effective monster hunter, capable of hitting seemingly invulnerable opponents for massive amounts of damage.

2. Genius inventor leads his extended family of plucky assistants. Cumulative 1-in-12 chance per encounter that they've all been transformed into anthropomorphic ducks by an experiment gone wrong. Each time they're encountered, they're out testing a new invention and insist on demonstrating it to/on the PCs. The invention might be beneficial to the test subject or a piece of ultra-technology that the inventor will offer to sell to the PCs because he inexplicably considers it to be a failure, completely ineffectual, or overly dangerous. The inventor and his family are always friendly and affable - the only variation is what kind of device they are friendly and affably trying to test.

3. Family of master criminals wearing black-and-white striped jumpsuits and black domino masks. They might ask the PCs to hold some treasure for them «until the heat dies down», or open some locked doors and disarm some traps for the PCs as a demonstration of their skill, or ask the PCs to join them on a «heist» before inevitably betraying them, or target the PCs for a stick-up. When unloading goods from the PCs during a betrayal or stick-up robbery, the criminals are far more interested in one type of mundane object than in coins or treasure.

4. Mysterious figure in a space suit leads a team of technicolor plant and fungus creatures. Any PC or retainer who recently died to a slime, mold, plant, or the like will be present in their transformed state. The figure may be willing to trade unique material components for a proprietary medicine that cures the effects of such transformative threats, or may attempt to «recruit» PCs by transforming them.

5. Fantastically wealthy and idiotically foppish 0th-level dilettante escorted through the underworld by the hyper-competent team of seasoned adventurers he's hired as «porters» and «torch-bearers» to show him around.

6. Self-aggrandizing and belligerent «captain» wearing a yellow jumpsuit is accompanied by 1d3-1 intelligent and reasonable scientist advisors in blue jumpsuits and 1d12+1 security personnel in red jumpsuits. Make a reaction roll only if advisors are present, otherwise the captain is unerringly hostile. The security personnel have only 1 HP each and are incompetent combatants. When security is defeated, the captain will teleport to safety. He always possesses a piece of ultra-technology that he drops on any roll of a natural 1.

7. Team of adorable woodland creatures with whimsical names bearing miniature adventuring gear made from twigs, leaves, and acorns. Each time they're encountered, they're on a «mission» to rescue the victim of a kidnapping. They might ask the PCs for help with the rescue, or attempt to detain them for questioning, or believe that the PCs are trying to thwart their rescue, or believe that one random PC is the «victim» and attempt to return them to the nearest city the next time the party is asleep. The creatures prefer to lay traps and ambush the PCs in their sleep rather than initiating direct combat. They have few hit points, but are hard to hit due to their small size and use of cover.

8. Hyper-intelligent talking dog leads a team of under-qualified amateur detectives. Each time they're encountered, they're searching for «clues» to solve a mystery. They might ask the PCs for help, or attempt to detain them for questioning, or demand random items of mundane equipment as «clues», or be certain that the PCs are guilty of the crime at the center of their mystery.

9. Team of outcast mutant superheroes. Each has a garish spandex costume, a silly code-name, and a single magic power they can use at will. Each time they're encountered, they're on a new «mission» to defeat a different «villain». They might see the PCs as potential victims in need of protecting, or as potential allies in their fight, or as an unnecessary distraction from their mission, or as their villain of the week.

10. Bright yellow giant accompanied by technicolor spectral undead. Any PC or retainer who has recently died will be present. The giant is insane, always hungry, and utterly paranoid about the «ghosts» he claims follow him everywhere. He may believe the PCs are ghosts and be afraid of them, or warn the PCs about the nearest actual undead threat, or demand to eat all the PCs' rations, or believe himself to be temporarily invulnerable and attempt to swallow the PCs whole.

11. Angsty human barbarian with a magic sword leads a group of half-animal, half-mineral monsters. Each creature has a natural attack that mimics the effect of a spell, and makes a single weird alien sound that is nonetheless intelligible as conversation to the barbarian. He is determined to slay any «evil wizards» and destroy any «unholy magic items» he encounters, with predictable results for the PCs

12. Undead anti-cleric with the power to «turn» living humans leads a party of undead crusaders to recover unholy relics for the glory of Hell. Any PC or retainer who recently died will be present. The crusaders demand the destruction of any holy symbols or divine magic items the PCs possess. They attempt to «convert» living characters and «recruit» dead ones to their anti-religion. Happily, they're also eager to trade to acquire any cursed items in the PCs' possession.

by **Lord Simon Black, scribe of the Pile of Bones**

The Grey Shaded Hex: an alternative to the alignment chart

The traditional alignment chart is usually among the first things one considers when rolling a new character. The problem is: it sucks. The 3x3 grid really tracks two things: your character's belief in legality and morality.

The grey shaded hex is a new way to approach morality and motivation for PCs and NPCs. The hex is based on the light triad and dark triad of personality traits, a recent system developed to consider morality in people featuring concepts like Machiavellianism and faith in humanity. There are three traits examined in each triad. Each trait has a Bright side and a Dark side.

The problem here is that the model of triads is too complex for fast character creation. To adapt it for RPGs, it should be simplified a little bit. The Bright traits of a character are Empathy, Selflessness, and Protection, and the Dark traits are Callousness, Self-Entitlement, and Manipulation.

When rolling a new character, consider: is this person Empathetic, connecting to other people emotionally? Or are they Callous, unfeeling and unemotional, giving little consideration to anyone else? Are they Selfless, caring more for the well-being of others than for themselves? Or are they Self-Entitled, looking out for number one, caring only for their own comfort and safety? Finally, is this person Protective, a defender of the weak, guarding against those who would use and abuse them? Or are they Manipulative, willing to strategically exploit other people for their own gain? Are you…

B
D
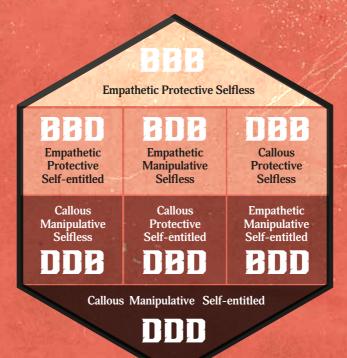
| Empathetic? or Callous? | Protective? or Manipulative? | Selfless? or Self-Entitled? |

Having selected the three traits that best fit your character, you end up with either three **Bright traits**, three **Dark traits**, or a combination of two and one. Characters with three matching traits are the epitome of goodness or evil. While many strictly good folk populate the world and they should exist somewhat commonly, all-dark characters should be reserved as villains, thugs, and monsters. The majority of people fit somewhere into the grey area.

Just looking at the hex, it may be hard to rationalize what some of these archetypes would look like as a character, **so let's flesh some out.**

BBB: The Saint. An everyday hero, someone who is loved by all and who in turn spends their life in pursuit of making the world better for everyone else, no matter the stakes or the personal reward.

BBD: The Mercenary. A fairly good hearted person who will fight to protect the weak, as long as they

	Empathetic Protective Selfless	
BBD Empathetic Protective Self-entitled	**BDB** Empathetic Manipulative Selfless	**DBB** Callous Protective Selfless
Callous Manipulative Selfless **DDB**	Callous Protective Self-entitled **DBD**	Empathetic Manipulative Self-entitled **BDD**
	Callous Manipulative Self-entitled **DDD**	

get something in return.

BDB: The Parent. Someone who genuinely cares about and feels deeply for others, but is okay with deceiving and manipulating them, as long as it's for their own well being.

DBB: The Reluctant Hero. A gritty, down-to-earth type who may appear gruff and cold, even rude on the outside, but who deep down, truly cares for their friends.

DDB: The Politician. Someone who cares for their people, but has little regard for outsiders and is willing to do anything to make their country great, no matter the cost.

DBD: The Prison Guard. A cold protector of the status quo, who cares only for the pay they receive, but who won't tolerate fighting or exploitation amongst those under their charge.

BDD: The Spymaster. An expert manipulator who can find and exploit people's strengths and weaknesses, connecting with them emotionally only to use and abuse them.

DDD: The Gutter Thief. An antisocial, cruel, and greedy person who only cares for their own personal gain and will betray, deceive, and steal to get what they want.

Of course, these are only guidelines and examples. Any character can be fleshed out using this system, and as they develop and grow their willingness to do certain things may also change. So this shouldn't be looked at as the be-all-end-all of your character's personality. It is simply a new way to approach motivation and alignment, and most importantly: **it's meant to be fun!**

by **W.F. Smith**

DON'T LIST OUT GEAR

SOMEONE POSED THE QUESTION *"HOW FAR DO YOU GO WITH GEAR WHEN CREATING OSR SHIT?"*

I started from scratch. ***Prismatic Wasteland*** is a science fantasy game, so I couldn't simply crib the equipment list from a fantasy game and call it a day. At the same time, most sci-fi gear lists left me cold: they weren't strange enough. I began writing up gear, drugs, and mechanics for each, but a small handful of items just took up so much space. I am very deliberate with space in my game and aim for the much-vaunted "control panel" layout (here is a great Questing Beast article[1] on that subject if you're interested). Instead of using two pages to list maybe 20 specific items and drugs, I now have 1,600 possible random items (Gear) and 1,600 possible random drugs/potions (Chems) all on one page.

I use a **spark table** with an element of choice to generate Gear and Chems. Spark tables were developed by Chris Mc-Dowall, and you can read about them on his blog[2]. Where these spark tables differ is that for each result, the person rolling has two words to choose from.

GEAR

	FIRST WORD	SECOND WORD
1	Anti-Gravity OR Aquatic	Backpack OR Bandages
2	Automatic OR Biomechanical	Bandana OR Belt
3	Bright OR Cybernetic	Boots OR Briefcase
4	Diamond OR Electric	Candles OR Chalk
5	Extendable OR Floating	Cloak OR Flashlight
6	Folding OR Glowing	Gloves OR Goggles
7	Grappling OR Holographic	Helmet OR Hook
8	Implanted OR Laser	Jewelry OR Lamp
9	Leather OR Living	Lantern OR Lockpicks
10	Memory OR Monitoring	Lapel Pin OR Lighter
11	Musical OR Night-Vision	Map OR Marbles
12	Orbital OR Pocket	Mask OR Mirror
13	Portal OR Prosthetic	Monocle OR Net
14	Recording OR Remote-Controlled	Paint OR Pole
15	Rubber OR Self-Replicating	Poncho OR Rope
16	Shoulder-Mounted OR Silk	Rug OR Sand
17	Smart OR Solar-Powered	Scabbard OR Sneakers
18	Space OR Spray-On	Socks OR Spectacles
19	Stealth OR Symbiotic	Tent OR Thimble
20	Telescopic OR Wrist-Mounted	Torch OR Umbrella

CHEMS

	FIRST WORD	SECOND WORD
1	Bulking OR Cosmetic	Acid OR Antidote
2	Cosmic OR Curative	Biscuits OR Candy
3	Death OR Demon	Coffee OR Cola
4	Dream OR Extradimensional	Cream OR Crystals
5	Fairy OR First Aid	Dust OR Floss
6	Fortified OR Hair-Growth	Foam OR Glue
7	Hallucinogenic OR Healing	Grits OR Gum
8	Hypnotic OR Love	Jelly OR Juice
9	Mind OR Neon	Lotion OR Lubricant
10	Nutritious OR Old Fashioned	Milk OR Oil
11	Protective OR Radiation	Parasites OR Paste
12	Rapid Response OR Rational	Perfume OR Pheromones
13	Regenerative OR Resilient	Pills OR Pipeweed
14	Revival OR Sleep	Poison OR Potion
15	Slippery OR Smart	Powder OR Salts
16	Smelling OR Snake	Salve OR Serum
17	Soul OR Soy	Shampoo OR Spice
18	Space OR Spectral	Spray OR Syringe
19	Strength OR Truth	Tonic OR Vaccine
20	Vanishing OR Wizard	Water OR Wax

(1)Ben Milton, "Control Panel" Page Layout in the OSR, (Nov. 24, 2018) http://questingblog.com/control-panel-book-layout-osr/

To generate random Gear or Chems, roll 2d20 to determine the first and second words of its name and choose the combination of words that sound most natural. With 3,200 possible results on these five columns, there are many results that might be silly or nonsensical, but the limited ability to choose the combination of words should cut down on this. However, it doesn't totally foreclose it; if you want Night-Vision Gloves, by all means pick that over the Night-Vision Goggles. (As an aside, I would say for Night-Vision Gloves to function, you have to cup your hands around your eyes like a child pretending to use binoculars).

Game mechanics are determined ad hoc: collaborate to determine what the Gear or Chem does based on its name. By default, Gear takes up one inventory slot and performs one simple function. A Chem has Usage d8 and either (a) restores 1d4 to one particular stat and deals 1d6 damage to Grit or (b) grants advantage at tests with two particular stats and disadvantage to another stat for one Duration. More useful Gear may take up two slots or have a usage die, and more useful Chems may take up one slot, have a lesser usage die, or damage a stat. These are the roughest of guidelines and they use terminology from *Prismatic Wasteland*, so simply ignore it if your game doesn't use inventory slots, usage die, Duration, stats, or Grit.
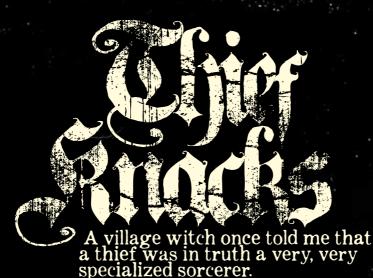
The name of the item, above all else, should determine how it functions. I list a small handful of example combinations and the mechanics I would use for them, but it is more fun to be surprised by a combination and try to determine for yourself what it does. The characters of the Prismatic Wasteland are surrounded by gizmos and gadgets from long-bygone advanced societies, so the stuff they find in the chrome dungeons should feel a bit weird and hard to explain. Here are some example Gear and Chems for inspiration:

Example Gear
- **Floating Rug.** Can fly and carry up to two people for 2 Duration. Two Slots, Usage d12.
- **Night-Vision Goggles**. Allows the wearer to see in darkness. One Slot.
- **Pocket Sand**. Throw at a target's eyes to blind them for 1 Duration. One Slot, Usage d8.
- **Space Helmet**. Can breathe underwater or in space. Ignore toxic fumes. One Slot.
- **Smart Torch**. Emits light (in a color of your choice) in a small area. Voice controlled. Dimmable. One Slot. Usage d12.

Example Chems
- **Healing Crystals**. Attuning heals 1d6 Grit. Usage d8.
- **Love Potion.** Fills the imbiber with non-romantic, familial affection for the first person they see for 1 Duration. Usage d6.
- **Old Fashioned Cola.** Advantage at all Dexterity and Wisdom tests for 2 Duration. When the Duration ends, deals 1d4 Constitution damage. Usage d8.
- **Smelling Salts**. Awakens creatures, restores one level of Stress, and deals 1d6 Intelligence damage. Usage d8.
- **Snake Oil.** Advantage at tests to sell it and disadvantage at tests to buy it. One Slot.

by **Josh McCrowell**

Thief Knacks

A village witch once told me that a thief was in truth a very, very specialized sorcerer.

A missionary from O said to me that thieves tapped into their psi powers. The Beggars' Guild believes that the Thieves' Guild is actually a cult, and whispers of forbidden rites of ancestor worship and the terrifying graves of deified guild masters deep in the vaults of Thief House.

Whatever the truth, all thieves have seven supernatural abilities. Some can use them more frequently than others. Anybody can sneak. The thief makes the Sign of Silence and stills the air around them. Anybody can climb a wall. The thief uses the Invocation of the Spider and runs to the top of the Tower of the White Elephant.

These rules are intended to make thief characters pack a little more oomph. They're written to hypercharge the percentile-based skill system in games like Advanced Dungeons & Dragons or Old-School Essentials without actually fiddling with the numbers.

Whenever a thief tries to do something by mundane means, use your rule set's resolution mechanics. A d6 roll, an attribute test, whatever.

The thief can choose to use one of their knacks instead by simply rolling on the thief's percentile skill table. On a success, the knack is refreshed and may be used again. On a failure, the knack is gone until the next time the sun crosses the horizon.
(Yes, that means that thieves can use their knacks once during the day, and then again during the night.)

Here are the knacks. They have boring names. Thieves who use them understand that naming things with flair is one of their primary duties.

Climb Sheer Surfaces - You can climb a sheer surface like a spider. This knack lasts as long as you're continuously ascending; one can climb the Tower of Babel using this knack. However, you cannot stop moving or the knack ends.

Find and Disarm Trap - When you use this knack, you can ask the Referee if one particular thing is trapped. If it is, the Referee must tell you what the trap is, what its triggers are, and what you need to do to disarm it. Disarming traps in this way almost never requires a roll.

Hear Noise - When you use this knack, point your finger towards something. You can hear perfectly what you're pointing towards. If your fingers are pressed against a door, you can hear what's being discussed in the next room. If you point towards an area with hiding enemies, you can tell how many lie in ambush by hearing their hearts beating. If you point at someone you can see, even if they're miles away, you can hear them as clearly as if you were standing next to them.

Hide in Shadow - You can step into your own shadow. While in your shadow, you're practically invisible. The only things that can hurt you are magic weapons or spells able to target ethereal creatures. However, you can't move or interact with your environment while in your shadow.

Move Silently - You can utterly still the area around you as long as you hold your breath. Nothing within 10' of you makes any noise. You can smash through a window. You can gank a husband and not worry about his screams waking up his wife lying in bed beside him. You can pat the wildly barking dog on the head. It's all good.

Pick Locks - You make a secret knock—like the Fonz on a jukebox. A locked or magically sealed door/chest/shackles instantly pops open. Even barred or stuck doors open for their friend.

Pick Pockets - The referee tells you everything that the person is carrying. You've opened their inventory. Select one thing. It's now in your inventory. Nobody notices until it makes sense for them to do so.

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

WHAT IS TESTED?

WHEN DESIGNING A DUNGEON, ONE QUESTION YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF IS: WHAT AM I TESTING FOR?

Math tests challenge your maths skills. Drinking contests challenge your liver and your brain. But what does your dungeon test? How is the wheat separated from the chaff?

If you write a test that everyone succeeds at, you are merely writing a dungeon tour. The party walks through, witnesses all this cool shit, and has the same experience no matter how skilled or unskilled the players are. (Digression: I know at least one group that enjoys dungeons like this. Nothing wrong with that; they're having fun.)

If you write a test that everyone fails at, you are merely writing a doom cave. Rocks fall. Everyone dies. If no one, no matter how skilled or lucky, can progress through your dungeon, you've written a dead end. So a good dungeon must lie somewhere in the middle. But what is the mechanism that sorts skilled groups from unskilled groups?

Does it test aggregate weight? Does the first room weigh the entire party, and if they weigh less than 1000 lbs, they may walk across to the treasure vault, while heavier parties fall down the pit straight to hell?

Does it test the character's combat skills? There are different kinds of combat tests. Does it test their character builds? i.e. did they build a strong enough character, numerically and mechanically, with enough synergy and clever combos that they can wear down difficult foes? Does it test their levels? Does it test their tactics, with lots of fights that can be deadly unless the party retreats to a choke point? Or the party's insight, where they must realize that the shrine guardian can only be killed when it is outside of the shrine?

Does it test their resourcefulness when trying to solve OSR-style problems? Must they solve riddles? Or find hidden doors? Do they use inductive logic to solve things, such as realizing that the cure for the fire snake's venom is the ice snake's venom?

Does it test their role-playing abilities? Does it, god forbid, test a player's acting ability? Does it test the parties ability to discern the motives of NPCs? Does it test their discretion in choosing which NPCs to trust? Does it test their ability for subterfuge and lies? Does it test their scheming ability?

Does it test system mastery, where players have an advantage if they know protection from evil also protects against possession? Does it

test setting knowledge, where a player has an advantage if they realize that the guy in a mantis mask is a high-level assassin? Does it test luck? If you use dice, you are testing luck, but to what degree?

You probably read through this list and shook your head at some entries, and nodded approvingly at others. That is good. You are thinking about it.

I have seen dungeons test all of these things, to large and to small degrees. Suffice to say they are all adjustable. An organic chemistry exam can have 60% of its questions test redox reaction, or it can have 0%.

For example, if you write a dreamlands dungeon where a character's ability scores are all mirrors of their Charisma score and all of their abilities are replaced with randomized dream abilities, you have negated any influence character build has on that player's success or failure. And there is no right answer. Some groups will love one thing, others will loathe the same.

Narrow and Broad Tests

When you have an obstacle, how many ways are there to overcome it? Combat, the quintessential obstacle, usually has a bunch of ways: diplomacy, fighting, bribery, running away, treachery, etc. There are many paths to success in a broad obstacle.

Some tests are narrow. A door that can only be opened with the crystal scepter. A hidden room that can only be found with magic, not ingenuity. There are few paths to success in a narrow obstacle.

Generally, I like things to have at least three solutions. A locked door is a good example. It has three or four solutions. It tests a character's build by allowing a thief to pick it or the wizard to cast *knock* on it. It tests a party's willingness to risk a random encounter by allowing anyone to kick it down noisily. It tests a party's thoroughness by allowing them to find the key in room 22 and open it.

Personal philosophy: if you are going to trap the party in a dungeon, give them at least three ways out. Don't make any of them easy.

Rule of Thumb: Don't use narrow tests. At their worst, they're just pixel-bitching. Narrow tests are cool only when they are optional. A clue that can only be found if all of the spider webs are burned away. A small treasure vault that can only be opened if the party answers a riddle correctly.

Riddles

There is a wrong way to use riddles, and it involves putting the riddle in the middle of the main path through the dungeon. If the party can't answer the riddle, they can't progress in the dungeon. Shitty. If you are going to have a riddle block a main path of the dungeon there should be other ways around it. It should be a broad test. If a sphinx blocks a path, you should be able to kill it, bribe it, or go around it. Alternatively, you can use a riddle to block off a small side-branch of the dungeon, as mentioned above. Maybe just an alcove.

Pro-tip: What to do when the smartest player is playing the dumbest character? You obviously can't have the Intelligence 5 guy answer all the riddles. Just transmigrate the answer over to the INT 18 wizard, and let it come out of his mouth. Fiction is preserved, the smart player gets to have fun being smart at the table, and honestly it probably takes a table full of people to simulate Intelligence 18.

Discriminatory Ability and Secret Areas

Remember when I said a test that fails everyone or passes everyone can't discriminate between skilled parties and incompetent ones? That's still true.

If you want to have a test that discriminates between skilled and incompetent, you need to have challenges with a variable difficulty.

Rule of thumb: Some treasure should be easy to find. Some treasure should be moderately difficult to find. And some treasure should be damn near impossible to find.

The reason for this is to test (and therefore reward) players who search.

If the group just runs through the dungeon, they'll get the obvious treasure that is just sitting out in the open. Maybe they're low on health, or maybe they're just careless.

If the group is clever or thorough they'll find more stuff. Chests hidden under beds, keys in the pockets of dead guards, secret passages hidden behind easily-moved bookshelves, etc.

If the group is clever, thorough, and tenacious they'll find everything, including the really hard to find stuff. The treasure at the bottom of the outhouse. The secret alcove that can only be discovered if you topple the statue of Nyarlathotep, which takes time and makes noise. Some parties won't be able to do this because they're low on HP, running out of time, or too low-level to risk more wandering encounters.

The reason I write my dungeons like this is because I want to reward cleverness and tenacity. With treasure.

If finding all of the treasure in your dungeon requires a moderate effort (not automatic, not extremely difficult), then you might not be offering enough rewards to players who run quickly through your dungeon (perhaps they're dumb, perhaps they're too low-level) and you might not be offering enough rewards to players who are both clever and tenacious.

Two Rabbit Tattoos Talk About Hidden Rooms

Right Rabbit Tattoo: It sounds like you're advocating putting treasure in rooms that most parties won't ever find.

Left Rabbit Tattoo: Yes.

Right Rabbit Tattoo: Why waste time creating content that most players will never get to enjoy? Surely, it is better to spend your time creating treasure and rooms that everyone will get to enjoy. Take those impossible-to-find treasure vaults and stick them somewhere obvious, like on the main dungeon path.

Left Rabbit Tattoo: I think one thing about old-school play that a lot of newcomers don't grok is that there is a lot more emphasis on exploration, and less emphasis on straight-up combat.

When you do well in combat, you survive with less damage, or none at all. There's a variable degree of success in it.

When you do well in exploration, you should find more treasure. There should be a variable degree of success in that, as well.

Right Rabbit Tattoo: Do what you want, but be aware that the DMs who follow your advice will write up 10 rooms and their players will only find 8 of them, on average. That can be frustrating for a DM.

Left Rabbit Tattoo: You know what? I'm okay with that. It's more important to me that my dungeon is a more discriminatory test of exploration ability.

By **Jack Shear** - Art : **Sam Mameli**

In Praise of
Vanilla Fantasy

I n some circles, "vanilla fantasy" gets a bad rap. It gets labeled as boring, generic, and lazy. I've even been told that the problem with mainstream D&D is that it's "not weird enough." Now, I'm a fan of specific, stylized flavors in fantasy RPGs. It's safe to say that I favor the high concept, bespoke, and special snowflake over the expected fantasy conventions and the well-trod ground of the high fantasy/sword & sorcery nexus. Even so, I want to tell you why vanilla fantasy is actually a good thing to have at the forefront of the hobby.

VANILLA FANTASY IS THE LINGUA FRANCA OF FANTASY RPGS
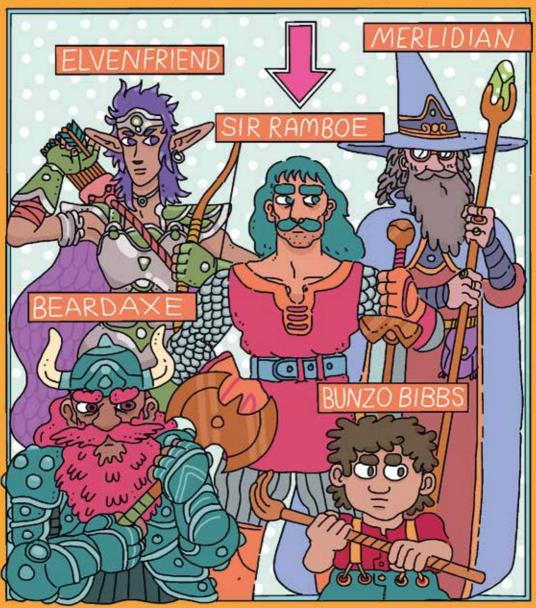
If you want to explain what D&D is like to someone who has never had the pleasure of playing before, it helps to have some established tropes and recognizable cultural references to fall back on. "It's like Lord of the Rings" goes a lot further than "Well, it's like ancient Tibet but everyone is a crab person and magic comes from stitching patches of demon skin to your body." The latter may be more evocative to the jaded palate, but the former is far more legible to a larger audience.

VANILLA IS TRANSLATABLE

Even if you aren't running a vanilla game, vanilla products still possess utility. Here's why: it's easier to add weird elements to a vanilla product than it is to strip away weirdness that doesn't fit the kind of game you want to play. "Weird" game products are often so heavily slanted toward an auteur's conception of strangeness that they aren't often cross-compatible with other "weird" products. Vanilla products, on the other hand, can be more easily bent toward a variety of purposes and intents because they are made to inhabit the middle-ground.

WHEN EVERYTHING IS WEIRD, NOTHING IS WEIRD

Rejecting everything that smacks of vanilla probably makes your game feel fresh and vital... for about three sessions, tops. Once the novelty wears off, all those weird elements will feel as rote and expected as elements derived from traditional fantasy. It's worth keeping in mind how vanilla works in the world of cooking: even when added in small amounts, it is an ingredient that helps bring out the punch of your other flavors. In most settings, the presence of vanilla setting elements makes the truly weird stuff stand out. Vanilla doesn't compete; it enhances the stronger flavors.

VANILLA MIGHT JUST BE WHAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY WANT

Although you, in your rarefied DIY circles, may deride vanilla fantasy, the larger RPG-buying public might not share your views. In fact, sales figures seem to bear out the notion that vanilla sells better than more specialized kinds of fantasy. The reason the Forgotten Realms and Golarion are more popular than your favorite esoteric setting isn't because they have been foisted on rubes— it's because people find those settings comfortable and desirable when they're thinking about how they want to spend their hobby time. Not everyone wants to fight shit golems. Think of it this way: the more people who come into the hobby because they want to make a Drizzt clone means more people who will stick around long enough to delve into the wilder niches.

THEY MAKE VANILLA SO THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO

I consider it a god-damn service that WotC and Paizo make vanilla fantasy because it means that I don't have to. They've got that arena covered, so I can make my own, odder forms of fantasy. Vanilla and weird aren't in binary opposition: they're an aesthetic dialectic. One doesn't exist without the other. And since they have vanilla fantasy covered, you have the freedom to go hard at the more idiosyncratic, personal end of the spectrum.

by **Paolo Greco** - Art after **Gustave Doré**

My goblins are dirty,
My goblins are goons,
My goblins are many
Their smell makes you swoon
My goblins are daft,
My goblins are dank.
My goblins eat boogers
And pull some mad pranks

My Goblins Are…

I never have humanoids in my fantasy RPGs. Humans run the gamut of all possible moralities and roles, and deliberate homicide feels quite different to hetericide. If you want murder and betrayal and evil, don't be shy: kill, backstab, and hurt fellow men.

Goblins, tho. Goblins are different.

Goblins are dirty, feral kids. Goblins are grotesque, both in a literal sense of cave-dwelling troglodytes, and in a more meaningful sense of odd, off, weird, and a chunk more than "a bit wonky". Petty, greedy, prone to deformity, displaying undecipherable gender dysmorphism and not caring about it, goblins have the class-less, level-less, hyper-violent society you'd expect after an unsupervised mid-morning primary school recess lasting three weeks.

Goblins are all different, mismatched in attire and shape and eye-colour, all squeaky voices and craven laughs. Goblins form gaggles to wander both the wild and tunnels looking for cake and a better weapon than the chair leg they are currently wielding two-handed.

Goblin encounters should always include some occasion for shenanigans, some mutated goblins, and some weird set-up: this can be either straight slice-of-life in a grotesque location or a ridiculous event but completely out of place.

Goblins don't have an odd thing or two to spice them up: instead they fell in the weirdo saucepan as kids, and when trying to get out they fell in again, and then the pot tipped and flipped over the goblins trapping them underneath. When playing the inevitable melee, each attack should be different: a goblin swings at you with a pillowcase filled with rocks, another jumps and bites your calf, another climbs over you to stab the back of your neck like you were a Colossus, yet another singes you with laser eyes.

One last thing: goblins are always, always hilarious. Even in death, play it for laughs. No tragedy! Goblins are slapstick, goblins are farce, goblins are low comedy, goblins are snark. Leave no room for anything sad: all goblins want to die like they lived, cackling gingerly. A word of warning: don't attempt to play them seriously, or they might become regular children.

D10 Utterly Inexplicable Goblin Situation

1. Goblins petting white rabbits, nervously stopping and putting the rabbits down as soon as the PCs notice them. If inquired, they vigorously deny petting rabbits. - **2.** Goblins strutting on giant wargeese (stats as ogres). - **3.** Goblins wearing shiny armour and being honourable knights. And failing at it in the goblinest way possible. - **4.** A lonely goblin standing guard, accompanied by their bear plushie Patchington, roleplaying to be the World Emperor. **5.** Goblins are playing football. Er, footgoblin: the ball is a tiny live shrieking goblin, tied and bound in a lumpy, angry, bitey ball. - **6.** Goblins are carrying a mutant goblin on a palanquin and nobody knows where they are going. **7.** Goblin diplomats, throwing a barrage of carefully weaponized insults to a delegation of another faction. **8.** Goblins are tunnelling around the dungeon or doing construction work in ways so risky the mind boggles. - **9.** Goblin Surgery: a goblin feels poorly, but thankfully a crew of goblin surgeons is about to cut them up and probably replace what ails them with something completely inappropriate. - **10**. The Goblin Game, where all participants slap each other and swap possessions following incredibly complex rules (No! can't counter a double slap on Saturday while stealing a broken tool, unless straddling rules are in effect). Obviously it would be inappropriate for the PCs to not join in.

D7 Insane Secret Goblin Warfare Techniques

1. Goblin Pot Airmail: trebuchet shooting goblins in clay pots. The pots smash at landing, dealing 1d6 damage. Somehow goblins survive the landing unscathed. Every time. - **2.** Goblin Monster Train: a goblin diplomat chased by a random mob it harassed, trying to run toward the enemy to unleash the mob on them. - **3.** Operation FIREWOLF: goblins riding wolves, close in melee with the enemy, and as they are about to die immolate with firebombs. **4.** Slime Squad: goblins with buckets filled with oozes and slimes run close to the enemy, throw the buckets at them, and run away. - **5.** Giant Goblin Robot: treat as a mountain giant, but every round of operation there's a 10% chance of a shutdown for 1d2 rounds, and a 20% chance of it catching fire. - **6.** Goblin Morale: this gaggle is positively the most cowardly goblin group ever. It always fails morale rolls, and has learnt to embrace propensity for self-preservation into its tactics. The goblins start pelting the opposition with arrows and stones until melee starts, when they rout and flee. They rally a few minutes later and return to shooting at the enemy... again and again and again, in a never-ending cycle. - **7.** Civilised Warfare. The goblins deal only non lethal attacks (including pretend spells they only shout the names of) and are righteously offended if the opposition doesn't do the same.
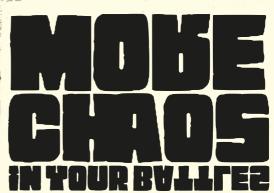
D8 Unexpected Goblin Location

1. A butcher, with odd cuts of strange meat hanging from hooks and entrails from any and all D&D monsters scattered all around. - **2.** A salon, with really dirty plush furniture and cheap hooch aplenty - **3.** A device room, containing an engine or a pump or a printing press or something similar, in overlapping states of disrepair but still operated by the goblin crew. - **4.** A goblin crèche, with 6d20 extra goblins. - **5.** The "Graffiti & Chill Room", where goblins hang out to watch graffiti and then... chill. - **6.** The Great Poo Room. - **7.** The goblin mechanical workshop, where nothing works reliably. Yes, even things that work fine elsewhere, wobble into catastrophe here. Artefacts and holy relics can even fall apart when used in this room. - **8.** A pottery workshop and kiln, where goblins make really wonky pottery, glaze it with the most eager colours and patterns a kindergarten could collectively imagine, and then fill them with whatever they find.

D30 Mutations and Other Goblin Weirdness

1. Very furry. Better defence and protected from cold. - **2.** Horribly fat, the goblin is fed by its tribe to be slain and eaten during periods when food is scarce. Double HP, can't run. - **3.** The goblin has a skin membrane between arms and legs, allowing her to glide. It makes it impossible to wear armour though. - **4.** Can make any noise through vocalization and they will make any noise through vocalisation. Repeatedly. - **5.** Horribly strong. Ridiculously buff. His biceps have biceps. Deals double damage in melee and throws objects at three times the normal distance. The goblin body can't quite cope with so much awesome, though, taking damage when such huge strength is abused.

6. Pea green, photosynthetic goblin can survive on water and sunlight. Shame that goblins hate sunlight. - **7.** Uncannily warty. If still and crouching is easily mistaken for a pile of rotting garbage. - **8.** Very sticky and strong. Grapples like an ogre and can easily climb walls and steal stuff. - **9.** Big-jawed, sharp-toothed, ever-hungry. Bite deals 2d6 damage. - **10.** Mostly glabrous, pink and swollen, the goblin looks exactly like a perfectly healthy human blond kid.

11. Really big, strong and burly. In combat, treat as an ogre, except for morale purposes. - **12.** Immortal and unable to reproduce. This goblin might have died hundred of times, often in embarrassing ways, but is very far from realizing it. Regenerates 1 HP per turn. - **13.** Flexible bones. Can squeeze through a hole the size of a tennis ball and takes no damage from falls and blunt trauma. Wobbles. - **14.** Feels no pain. Doesn't understand it either. When it should be collapsing or dying, it can save to stave off the condition for another day. - **15.** 1d6 arms. 1d6 legs, 1d6 heads, eyes, ears, noses. Still a single goblin brain to run it all - **16.** Can shadow-step once a day, reappearing from a shadow in a range of one mile. However, this happens only when frightened and can't be activated deliberately. - **17.** The goblin has a big swollen skull, looks a bit stupid, and can't talk. Unbeknown to any of the goblins, it is able to plant ideas and beliefs in other goblin minds (three times a day, save to resist). - **18.** Smells like freshly baked bread instead of reeking like a normal goblin. Tastes like freshly baked bread too. Until the day this goblin is eaten they benefit from advantage on reaction rolls. - **19.** This comically hairy goblin with a roguish smile is, in fact, a were-worg. - **20.** Very sexy. For Anything. Of any gender and sexual preference. Can get laid without much effort. Probably due to goblin pheromones or something. - **21.** Three eyes. Can see radioactivity, magic, and other emissions and auras, and also particularly elusive phenomena like the flight of invisible herons and other people's problems. For some reason, other goblins find this mutation particularly funny. - **22.** Freakishly long and slender hands. Imagine a human child with hands five feet long. - **23.** No head. A mouth is where the neck should be. Has 10 little eyes on its fingertips.

24. Metal bones. Double HP, +6 AC, fists like hammers, sinks like a stone, points north if held up by a rope . - **25.** Can breathe in, inflate, and become a goblin balloon. If warmed up with a fire or by sunlight, rises to the sky. Often chased downhill for sport. - **26.** Silicon-compatible body chemistry. Can survive on water, rocks and soil. Resistant to electricity, additional damage from fire. Shiny as hell. - **27.** Self-fecundating. Had 5d30 identical but sterile daughters, in addition to 2d30 offspring due to more traditional mating practices. (If you are willing to entertain the idea of "goblin traditional mating practices". Ugh.) - **28.** Really, really, really loud voice. Can be heard from far, far away. Can't speak at less than full volume though, and also does not understand the concept of inside voice. Only coping strategy: breaking into song. - **29.** This goblin does not need a potty, but oozes an oily substance (about a pint a day if properly fed), that can be collected and used for lubricant, burning oil, and even food. If one can get over the complex bouquet of lemon flower, camphor, goblin armpit, and waste engine oil. - **30.** This goblin is, in fact, a changeling left there by a very, very intoxicated faerie queen on a three-years-long bender. Nobody ever realized this.

by **Nobboc** - Art: **Gustave Doré**

MORE CHAOS
IN YOUR BATTLES

This combat sequence variant is inspired by *Into The Bastards*, a little wargame published in *Battles Magazine* #6 which depicts the first tank battle of the First World War. In this game, the rigid sequence of play gives way to drawing random chits as soon as the battle reaches peak intensity.* Not only are units activated randomly, but some random events are thrown in for extra uncertainty. I am using *Old School Essentials* (or B/X) here as a basis but it should work with most adventure games. This initiative system brings back the chaos in your battles, keeps players focused, and makes fights shorter to run (and possibly deadlier too).

CARDS

• Use a pack of 52 regular cards (or cardboard chits, coloured dice, home made cards... but I find a poker deck quite handy). Put the numerals on one side, the jacks on the other, and remove the other face cards, including the jokers.

• Assign the party a suit (spades, hearts, diamonds, or clubs) and each character a numeral card of that suit (including fighting followers, who can be a single unit). These card are called the **activation cards**. Get someone to record everyone's cards to avoid confusion.

ENEMY UNITS

• An enemy unit represents an enemy or a group of enemies. For example, if the party encounters 9 goblins and 1 ogre, you can decide to make 3 units of 3 goblins each, the ogre being its own unit. If the party encounters a rival gang of 5 adventurers, you can group them as you see fit, or decide to have five units.

• Assign each enemy unit a numeral of a different suit than the characters'. These are the activation cards for these units. Write it down!

• Whenever possible, and except in special cases, try to have a balanced number of activation cards on each side.

THE ACTIVATION DECK

• When combat occurs, after resolving any surprise rounds collect all friendly and enemy activation cards. This is your **activation deck** for the battle.
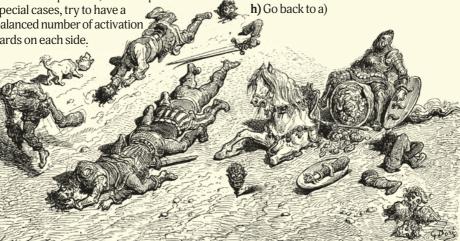
Note: Another way to make sure you remember which card is whose is to have another deck handy: just give the players their activation cards and make a little panel of monster activation cards in front of you.

COMBAT SEQUENCE

Repeat each round like so:

a) Shuffle the activation deck.

b) Everyone who wants to cast a spell or retreat must declare it.

c) Check morale if needed.

d) Draw a card from the activation pack:
- If it's an activation card, the character or unit takes their turn.
- If it is a chaos card (see below), roll a die on the chaos events table #1 and resolve it.

e) Draw a new card, discarding the one just played.

f) When there are no more activation cards in the activation deck, the round ends.

g) Roll 1d6. If the result is less than or equal to the number of combat rounds completed, add a Jack to the deck. **This is a chaos card**.

There can't be more than 1 chaos card for every 3 activation cards. Don't add any more after you reach this limit.

h) Go back to a)

ACTIVATION
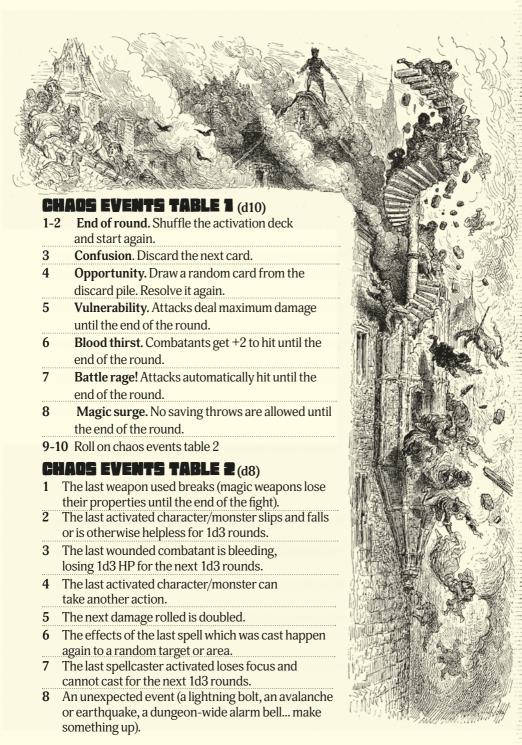
An activated character or unit can perform one action. Members of the same unit may take different actions, but do so at the same time (the referee decides how to manage it). The list of possible actions includes:

• **Movement and/or melee attack**
Slow weapon attacks are resolved 1d6 activation cards later or at the end of the round. For example, Albard the Fool is activated and decides to move and then attack in a melee. His move is resolved immediately but as he wields a two-handed sword (slow weapon), he rolls 1d6, and gets a 3. He then has to wait until 3 activation cards are played (or until there are none left in the deck) before he can resolve his attack.

• **Movement and/or ranged attack**.
You must not have moved to shoot a crossbow or throw a heavy object (such as a barrel, large rock, or dwarf.)

• **Spellcasting**. A character or monster wishing to cast a spell must not have done anything else during that round, not have been hit, nor failed a saving throw.

• **Retreat.** From *Old-School Essentials*: *The character turns and flees from melee, moving up to their full encounter movement rate. This round: the character may not attack; the opponent gains a +2 bonus to all attacks against the character and ignores any AC bonus due to the character's shield.*

• **Miscellaneous actions** like looting a dead body, drinking a potion, binding a wound, rummaging through a bag... may or may not allow movement in the same activation. The referee estimates the time the action would take.

OPTIONAL INITIATIVE

You can roll initiative at the beginning of each round before building the activation deck. Roll 1d6 for characters, and another 1d6 for the enemy. The winning side puts one activation card of its choice on top of the deck. If the winner rolls 6 and the loser gets 1, the winner also chooses which card goes at the bottom of the activation deck.

CHAOS EVENTS TABLE 1 (d10)

1-2   **End of round.** Shuffle the activation deck and start again.

3   **Confusion.** Discard the next card.

4   **Opportunity.** Draw a random card from the discard pile. Resolve it again.

5   **Vulnerability.** Attacks deal maximum damage until the end of the round.

6   **Blood thirst.** Combatants get +2 to hit until the end of the round.

7   **Battle rage!** Attacks automatically hit until the end of the round.

8   **Magic surge.** No saving throws are allowed until the end of the round.

9-10   Roll on chaos events table 2

CHAOS EVENTS TABLE 2 (d8)

1   The last weapon used breaks (magic weapons lose their properties until the end of the fight).

2   The last activated character/monster slips and falls or is otherwise helpless for 1d3 rounds.

3   The last wounded combatant is bleeding, losing 1d3 HP for the next 1d3 rounds.

4   The last activated character/monster can take another action.

5   The next damage rolled is doubled.

6   The effects of the last spell which was cast happen again to a random target or area.

7   The last spellcaster activated loses focus and cannot cast for the next 1d3 rounds.

8   An unexpected event (a lightning bolt, an avalanche or earthquake, a dungeon-wide alarm bell... make something up).

by **Warren Denning** - Art: **Gustave Doré**

COMBAT OBJECTIVES

Often D&D combat can devolve into a sluggish exchange of blows between sides with the only objective being to kill one side. This is often unrealistic; most people don't want to die and really only the most zealous will fight to the death. B/X provides tools to help a DM guard against this outcome by employing three checks: Surprise (2-in-6), Encounter Reaction (2d6), and the Morale Check (2d6). Another tool to add is eliminating "kill everyone" as the default objective to combat once it is determined the encounter is hostile and ready to attack.

Roll d8 on one of the tables below, according to the encounter's intelligence.

INTELLIGENT (humanoids and people)

1: Grab the gold or valuables. - **2**: Capture the caster or spellbook. - **3**: Sacrifice the cleric in the name of foul gods. **4**: Hit & run! Reduce one or more PCs to half their HP, then withdraw. - **5**: Loot the party for supplies and equipment. **6**: Push the PCs out of the room/area/bridge, then guard it. - **7**: Capture the animals/NPCs/hirelings. **8**: Hold position until more dangerous reinforcements arrive.

INSTINCTUAL

(beasts and monsters)

1: Attack the nearest NPC or pack animal — drag them into the underbrush. **2**: Attack the weakest/smallest PC — drag them into the underbrush. **3**: Hold a specific territory. **4**: Bloody the largest PC in a territorial display. - **5**: Fight until hit with magic. **6**: Ravage backpacks for food. - **7**: Hit & run! Next three encounters will be with this creature. - **8**: Territorial display, but will yield ground quickly.

UNINTELLIGENT

(oozes, constructs, some undead, and plants)

1: Attack nearest party member. - **2**: Consume one target then go dormant or leave. - **3**: Probe each party member looking for gold, nectar, metal, stolen jewels... - **4**: Attack until someone issues a command or says "stop" in a specific language. - **5**: Move to inconveniently block the characters' way. - **6**: Cover or grow around an object of significance for reasons unknown. - **7**: Attracted to person with a specific color/sound/smell/taste/astral aura. **8**: Attack those who stole something.

by **Kobayashi**

HERE IS A LITTLE RULE TO HANDLE CHASES, RESEARCH, CRAFTING, TRIALS, ACTION SCENES THAT DON'T INVOLVE FIGHTING, EVEN MASS COMBAT, AND PROBABLY MANY, MANY MORE THINGS WE HAVEN'T THOUGHT OF YET. ALL YOU NEED ARE ATTRIBUTE SCORES AND A D6.

HIT POINTS, HIT POINTS EVERYWHERE

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Your task has a set number of hit points (HP), and you deal d6 damage to it each round. When you bring it to zero, the task is completed. Also, your task inflicts "damage" to one of your character's attributes: any important endeavour will be taxing.

Maybe we should start with an example: *Joshua the halfling wants to pick a lock in the middle of a fight. The GM decides that the door has 12 HP. Each round, Joshua's player makes a Dexterity check. On a success, he inflicts d6 damage to the door; if he fails, the lock causes d6 damage to Joshua's DEX. If the door's HP reach zero, the door opens. If Joshua's DEX gets to zero first, he's done. No do-overs.*

As you can see, it's pretty easy: the main task of the GM is deciding the opposition's HP. A range of 10 to 20 is enough, around 5 means the scene can be resolved with a simple attribute check, more than 20 and it becomes tedious. As a rule of thumb: use the character's attribute minus 3 for an easy challenge, or the attribute plus 3 for a difficult one.

Another factor is deciding how much time an attribute check takes. In the example above, the character Joshua could make an attribute check each round. Some tasks can take longer:

Malekar the Magnificent wants to study an obscure tome of occult magic. The GM decides that each Intelligence test will take a day. Being as cryptic as it is massive, the tome gets 20 HP. Proceed as in the above example. If Malekar's INT reaches 0 before the tome's HP does, it proves impossible for Malekar to decode.

A nasty GM could even rule that the failure triggers a nasty curse. It is also possible to make the attribute check harder for the character (disadvantage 5E style, roll 4d6 under, whatever way you do these things). If your attribute modifiers are in the -1/+1 range, you can add them to the damage rolled. (If your game uses higher modifiers, downsize the damage die to a d4.) Critical hits may result in double damage if you wish (but in that case critical misses mean the character's attribute takes double damage as well).

TIME TO PLAY

With a simple set of numbers you can now model... perhaps not everything but a lot of things, surely. Let's try:

• *A character stands trial. The judge doesn't like adventurers (15 HP). The group's most articulated member (Charisma 16) is the defence attorney and the others managed to blackmail some witnesses (+1 to damage rolls). Each roll represents a day of trial. If the judge's "trial HP" reach 0, the character is acquitted. If the attorney's CHA reaches 0, the character is found guilty.*

• *A small group of peasants (Strength 10) is facing an attack by orc raiders (15 HP). The orcs are vicious, so the peasants roll with disadvantage, but the village's fortifications are pretty good (they get +1 to their damage rolls). You roll for each day of battle. If the peasants' STR is reduced to 0, they flee/die/whatever (if you need casualty numbers, just roll a die representing a quarter of the peasants' forces).*

• *The characters' ship faces a dangerous storm (15 HP), the captain makes a Dexterity roll per hour, with their experienced crew granting +1 to damage rolls. If the captain's DEX reaches 0 before the storm does, bad things happen (the characters are lost at sea, the storm claims the lives of the crew, the ship sinks...).*

Of course, even if a character succeeds at the tasks, failed rolls may have consequences along the way (usually wasted time or resources).

by **Emmy Allen**

Playing Chess with Death

When you would die, Death comes to claim you. Time freezes, everything but Death and yourself become somehow less than real. You die automatically and are led away, unless you can do one of the following:

GAMBLE WITH DEATH

You can offer to play against Death in a game of skill or chance. You and the other PCs actually play a game against the GM (who represents Death), perhaps liar's dice, a hand of poker, or a riddle contest. Death gets to choose the game (GMs: pick one you're confident you can win). If you lose, Death gets to take one of your companions as well as you. You only get one shot at this each time Death comes for you.

BRIBE DEATH

You offer Death a substitute soul in your possession to take instead of yourself. Spells to claim people's souls such as Magic Jar are useful here. Alternatively, if somebody has signed a contract saying you own their soul, you can sell that contract to Death in exchange for your own life. The soul should be at least as valuable as your own, but Death might be willing to haggle. Might.

BARGAIN WITH DEATH

You promise Death something he wants. You might finally kill somebody who's frustratingly evaded him (such as a lich). You might allow him to possess your body for a time. You might be set on a quest of cosmic importance. It's up to Death to decide if he accepts, and if he feels you're trying to renege he can snap his bony fingers and have you die whenever he wants. If you do this, even though you get to live, your life just got a lot more complicated, and if you die while completing Death's task things will only get worse.

FIGHT DEATH

If you insist. Death has 20 HD, passes all saves on a 2+, kills you on a successful hit rather than dealing damage, and is immune to fire, drowning, poison, mind-control, etc. He is a divine being and can basically create whichever supernatural effects he wants. You won't win this unless you have an especially clever plan, and even then it will only work once.

If you successfully wriggle out of dying, Death leaves, and you snap back to reality on 1 HP.

WHERE DOES DEATH LEAD YOU?

The GM makes a judgement call as to where your soul goes after death based on the virtue of your deeds, any pacts made with supernatural beings, and so on. This will affect your next PC.

• If you go somewhere good, treat all 1s when rolling for attributes as 6s.
• If you go somewhere bad, treat all 6s when rolling for attributes as 1s.
• If your soul was claimed by a supernatural being, as well as this then your new PC is also tainted by that being and may have an appropriate weakness (such as double damage from Holy things) and a tell such as an extra finger or birthmark.
• If your soul is totally destroyed, you roll up your stats normally. However, your next PC is soulless and dies automatically when they hit 0HP: no saves, no injury tables, no bargaining with death. Find a way to gain a soul before this happens.

The PCs are finally geared up (or angry enough) to take on the dragon! It´s gonna be a big event in your campaign (because: DRAGON!) and you want the treasure hoard to be worthy of it. How do you make it something truly special without making it stupidly huge? How can you make quality compensate for the fact that you´re not actually giving your players literal hillocks and ravines of coinage?

What the
Arkenstone
Can Do For You

Here are some suggestions for things that have served me well over the years:

HISTORY

The dragon hoard par excellence is probably still Smaug´s, and it´s heaped with the story of the dwarvish kingdoms and their alliances and rivalries with their neighbors. Describing the treasure is one of the few times you have the undivided attention of everyone at the table, so it´s a great time to sprinkle (not dump) some exposition onto your players. Coins bearing the face and name of the second Warlock-emperor of the Melechan dynasty (worth ten times their mere weight value to collectors), arrows crafted by elven fletchers to slay the Arch-lich Kazshet, or the gilded toe-bone of the poet-scholar Saint Gweniach will draw a lot more attention to the history of your setting than any dry dissertation by long-bearded scholars or sleepy ents. Focus on bits of history that are or will be important to your campaign´s current events, and especially the active interests of your players and their characters.

DANGER
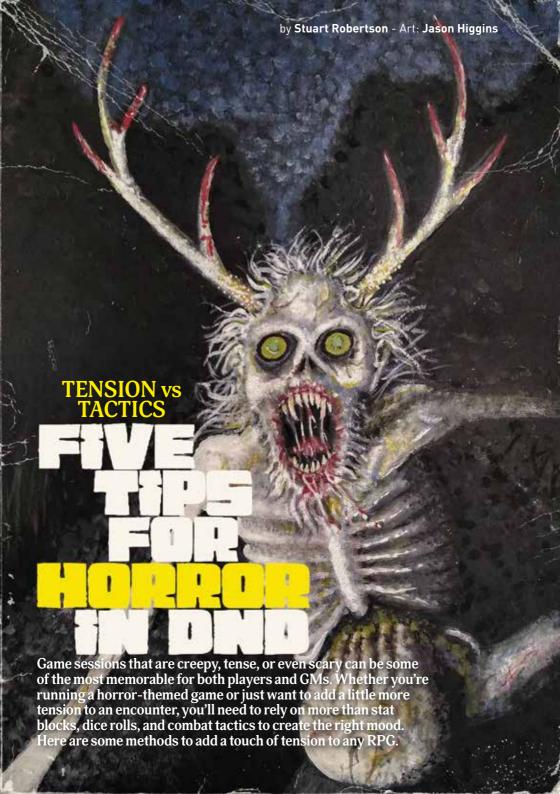
Smaug´s hoard contains the Arkenstone, a wondrous gemstone that bears more than a passing resemblance to the doom-fraught Silmarils. Perhaps the Temple of the Risen Sun doesn´t think a reliquary of Saint Gweniach belongs in the hands of murderhobos. Perhaps Kazshet´s

agents infiltrated the circle of elven fletchers to add a curse to the enchanted arrows. Perhaps, as with the Arkenstone, there are cultural, personal, or political ramifications to the ownership of some of that treasure. One of the things that makes The Hobbit stand out from generic fantasy fare is that there are exciting and fascinating consequences to the slaying of Smaug. So can it be with the dragons in your campaign.

SOMETHING PERSONAL

This is a great time to make callbacks to the backgrounds of the PCs or events that happened earlier in the campaign. The paladin´s great-grandfather´s sword doesn´t need to be in the hoard, but there might be a sword that´s marked with the rune of a company of knights he once rode with, or the champion´s prize from a tourney the great-grandfather competed in. There might be a treatise on abjuration magic written by the mage who was a mentor to the wizard PC´s teacher. There might be some piece of jewellery or other objet d´art that a villain vanquished by the PCs early in their careers sent as tribute or a bribe to the dragon.

Callbacks like this are a great way to make the players feel like their characters fit into the setting.

by **Stuart Robertson** - Art: **Jason Higgins**

TENSION vs TACTICS

FIVE TIPS FOR HORROR IN DND

Game sessions that are creepy, tense, or even scary can be some of the most memorable for both players and GMs. Whether you're running a horror-themed game or just want to add a little more tension to an encounter, you'll need to rely on more than stat blocks, dice rolls, and combat tactics to create the right mood. Here are some methods to add a touch of tension to any RPG.

Description vs Dice

It's the little things that create a creepy atmosphere in a game. Try and make sure you're giving your players enough descriptive language to properly imagine the scene in their mind's eye. You don't need to give them long-winded descriptions or read from the pre-written boxed text, but you should do more than give them bare-bones accounts of thirty-foot-long hallways leading to the next standard door. Try to include all five senses if you can. Cold breezes, damp odours, and echoing sounds can make an otherwise basic description feel a bit more real.

Avoid rolling the dice for checks to find traps and secret doors. Ask the players what they're doing and answer their questions about the scenery they're examining. This is a great opportunity to go into more detail with your descriptions since the players have asked for more info anyway. The more you are describing the scene and the players are telling you what they're doing there the better.

Lots of dice rolling, including combat, can take away from this a bit. Combat is the action part of a movie, as opposed to the scenes where you build tension.

Suspense vs Surprise

Roll for initiative! Make a saving throw! You take 13 points of damage! These don't make your game as scary as when players are nervous about the potential for those things to happen. The sudden appearance of a slavering monster doesn't leave your players much time to be afraid before they switch gears to thinking about the combat system and how to defeat it. Monsters that you can hear approaching or see climbing out of their coffins are much better – the players have time to think about what might happen if they face the monster. Having to decide whether to edge carefully around a pit when you know there's a chance of falling in is much scarier than a covered pit trap that you suddenly fall into. A sudden explosion of yellow mold spores isn't scary. A sickly yellow mist that fills the hallway ahead is.

If you are exploring a dungeon and you find a room with a closed door, open it, and a gorilla jumps out, you're going to feel like it's arbitrary and the tension will be gone. If instead you receive clues before opening the door that gets you ready to accept what you find, it'll work much better. The room has a strange musky smell. You hear some scratching sounds from behind the door. If you listen at it you might hear breathing.

Mystery vs Mundane

When players know too much about the mechanics behind them, the monsters stop being scary. Once they've memorized all the stats, read the ecology, and know all of the game fiction about a bugbear or a gremlin, it's not scary anymore. It's an exotic animal at best, and just a pile of game rules to be predictably dealt with at worst. If the players think you will only give them encounters (monsters, traps, or hazards) that are «level-appropriate» and manageable, they're

not going to think twice about charging headlong into the fray.

A little extra mystery to what the players encounter will add a lot of tension to your game.

Clues vs Chaos

The flip side of mystery is that it can't just be random or arbitrary. If it is, you'll break your players' suspension of disbelief and they'll stop buying into the reality of the fictional world. This is exactly the same thing that happens in a movie when you think «What? come on, that doesn't make any sense!» When that happens you're 'out of the movie' and it's the same thing in a tabletop RPG. The more your world feels internally consistent the more players will buy into it. Don't confuse this with realism – you can still have the suspension of disbelief in a fantastic world.

How did the zombies get in this room, and why aren't they attacking the dwarves playing cards in the last room? Sure, you can make up some explanation for that, but if your players are thinking about it at the table, they aren't thinking about the zombies being scary. On the other hand, passing by some recently unearthed graves before you run into the zombies gets you ready to accept their appearance.

Fleeing vs Fighting

As soon as players commit to fighting with a monster, it becomes a little less scary. It might be a tough opponent but that's just a relative level of challenge. Combat typically runs much slower than the other parts of the game, so the pacing will also change and that will also affect your level of tension. It's almost an inverse of what you'd see in a movie – where fight scenes are often the fastest-paced on the screen, they can be the slowest paced in an RPG.

If your players get an opportunity to decide to run away, on the other hand, the tension increases. The players (not just the characters) have a fear of what would happen in the combat encounter. So whenever possible, try and make sure the PCs have a choice about combat, and that running is a viable option.
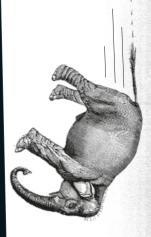
Again, this won't work if your players think you'll only give them 'appropriate' challenges, or that you'll fudge the dice to keep their character alive if things go bad for them. That's when you get players attacking everything without a second thought. Having some player-controlled retainers along with the party can be a good way of letting the players see the results of bad choices without taking their main character (and thus the player) out of the game.

I find this works best when there's a time limit under which the players need to decide whether to flee or not, and not simply break off from combat whenever they feel like it. Perhaps the monster is breaking down the bars of its cage to attack the players. Skeletons are pulling the heavy stone slab off their crypt. Or animated statues are heading down the hall towards the room, leaving the players a few moments to decide between fight or flight.

Characters in scary movies spend more time running from monsters than fighting them... It should be the same in games.

by **David McGrogan**

BATHOS

The overwhelming narrative characteristic of D&D, insofar as it has any such characteristics, is, in my experience, bathos: the sudden and unexpected shift in mood from the grandiose to the mundane, the tragic to the comedic, the heroic to the inept. Wandering monster tables, reaction dice, rolling in the open, taking results as they come, and resolute avoidance of illusionism or palette-shifting of any kind – all of these elements of 'old school' D&D play contribute to the development of the bathetic. People who like 'narrative' games and prefer things to make 'dramatic sense' usually miss that this is a feature of D&D in its purest form, not a bug.

An example of bathos from one of my games: Eki Ulele had just survived the most difficult and bloody encounter the party had yet had, in which eight bandits and two hireling retainers had died and one of the PCs taken to the brink of dying. Eki had been through, in many ways, his toughest moment. He had faced down the bandit leader and bluffed him into retreat, then survived a nerve-wracking chase through a pitch black forest, with no weapons or magic and only flasks of oil to aid him. He had led the opposition away from his wounded friends, buying them time to escape. If I was interested in trying to develop the 'plot' of the campaign, as if it was a story, this would have been a defining episode for this character – the making of him. He would have gone on to greater things, and grown in stature because of what happened to him at the bandit lair. Or perhaps he would have died bravely in one final showdown with the bandit leader, going out in a blaze of glory, remembered for ever more for his feat of bravery and self-sacrifice. But the dice said otherwise: having survived the bandit encounter through his skill and courage, the next day, trying to find his way back to town, he got an unlucky result and had a wilderness encounter; he then got an unluckier result when it turned out to be giant bees; and he then got an even unluckier result when he failed his surprise roll. He died a meaningless and ignoble death alone in the forest, stung to death by mindless insects. And after all that heroism the day before. **Bathos.**
Yet this has its own narrative sense. Bathos and absurdity are proud and important traditions in drama and comedy. They may not be 'emotionally satisfying', but they have their own value because they remind us that life is unpredictable and tragic, that pride comes before a fall, and that plans fail. They also make the moments of heroism and greatness all the more poignant. The next time somebody makes out that you should fiddle or ignore dice rolls in the name of maintaining some sort of narrative consistency, remind them of this: 'I prefer it bathetic, darling'.

Above:
Sire Boldredo of Bluecastle celebrating his victory against the Ogre Prince of the Caves of Darkness

by **Trollsmyth** (J. Brian Murphy)

If Failure, isn't Interesting, SKIP IT!

We've all seen fifth edition DMs do it: a player asks a question and the DM reflexively asks for a skill roll. Professor Dungeon Master over at the Dungeon Craft vlog says, "Don't do it!"* and wisely brings up the Garden of Eden problem. This happens when a plot or adventure can't progress unless the characters successfully take a particular action. (It's called the Garden of Eden problem because until Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, nothing can progress. There's no tension, no drama, no conflict; the happy couple remains in paradise and nothing dramatically significant happens, which is awesome for them but sucks if you're trying to tell an entertaining story or run a fun game.) I believe it's Dyson Logos I've seen repeatedly on Facebook saying something along the lines of, "If you don't want to accept what the dice tell you, why are you rolling the dice?" This is the flip side of what Prof. DM is saying; if you're not willing to accept failure, why invite it by invoking random chance?

I'm going to take this a step further: if failure isn't potentially fun, don't bother rolling. If the players are attempting to pick a lock in a dungeon and there's no reason for them to rush, no chance for a wandering monster to interrupt their efforts, or the dungeon's inhabitants aren't taking the time to lay ambushes or sneak up on them, I just say they succeed. This goes doubly so if the PCs are back in their safe base, and have uninterrupted hours to inspect and work on the lock without fear of ninja ambush or the like.

Conversely, if I can make failure interesting and the roll is otherwise unmomentous, I'll ask the players to roll. No, I'm not rolling to see if the bard can successfully sing Scarborough Faire, but I might roll to see if someone in the audience knows it's used by a secret rebel group that they believe is responsible for the kidnapping of their sister and so decides the PCs need to be ambushed, or possibly pointed out to the Iron Baron's secret police. Or maybe extreme success is interesting: you might shave a few gold pieces off the price, but if you demonstrate superior haggling skills the merchant will decide you're the perfect spouse for her ne'er-do-well son.

And yes, this goes doubly so in combat. Most rolls are interesting in combat, succeed or fail. But there are fights that are just foregone conclusions, and there's no chance of anyone else intervening no matter how long the matter drags out. There's no point in suffering through the string of misses that are just going to eat up valuable gaming time. If there's no chance of failure being interesting, I just let the characters succeed.

In the best fights and the best dungeon delves, every second (or, at least, every six-second round) counts. But not every encounter or adventure pushes such exacting standards. If the most interesting thing that happens from failure is that someone else tries instead or the PCs rest and try again, just let them succeed. If the fight has gone on long enough and the outcome is absolutely going to be PC success, just let them win and move on. **Your game will be better for it.**

* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g43pLNa5h6c

by **Leander Elwischger -** Bad art: **Nobboc**

SMALL TABLES OF GONZO BODY HORROR

1-2 HEAD

1. One half of your brain melts. You lose either all creativity or your ability to think rationally. **2.** A little tumor brother grows on the back of your head. Talks without pause, loves attention. **3.** One of your eyes turns into a slug who happens to love you. You can still see through this little friend as if it were a portable eye. **4.** Your head explodes! You can still talk and everything but your head just isn't there anymore. **5.** Your nose changes to that of the last animal you encountered. **6.** Each of your teeth turns into a little toe. You can move them, it feels weird. Eating is an experience.

3-4 TORSO

1. Torso turns transparent. Gross and cool. You can see your breakfast being digested. **2.** Sweat turns into sticky slime. Smells worse. Can be used as glue. **3.** Your body grows abnormally. You'll need to eat twice as much to be sated. **4.** Grass grows on your belly. **5.** Your heart grows in size. Cortisol levels increase dramatically. **6.** Ventriloquy. A mouth appears in place of your belly button and you can use it to talk. The voice differs from your own.

5-6 BACK

1. Fur starts to grow on your back. Keeps you warm in the cold. **2.** 1d4 arms burst from your back. Receive damage for each. Can hold weapons. **3.** New orifices that give off spores. Mushrooms might like you more now even though you smell musty. **4.** Each day a new eye pops up on your back. You can't control them. **5.** As time passes your back stretches turning long, and snakelike. **6.** Hundreds of tiny bug legs emerge from your flesh. You can lie on your back and be carried by them.

7-8 ARMS

1. Your arm turns into a tentacle! You lose your hand and fingers but gain in reach. **2.** Your main hand melts and out of its stump grows a sharp bone that can be used as a weapon. **3.** Your fingers turn thick and clumsy like sausages. **4.** Arm bones turn to rubber. You lose all feeling but you can still grip objects. **5.** You can shoot your fingernails out. They regrow in a minute. **6.** Your arms are detachable. Do something dumb with your new ability.

9-10 LEGS

1. Legs grow in length. Feels like a torture rack. **2.** Legs grow a cowardly mind of their own. Will attempt to run away when encountering danger. **3.** Your toenails harden and won't stop growing. **4.** Chicken legs hahahahahahaha. **5.** Legs break more easily but heal faster. A bad landing shatters them, but you're back on your feet and ready to jump again in a few minutes. **6.** You lose one leg. A cobra is slowly growing out.

By **Kezie Gracie**

THE AFFLICTION. "IS IT SO STRANGE TO BE A GOD?"
APOTHECARIES DEBATE THE SO CALLED WHALE HEART AFFLICTION.
THOSE IN FAVOUR OF ITS CLASSIFICATION AS A DISEASE OF THE
BODY ARGUE IT IS A FEVERISH HALLUCINATION BROUGHT ON BY
AN ACUTE CASE OF FOOD POISONING FROM TAINTED SEAFOOD.
OTHERS DECLARE IT A MAGICAL MALADY, PERHAPS THE RESULT
OF A TWISTED RITUAL. MOST SIMPLY CALL IT MADNESS

BUT HOW?
USE THIS BIT OF GAMESTUFF AS A CURSE TO AFFLICT A CHARACTER WITH, AS THE START OF A QUEST TO GODHOOD OR AS SET DRESSING FOR A WEIRD COASTAL COMMUNITY

SYMPTOMS
1 ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY THAT YOU ARE THE WHALE GOD, REVERED BY ALL OVERSIZED SEA CREATURES AND PATRON DEITY OF WHALES. THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE WHALE GOD. CHANCE MEETINGS BETWEEN TWO SUFFERERS ARE KNOWN TO END IN BLOODSHED. LUCKILY THE DISEASE IS RARE

2 AN UNSHAKABLE, UNRELENTING ATTRACTION TO THE SEA. SPECIFICALLY TO WADE IN AND BE SWALLOWED BY A WHALE SO YOU MAY ASSUME YOUR FINAL FORM. LARGE LAKES (OR ANY PUDDLE OR WATER IF YOU'RE DRUNK) WILL DO IN A PINCH.

3 YOU CAN COMMUNICATE WITH LARGE MARINE LIFE IN DREAMS (TO YOU, VISIONS, TO OTHERS MERE FEVERED HALLUCINATIONS).

4 CLOTHES (IF YOU ARE STILL IN THE HABIT OF WEARING THEM) GROW STRONGER WITH THE REEK OF BRINE EVERY DAY

5 YOU LEAVE WET FOOTPRINTS IN YOUR WAKE.

WHALE HEART

AN AILMENT OF HEART, MIND AND SEA

CONTRACTION
1% CHANCE AFTER EATING RAW SEA FOOD. CHANCE INCREASES WITH THE SIZE OF THE ANIMAL AND THE DEPTH FROM WHICH THE MARINE LIFE ORIGINATED. **1 FOOD POISONING:** CONSUME BRINE FROM A BULL WHALE HEART PICKLED IN WATERS FROM THE DEPTHS. **2 RITUAL:** DOCKSIDE RUMOURS VARY AS TO WHAT WARDS NEED TO BE CARVED INTO THE FLESH AND JAR, THOUGH MOST AGREE YOU SHOULD DEFINITELY ADD SOMETHING SPICY TO COUNTER THE FOUL FLAVOR. THE PRACTICALITIES INVOLVED IN SECRETLY SECURING AND PICKLING A 400 POUND HEART THE SIZE OF A COW IS FOR THE WOULD-BE GOD TO FIGURE OUT FOR THEMSELVES.

CULMINATION.

WHEN YOU WADE INTO THE SEA AND ARE SHALLOWED BY A WHALE, ROLL 2D6:

12+ THE CREATURE IS NOW YOUR AVATAR AS WHALE GOD. UNTIL KILLED OR OTHERWISE DISLODGED USE ITS STATS AND GAIN ABILITIES LIKE TIDAL WAVE, INHALE, LEVIATHAN'S CALL, ECHOLOCATION, LOOK INTO THE DEPTHS. THE STATE OF YOUR HUMANITY GRADUAL SOUL MORPHING, AND LOSS OF HUMAN SPEECH RESTS ON THE GM.

10-11 YOU HAVE MERGED WITH THE CETACEAN, BEING WHALE GOD AND LORD OF THE WAVES. EXPOSED TO THE DEITY'S ALIEN INTELLIGENCE IS ENOUGH TO CURE YOU OF THE MADNESS. BUT HAS IT TRULY MADNESS? WHAT MIGHTY AND TERRIBLE DEEDS COULD THE TWO OF YOU ACCOMPLISH TOGETHER?

7-9 CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE INSIDE A WHALE. THE SHOCK IS ENOUGH TO CURE YOU OF THE MADNESS BUT THAT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACTS. YOU MAY BE ABLE TO MANIPULATE THE CREATURE THROUGH ATTACKS FROM THE INSIDE BUT BE CAREFUL HOW LONG YOU LINGER.

6 HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE DIGESTED? BETTER TRY TO HACK YOUR WAY TO FREEDOM IF YOU DON'T WANT TO FIND OUT.

CURES

- DRINKING, TOUCHING, SEEING NO WATER FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS.
- VOMITING UP OR OTHERWISE REMOVING THE WHALE HEART OR CONTAMINATED FOOD BEFORE IT IS FULLY DIGESTED.
- SURVIVING BEING SWALLOWED.

ADVENTURE HOOKS (AND HARPOONS)

1) THE SMUGGLERS KEEP AN ORACLE CHAINED IN THE DARKEST RECESSES OF THEIR CLIFFSIDE HIDEOUT. HE CLAIMS TO COMMUNE WITH THE LEVIATHANS FOREVER STRAINING TOWARDS EVERY GLIMPSE OF WATER. AND PROMISES YOU WILL BE GRANTED COMMAND OF THE WAVES IF YOU FREE HIM AND TAKE HIM OUT TO THE OCEAN.

2) A PICKLED HEART IN A JAR NEARLY THE SIZE OF THE ROOM. A TAP ON THE JAR DRIPS BRINE ON THE USED TANKARDS SCATTERED BELOW IT. WET FOOTPRINTS TRAIL AWAY.

3) PLUNGED INTO THE OCEAN AND SHALLOWED BY A WHALE, THIS SHOULD BE THE END NOT THE BEGINNING. BUT THE ECHOING INSIDES OF THIS LEVIATHAN LEAD TO A HOLLOW CHAMBER SLOSHING WITH FLUID AND FLOPPING FISH. SUSPENDED WHERE THE HEART SHOULD BE IS A TRAILING BEARD ATTACHED TO A HUMAN, PROTRUDING BONES SCRIMSHAWED WITH A SERIES OF PICTOGRAMS DEPICTING THE BOAT YOU SAILED ON, AMONG OTHER SCENES OF YOUR LIFE. CRACKED LIDS OPEN IF YOU APPROACH. THE WHALE GOD HAS A JOB FOR YOU.

4) THE ICEBREAKER FLEET RETURNS TO PORT EARLY, THE CHANNEL STILL PARTIALLY BLOCKED. THEIR ATTENTION IS STOLEN BY THE ICEBERG HAULED BACK WITH CHAINS; ENCASED INSIDE IS A TWISTED SKELETAL WHALE WITH A WOMAN SUSPENDED WHERE ITS HEART SHOULD BE. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE IT THAWS, AND SOON AFTER THE CHANNEL WHERE THE SEA CREATURES HAVE BEGUN TO GATHER.

5) DEAR GODS, WHAT WAS IN THAT SEAFOOD!?

by **Diogo Nogueira**

or: How to never describe a dungeon

Boring Dungeons

I've heard it a thousand times. You probably heard it too. Some people, I don't know why, say that dungeons, especially large ones, are boring. The endless repetitions of rooms and corridors and having to choose to go left or right, north or south depresses them. I don't know why. Actually, I do know why.

Because they don't really know how to run a dungeon. It seems easy, effortless. Just say what's in the room where the PCs are and where the exit passages go. But it's not. They get bored with the likes of: «you get to an intersection and there is a door to the north and two passages, one going east and one going west» because that's a terrible way of describing a dungeon environment. It gives nothing really useful for the players to choose from.

You should never describe a dungeon like that. There's a lot more going on that what we can initially see. A good referee will take all the context (what the dungeon was, what it is now, who lived there, who lives in there now, who or what passed through this passage...) and use it to describe the dungeon, to make it alive and real. If the east corridor leads to a natural cavern covered with mushrooms and myconids, maybe when the PCs look down that passage they see a dim fluorescent light that emanates from the weird moss that lives there, and feel a light cool breeze flowing from that direction. Some moss may be growing in that corridor also. If to the west there is a nest of giant spiders, that corridor has more cobwebs covering it than the other passages and some threads are still vibrating, as if something is probing the web. The thing people who think dungeons are boring and repetitive don't get is dungeons can be as surprising and exciting as anything else (if not more, since under the earth, distant from the laws of nature and hidden from the blinding light of the sun, anything can exist). And it's the referee's job to pass that feeling to the players.

Exploring a dungeon is basically **an exercise of choice**. Every room, every corridor, every passage offers a choice. Do we go in? Do we go north, south, east, west? And like all other choices, a dungeon choice only makes sense if it's not made at random. Players need information to make that choice, otherwise they can simply roll a die, or the referee can choose for them. Thus, the referee must provide clues and signs. They need to present each choice within a context that the players can use to extrapolate what their decision might lead to. They don't have to outright say that this passage leads to mushroom men and that one to giant spiders, but the information they present must have a connection to the truth. Guessing the truth is totally up to the players. That's where player skill comes in.

So there you have it. Never describe a dungeon in a boring and simplistic way like «a room with hallways to the north, east, and west». Think about what's at the end of those hallways. What went through those rooms. Think about what signs would have been left behind as clues for the players to make a better informed choice. If you can, give them three clues for each option. Think about their senses. What can they smell? What can they feel? Do they see anything? Do they hear any noise? Does a bad taste suddenly appear in their mouth? Make your dungeons alive and no one will ever find them boring.

by **Andrea "Vyrelion" Bach**

Roll 1d6

WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED!?

No room for awkward silences waiting for stuff to happen and for the game to get going. At the start of a new adventure roll on this table to give the beginning of your game a vitamin shot!

1. BARELY ESCAPED AN AMBUSH

The PCs ran with their lives after being ambushed: they eventually managed to defeat and chase away the attackers, but they paid a price. The brave ones fought and got hurt pretty badly (lost 1d6 HP – can't drop below 1 HP); the smart ones threw their valuables and ran (lost one item, DM's choice).

2. STOLE SOMETHING VALUABLE

The party are back from a simple job that has earned them some money (a total of 2d6 x 10 gp), but also the attention of law enforcement... who is hot on their trail.

3. AWAKENED AN ANCIENT EVIL

The PCs unwittingly disturbed a forgotten tomb to pilfer its contents, took a ruby and freed a demon, or stole the sacred pendant of a mummy. Whatever they did, a relentless evil has been unleashed in the area. The characters have one minor magic item that can solve the problem, but the evil knows it.

4. GOT CURSED

The group stumbled on an unholy place, stole a cursed item, or angered the wrong hermit: they are suffering from a minor curse that is not dangerous but very annoying.

5. WALKED WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER FOR DAYS

The characters ran out of food or water several days before reaching civilization and were unable to forage anything. Perhaps their supplies were stolen or destroyed. They are hungry and thirsty: they suffer a penalty to any attack roll, ability check, or saving throw. This penalty starts at -2 and is reduced by 1 each day where they manage to eat their fill.

6. GOT ROBBED ON THE WAY

The PCs got robbed while they were camping along the way to civilization without realizing it until it was too late: each PC can choose two items from their equipment. They lost all their other equipment and all their gold.
However the robbers have inadvertedly left some clues to their identity like: an arrow with very peculiar fletching, a medallion with a name, a map to their hideout, or a letter signed by someone living in town.

FEAR THE FACELESS GOD

The Faceless God sates its hunger by feasting on pain and despair. Every tear shed, every bleeding wound, every life taken strengthens its empty soul like a fearful and passionate prayer. Although it rarely ventures into the physical realm, a few statues of it are scattered around the world. They're hidden in the marshes of the Lost Bay, in underground labyrinths, or on distant moons: pale marble in the shape of an elongated, genderless figure with a dark void where a face would be.

The deity likes to manifest its presence in stagnant waters, the moonless dark, moments of quiet solitude, and sweat-drenched dreams. Strong yet broken souls are its favourite prey; restless and ambitious folk in search of glory and wealth.

The god grabs its prey by the ankle, the wrist, or the neck (difficult save allowed) and drags them into its otherworldly kingdom, a dark ocean of nothingness, lost amidst colourful stars. The Faceless God demands from its victims that they give themselves over to it. It pushes them to launch into a ravenous quest for money and power. Whoever surrenders to the Faceless God is devoured by its empty face and spat back onto the material plane.

Followers of the deity are given a fragment of its power: once per day, they have advantage to any roll made directly against another sentient being (fighting, lying, manipulating, stealing). They must, however, show loyalty: every day they must act at least once against an ally's or friend's interests. If they don't, they are plagued by nightmares so maddening they don't get any benefits from rest (no healing, no spells).

Those who are able to fight off the god's influence, or manage to escape its grip during the first encounter, see their soul permanently marked. (Roll 3d6. If the total is lower than the character's Wisdom/Will/Heart, that's their new score.)

Deep in the underground belly of the Lost Bay lies the former face of the god; a mask fashioned out of the purest gold, broken into countless splinters. If repaired, the mask protects its bearer from the Faceless God's powers.

It is said that whoever tricks the god into wearing the mask will mend its inky black heart and reveal its true form: a lost, wounded child.

by **Kobayashi**

WHAT IS MY SWORD?

Let's suppose that Grun the dwarf finds a sword in a pirate ship. You, as the referee, know this is a +3 sword. Grun doesn't.

This modifier comes from the sword's characteristics, and as long as the user does not know them they cannot benefit from it. At first it is a nice sword that does not grant any particular bonus. But as a dwarf, Grun finds out that the sword is made of a rare orichalcum alloy. This first characteristic gives him a +1 bonus. He can therefore write on his sheet:

`Orichalcum sword +1`

Later, Grun learns that only the Atlanteans were able to create this kind of alloy, which gives him the sword's second characteristic and increases its bonus to +2:

`Atlantean orichalcum sword +2`

During an adventure, Grun confronts the degenerated survivors of the Atlantean army. When he takes out his sword, they bow down before him. That's when he learns that he's wielding the sword of the King of Atlantis. The third and last characteristic of the weapon is discovered, which increases its bonus to +3 :

`Orichalcum Sword of the King of Atlantis +3`

Generally speaking, the first characteristic should be relatively easy to find but the following ones should require a minimum of research. The second one can be found during a break between two adventures and the third one will be found during a game.

This is a simple way to give these items a story, weaving them into your campaign world. Wearing the armor of Aofel the Kingslayer will always sound better than «I have +2 chain mail».

Obviously, this can be used for any magic item beside swords. For items with no modifiers, have a characteristic per distinct power or spell-like.

by **Javier Prado & Nobboc** - Art: **Javier Prado**

Pronounce: Pat -She

Bad Patxi

More than all the sourcebooks that clutter our bookshelves or all the titles in appendix N, **the folk tales** are an inexhaustible source of inspiration, stories, monsters, encounters... Countless stories from all countries and cultures, a fraction of which we were told as kids, and that we will pass on to our own children. Let's read a rural tale from the Basque region (that beautiful country across the French-Spanish border) and see what we can do with it.

It is said that many years ago there lived in the Basque country, not far from Knock's offices and a few hills over from Bilbao, a blacksmith named **Patxi Errementaria**. He was known to lead a life full of vice and sin but as Patxi was the best blacksmith in the region, the king's men were ordered to leave him alone. His dreadful reputation had even reached Hell, where demons had been fighting to see who would get his soul. The winner showed up one day at Patxi's house, intent on taking the blacksmith with him to Hell. Patxi politely invited the demon to his table so they could have lunch before their long journey. The demon gladly obliged, since Patxi was known as a good cook. But when he finished eating and tried to get up, he discovered that Patxi had smeared his seat with sticky resin. The demon spent the next seven years at the table, tortured and humiliated in a new way every single day. A second demon eventually came to Patxi's home. The blacksmith first invited it to rest from his journey before setting off again, offering it a comfortable bed with a luxurious feather quilt. After the demon woke up from his nap, he discovered that the mattress had also been covered with resin and that he could not move either. Seven years later, a third demon walked up to Patxi's door. The blacksmith pretended to follow him, but just before they left he suggested that the demon climb the fig tree in his garden to get some juicy fruit to eat on the way. The figs looked magnificent and the demon was happy to help. But this magical fig tree was the very tree from which Patxi got his demon binding resin... As soon as the demon had grabbed the first branch, he too found himself stuck and trapped. And in the years that followed, children passing by never missed an occasion to throw stones at him as they left for school in the morning;And again on their way back in the afternoon.

1 **Note:** Demons can be toyed with. They will succumb to the same temptations they like to use against humankind, perhaps even more often. Gluttony, sloth, envy. We could easily add the other deadly sins. Demons are not necessarily very clever. Their **greed for souls** can play tricks on them.

3 **Let's stat Bad Patxi!**
Human, master blacksmith.
AC 7 [12] (leather), **HD** 4+1*** (22hp), **Att** 1 x magic hammer (1d6+3) or 2 x fist (1d2+2), **THAC0** 15 [+4], **MV** 120' (40'), **SV** D6 W7 P8 B10 S10, **ML** 12, **AL** Chaotic, **XP** 350.
- Bear Hug: If a victim is hit by both fists in the same round, Patxi hugs for an extra 2d8+2 automatic damage.
- Ill-Will Aura: each time you see Patxi, roll vs Spells or suffer the effects of *cause fear*. Once you succeed, you don't need to roll anymore.
- Malevolent Charm: like *charm person* once a day.
- Regeneration: As long as Patxi is within 100 yards of his forge he regenerates 1hp per round
- Mailua, magic hammer, +1. Gift of the wicked dwarves. The handle is made of the bone of a finger of the first dragon **Erensuge**, the head is a moonstone. *Knock, detect invisible* and *mirror image* once a day.

Patxi hates everyone and everything except his forge, his hammer, and his fig tree. His work is his passion and only reason to live, which forces him to behave with people so he isn't cast out of civilisation.

2 **A magic tree** - Patxi has a fig tree in his garden which bears mouth watering, magnificent fruit all year round. The tree also produces a magical resin.
• Universal glue: sticks anything to anything forever. Patxi sells it in tiny jars (3 uses) for a small fortune. When you say a command word (unique to each jar), the glue loses its properties and glued items become unstuck.
• The tree itself is a trap. One must save vs Spells to resist the urge of tasting a fig, and save vs Paralysis to avoid getting stuck to the tree when picking fruit. Stuck pilferers must wait until Patxi comes to release them (and most of them are never seen again).
• The first time you eat a fig, roll 1d6.
-1-2: Yummy! Gain 1d6 x 100 XP.
- 3-4: Yummy! It's the best fruit ever.
- 5-6: Yummy! Lose 1d6 CON, and save vs Death or die in agony.

4 **Hooks**
1 - After a **TPK**, the Devil hires the dead characters to investigate the disappearance of three of his demons. If they bring them back safely, their mortal form will be restored… until they die again.
2 - The fig tree is dying and Patxi can't stop crying. He has given up on his work. The town council of Bilbao asks the adventurers to find a solution as the area will not be able to do without Bad Patxi's production for much longer.
3 - Two characters are unfortunately glued together and Patxi alone knows the word of power that would unstick them. He will give it to them if they first complete three tasks…

The end of Patxi's Tale:
Patxi finally died of old age. Death came for him and took him straight to Hell. But the demons there wanted nothing to do with him. They closed the gates of Hell just before he arrived. Patxi was finally brought to the gates of Heaven, but Saint Peter refused to let him in. Out of shear weariness, Death brought Patxi back to his house and decided to forget about him. If one day while walking in the hills you hear a hammer striking an anvil, beware of the blacksmith! And never, ever accept any invitation from Bad Patxi!

by **Charles Wells**

Vermis Saturnalis

The Charnel Saturnalia

Known colloquially as the Bone Dance or Dance of the Dead, the Charnel Saturnalia is a phenomenon set in motion by the death of a musician who has sold their soul in exchange for supernatural virtuosity in life. When the musician is interred, one of the worms that devour their corpse is corrupted by the connection established by their infernal pact and becomes the Vermis Saturnalis or Ear Worm, a mindless horror imbued with necromantic power and an insatiable hunger for human flesh.

very night of the full moon, and each night for six nights thereafter, the Ear Worm raises as skeletons any corpse who died under its dancing curse (see below) and whose bones remain within its home graveyard. These skeletons, clawing their way up out of their graves, then begin a dance led by one of their number – in the first instance the bones of the accursed musician. This dance then becomes a procession, leaving the graveyard and performing a circuit of the local environs.

Any human who sees the Bone Dance and hears its music experiences a strong magical compulsion to join in the revelry **1.** Once set dancing, the ensorcelled victim can do nothing but dance among the skeletons until the spell is broken.

The Bone Dance is vigorous and continues without pause for hours. Any living person under its spell quickly becomes physically exhausted, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness. In the case of victims in poor health, the dance may even result in death **2.** Unconscious and dead victims

are propelled along by the skeletal revellers, their limp bodies twirled and dipped and passed from hand to bony hand as the Saturnalia completes its grisly circuit.

An hour or so before dawn the procession returns to the graveyard – perhaps with fresh victims in tow – and the skeletons return to their graves, reverting to their inanimate state until the following nightfall or, on the seventh night, the next full moon. Victims in good health frequently awaken in the graveyard once the Saturnalia is complete and, though exhausted and terrified, make their way to safety. However, anyone who has once succumbed to the pull of the dance is likely to do so again, needing only to hear its music to feel its powerful call. In this way, the same victim may be lured into the dance night after night, until their body is too weak to rise at its conclusion **3.** These, along with any that have died along the way, are devoured by the Vermis Saturnalis, their bones rising to join the undead revelry on the following full moon.

So long as the lead skeleton keeps playing, victims and skeletons alike are unaware of

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their surroundings and do not defend themselves if attacked. Those who are physically removed from the dance are non-conversant and try with all their might to return to it until they can no longer hear its music. In cases where a participant can no longer hear the Saturnalia, either because of distance or through the destruction of the lead skeleton or its instrument, conscious victims regain awareness of their surroundings and are free to act, while skeletons revert to their natural behaviour, rending the nearest intelligent living creature with their bony claws.

In order to begin, the Charnel Saturnalia requires an instrument of the type played by the damned musician. If such is unavailable, the Ear Worm waits patiently, employing magical powers of suggestion to compel any person who visits its home graveyard to bring such an instrument in secret and leave it as an offering.

The only way to end the curse of the Charnel Saturnalia is to destroy the Vermis Saturnalis itself, which may prove difficult, as it not only burrows underground, but grows as it feeds, potentially reaching terrifying proportions **4**. The Vermis Saturnalis is nonetheless of worm-like intelligence. It can it be lured to the surface with proper bait – flesh, living or dead, placed on the earth of its home graveyard – and, like many earthworms, it emerges from the earth in response to vibrations like those caused by heavy rain.

While not undead, the Vermis Saturnalis is vulnerable to divine magic and can be turned as though it were undead. It also suffers damage from holy water and cannot consume magically sanctified corpses or exist on magically hallowed ground. If the graveyard housing the Ear Worm is sanctified by a cleric of sufficient level **5**, the worm is destroyed and the curse lifted.

The Vermis Saturnalis has a finely tuned tactile system capable of detecting vibrations in the earth. Its body is also covered in light and chemical receptors which allow it to avoid sunlight and taste potential food. When it detects movement in its home graveyard, the Ear Worm waits for any disturbance to subside and then investigates from below. If it finds flesh, it begins to feed, burrowing into its victim or, in the case of a larger worm, consuming it whole and excreting any bones in its wake.

The Vermis Saturnalis does not intentionally engage in combat and flees from physical pain, but it also reacts to distress by thrashing violently, potentially lashing or crushing any assailants with its long, wriggling body.

The seven tube-like "hearts" of the Vermis Saturnalis are potent magical ingredients in the casting of spells and crafting of magical items related to undeath, suggestion, and music **6**.

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1 Save vs spells to resist dancing

2 Lose 1d3 HP per night of dancing.

3 After each night of dancing, save with a cumulative penalty of -2.

4 The Ear Worm gains one hit die after killing each new victim, starting at 1 HD.

5 The cleric must be of a level twice as high as the worm's hit dice to sanctify the cemetery.

6 The seven hearts can be sold for 100 gp per hit die of the Ear Worm.

Pinkish slimy worm giving off a foul smell of rotten flesh, covered with colorless and urticant sensitive bristles.

The Vermis Saturnalis. AC 7 [12], HD 1-12, Att 1 x bite (1d6 + 1 per 2 HD) or 1 x lash, THAC0 17 -1 per 2 HD [+2, +1 per 2 HD], MV 60' (20') burrowing or on land, SV as monster of same HD , ML 5, AL Chaotic, XP 350.

- Lash: Anyone within 15 feet takes 1d4 damage per 2 HD and is stunned for 1 round. Save vs Breath Attacks for half damage and to avoid being stunned.

by **Gus L** - Art: **Michael Sheppard**

MISE EN PLACE OF DUNGEON DESIGN

SO YOU WANT TO BUILD A DUNGEON ADVENTURE FOR A CLASSIC STYLE ROLEPLAYING GAME, AND YOU WANT IT TO BE GOOD HOW DOES THAT WORK? WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

Start with a clear idea of what exactly a "dungeon" implies and what it is as a game tool. A dungeon is a specific form of "location based adventure"—an adventure that will involve the exploration of a fictional space room by room. It's the primary kind for a particular exploration, navigation, and problem-solving style of play that is the oldest and still a compelling one.

What is necessary for a dungeon adventure is to create a bounded fantastical space, "rooms", linked together in some order that the players can freely navigate: backtracking, turning, and determining routes. Traditionally this means a series of stone corridors and chambers filled with monsters, treasures, traps, and other obstacles. However, neither the aesthetic of the space nor the nature of the inhabitants, valuables, and challenges within are fixed elements of design, and reinterpreting the dungeon space can make for a novel and exciting adventure. A dungeon need not be an underground maze or cave system: buildings, shipwrecks, space stations, castles, formal gardens, or the corpses of enormous beasts can all make a fine dungeon. Likely when you decided to write an adventure you already had a story in mind, and that's good, but since location-based adventure is about the players' decisions, that story will need to recede into the background. Dungeon crawls emphasize exploration, unpuzzling obstacles, and player choices to create their tension and excitement. A good adventure location is a sort of toybox where players will discover a variety of obstacles and scheme to overcome them. This type of play becomes very difficult when the adventure canalizes player decisions to fit a predetermined path to a specific climax. A designer will get better results from focusing on the nature of the location and the challenges within, rather than what they want the players to do there.

Don't abandon your story, because it does have an important part to play in dungeon design, but set it aside to focus on the aspects of your adventure that will affect play more directly.

• **Layout**: the arrangement of space in the dungeon.
• **Theme**: the aesthetics and appearance of the dungeon.
• **Ecology**: the nature of and relationships between the denizens of the dungeon.

THE FIRST QUESTION IS SPACE

The first question of dungeon design is space. Before a designer can address the themes and story of a fantastic location they should consider the game mechanics of the location itself, to think of it as a board or arena for play. Space takes time to traverse, and in a classic roleplaying game time embodies risk: random encounters, torches running down, exhaustion, and increased distance from the safety of the entrance. Some contemporary systems lack mechanics and procedures for exploration, and for them it makes sense to abbreviate exploration, designing locations that are a series of encounters or challenges with little space connecting them. However, making exploration a coequal part of play requires a location with enough space for risk to manifest, and because of that dungeons need a more complex structure of rooms that gives players choices about how they will navigate them, but is of a scope and complexity where those choices are meaningful. This layout is traditionally, and still most effectively, organized on a map. Drawing or finding a map is simple, but its layout isn't and creating a useful dungeon map is itself a process that must consider the placement of obstacles, encounters, treasures and paths through the dungeon, but to do so in a way that accounts for the risks and resources that the characters will exhaust to reach their goals within the dungeon.

Designing adventure maps is thinking about space and time, and not just fictional time. Begin by considering the time you and your players have to devote to the game. A party of adventurers using a lighter rule set moves through roughly three to five rooms per hour of play, assuming 1-2 encounters or other obstacles in those rooms and a reasonable level of detail to poke at. For a one session, two to four-hour game, a dungeon of 8 to 12 rooms should be sufficient. While multi-session games can utilize larger dungeons, these time constraints are still important because they help determine the limits of one session's worth of exploration and so the placement of entrances and exits.

This basic scope is important because it gives the designer expectations and guidelines for size and complexity. Too much complexity or too many rooms and the players will never be able to make meaningful progress in the adventure or understand the layout. Too few rooms and too little complexity and the adventure risks not offering many choices, reducing play to a predictable set of scenes and encounters. After establishing the basic scope of the layout there's plenty of specifics to contemplate and RPG cartography has its own complex set of arguments, maxims, and strong opinions (basic tips in the sidebar).

NO STORY—ONLY THEME!… REALLY NO STORY?

There's no story to a dungeon crawl. Narrative beats make assumptions about how the characters within a story will act, and become very difficult to maintain when those characters' decisions are being made by someone other than the author. Player decision making is unlikely to bind itself to even as simple a narrative structure as: incident, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. The players may decide that they wish to avoid the climax's confrontation by siding with the antagonist, or they may turn away from the rising action as they become distracted or the risk seems too high and the rewards uninteresting. Instead the dungeon designer is best building only the space for a story to unfold, and relying on the players to determine the narrative within that story.

Still, every location has a story, a history that informs the situation the players find when they explore, there's just no story for how the adventure within the location will unfold. Some events or endings are more likely than others, but the game master and especially the designer can't depend on

those likely conclusions to the adventure because it's the players' adventure, and players are unpredictable. Even having set a story aside and rejected forcing a specific narrative, a designer still needs to set the situation, define the goals and personalities of the other actors (NPCs or monsters within the adventure—a distinction isn't helpful here) and describe the backdrop, and this is how story finds its way into successful dungeon adventures.

Rather than a traditional story, consider your ideas about the location's history, backstory, and appearance. Set a "theme", one that will work with the "layout" and "ecology" together to define the dungeon adventure. Putting a plot to it is likely to fail because players don't know it or if they do they may reject it, but theme will still appear in the basic design materials of the location's clues, appearance and obstacles. This is the joy and burden of location-based classic dungeon crawling: the setting can vary widely, and the story has to evolve from player decisions.

SITUATIONS AND HISTORY

Building a compelling initial situation is as much a part of adventure writing as designing a good map, but without underpinning knowledge ready to be uncovered by the players, without some poised narrative energy— pent up and ready to be released by player interaction — it will be hard to visualize and incorporate that situation. A good location-based adventure should start in equipoise, with a situation more or less static but ready to tip into disaster and action with player interference. Other formats, developing situations, clocks, and chaos indexes offer alternatives, but depend on the campaign as a whole.

The history of the location and the stories of its denizens will set

MAP & LAYOUT TIPS:

• **Avoid linear maps**. Branches, loops, verticality, secret doors, rooms with multiple entrances and exits all make the map of your dungeon a puzzle that the players can solve.
• **Consider the size and scope.** Add empty rooms to create space when needed and rather than a single sprawling location consider sub-levels or 'nodes' of 10-30 rooms each.
• **Place multiple entrances and exits**, especially if the dungeon is larger. Use locked gates, trapdoors, chutes, and secret doors to make discovering these exits and their relationship to the dungeon layout itself a reward.
• **Avoid "blockades"** such as locked doors that prevent access to important dungeon locations. There should always be alternate paths and puzzles that allow players options and tough choices.
• **Verticality** is a traditional way to break up regions or levels, but it's harder to use within individual rooms as it can be difficult for the GM to describe complex spaces: multi-level rooms and oddly shaped rooms are best used sparingly.
• **Symmetry** is risky, while it can be a useful tool for hinting at secret spaces and encouraging player comprehension of a map, it also can easily lead to dull and linear maps. Before relying on it, consider the fictional reasons for the symmetry, how it will affect play, and that in real architecture most symmetry is only partial.
• Most importantly, the map of your dungeon should have an **internal logic**: the placement of rooms should make sense both fictionally and spatially. A throne room should be large and accessible, not hidden behind the kitchen or waste dump.

your initial situation, define the spatial layout, and influence the outcome of the adventure. For a designer, backstory is inevitable: it helps build the location in their mind. However, the designer doesn't need to pass that on to the reader unless it's something that the players can discover by interacting with the location. In most adventures backstory detracts from usability by taking up space better spent on more accessible details, complicating the product layout, and by adding information that may make it harder for a game master to incorpo-rate the adventure into their game. However, minimalism and the elimination of all history or backstory is as much a poor design decision as too much.

Backstory helps the designer build the layout of the location: defining what spaces are, how they are used in the present and why they were built. It informs the attitude, relationships and nature of the location's inhabitants (the "ecology") and can give the players clues about puzzles and obstacles within the location. Most importantly it defines the description and aesthetics of the location, its theme. Theme evolves naturally from the designer's efforts to conceptualize a location, its history and the present situation, and fill out its details, but you shouldn't waste it on an introduction that the players won't read and that the game master is likely to skim over or forget during play.

Maps, monster statistics, and other mechanical as-

BUILDING THEME WITH STORY

• **Rumors and hooks** almost always incorporate history and backstory, they represent clues to the location of treasures, the nature of obstacles, or the goals of the opposition within a location.

• **Build evidence and background stories** into the location descriptions rather than relaying it to the game master, they're useful only in as far as the players can discover them.

• **History defines the appearance of a location**: layout, building material, state of repair, existence or type of secret doors and traps—moreover it gives the players clues to them.

• **Murals, carvings, graffiti and detritus** are all defined by history and backstory, and they encourage player investigation while creating a sense of a living space.

• **History and background stories** help make the goals and attitudes of a location's inhabitants more plausible and transparent.

BUILDING ECOLOGY AND FACTIONS

• Consider the locations of faction food and water sources as well as waste disposal, not only because these create coherence but they also define faction territories and offer ways to threaten or destroy the faction.

• Not everything needs to make ecological sense in a literal way of having food sources and a lair, but everything should have a place within the larger ecology of the location, meaning relationships with other inhabitants.

• Define the leadership, goals and concerns of each faction, even if they are simply to find prey. Knowing the fears and price of a creature makes it much easier to determine how characters can enrage, befriend, trick, or distract it.

• A faction leader or other NPC doesn't need a lot of detail to come alive, a memorable physical characteristic, a few adjectives, and a sentence describing what they need to cooperate with the party and their fears is usually enough.

• For larger, more important factions create an "order of battle" that lists its numbers, resources, and a few tactics it will use in response to likely threats or strategies.

• Don't feel bound by existing monster/spell/item descriptions because the internal coherence of your adventure is more valuable than fidelity to a manual. Existing statistics provide guidelines and models, but even in complex systems they can be reskinned and used differently quite easily.

• Random encounters and random encounter tables are a key to dungeon design, not only do they create time pressure, but they also introduce your factions and offer opportunities to encounter their representatives outside their lair.

pects of location design won't vary too much between similar adventures, but the theme can. Saturating a location with a consistent aesthetics and repeated theme improves an adventure by making it easier to visualize, stick in the mind, and fill out details.

For the game master, theme makes expanding the necessarily limited descriptions of the rooms easier. It fixes the overall aesthetic as well as the past and present situation in their mind which helps with improvisation and answering unexpected questions. More responsive refereeing alone will give the players more knowledge and tools to act inside the fiction, but theme also offers players consistency, allowing them to better visualize the space, recognize clues, investigate, and think up unexpected solutions.

ECOLOGY

With layout and theme, all that's left is a greater focus on the inhabitants of your dungeon and the ways they will interact with the party, each other, and the space itself. This dungeon ecology is, as mentioned in the 1979 *Dungeon Masters Guide*, a fantastical one which needs to be comprehensible, not scientifically functional. The goal is to create a web of plausible and recognizable connections between the creatures and the space of your dungeon that players can observe,

understand and exploit. Understanding the logistics of the inhabitants can be useful but they aren't the core of the dungeon ecology. The most necessary and impactful aspect of ecology is the relationships among the inhabitants of the location: its "factions".

FACTIONS

Beyond continuing the aesthetic coherence brought by a good theme, ecology includes the relationships of predator and prey or tyrant and underclass among the inhabitants. For these stories and relationships to matter they must be something the players can see and exploit. Within factional relationships there's room, and even a need, for story, but again, the details of the past are less important than a present that the adventurers can interact with. Details such as the reasons for factional animosity are useful at

times especially as they offer information that players can capitalize on when they inevitably become enmeshed in faction politics and struggle, but most important are the power relations and attitudes between the location factions, the personalities of their leaders, and what they will demand to work with the adventurers.

While it's common to think of factions as groups of intelligent and organized creatures within a location this need not be the case. A faction can be an individual creature such as a powerful predator. Eeven a weaker creature whose very lack of power makes them a natural asset for the adventurers can work. Likewise, factions need not be intelligent: packs of animals or a single dangerous beast can define the relationships between the inhabitants of a location, and their goals and reactions to adventurers are useful to consider. Nor do factions have to be native to the location. Rival adventuring parties or other intruders may also contest the players goals within a location and offer enemies, allies, or simply complications.

COHERENCE

Creating a coherent adventure is a test of how well the aspects of layout, theme, and ecology blend at their edges and support each other, because despite the way this advice is structured they overlap and mix rather naturally. Coherence is especially important because the space is fictional and fantastical, meaning that visualizing it and understanding it require more imagination than visualizing a fictional real world space. Design and description need to work together to build some sense of plausible order, one with fantastical elements that depart from the real, but which still contains internal logic. Coherence is hard to quantify as it accretes from other elements of design, but the goal is to create an adventure that's identifiable as a "dragon's cave" rather than "a cave with a dragon in it."

For the GM, coherence and consistency allows for greater ease in adding detail and provides an understandable whole, a narrative of the location itself that's easier to remember than disparate elements. For the players, coherence allows greater interactivity with the setting because there's an internal order to the location that they can unpuzzle.

Finally, the necessary preparations are complete, the mise en place of the adventure is ready—a map is drawn, factions prepared, rumors written, theme and initial situation readied. The only step left before you can run the adventure is to write the keys for its individual locations. Keying is often the most time consuming aspect of adventure design, especially for published adventures which have their own complex set of hotly-debated styles and rules. Layout, theme and ecology provide a firm foundation from which connected and coherent location keys easily grow from. They also provide tools for the designer to fill in any gaps with.

by **David McGrogan**

What Counts as a
Fuck You
Moment?

If there is one principle upon which I submit almost all RPG players would agree, it is that 'fuck you' moments are weak DMing. They belong in the realm of bad fantasy game books, in which you are regularly faced with binary choices with one option leading to death without any fair warning whatsoever.

The devil, as always, is in the details. What exactly is a 'fuck you' moment? It is one in which a player character blamelessly dies or suffers serious harm. But that definition needs teasing out. We all know that if the PCs simply enter a room and the ceiling falls on their heads, and there was absolutely no way of them discovering this in advance or avoiding the result, then the DM is fucking them over. It's the edge cases that are much more common and need careful thought.

The crucial word in the above definition is 'blamelessly'. If a player's character suffers because of something that he or she had a hand in, then that is generally fair. If, on the other hand, no blame could be attributed whatsoever to the decision-making of the player, then the DM is probably fucking them over. Here are some more specific guidelines that I think stem from that basic distinction:

1 It is not a 'fuck you' moment if the PCs fail to make adequate preparation in advance and suffer harm as a result. If they fail to bring adequate light sources into the dungeon and get trapped in the dark, that is just a natural consequence of their own actions.

2 It is not a 'fuck you' moment if the characters simply get out of their depth in a dangerous environment as the result of a roll of the dice. The wilderness is dangerous and the players know it. If they randomly encoun-ter a red dragon in the mountains, and it kills them, it is not a 'fuck you' moment. (The analysis would be different if the DM simply inflicted a red dragon on them delibera-tely, on a whim.)

3 It is not a 'fuck you' moment if the PCs fail to perform proper recon-naissance and suffer as a result. This could be as simple as having a scout tapping the ground with a 10' pole in a dungeon, or as complex as sending an invisible servant into an orc den to establish its contents. If the ceiling falls on the PCs but they could have discovered it was unstable by just stopping and looking or listening, or tapping it with a spear, then the results are fair.

4 It is not a 'fuck you' moment if a player character is poisoned or paralysed by a monster or dungeon 'scenery' or similar. These are expected risks and if the player doesn't want such things to happen, they shouldn't be playing old school D&D.

5 It is not a 'fuck you' moment if a PC is made a target for revenge. If a character makes enemies, then those enemies might attempt to assassinate, steal from, injure, or inconvenience them – and the results of this may be a complete surprise to the PC/player concerned. As long as the DM makes the appropriate rolls for those enemies fairly, the results are also fair

An additional recommendation is that the DM should generally roll dice in the open and tell the PCs in advance what the DM is rolling for, and what dice result is required for the Bad Thing in question to happen. This instantly removes any suspicion of bias, favouritism, or malice – and hence that the DM is trying to fuck anybody over.

Worldbuilding: WHEN IS ENOUGH TOO MUCH?

by **Jack Shear** – Art: **Goran Gligovic**

More people have read the *Lord of the Rings* novels than have read *The History of Middle-earth* books. Based on that alone, there is a strong argument to be made that people are more interested in what is going to happen in an unfolding narrative than in what happened in the past of a static narrative, at least when it comes to general engagement with fantasy as a fictional mode.

This matters when it comes to RPG worldbuilding that you want to appeal to and be read by other people. It's often the case that DMs spend a lot of time lovingly detailing their world's minutiae, backstory, and history; you get things like timelines, essays about fictional cultures, and walls of text about Elven liturgy whether you want them or not. As it turns out, a lot of people don't seem to want that stuff. Back in the heady days of Google+, there were two really interesting threads asking about people's preferences when it comes to detailing the history of fictional worlds. The majority of people who responded admitted that they aren't interested in an excess of that stuff—and the degree to which they weren't interested was

both well defined and emphatically stated. That might be an artifact of my Google+ circles being heavily weighted toward an OSR perspective; maybe there is a sharper divide between people who prefer heavy text and those that don't, but in any case the dissent against Big Setting is pretty significant even if it might not represent a majority view. I think I understand why people aren't interested in page after page of fictional history and paragraph after paragraph of worldbuilding: it's the DM version of "let me tell you about my character" magnified without a sense or proportion or boundaries. Since the DM's job is "being everything else" besides the player's characters, the world is essentially the DM's character; any long-running

history of that world is the DM telling you all about their character, often in unnecessary detail.

Dear DM: if you would roll your eyes at a five-page character back story that a player wants you to read, you should roll your eyes at your own expectation that the players will read five pages about the history of the Cult of Paradoxis and their war with the fire giants too.

Naturally, the same applies to the hyper-detailed settings you can buy off the rack (especially when that detail is inserted into a core book), except in that case the "DM" is a game designer who doesn't even have the decency to run the game for you. The net effect is the same: whether a big publisher

has thirty pages of back story I am supposed to read before I get any actual gameable content in a book or a DM gives me a thirty page PDF of setting notes I'm supposed to read before we can play, I've got the same set of objections:

• **Don't give me homework.** Although ten pages of detail on a city might be useful notes for a DM to have, if you ask me to read those ten pages before the game actually starts you're giving me work to do when I signed on to have fun. Worse yet, you're actually taking away the fun of letting me discover the interesting things about the city while playing the game.

• **It's not as special as you think.** Many worldbuilders are kidding themselves about the uniqueness of the history they've written for their settings. If it fits into the familiar pattern of "In the Age of Fire, the dragons rose and gathered their followers, but were eventually beaten back by the Knights of Gorro, led by the Great King Fajadhul who founded the city of Dahan in the Year 100030," you should realize that the names and dates could be swapped out to create the back story of a million other nondescript fantasy settings. This is sub-Tolkienism.

• **Now is the only thing that matters.** People undervalue immediacy when it comes to game settings. If the important

history of the setting is what just happened, chances are that the player characters can still get involved in it and push things in interesting directions. If the history (or, sigh, prehistory) is too far in the past to interact with, it might shape the setting but it doesn't really shape play—and therefore the players don't need to know about it at all.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we need to swing to the extreme of creating settings with no history or sense of place. It definitely doesn't mean that you're a bad person doing a bad thing if you enjoy writing great swaths of setting material. And it doesn't mean that there is an objective standard as to what constitutes "excessive" setting detail—that's clearly a subjective, individual call. It might mean, however, that we need to rethink the extent to which we focus on heavy text when worldbuilding and to reconsider how we deploy information about a setting if we want other people to engage with it.

If you want to have the "lonely fun" of writing up every corner of your setting for your own edification—that's one thing. If you want to appeal to that rare deep-delver who buys a two volume coffee-table *Guide to Glorantha* and reads it like a novel, that's another thing. If you're giving the rough outline of your setting in a core product and are saving up all the essays and timelines for the separate

setting book that you know will have a smaller audience, that's a reasonable thing too. But if you're writing up your setting in glorious detail with the expectation that you'll get a big audience to read your creation as lovingly as you wrote it, I think you're setting yourself up for disappointment.

There are alternatives to the usual textbook-style info-dump of delivering setting information still favored by the publishers of traditional RPG books. Though the "big book" model still prevails among publishers who have been slow to embrace innovations in design, that lethargy shouldn't be confused with either a successful methodology or a winning standard. Obviously, there is no one-size-fits-all approach that is appropriate to every worldbuilding project, but it's worthwhile to think about the form for your content if you aren't getting the level of interest you want. It might not be the audience that needs to change—it might be that your invitation to the audience could use some work.

The point is: you inevitably make choices in the presentation of your setting that will tip the level of other people's engagement with it whether you're thinking about it or not, so you might as well think about what you want, the expectations of your audience, and the crucial area of overlap therein.

MAKING A POWDER KEG
THE DUNE WAY

DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A SETTING THAT IS A POWDER KEG OF COMPETING INTERESTS, INTRIGUES, AND GOALS? A POTENTIAL CONFLAGRATION INTO WHICH YOUR PLAYER'S CHARACTERS ARE THRUST IN THE MIDDLE OF?

The set-up of Frank Herbert's Dune is what you should be stealing from. Although it's got a ton of worldbuilding and detail, the basic premise of Dune is pretty simple and easy to reskin to suit just about any campaign setting. The conflict in Dune revolves around six competing factions, each of which is easy to scrub of specificity and refashion. Here's what Dune has and here's where you get to play with the ideas therein: **Dune has...**

- ...House Atreides & House Harkonnen
- ...The Bene Gesserit
- ...The Fremen
- ...The Padishah Emperor
- ...The Spacing Guild

So you need...
- ...Two noble houses with a long-standing hatred of each other that will inevitably erupt into violence
- ...A religion that masks its political power in the guise of spiritual guidance
- ...An unaligned tribal military force that exists outside the structure defining the other factions
- ...A distant ruler with a powerful military force that defends traditional power structures
- ...A mercantile force that masks its political power in the guise of pure economics

Notice that each of these groupings represents an approach to political power: the power of an aristocratic title, of religion, of the nomad, of the military, and of the economy. Create factions that represent these groupings of political power, make them compete for a limited resource, and let the sparks fly. NOW YOU'VE GOT A POWDER KEG. HAND YOUR PLAYERS THE MATCH AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

by **E.A. "taichara" Bisson**

SOME INSPIRATIONAL SPELL SHARD TABLES

When you're coming up empty and you need an idea for a spell, sometimes a few word prompts help; some inspirational snips and shards you can recombine. That's where these tables come in.

Naturally, there's the more involved way and the less involved way: More Involved: Roll 1d3+1 for the number of prompts to combine, then d4s to determine which tables, then 1d10 on each table. Less Involved: Pick how many prompts you want and then roll on whatever tables you like. Or just pick your prompts and smash them together, that works just fine.
All prompts, of course, to be taken as literally or metaphorically or just-vaguely-related-ly as you like!

TABLE 01	TABLE 02	TABLE 03	TABLE 04
01. bone	01. shadow	01. finding	01. shape
02. blood	02. night	02. vision	02. confine
03. sun	03. moon	03. curse	03. mind
04. ash	04. earth	04. blessing	04. dream
05. flame	05. storm	05. wither	05. touch
06. plant	06. talon	06. mend	06. protect
07. thorn	07. ice	07. travel	07. sunder
08. sea	08. glass	08. strength	08. cocoon
09. salt	09. steel	09. decipher	09. preserve
10. gold	10. light	10. conceal	10. fear

Substituting related words/concepts: also totally cool

And here are some example spells prompted by combos of some of the above shards

THREEFOLD WARDING. (curse + protect): Inking three dots of kohl or ochre on the inside of each wrist (or equivalent) prevents hexes, curses, or other eldritch blights from taking hold; each time a curse is thwarted, a dot burns from each wrist and leaves a wound.

GRAND VOYAGE. (earth + sea + travel + light): For the next six hours, a subject and all that they travel with, up to a small cart, cross distance as follows — four times their speed on land, unhindered by terrain; twice their land speed on water, even without a vessel; and should sunbeams, lighthouses, rainbows, or stranger things permit, traveling on beams of light as if solid ground.

ELEPHANT EXISTENCE. (shape + conceal): One object or individual cannot be described or even comprehended as a whole for 1d6 hours. Individual attributes may be relayed, but a coherent whole description simply won't come together.

ACTINIC BRAMBLES. (storm + light + thorn): An area up to 10 metres in diameter erupts in crackling, clinging briars of semi-tangible stormcloud for the next ten minutes. Anything and anyone already in the area, even if invisible or intangible, is lined with a pale glow; anything or anyone that moves is jolted with lightning.

BLIND PILLAR'S TRAVEL. (talon + cocoon): Chart your course in your mind and be enveloped in rough silk that cushions you — which is good, because you are not staying upright any longer — and lulls you into a drowsy sense of comfort. While you rest, the silky cocoon sprouts many pairs of strong spurred claws and sets off on the path, walking, climbing, scaling stone, and contending with all obstacles (including fighting with those claws if necessary). Unfortunately you are aware of nothing outside until you reach your destination or the cocoon is destroyed; but you're bright-eyed and refreshed when you get there.

THE SLEEPER'S QUEST. (mend + dream + decipher): A slumber descends from which the subject will not awaken for twelve hours. During that sleep, the dreaming self must untangle a code, thread a labyrinth, or deal with a similar puzzle, when the twelve hours are over, they wake with a dreamstone in hand that can restore the lost, from shattered vases to broken promises. It is possible to die in the dream, alas.

BURNINGHEART. (fear + flame + vision + finding): Sacrifice a portion of one's own lifeblood and a beloved trinket to a brazier burning with bright coals, and stare into the flames; an adversary's greatest terror and the path to best make use of such a thing, whatever it might be, will be seen within the fires.

GREY SANCTUARY. (blessing + confine): A single chamber marked with glyphs on the ceiling, floor, and walls doubles the chances for success in a specific task (including healing) for 24 hours. However, if the chamber is breached in any way, or any enter or leave, the enchantment shatters.

GREENBLIGHT. (touch + sunder + plant): With hands (or other extremities) gnarling black and tainted, for the next five minutes any plant matter touched shrivels instantly. Flowers brown and wilt, greenery dries brittle, even wood can be rendered punky and in splinters. Plant creatures take double damage from unarmed attacks and spells alike.

WINTER'S LONG REACH. (vision + thorn + earth + ice): Gaze about as far as you can, even to the horizon (or equivalent). At any point along the vista, at your will, the ground may split apart — or simply be raised high — as uncountable sharp spars of ice suddenly grow skyward up to a height of 10 metres. The ice lasts until it melts.

THE DAY TURNS ITS FACE. (curse + wither + sun): Until this curse is lifted, broken, or runs out its time (up to a year), the afflicted soul finds their strength, vitality, and physical skill halved during daytime hours, their flesh growing feeble and wasted.
Being struck by the rays of the sun intensifies the blight, leaving the subject a quarter of what they once were until fleeing the sun's touch.

MANTLE OF MIDNIGHT. (mend + sunder + protect + night): Draws a portion of the night sky down to wrap around a subject's shoulders like an all-enveloping cloak. For the next eight hours, the mantle keeps away the night chill and offers all the benefits of chainmail. Additionally, once, at the subject's wish, an attack against their person may either be magically converted to healing energy, or mirrored back at the assailant as a bolt of inky force that shatters weapons or maims claws.

by **Nicolas Dessaux**

30 TOMES OF
Magic

The Exhaustive Library of Classical Magic has a doorway to every world. Every plane, demi-plane, and pocket dimension where arcane magic is a possibility. Oftentimes, it is a two-foot-high door hidden behind the bookshelves of a powerful archmage's lab. Or a side gate in the glass house at the top of a wilderness wizard's tower. In the Goblinburg Academy of Wizardry, it is an invisible whirlpool at the bottom of the Great Memorial Fountain. Access to all magically active dimensions is paramount to the Exalted Professors of the Library. These respectable gnomes often venture out in their top hats and tailcoats, taking measurements with weave-metres and arcanic fluxographs. When encountering a spellcaster, they insist on following them so they can examine their magic in the field. While the Professors are all powerful mages, they are bound to follow the Multiversal Non-Intervention Accords of 1033 and therefore cannot directly intervene. This doesn't prevent them from offering pointed technical advice and useful critique.

The Exhaustive Library of Classical Magic prints the following grimoires, classifying all known spells under the Thirty Great Topics. When in the field, some Professors helpfully leave them in places where magic-users are bound to find them.

01-03
TOME OF
DIVINATION
Clairvoyance
Clairaudience
Detect Evil
Detect Invisible
Detect Magic
ESP
Locate Object
Read Magic
Read Languages
Wizard Eye

04-08
TOME OF
ILLUSION
Hallucinatory Terrain
Invisibility
Invisibility, 10′ radius
Magic Mouth
Mass Invisibility
Mirror Image
Phantasmal Forces
Prismatic Wall
Projected Image
Ventriloquism

09-12
TOME OF
FORCE
Fly
Levitate
Magic Missile
Protection vs Normal
Missiles
Reverse Gravity
Shield
Telekinesis

13-16
TOME OF
MIND CONTROL
Confusion
Fear
Feeblemind
Geas
Mass Charm
Mind Blank
Repulsion
Sleep
Suggestion

17-20
TOME OF
CHARMS
Charm Monster
Charm Person
Charm Plants
Hold Monster
Hold Person

21-24
TOME OF
SUMMONING
Monster Summoning I
Monster Summoning II
Monster Summoning III
Monster Summoning IV
Monster Summoning V
Monster Summoning VI
Monster Summoning VII

25-28

**TOME OF
TRANSFORMATION**

Growth of Animal
Growth of Plants
Polymorph Any Object
Polymorph Others
Polymorph Self
Massmorph
Shape Change
Simulacrum
Strength

29-32

**TOME OF
ICE & FIRE**

Delayed Blast Fire Ball
Disintegrate
Fire Ball
Ice Storm
Meteor Swarm
Pyrotechnics
Wall Of Fire
Wall Of Ice

33-35

**TOME OF
THE MAGE**

Anti-Magic Shell
Detect Magic
Dispel Magic
Extension I
Extension II
Extension III
Permanent Spell
Read Magic

36-40

**TOME OF
THE DOORS**

Dimension Door
Gate
Hold Portal
Knock
Pass-Wall
Phase Door
Teleport
Wizard Lock

41-44

**TOME OF
NECROMANCY**

Animate Dead
Clone
Death Spell
Infravision
Magic Jar
Reincarnation

45-46

**TOME OF
THE PLANES**

Astral Spell
Conjure Elemental
Contact Higher Plane
Invisible Stalker
Legend Lore
Limited Wish
Maze
Rope Trick
Wish

47-50

**TOME OF
EARTH & WATER**

Control Weather
Lightning Bolt
Lower Water
Move Earth
Part Water
Stone-Flesh
Transmute Rock-Mud
Wall of Stone
Water Breathing

51-52

**TOME OF
LIGHT & DARKNESS**

Continual Light
Darkness, 5′ radius
Infravision
Light

53-56

**TOME OF
WORDS & SYMBOLS**

Read Magic
Read Languages
Explosive Runes
Power Word-Blind
Power Word-Stun
Power Word-Kill
Symbol

57-59

**TOME OF
TIME**

Extension I
Extension II
Extension III
Haste Spell
Slow Spell
Time Stop

60-63

**TOME OF
THE SPIDER**

Cloudkill
Hold Monster
Hold Person
Web
Wizard Eye

64-66

**TOME OF
CURSES**

Feeblemind
Geas
Remove Curse

67 - 69	**70-71**	**72-75**
TOME OF PROTECTION	**TOME OF PLANTS**	**TOME OF WONDERS**
Anti-Magic Shell	Charm Plants	Levitate
Invisibility	Growth of Plants	Mirror Image
Protection vs Normal Missiles	Speak with Plants	Polymorph Any Object
Protection vs Evil	Transport via Plants	Reincarnation
Protection vs Evil,10´ radius		Reverse Gravity
Shield		Rope Trick
		Wizard Eye

76-78	**79-82**	**83-84**
TOME OF THE MASSES	**TOME OF THE WALLS**	**TOME OF SELF CHANGES**
Mass Charm	Pass-Wall	Invisibility
Mass Invisibility	Prismatic Wall	Polymorph Self
Massmorph	Wall of Iron	Shape Change
Mass Suggestion	Wall of Stone	Strength
		Water Breathing
		Wizard Eye

85-86	**87-90**	**91-92**
TOME OF GOODNESS	**TOME OF THE ELVES**	**TOME OF SOUND**
Control Weather	Charm Person	Magic Mouth
Detect Evil	Charm Plants	Ventriloquism
Protection vs Evil	Clairvoyance	Deafness
Protection vs Evil,10´ radius	Growth of Plants	Silence
	Invisibility	
	Sleep	

93-96	**97- 98**	**99-00**
TOME OF THE WITCH	**TOME OF GROWTH**	**TOME OF RENAISSANCE**
Charm Person	Extension I	Clone
Charm Monster	Extension II	Simulacrum
Feeblemind	Extension III	
Phantasmal Forces	Growth of Animal	
Polymorph Others	Growth of Plants	
Wizard Eye		

by **Brent Edwards** - Art **Evlyn Moreau**

ISTUS
TAKE THE
WHEEL

OSR GMing and the Joy of Letting Go
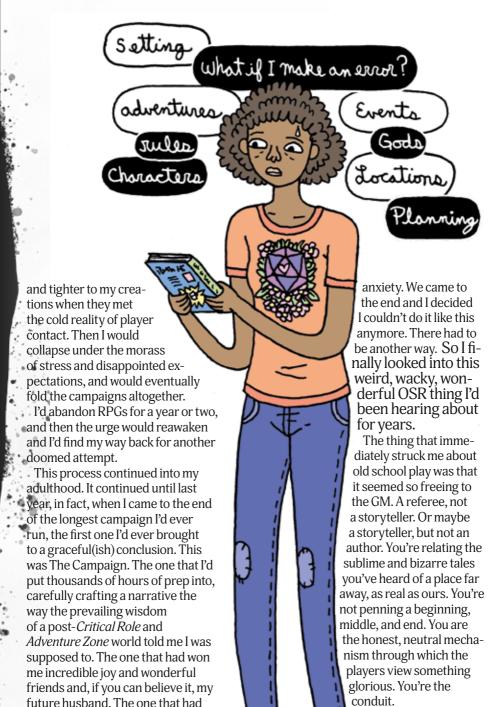
Istus is the goddess of fate and destiny in good old Gary's Greyhawk campaign setting. She spins the tapestry of the universe from strands of potentiality. She bears the weight of penning the future, down to the most minute detail. She is all-seeing and all-knowing. And I used to think I was her.

From the beginning of my RPG obsession, my experience GMing (as a preteen roping my too-young brothers and my tolerant mom into a stumbling, fumbling dungeon delve with my brand new 3rd edition Player's Handbook) was one of hesitance, confusion, and panic. I'd been poring over supplements from the 2nd edition since elementary school, marvelling at the realities hidden in the words on the page, fantasizing about making a world come to life for others as vividly and dynamically as it manifested in my head. I wanted to, needed to, more than anything, but it didn't seem possible. It seemed overwhelming. I felt anxiety burrow into my brain when I imagined the attempt. What about when I didn't know what to say? What about when I made a mistake? The illusion would be shattered. The world would be gone. I hesitated for years, but when I got my hands on that PHB I decided it was time. If I tried hard enough, if I held on tight enough to my vision, I could do it. (I couldn't).

As I grew up, I came back to GMing again and again. I would feel that deep yearning in my gut to bring a world to life, to let others step into a living universe outside of their own. There was a path to that place. I could see it, ephemeral and fleeting maybe, but the path was there, just as the other world was. I would work myself up, I would manically and directionlessly assemble people and places and events and gods, I would hold on tighter

Setting

What if I make an error?

adventures

rules

Characters

Events

Gods

Locations

Planning

and tighter to my creations when they met the cold reality of player contact. Then I would collapse under the morass of stress and disappointed expectations, and would eventually fold the campaigns altogether.

I'd abandon RPGs for a year or two, and then the urge would reawaken and I'd find my way back for another doomed attempt.

This process continued into my adulthood. It continued until last year, in fact, when I came to the end of the longest campaign I'd ever run, the first one I'd ever brought to a graceful(ish) conclusion. This was The Campaign. The one that I'd put thousands of hours of prep into, carefully crafting a narrative the way the prevailing wisdom of a post-*Critical Role* and *Adventure Zone* world told me I was supposed to. The one that had won me incredible joy and wonderful friends and, if you can believe it, my future husband. The one that had sent me into countless panic attacks and spiralling depression and

anxiety. We came to the end and I decided I couldn't do it like this anymore. There had to be another way. So I finally looked into this weird, wacky, wonderful OSR thing I'd been hearing about for years.

The thing that immediately struck me about old school play was that it seemed so freeing to the GM. A referee, not a storyteller. Or maybe a storyteller, but not an author. You're relating the sublime and bizarre tales you've heard of a place far away, as real as ours. You're not penning a beginning, middle, and end. You are the honest, neutral mechanism through which the players view something glorious. You're the conduit.

It felt like I could breathe again when

I thought about running a game this way. I felt such relief. I felt like I could finally see the ephemeral path to the other world I'd glimpsed over and over again as a kid. The one I thought I was building for my players and I for the last few years, but that had ultimately eluded me. It took me a long time to articulate what about the OSR opened that path up to me again, but I knew it had to do with losing control. With letting go.

There's a discussion to be had about the greater control old school play confers on the GM in the "Rulings, not Rules" sense. There's GM fiat aplenty in this corner of the RPG world, but that's not the kind of control I'm talking about.

I'm talking about letting go of narrative control. Of having to decide ahead of time what's going to happen. What they're going to see. What the world will offer up to them. Relying on random encounters, and random tables, and reaction rolls, and and and... it frees you of the responsibility to craft what should happen, and instead lets you dedicate all of your mental cycles to fill in the gaps of what is happening.

Because, like in the real world, nothing should happen. Stuff just happens. This is what I missed when I was a kid, all the way through to a stressed, lost 30-year old trying to make my dearest friends happy with the game we cared so much about. The way to create that feeling, that elusive, transcendent sensation of touching a real world beyond ours, is to make it like ours. Make it real. Make it random. Make it just a little bit senseless and unpredictable and miraculous and, yes, cruel, because there is magic to be found in that.

Powered by the Apocalypse games have some variant of "hold on lightly" in their stated principles. *Apocalypse World* says to "Sometimes, disclaim decision making." There's a whole realm of debate on how much PbtA and OSR relate to one another, and whether they have anything to learn from each other, but I think this is one place where they definitely overlap. Hold on lightly. Play to find out what happens. I'm not going to argue about which framing is better - I have deep love for both schools. But I do know how it finally clicked for me. When I read thousands of words on the PbtA style of gamerunning I glimpsed the light but I never comprehended it, not completely. When I found my way to the OSR, first read the *Principia Apocrypha*'s* advice to "Divest yourself of their fate," I fucking got it.
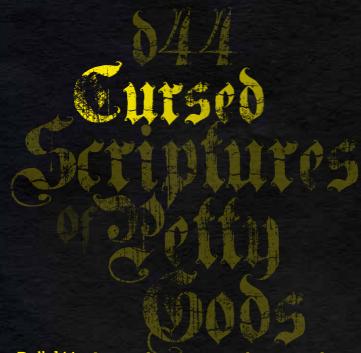
There is joy in letting go. There is dizzy ecstasy in watching things you and your friends have created and care deeply for going careening in strange and unexpected directions. There is an unbelievable pleasure in being both creator and audience all at once. And without letting yourself be surprised you will never get to experience that pleasure. You will close off the path.

GMing is a huge responsibility. You are the facilitator of everyone's fun. You are responsible for creating a verisimilar world, and engaging challenges, and the range of things that could potentially happen. What you're not responsible for, what you can't be responsible for, is deciding what does happen. Because you're just the conduit. The lens through which the other world reveals itself to you and everyone else at the table. Deciding the fate of worlds isn't your job. That's on Istus.

by **Brent Edwards** Art **Michael Sheppard**

d44 Cursed Scriptures of Petty Gods

Roll d44 when a character reads a cursed text.
The first die determines the petty god the text concerns.
The second determines the nature of the text.
Saves vs the curses themselves or their secondary effects
may be permitted at the GM's discretion.
Don't be mean, but let things spiral.
Curse removal should be feasible enough that it doesn't
make the player want to reroll, but the solution should be
weird and specific. No simple visits to the local temple.

Tardoer
Patron Saint of Small Creatures Coated in Slime

1. Heretical (Desiccation)
The reader becomes repulsed by all forms of moisture, convinced that all possible sources of hydration (even if alcoholic, sanitized, or magically purified) are tainted with larval parasites that will infest them. After a week of eschewing liquids the reader becomes desiccated and brittle. They no longer need to consume water to survive, but have their armor class penalized by 2. Whenever the reader receives a critical hit, the part of their body that was struck crumbles into dust. Every time they are forced to consume liquid, they are cured of their brittleness for one week and lose a level. If their level is ever reduced to zero, the larval parasites reach maturity, and dozens of large axolotls burst violently and fatally from all quarters of their body.

2. Penitentiary (Budding)
2d4 pores on the reader's face gradually expand over the next 12 hours. Attempts to extrude the contents result in a viscous, slightly green slime. After the incubation period, half-develop vestigial faces identical to the reader's push themselves into the openings of the pores and ceaselessly babble senseless strings of seemingly random words. Anyone other than the host that listens to the babbling for more than 1 hour is overcome by a driving urge to try to tear a face out of one of the pores and take its place. The destruction of any face halves the host's Charisma (round down).

3. Blessed (Egg Sac)
The next time the reader sleeps, they awake engulfed in a gelatinous mass within a slimy membrane reminiscent of an amphibian egg sac. Piercing/slashing attacks cannot be made from within the egg sac without breaching the membrane, but blunt weapons are usable. Air, liquid, force, and sound pass through the membrane without issue but solids cannot. As long as the reader remains in the egg sac they heal at double the normal rate and do not need to consume food or water. Every time the membrane is pierced, the contents spill out and the reader is freed. The next time the reader sleeps they awake to find themselves once again encased in the membrane and that they have become two smaller versions of themselves. If there are ever a number of reader entities in excess of the reader's HD, the next time they go to sleep the rest of the party awakes to find the sac completely full of thousands of mundane frogs which promptly burst the membrane and scatter.

4. Apotheotic (Pollywog Hex)
Immediately and once per day thereafter the reader sprouts a new leg somewhere on their body (roll 1d4: 1 = Head, neck or shoulders. 2 = Torso or arms. 3 = Hips or rear. 4 = Existing legs, including ones growing out of other parts of the body.) Every hour spent immersed in water at least to the neck causes a leg to be absorbed back into the reader's body at random, with any original legs disappearing last. If the final leg is absorbed, the reader develops a tadpole-like tail that remains even when new legs grow. It allows them to swim at twice their normal movement speed, but is difficult to hide and unpleasantly slimy. While the reader has no legs they also gain the ability to breathe underwater.

Klakyon
Geode Avatar of
Incomprehensible Geometries

1. Heretical (Decalcification)
All of the bones in the reader's body instantly dissolve, leaving them a distorted blob in human skin. The character's Strength and Dexterity scores are halved. The transformation does not seem to harm the reader, however, and their new form seems remarkably resilient and adaptable. They may maintain a passably human shape for an hour or so, though the effect is slightly uncanny and exhausting to maintain. They may deform their body to the point that given enough time they may slip through very tight tunnels or under the cracks of poorly-fitting doors. They are also fairly stretchy and may be used by their companions as a slingshot, trampoline, etc.

2. Penitentiary (Duplication)
The reader is unable to walk forward or backward without doubling or diminishing respectively in a fractal-like pattern. Every step forward causes them to unfold from a vertical line through their midpoint, doubling their width and leaving them with a half-self attached to their extremities on either side. Every step backward reverses this effect. Further duplications from the first create increasing angular deviations eventually resulting in a spiraling, shambling, multi-faceted being. If the reader consecutively doubles a number of times equal to their total HD they fracture and break into individual reader instances, who also fracture and break, repeating down to a microscopic level. Should the reader ever take a step backward when they're undoubled, they fold in on themselves and collapse irretrievably into nothingness. The reader may walk sideways without penalty.

3. Blessed (Acuteness)
The reader's touch becomes supernaturally sharp. Though the appearance and texture of the reader's flesh does not change touching anything that could reasonably be cut by a good knife (paper, cloth, flesh, etc) with their bare skin results in a very clean slice. Things that cannot be cut are scraped or etched, up to and including diamond. Though this presents interesting problems in their day to day existence, the curse is not without its benefits - any unarmed attack the reader makes with bare flesh is automatically a critical hit, though their base unarmed damage is unchanged.

4. Apotheotic (Geodic Exemplar)
The reader's flesh transforms into perfectly pristine radiant crystal. They gain natural armor equivalent to plate. All of their physical attribute scores are immediately maxed. Their body projects a beautiful pink-hued luminescence as a light spell. Any mineral matter that makes contact with their crystalline flesh serves as a seed for further crystal growth: imperfect nodes and deformities that rapidly spread across the body unless quickly chipped off (a difficult task due to their hardness). Given the amount of ambient dust in most environments, this process usually results in a near-immediate formation of rampant crystalline tumors around the reader's body, encasing them in an impossibly dense shell unless a method is quickly found to filter the air around them.

Choking the Miasmatic
Caldera Eidolon

1. Heretical (Oxygenation)

The reader's body becomes supernaturally adept at retaining oxygen. This immediately manifests as a drastic reduction in their rate of breathing, grants them advantage on tests involving athletic endurance, and allows them to hold their breath for up to an hour. Standing too close to the reader while they're actively breathing may cause others to become faint. If exposed directly to open flame or very high temperatures, the reader has a 1-in-4 chance per round to explode violently.

2. Penitentiary (Asphyxiation)

A cloud of carbon dioxide gradually begins to coalesce around the reader's head. The cloud is not affected by wind or air pressure. Those putting their faces directly next to the reader's head will be similarly affected until they move. The day that the text is read, the reader finds they have increasing difficulty detecting smells. The second day the reader becomes short of breath after one round of intense physical activity and takes disadvantage on all physical checks until they've had a short rest. On the third day the reader will be constantly gasping for air, unable to act or function beyond moving slowly and occasionally lapsing into unconsciousness. The reader will suffocate in their sleep before the morning of the fourth day unless a method of getting oxygen directly into their lungs is devised before that time.

3. Blessed (Smothering)

A whorl of ash and dampening gasses are expelled every time the reader exhales. This is likely to have an ill effect on the manner in which they are received by NPCs with a superstitious nature - puffing out apparent smoke with each breath has certain connotations. Open flames near the reader are extinguished immediately. With a concentrated stream of air, the reader may temporarily blind someone in close quarters with pumice ash. The reader is also able to breathe in thick smoke without penalty.

4. Apotheotic (Sylph Ascendancy)

The reader suddenly and instantly sheds their mortal form in a blast of shredding wind, leaving them as a sylph: a spirit made of deoxygenated air. In this form the reader is invisible, capable of flight, may pass through any aperture that isn't airtight, and may knock physical objects and beings back or even prone with bursts of pressurized air. The sylph's form is tenuous and easily disrupted. When exposed to wind or airflow stronger than strenuous breathing, the reader's gaseous makeup will be irretrievably scattered in 1d4 rounds at which point they cease to exist.

Glimrela
Halfling Goddess
of Gaudy Bangles

1. Heretical (Humility) The reader finds that their day-to-day needs are always provided for comfortably through happenstance and coincidence. They will always be able to find ample tasty and filling food, that is either dropped, donated, or foraged with little effort. Humble clothing and essential gear are easily discovered whenever the reader is in a location where these items could reasonably be found. In addition, the reader will be received with general positivity by those around them - give them advantage on reaction rolls when it makes sense, especially with animals and good-hearted people. However, the reader will find themselves unable to hold onto wealth of any kind or amount. Loose change constantly goes missing. Caches of hoarded wealth are found and ransacked by rival adventurers. Bank tallies are erased. Trade goods are spoiled or damaged. Property and titles are lost through legal loopholes or rival claimants. If treasure for XP is being used, the reader is unable to advance while this curse is in effect.

2. Penitentiary (Numismatics) All coinage that the reader touches has the pattern on its obverse changed to a depiction of the reader's head in profile. This change is very apparent to anyone that has experience with the type of coin being used and will generally result in the assumption that the coin is fraudulent. This transformation may occasionally be useful when attempting to demonstrate one's importance to someone unfamiliar with the currency in question.

3. Blessed (Petty Riches) The reader finds that any coinage they take possession of, no matter how briefly, is replaced by double the quantity (not value!) in copper pieces the next time it's perceived. This occurs whenever the coinage is left unobserved and applies to any new copper pieces created this way as well as mundane currency. Any copper pieces spent, given away, cached, abandoned, or otherwise disposed of by the reader find their way back into their possession within one day, often to be discovered somewhere unexpected and unavoidable, doubling once more in the process.

4. Apotheotic (Glitter Golme) All jewelry currently worn by the reader becomes permanently grafted to their flesh. Thereafter, upon seeing a piece of jewelry of good quality for the first time the reader will be compelled to take it by any means necessary and put it on, at which point it too will be permanently affixed to their flesh. Once a number of jewelry pieces equal to the reader's HD becomes joined to them, the jewelry will begin to spread over their flesh in recursive patterns of fractal filigree mimicking the original pieces. The reader is completely covered in 1d4 days. Removal of any section of this shell is agonizingly painful, resulting in the loss of one level and a mundane piece of jewelry worth 100 GP * the reader's new level. If the reader is harvested in their entirety, they are worth the total treasure requirement to advance to their current level, or if treasure for XP isn't used 1000 GP * the reader's total level . This harvesting kills the reader.
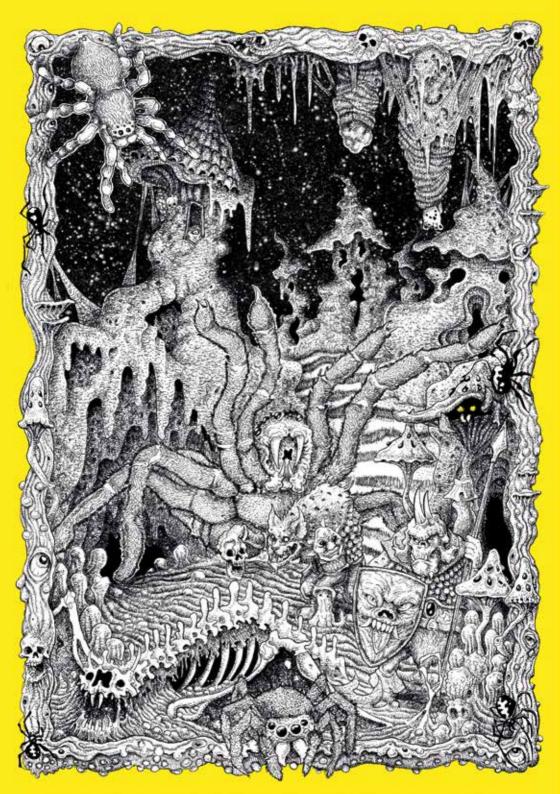
by **Ktrey Parker** Art **Huargo Illustrador**

WHAT ARE THOSE SPIDERS DOING?

You rolled another giant spider on the encounter table but you'd rather die than cheat on an encounter roll. Well, grab your trusty d30 and get ready to add some more denizens to your dungeon!

Black Widow

1	Amputating the hind leg of a cave locust
2	Brooding an egg sac, rolling it around and around
3	Cannibalizing a contorted Casanova post-coitus
4	Casting silk strands into corners to rebuild their web
5	Clinging menacingly from a cobwebbed ceiling
6	Cocooning an ashen-faced acolyte
7	Constructing a sturdier guideline across a chasm
8	Discarding the husk of an utterly drained giant bat
9	Eating damaged webs to regain essential nutrients
10	Ensnaring several sprites with strategically placed toil
11	Entangling a goblin bodyguard, on their way to betray the King
12	Flinging bits of armor and a helm from her home with a clatter
13	Glistening black in the damp, her telltale red hourglass blazing
14	Guarding her skittering spiderlings tenderly
15	Hanging, stock-still, in the center of her gossamer abode
16	Hoisting a still twitching tiger beetle into a corner for later
17	Immobilizing several struggling stirges
18	Liquefying the organs of an orc, stiff and pale
19	Mending her damaged meshwork meticulously
20	Completely obscuring an exit/entrance with webbing
21	Preening monstrous mouthparts repeatedly
22	Rappelling rapidly to fetch a robber fly that wriggled free
23	Retiring to a convenient alcove as hobgoblin boots stomp by
24	Slowly descending via her spinnerets
25	Stepping lightly over a treacherously trapped floor
26	Strumming strands to draw a curious carcass crawler closer
27	Suspending an enveloped driver ant
28	Swiveling to confront a halfling who is trying to rescue a friend
29	Tugging on a silken skein to test its resiliency
30	Weaving a magnificent labyrinth of interlacing webs

Crab Spider

1 Ambushing a squad of kobolds, armed only with torches
2 Carrying horripilating spiderlings on their broad backs
3 Climbing down from their ceiling corner perches
4 Clutching a dead giant rat in their hairy pedipalps
5 Coating the floors, walls, and ceilings with fine, glistening cobwebs
6 Consuming an elf, dead by their toxic bite
7 Dashing to perceived safety underneath a defaced altar
8 Defending pulsating egg sacs, hatching any minute now
9 Dining on a veteran they caught sleeping on watch
10 Dismantling a fire beetle as they fight over its remains
11 Fishing: they skate on the surface of a pool
12 Gnashing teeth of a gnoll soon deceased as their venom takes effect
13 Grooming bristly faces, eight shiny unblinking black eyes staring
14 Hiding among huge mushrooms, blending in well with the caps
15 Injecting their venom into a struggling killer bee
16 Lurking above door frames, perched and ready to pounce
17 Mimicking bleached bone amid a large pile of skeletal remains
18 Nesting cozily among gothic ceiling arches
19 Secreting pheromones, allowing them to move among driver ants
20 Presenting a silk wrapped robber fly to a potential lover
21 Repairing a section of web, mistakenly placed in front of a door
22 Scaling ornately carved columns that support the ceiling
23 Scuttling across echoing flagstones
24 Slinging innovative web «bolas» at their prey
25 Slurping the liquefied insides of a dwarf
26 Spinning fine filaments that serve as tripwires to alert them of lunch
27 Squatting silently in the shadows cast by medusa statues
28 Stalking an abandoned, heavily laden mule, misplaced by his owners
29 Swaddling a foolhardy harpy, ensnared by their webs
30 Waving iridescent palps in an intriguing courtship display

Tarentella

1 Attacking a pair of tangoing traders
2 Biting a group of jitterbugging bugbears
3 Catching a cleric mid-conga
4 Clambering over a passed-out paladin
5 Covered in itching hairs, prized by thieves as lockpicks
6 Creeping rhythmically, as if to unheard music
7 Crouching suddenly, about to spring on an unsuspecting skeleton
8 Dismembering a druid that danced herself to death
9 Dwelling among piles of moldering books
10 Feeding their young a friar, frazzled from the foxtrot
11 Glaring at a tuning bard, almost expectantly
12 Grabbing at gamboling goblins
13 Hauling a horse that died from excessive dressage
14 Hunting hurtling hobgoblins
15 Jumping on an oblivious bombardier beetle
16 Laying tambourine-shaped eggs along the base of an ornate dais
17 Leaping onto line-dancing lizard men
18 Lining their lairs with fusty sheet music
19 Menacing a moshing medium
20 Molting, it's said the skins make for marvelous banjos
21 Patrolling their territory with synchronized cadence
22 Scurrying after a sashaying smuggler
23 Snatching a squirming giant centipede in their fangs
24 Springing suddenly from a trapdoor onto a passing giant shrew
25 Tailing some tap-dancing troglodytes
26 Tensing their long piliferous legs, one at a time
27 Thrumming on hollow skulls/webbed rib-harps with their pedipalps
28 Twitching with revulsion at the cry of an atonal shrieker
29 Whistling an infectious tune through the slits in their abdomen
30 Wrapping up an unconscious apprentice as their wizard waltzes

by **Ktrey Parker** Art **Dylan Horrocks**

WHAT IS THIS GELATINOUS CUBE DOING?
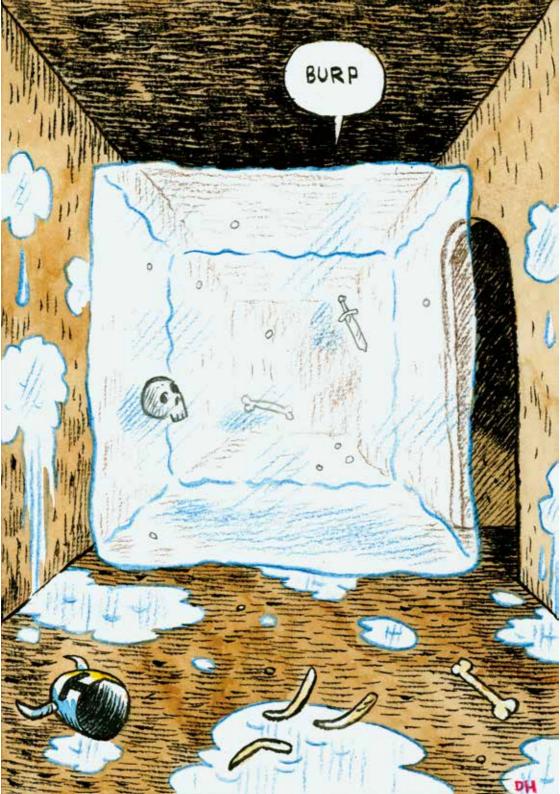
It's such an iconic monster that it has its own Funko Pop toy, yet you always encounter it in the same way: in the middle of a corridor, poised to ambush you, yet noticeable because of some indigestible remnants of its last meal... So roll d100.

1	Absorbing a swarm of rats, with sickening slurping sounds
2	Accruing a complete dining set: four chairs and part of a table
3	Accumulating contents of an alchemy lab: alembics/vials/etc.
4	Being goaded into a maze by a very tidy minotaur
5	Billowing to fill a cylindrical corridor
6	Blending in well with a damp, slick wall
7	Bloating slightly as it flows over a large stone
8	Blocking a hallway with its shimmering mass
9	Breaking down an unlucky nuisance of kobolds
10	Bulging obscenely as it surrounds a statue
11	Catching a goblin bodyguard completely unaware
12	Choking an inviting hallway completely
13	Clanging loudly as it drags a discarded shield along the floor
14	Clinging precariously to a narrow walkway
15	Clouded with metal shavings after wandering into an old forge
16	Coating the walls in stinking ectoplasm
17	Collecting several unusually large shells and carapaces
18	Comically stuffing itself into a stone trough
19	Conforming to the circular sides of a shallow pit
20	Congesting an already high traffic area
21	Cramming itself into a concave niche
22	Creeping around a blind corner
23	Damming a drainage pipe and skimming scum from the liquid
24	Decomposing a dwarf, which appears to levitate in the middle of a hall
25	Destroying a stout wooden door, a splinter at a time
26	Deterring a pack of hungry ghouls
27	Disintegrating several barrels slowly
28	Drawn toward a dying dervish
29	Drifting across an open area, a trail of slime in its wake
30	Engulfing the corpse of an elf
31	Extruding itself through a portcullis, creating tiny cubes
32	Faltering as a giant cave snail rasps it with its radula
33	Filling a fountain as frightened fishes flee
34	Flowing quickly down a ramp and picking up speed
35	Foundering across an iron grate in the floor
36	Gathering a morbid collection of humanoid skulls
37	Gradually dissolving a struggling zombie
38	Gurgling as a suit of tarnished plate mail is ejected

39 Having subsumed a grey ooze, it is very acidic and immune to fire

40 Hindering a hobgoblin patrol

41 Hugging the base of a large stalactite, ready to drop

42 Impeded by the flames of an irritated hellhound

43 Inadvertently catching several hundred rusty nails

44 Intercepting a swarm of beetles feeding on a dead mule

45 Leisurely enveloping a couple of crates

46 Lurching itself out of a shallow hole

47 Lurking in an alcove, completely surrounding a statue of a saint

48 Meandering away from a bright beam of light

49 Melding with another cube to exchange memory maps

50 Melting through a beautifully woven silk curtain

51 Messily agglomerating stubborn bits of bone and broken coffin

52 Mopping up detritus from very smooth flagstones

53 Occluding a rotating wall that it somehow managed to jam open

54 Oozing menacingly toward a medium

55 Osmosing an ogre: frozen in place

56 Overflowing from a small cellar door it inadvertently entered

57 Overwhelming an orc, completely benumbed

58 Painstakingly gliding up a steep incline

59 Patiently dismantling a dead driver ant

60 Plugging a drain in the center of the floor amid ankle deep water

61 Politely sweeping up a colony of yellow mould

62 Pouring itself out of a narrow gap in the wall

63 Pressing against a barricade of furniture, placed against a door

64 Prowling silently, in search of prey

65 Pulsating as glands from a digesting fire beetle glow

66 Quaking with satisfaction after a lizard man meal

67 Quivering after a curious cave locust takes a bite from it

68 Rambling over caltrop strewn floor, conveniently clearing a path

69 Recoiling after brushing past a sconce containing a lit torch

70 Sagging slightly to avoid the green slime on the ceiling

71 Scouring walls clean of moss and moisture

72 Seamlessly camouflaged in an arched doorway

73 Seeping its way down from a dais

74 Shivering slightly as a dozen darts launch into its bulk

75 Shoving its way past a gang of gargoyles

76 Sinking into a pool of water, dining on algae

77 Skeletons inside are animate, just along for the ride

78 Skulking at the bottom of a descending ladder

79 Sliding into a crypt niche to feast on tasty bones

80 Slinking away from an angry carcass crawler

81 Slowly crumbling a shrieker suspended inside of itself

82 Sluicing down a chute with a sickening sound

83 Sneaking up on a giant spider, busy wrapping a robber fly

84 Sputtering over a paralyzed paladin

85 Squeezing itself through an arrow slit

86 Stymieing a group of gnomes, keeping it at bay with torches

87 Surging rapidly down a hallway after ingesting a potion of haste

88 Surprising a troop of troglodytes

89 Surrounding a benumbed berserker

90 Swelling upwards to reach roosting bats

91 Teetering on a narrow walkway traversing a chasm

92 Throbbing as it surrounds a helpless halfling

93 Thwarting a thoul, who can't tear chunks from it fast enough

94 Transuding through an ornately filigreed gate

95 Trembling slightly as pots and pans it's picked up shift around

96 Turning the tables on some stealthy bugbears

97 Undergoing mitosis: splitting into smaller, identical cubes

98 Utterly clogging a stairwell with its massive bulk

99 Waiting patiently at the bottom of a pit trap

100 Wobbling after a mighty blow from a troll's club

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Sam Mameli**

Complete the ENCOUNTER

The Dungeon's Master

The Master is a _____ who has claimed the dungeon pre-
sented on the next spread. They used to be _____
but didn't like _____, so they are now on the right track to
_____. Their _____ followers only control areas 18 to
21, but are now pushing against the hostile _____ holding
rooms number ___ to ___ (where the de●vil's mask is hidden).

The de●vil's mask protects its bearer from _____.
It also has the power of _____ whenever its bearer sacrifices
_____. Thrice daily, the mask can cast _____
of its own volition. For the de●vil's mask has a mind of its own! It wants to achieve
_____ by _____.

The Chimney Throne (room 20) was created by _____
but it is mostly known in _____ myth because of its role in
_____. The throne has no magical powers, but its intricate
mechanisms are used to control _____ and with the right key
it can also _____. The moon and star symbol at its top was
a later addition when it was brought to the dungeon. They are extremely valuable to
_____, who would pay a handsome price for it.

Additional notes:

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art & map: **Sam Mameli**

Complete the DUNGEON
of _____

1. Entrance. The stairs rise from the waters of _____ . The door is trapped by _____.

2. Ophidian Atrium. Four monohydras statues animate if _____. The goo in the puddle is actually _____. It can be neutralised with _____.

3. The Great Archway of _____. Deciphering the glyphs on the floor helps with _____.

4. Landing of the Sun and Moons. The gate only opens for _____ or the bearer of the d👁vil's mask.

5. Landing of the Oracle. The monohydra from room 10 speaks through the lion's mouth. It truthfully answers questions about _____ but spits poison for __ d6 damage if angered.

6. First Landing. It is guarded by _____, who alone are allowed in the armoured room (9).

7. Ancient Stone Garden. The dungeon was built around these _____ monoliths. Touching them one after the other has a chance of _____ _____. The stream leads to _____.

8. Dump. Among the fossilised debris and more recent dejections, _____ _____ can be found for every turn of icky search. Each turn, there is a cumulative 1-in-6 chance that a character gets _____.

9. Armoured Room. Empty. All spells cast here have a 1-in- __ chance of being bounced onto another target.

10. Lair of the Monohydra. Most of its heads were lost in a battle against _____ _____. Whoever ventures into the passageway is considered an offering. The floor of the lair lies _____ ft below. Among broken bones, is a gleaming magical _____.

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11. **Purification Pit.** The ancient _____ used this room to cleanse themselves under the waterfall. Doing so in the name of _____ restores _____ hit points and ____ spells. Anything falling down the pit is spat out in 12.

12. **Entrance to Floating Rooms.** The bottomless pit communicates with 11. Water from the waterfall there runs into the underground lake on which the room is afloat. The lake is inhabited by albino _____.

13. **Refugees.** Empty room. In the corner, 1d3 _____ are hiding from _____.

14. **Treasure chest.** Can only be accessed by walking the tight rope from 13. The chest contains half a dozen _____.

15. **Life Choices.** Coming from everywhere at once, the voices of _____ warn that «greed and peace are frenemies» and that «the delver must keep delving to find _____».

16. **The Nook of Greed.** Locked but empty chest. The intricate lock releases _____ _____ gas; save or lose _____ until _____ _____.

17. **The Garden of Peace.** Crossing the bridge requires leaving _____ _____ behind. Once in the empy garden, one can stay indefinitely without the need to _____.

18. **First Antechamber.** A blind _____ lives here, afraid of going further. They have a lot to say about _____ but hate being asked about _____.

19. **Final Step.** Formerly the lair of a fierce _____, now deserted after _____.

20. **The Room of Thrones.** Each throne is at the top of its own moated pyramid, with the Chimney Throne (see p. 146) in the centre. Sitting on any of the empty thrones, one must save or _____.

21. **Exit to _____.** Large amounts of blood have been spilled here. Whoever or whatever that was, they managed to drag themselves outside.

by **Sándor Gebei**

D6 HEXCRAWLING

This is a concise procedure developed for a ruleset I ended up abandoning. It has served me well over the years, and it might be of use to you, too. I'd like to thank Gavin Norman, whose blog posts really inspired me.

WILDERNESS ACTIONS

The party has 3 actions altogether; 2 for the day and 1 for the night. Note that things that take only a very short amount of time might not qualify as an "action" in this sense, such as dealing with a Hazard or Encounter (see Event Table). The following actions are covered by the rules:

- **Move** (move to a new hex)
- **Search** (look for hidden location)
- **Hunt and Forage** (replenish supplies)
- **Camp** (rest and recover in the wilds)
- **Explore** (interact with a location)

• **MOVE** - The party leaves the current hex and moves into an adjacent one. A party on horseback may move an extra hex, except through swamps, mountains, and particularly dense forests. All obvious features and the terrain type of all neighbouring hexes are immediately revealed to them. After resolving the action, roll on the Event Table.

• **SEARCH** : The party sets out and looks for hidden features within the current hex. Immediately roll on the Event Table with a +2 bonus.

• **HUNT AND FORAGE** - The party collectively replenish their supplies from the wilderness. 1d6-2 rations are gained per character (increase die size for particularly skilled characters and decrease it for harsh terrain and weather). After resolving the action, roll on the Event Table.

• **CAMP** - The party stops to set up camp. Every member regains 1 HD's worth of lost hit points and removes 1 point of Fatigue (see below). Roll on the Event Table with a -2 penalty.

• **EXPLORE** : The party interacts with a location in a meaningful way. This includes the exploration of adventure sites (i.e. dungeons and lairs), dealing with people and their problems in a settlement, using a facility, etc. After resolving the action, roll on the Event Table.

FATIGUE RULE

Every night the party skips camp, they receive 2 points of Fatigue, penalising all their checks by -1 each; this penalty is cumulative.

EVENT TABLE

d6	Result
2-	Uneventful
3	Weather Change
4	Encounter
5	Hazard
6+	Location

• **UNEVENTFUL :** No unexpected event unfolds.
• **WEATHER CHANGE :** Roll on your weather table or decide how the weather conditions improve or worsen. Assume they don't change again until another Weather Change result.
• **ENCOUNTER -** Based on the time of day and the party's activity, generate an appropriate encounter using your method of choice.
• **HAZARD -** The party comes across an environmental hazard that tests their skills and possibly diminishes their resources.
• **LOCATION -** The party stumbles upon a hidden location within the hex, or a known one if they set out to reach a specific location.

Optionally, if you crave more chaos in your games, you can set an arbitrary chance for double events (I recommend 1-in-6). In such a case, you would roll twice on the Event Table and adjudicate the situation accordingly.

FIXING

"Fuck every detection spell," Scrap Princess writes on her blog*. She's not fond of spells like dispel magic, either**. I agree. These spells are boring. They are boring mainly because they have no materiality. Here's what happens when you cast a detect X spell: "Yeah that stuff you wanted to detect. You see them glowing in your detect-o-vision." Beyond that they don't do anything in the world. Nothing is touched or moved or changed.

Dispel is worse! RPGs are about the interesting things we experience together in imagined space. Dispel does the exact opposite: it actively removes interesting things from imagined space.

So let's try fixing these spells. In order, here's:
• A detection spell that's a glorified get-a-dog-to-sniff-this-out-for-you deal
• A detection spell that physically affects stuff you want to detect
• A debuff spell that's actually a summon spell
• A cancel spell that's actually a summon spell (these two should be one spell, probably, but whatever), and...
• A dispel spell that causes miscasts instead of outright cancelling magic.

SPELLS

by **Zedeck Siew**

REVEAL MAGIC

Level 1 - Duration: 1 turn per level - Range: 30ft per level

Animal swarms unconsciously sketch the invisible flows of the world. Fish school in math models, birds flock to magnetic fields, rats track pestilential urges. You tweak the minds of a single type of swarming creature. Any present are now unerringly drawn to all magic within range – they swamp charmed persons, enchanted gems, a jinn's passage, and so on.
Intelligent swarming creatures get a save.

COMMAND ILLUSION

Level 2 - Duration: 2 rounds per level - Range: Hearing

To cast an illusion is to tell the world a fiction about itself. You shout over this story, telling a version that better suits your purpose.
Speak a single-word command. All illusions within hearing distance obey this command, even if their form would otherwise prevent them from doing so – trees dance, walls flee, dragons wank, and so on.

SUMMON CURSE

Level 3 - Duration: Permanent - Range: Touch

You call bad intent from the upper airs. It streams out your fingers, coagulating into a bird made of yellow phlegm (3 HD, flies).
Target a single creature. The phlegm bird tries to stuff itself down your target's throat. If successful, your target suffers (d6):
1: Thin blood. Hurt, bleeds 1 HP a round. Heals at twice normal rate.
2: Hazard blindness. Unable to see beings that mean them harm.
3: Insomnia. Every day, saves or suffers -1 to all rolls. Cumulative.
4: Piquant soul. Supernatural predators always know their location.
5: Innocence. Inability to use or understand language in any form.
6: Itching. Itch itch itch! Disadvantage on physical and social actions.
Cast as a ritual, this spell may be used to curse an inanimate object. The bird soaks into the target object. It curses the object's owner.

EXTRACT CURSE

Level 3 - Duration: Permanent - Range: Touch

Like venom from a bite, you drain a curse from an affected creature or item. This curdles into an animal of your choice made of yellow phlegm.
It has 3 HD and abilities as per its form. If drawn from an item it wields or wears said item and must be in a shape suitable to do so.
The curse creature is intelligent and belligerent. It prefers to stuff itself down the throat of its creator (the person who cast the initial curse).

UNRAVEL MAGIC

Level 3 - Duration: Instantaneous
Range: 120ft

If reality is fabric, spellcraft is a weaving art. Target a single instance of magic within range. With a mystic needle, you pick its weft. It is undone.
Spells fizzle. Summoned creatures and permanent effects are disrupted for d6 hours. Magical objects or creatures lose their supernatural abilities for d6 hours. Sentient ones get a save.
Unravelled is not destroyed. Centred around the target, magical energy is warped into (d6):
1: An explosion of iron nails. The damage is equivalent of a shrapnel bomb or fireball. Carpets all ground within 10ft per level of the target spell, like caltrops.
2: Blood. Blood! Spewing from the target – soaking clothes, spraying faces, slicking surfaces up to 5 ft per target level. Save or retch.
3: Ego transference. The minds of creatures in sight of the target round-robin bodies in alphabetical order. Lasts 1 turn per spell level.
4: A temporal pocket. Creatures in sight of the target are frozen in time; 1 round per spell level. What if bystanders nick your stuff?
5: Vital force. It washes over all beings in sight of the target. It is invigorating and heals d4 HP per target level, and may exceed HP maximum.
6: A zombie. The closest dead body of HD equal to the target spell level rises and attempts whatever task the target magic was originally cast for.
Cast as a ritual, in a place of power this spell may be used to permanently dispel a magical effect, object, or creature. No side effects; takes a week per target level; the ritual fails if interrupted.
Probably a better way to do that Unravel Magic side effects table is to crib WFRP's Chaos Manifestations list, but I was lazy.

* http://monstermanualsewnfrompants.blogspot.com/2018/05/what-exactly-is-problem-here-re-1st.html
** http://monstermanualsewnfrompants.blogspot.com/2018/05/part2-of-what-exactly-is-problem-here.html

by **Vagabundork** - Art: **Letty Wilson**

ANOTHER FOOL FOR YOUR ADVENTURES!

When a character dies, it is more important to get the player a replacement adventurer quickly than doing it in an entirely believable way. However, a referee worth their salt will find ways to justify their arrival.

All fools below are level 0 fighters (as in, classless nobodies); if they survive, they become a first level character of a class appropriate to their stats and description. They retain their stats, but the player can roll the class' hit die and keep the result if it's greater than the fool's HP. They also retain their weird abilities.

Roll 1d30* to discover your new adventurer
*Simply roll 1d10 and then 1d6: add +0 on 1 or 4; +10 on 2 or 5; +20 on 3 or 6.
So a result of 8 and 3 is read as (8+20) 28.
Or just close your eyes and stab at the list with a pen.
Meet the Fools!

Estrella Ionia (5)

1. PIXIE. STR 10, DEX 12, CON 12, INT 14, WIS 11, CHA 13, 3hp. *8 smoke bombs, dagger (d4).* Pixie is an adventurer apprentice who has been following the PCs for a long time. She's learned a bit by watching them and now she thinks she can join them. She's 15 years old and somehow still believes that she's the daughter of a poor potter (this is true) and an elvish king (this is false, or is it? I don't know).

2. UQBAR. STR 16, DEX 16, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 9, 4hp, *Club (d6).* Uqbar is a relic from antiquity. He's trapped in a block of transparent ice and his orange-coloured eyes are open He's able to see and has gone completely crazy in a prehistoric kind of way. He wears silver armor, but once he's freed it turns out it was neither silver nor armor but only a layer of minerals that sprouted on his leather rags and skin.

3. OLIVER SAX. STR 10, DEX 10, CON 10, INT 15, WIS 12, CHA 9, 2hp, *Axe (d6), tent, tinder, flint, bowler hat.* A lost explorer, Oliver set up his camp in the next area that the player characters visit. He travels in search of a way to cure his wife Bette, whose main symptom is having acquired the shape of a bowler hat. In truth, Oliver's hat is just a hat, and Bette did not change shape, nor is she his wife. She rejected him when he proposed. Whether Oliver Sax is aware of this or not, I can't say.

4. TOM TILDRUM. STR 12, DEX 10, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 8, 4hp, *equipment varies.* In the middle of the next encounter one of the monsters has an epiphany and changes sides. Mechanically, Tom Tildrum is like any player character but his appearance is that of the monster.

5. ESTRELLA IONIA. STR 13, DEX 10, CON 12, INT 14, WIS 8, CHA 13, 3hp, *Pickaxe (d8), hand axe (d6), leather armour, headlamp, half a map, bag of berries.* A hole opens in the ground or a wall and Estrella Ionia comes out. She's a humanoid with the head of a star-nosed mole. Her goal in life is to find a treasure like no other, a legendary artefact (she has a piece of the map with an X that marks the spot).

6. LITTLE BILLY. Little Billy was the party's link boy (or any other hireling). When a player character dies, Little Billy consumes their soul and takes over their body, leaving behind a desiccated envelope. Little Billy doesn't inherit knowledge or memories, and he is also ignorant of the fact he has this power. Each time a PC dies in the presence of Little Billy, the player gets to take over their body, along with their stats and gear, but none of their class abilities.

7. JULIE D'AUBIGNY (aka Mademoiselle de Maupin). STR 13, DEX 13, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 8, CHA 13, 5hp, *Rapier (d10), men's clothing (as leather armour).* Bisexual badass with a sword. When she first meets the party, she treats them with suspicion: «*Who are you? Where am I?*» Julie D'Aubigny is an actress and singer from the Paris Opera, a lover of men and women alike. When using a fencing weapon (rapier, foil, sabre, or épée) she deals d10 damage instead of the usual d8. Her many duels often ended in blood so she constantly had to flee. During one of those flights, she ended up here.

8. MAZTER MOUZTIQUE. STR 10, DEX 15, CON 10, INT 11, WIS 10, CHA 9, 5hp, *Rapier (d8), buff coat (as leather armour).* Describe to the party how they hear a buzz, followed by a buzzing voice: "Take that. And take that!" Round the corner or behind some trees, they find Mazter Mouztique fighting his own shadow. The shadow seems to be winning, and it really looks like he could use some help. This poseur really thinks he is a hero and a great swordsman. Also, he's a mosquito.

9. ORSOLYA. STR 14, DEX 12, CON 14, INT 9, WIS 10, CHA 0, 8hp, *Dagger (d4), bow (d6), bearskin coat (as leather armour), animal trap, fishing pole, trained coyote called Piroska (bite d8).* A black bear walks towards the adventurers. The bear stands up and removes its skin. It was just Orsolya the hunter in a bearskin coat. The coat allows her to morph into a black bear, but only in appearance; her stats remain the same. Piroska the coyote can attack if Orsolya gives up her own action.

10. MR. CHEESE S. STR 10, DEX 12, CON 10, INT 9, WIS 13, CHA 10, 4hp, *Punch (d3), bread, fish, wine.* He's a pacifist hippie who loses his temper when provoked (save vs. spells or attack with bare hands, angry fists causing d6 damage). He wears a shirt with the caption: *«I am my own father».* Once a day, he can turn any liquid into wine of medium quality. At referee's option, he can perform a miracle once a day if he pases a save vs. spell — but if he fails, he falls unconscious for a few hours. Some possible miracles: making a blind person recover their sight, multiplying food items, resurrecting a dead person (in a failure, in addition to Mr. Cheese S. falling unconscious, the dead person becomes a zombie), walking on the surface of the water, talking to birds, making someone feel like shit from overwhelming guilt...

Uqbar (2)

11. MR. MOONLIGHT. STR 10, DEX 12, CON 10, INT 13, WIS 13, CHA 13, 4hp, *Cane with brass knuckles for a handle (d6), d6 smoke bombs, sunglasses, books.* Blond man, late twenties, black suit, sitting reading a chaos poetry paperback, he's so goth he wears sunglasses in bed! He's from Northampton, England, which nobody has ever heard of; «I play bass in a band there». Chaos magick: sacrificing a point of INT, WIS, or CHA and making a successful save vs. spells allows a chaos magick-user to bend reality in a non-cataclysmic manner. A sunny day turns rainy, and a rainy day becomes a thunderstorm; Moonlight can cast a lightning bolt (d10) against an enemy during a thunderstorm; he can cause a torch to burn its bearer for d10 damage, or throw a lamp and make it explode (d6, 6-meter radius); he can reverse gravity in a room for a few moments; or any other effect that would never happen unless the natural order was broken. If he fails his saving throw, the effect can be harmful to him, causing damage to his own HP, or even his stats. If his three stats reach 1, he can't use chaos magick again, even if he restores all his points.

12. SWEET JANE. STR 10, DEX 10, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 10, 4hp, *Kitchen knife (d4), nonexistence as full plate armour.* A semi-transparent, semi-solid woman who looks at you as though you were the apparition. She's a clerk from Lexington and doesn't really exist (you know it's hard to hit that which doesn't exist, right?), and she needs to make a save vs. spells (to summon enough existence) whenever she wants to attack or make any complex action under stress. *«I had a date with Jack but I got lost and came here instead».* She wants to go back to Lexington and marry Jack.

13. ESTHER & JANET. **Esther**: STR 8, DEX 12, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 11, CHA 16, 4hp. **Janet**: STR 16, DEX 12, CON 13, INT 9, WIS 9, CHA 8, 4hp. *Falchion (d8), dagger (d4), fire oil (d6), chainmail.* Two women occupying the same body, they share the same hit points. (Play her like Andy Sirkis would.) Roll a die: an odd number means Esther is in control; otherwise it's Janet. Esther wants to get rid of Janet; Janet wants to get rid of Esther. Whoever is in control sees an opportunity in the party, and asks to join them: «I'm a good fighting-woman, my blade will be useful.» When the player wants to switch between Janet and Esther, they must make a save vs. spells; on a failure, the Janet-Esther entity suffers a -2 penalty to all her rolls until she has a short rest, and won't be able to try switching again until she has a full rest.

14. BIKINI BOTTOM JOE. STR 13, DEX 12, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 9, CHA 10, 6hp, *Warhammer (d8), chainmail mankini (as chainmail +1).* In the next encounter, the monsters or NPCs are engaged in combat with Bikini Bottom Joe who asks the PCs for help. His most characteristic feature is his men's magical chainmail bikini. It only grants protection if no other clothing is worn. It doesn't protect from cold. When BB Joe is the first to attack in an encounter, he can make an additional attack at the end of the first round.

15. XIME URUTAU. STR 11, DEX 13, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 16, 4hp, *Dagger (d4), hooded leather armour, strange book, 20ft rope.* This new player character is an explorer, and the sole survivor of an attack or other calamity. She's been hiding inside a hole, protecting a book. (The book speaks in a weird language. Xime can understand and reply in the same tongue.) She loves birds and has a zanate (a South American grackle) companion called Galandra. Galandra will defend Xime when she's attacked; her beak deals d4 damage.

16. TAMAYAC. STR 14, DEX 10, CON 12, INT 11, WIS 10, CHA 9, 4hp, *Traditional K'iche' costume (tzut sash, huipil, skirt, leather sandals) as leather armour, box of cigars.* Tamayac comes to the rescue, wielding her trustworthy tijax (double edged obsidian knife). She's tougher than the great Mayan hero Kayb'il B'alam himself (when outnumbered, she rolls 2 dice to attack and uses the best result), smokes noxious cigars, and has all her lives and death tattooed on her skin. She's a poet, anarchist, guerrilla, and feminist who doesn't fear deaths and hates all forms of authority. Her tijax is the one her grandfather used for guerilla dungeon delving, so it might have hidden properties.

17. BRHADARANYAKOPANISHAD-VIVEKACHUDAMANI, OR BRHADA. STR 11, DEX 14, CON 11, INT 11, WIS 10, CHA 9, 3hp, *Dagger (d6).* A man is giving a lesson to a group of working-class goblins (or other lowly creatures more appropriate to your game — maybe even as lowly as human beings) about how their suffering isn't real because they aren't real. On the ground next to the goblins there are several cardboard signs with legends like: «Will work for food », «Need job», «Hungry!». When the PCs appear, he concludes the lesson and offers the party assistance (and his pupils, treat them as linkboys). Brhada is a follower of Inexistentialism, a philosophy professing the futility of life. Or maybe he's just a murdering psychopath. He has an Einstürzende Neubauten tattoo on his left arm that glows in the dark.

18. MASTER LUCIFER LOWBROW. STR 12, DEX 15, CON 10, INT 12, WIS 13, CHA 12,

5hp, *Rapier (d10), penny-farthing, bewitched crackowes, magic top hat.* This gaudy nobleman has made it his personal mission to roam the streets, wearing long pointy shoes (crackowes) that never wear out and allow him to flee rapidly (+2 bonus to run away from almost any situation walking or running), and sometimes riding a very expensive bicycle he stole from another nobleman. He wears a top hat that is impossible to lose (it returns to his head the next morning at the latest). Having somehow lost his memory, he only remembers that he's an aristocrat, and hopes to claim the wealth he no doubt must be entitled to. But he could be lying, of course.

19. LADY MADELINE VANFLOWER. STR 10, DEX 9, CON 14, INT 11, WIS 10, CHA 14, 5hp, *Dagger (d6), bottle containing The Authentic City, mask, layers upon layers of puffy clothes under a meringue like dress (as leather armour).* Lady Vanflower approaches the party confidently and says with a voice of great authority, yet musical and crystalline as a flake of snow: *«You must escort me to my mansion, gentlemen... ladies... and you will be well rewarded».* She's an aristocrazy from a city in a bottle, which she carries with her but can only access from doors found in important locations. Like all aristocrazies, she hides her hideous appearance behind a fine china blue mask which she calls *«my face».*

20. EVELYN SHARP. STR 10, DEX 15, CON 10, INT 11, WIS 12, CHA 10, 3hp, *Knife (d6), taxidermy tools, copy of Practical Taxidermy by Montague Browne.* She's a taxidermist and a trickster who smells of formaldehyde. She made a fake mermaid which she sold for big money and now she's on the run because the buyer (a criminal lord) found out he'd been conned.

21. ASHE. STR 10, DEX 10, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 10, 2hp, *Improvised hand weapon (d6).* He is a prisoner who joins the PCs when he is rescued (or if he escapes). For the rest of this exploration, random encounters are less frequent due to the fact Ashe partially knows the area. Referee and player must know there is a good reason he was locked up. Now that he is free again, nothing good will come of it. I can't tell you more at the moment. Send me US$10 for a full write up and get a free refill of Ashe's special dungeon crawling ability.

Evelyn Sharp (20)

22. JOREAN VANPORTFLEET.

STR 15, DEX 12, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 13, CHA 10, 6hp, *Flaming claymore (d8, ignores 2 AC from armour), holy armor (as chainmail), holy symbol.* The replacement adventurer materializes in front of everyone, wielding a terrifying sword of blue fire and wearing blue-white armour. «I came to wreck everything. God sent me». He doesn't know which god. Also, as everyone knows, God doesn't exist. Unless he's dead.

23. IRONY ELLIS. STR 12, DEX 14, CON 12, INT 10, WIS 9, CHA 9, 5hp, *Bite (d6), Scythe (d10), cobweb silk clothes (as leather armour).* In a dark corner hangs a huge cobweb. Inside is Irony Ellis. Almost human, almost spider, totally androgynous. Black eyes without pupil clustered in the face (only two of them are functional). Looking at Irony Ellis's face can cause trypophobia: the observer must make a save vs. spells or suffer a -2 penalty to all rolls for a turn. Saving successfully makes a character immune to this effect.

24. KATAL. STR 16, DEX 10, CON 11, INT 10, WIS 14, CHA 11, 5hp, *Axe (d6), blowpipe (d6), sacred tattoos (as leather armour), small yet magnificent stallion.* She's a nomad warrior from the Great Desert on a mission to retrieve some antique artifact that, she believes, will help defeat the enemies of her people. Her power tattoos, made with the blood of the ancients mixed with oils and pigments, protect her.

25. STEELO. STR 17, DEX 8, CON 10, INT 11, WIS 13, CHA 11, 12hp, *Two fists (roll 2d6 and keep the best), sci-fi gun (d10), robot body as full plate.* He's a human brain inside a clumsy robot built by a mad scientist. He has been buried for some years, his brain shut down to protect his mind. Recent expeditions loosened the soil and Steelo escaped his accidental prison. He tries to be a good person but his bad temper doesn't help. Steelo can't restore or improve STR, DEX, CON or hit points normally, he needs to be repaired by a mechnic or engineer. The time required can be a just few minutes or an entire week, at the Referee's convenience (or you can play Steelo like a regular character and assume that when he heals or advances in level someone has been working on him). He can also be accompanied by Maggie the Mechanic; treat her like a hireling who repairs him).

26. PADDY STU. STR 10, DEX 12, CON 10, INT 13, WIS 12, CHA 13, 3hp, *Knife (d6), bomb (d8), acid, writing set, flashbang grenade (save vs Paralysis or be stunned for 1d3 rounds).* Punk artist, gambler, he will write whatever you want for free.* When you read it, you learn something valuable but you must save vs. spells or lose one INT or WIS or CHA point, so bleak and dark are his words. When he tries to sell you his books, make another save or you purchase all you can buy with the money you have at the moment (the player must make a save to sell his books to a NPC). The customer will never feel cheated, though.

I Don't Like This Fool!

Not what you had in mind? Well, there's nothing to worry about since you can drop the poor bastard once you finish this adventure, or before that if you manage to get them killed. But why don't you give it a try? The worst that can happen is that you have fun watching shit go wrong for the poor sod.

I Really Don't Like This Fool!!!

Then perhaps the referee will let you roll a d6; a result of 4+ means you can roll the d30 again. On a 3 or less though, you, the player, are sent into the game world. All your stats are average (10), no matter whether you are an athlete, a circus juggler, or Einstein himself (hi ! I thought you were dead). Roll d6 for your hp, and your only equipment is what you are carrying right now, plus everything you can grab and hold onto in real life in the next 60 seconds – the referee will time you. Most mundane objects would deal d6 of damage.

* Look, he did write something for me once: http://falsemachine.blogspot.com/2019/01/something-about-railroading-for-jorge.html

27. EDWARF.
STR 12, DEX 10, CON 12, INT 11, WIS 12, CHA 10, 3hp, *Pick-axe (d6), manacles, onyx rod.* The remaining party members can hear the clanging symphony of the battlefield. Some monsters (perhaps encountered previously) have defeated a group or warriors, and only one remains. Edwarf stands next to the bodies of six other short men and a raven-haired woman with skin white as snow. *«She was my Queen and they were my brothers. Now I'm alone and free to wander.».* Onyx rod: the victim must save vs. spells or be blinded for a day.

28. SIBLING SNAIL.
STR 14, DEX 8, CON 10, INT 12, WIS 12, CHA 10, 4hp, *Flail (d8), shell (as chainmail).* A humanoid snail, looking at the party with strange eyestalks. They come from the Invisible City Beneath and are a monk whose mollusk god (or maybe it's just nature?) grants them a slime skill: once a day, Sibling Snail can vomit a stream of mucus up to 10 meters away. This mucus causes a -1 penalty to DEX related rolls and d4 damage each round until it's washed off. At zero hit points, the victim becomes a statue of calcium carbonate.

29. UTHYR PENDRAEG.
STR 14, DEX 10, CON 11, INT 11, WIS 13, CHA 15, 5hp, *Sword (d8), noble clothes.* He comes through the nearest entrance but doesn't know how this happened: he was in a castle just now. He claims to be the King of Logres.

30. STATE OF D'ARTHR.
STR 16, DEX 10, CON 10, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 10, 30hp, *Cold Ray (d8+freeze), explosive shell (d10), body as full plate armour.* A half-buried metallic capsule contains State of D'Arthr, an android from the future sent to a distant past to annihilate humanity, but its memory was erased when its time pod crashed. It has a cannon integrated into its left arm; it can fire Cold Ray (d8 and save vs. Paralyzation or suffer a -2 penalty to all rolls until you take a short rest and get warm), or an explosive shell that causes an explosion centered on an enemy (d10 within 6 meters). It can't restore or improve stats or hit points and stops working permanently at zero hp.
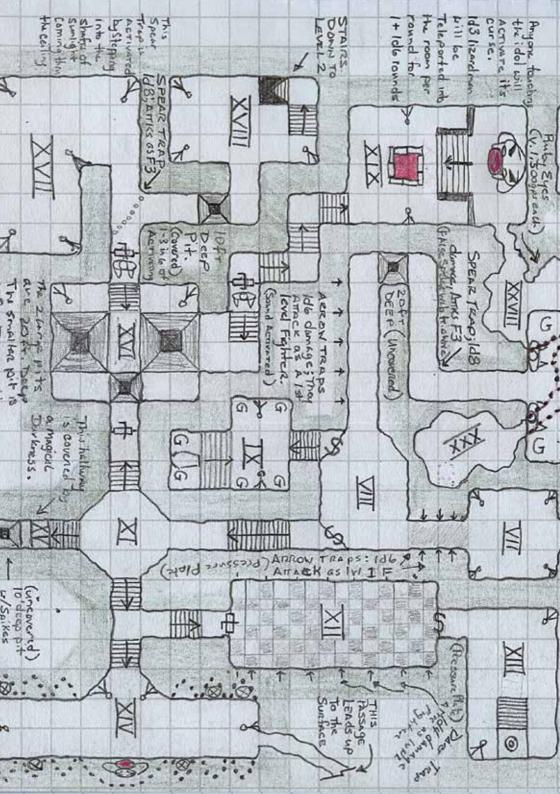
Irony Ellis (23)

NAME

AL

Class   Level   XP   +   %

Description

Ability Scores	Saving Throws	Armor Class	Health
STR	D	+/- DEX	HD
INT	W	Armor	+/- CON
WIS	P	AC	HP
DEX	B	Unarmored	Max
CON	S		
CHA	+/- WIS vs. Magic		

Movement ( )

Abilities

Equipment

Cp   Sp   Ep   Gp   Pp

Combat & Encounters   THACO

+/- FOR mod. to melee att./damage   +/- CHA mod. to reaction rolls
+/- DEX mod. to ranged attacks   to Initiative

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AL

Class   Level   XP   +   %

Description

Ability Scores	Saving Throws	Armor Class	Health
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WIS	P	AC	HP
DEX	B	Unarmored	Max
CON	S		
CHA	+/- WIS vs. Magic		

Movement ( )

Abilities

Equipment

Cp   Sp   Ep   Gp   Pp

Combat & Encounters   THACO

+/- FOR mod. to melee att./damage   +/- CHA mod. to reaction rolls
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Description

Ability Scores	Saving Throws	Armor Class	Health
STR	D	+/- DEX	HD
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WIS	P	AC	HP
DEX	B	Unarmored	Max
CON	S		
CHA	+/- WIS vs. Magic		

Movement ( )

Abilities

Equipment

Cp   Sp   Ep   Gp   Pp

Combat & Encounters   THACO

+/- FOR mod. to melee att./damage   +/- CHA mod. to reaction rolls
+/- DEX mod. to ranged attacks   to Initiative

PORT FOLIO OF CARTOGRAPHIC CURIOSITIES

Anyone touching the idol will activate its curse.

1d3 lizard men will be Teleported into the room per round for 1+1d6 rounds.

STAIRS DOWN TO LEVEL 2

Ruby Eyes (v.1,500gp.s each)

SPEAR TRAP! 1d8, Attcks as F3

XVIII

XVII

10ft Deep Pit. (Covered) 1-3 in 6 of Activating

SPEAR TRAP; 1d8, damage; Attks F3 (Pass spell will tr.Saves)

XIX

SPEAR TRAP; 1d8, damage; Attks F3 (Pass spell will trigger.)

XXVIII

G

20ft DEEP (Uncovered)

ARROW TRAPS 1d6 damage; They Attack as A 1st level Fighter. (Sound Activated)

XVI

G

IX

G

G

G

XXX

VIII

VII

This Spear Trap is activated by stepping into the shaft of sunlight coming thru the ceiling

The 2 large pits are 20ft Deep

This hallway is covered by a magical Darkness.

The smaller pit is

XV

XI

G/G

X

XII

ARROW TRAPS: 1d6 Attack as lvl 1 F

(Pressure Plate)

XIII

(uncovered) 10'deep pit w/Spikes

XIV

(Pressure Plate) Dart Trap 1d4 damage Attks as 1lvl F.

THIS Passage LEADS UP To the Surface.

← Water depth is 1d3ft
The water is very stagnant and covered w/ Algea & Slim[e]
drinking it requires a Save vs. Poison or be very [sick?]
for 4d12 hours
(-2 to hit & Dam[age]
move @ half r[ate]
must rest for [...]

XXII

XXIII

XXIV

#4 #2 #1

#3

XXI

XXV

(Pressure Plate)
STEAM TRAP
Save vs.
Paralysis &
damage.
(1d8) ↓

III

Sleep gas: Save
vs. Poison or fall
unconcious for
6d10 minutes

GAS TRAP (reactivated pulling by
the sconce)

XXVII

XX

G

G

G

IV

II

XXVI

XXXIII

G

G

G

G

V

I

10ft
DEEP
(covered)
1-3 in 6
of activating

TORCH
SCONCE

SPEAR
TRAP
1d8 damage
Trip wire trigger; Lvl 1 F Attack

[S] [S]
[S] VI [S]
[S] [S]

The Central Sarcofigi can
rotate either direction.
if moved to pointing @ the
Northern idol a (+1) Battle
Axe appears in Polish niche.
Pointing East-Ward unlocks
this West-ern Secret door
to room #IX.
Pointing Southward
idol opens the
Eastern Secret door
leading to
Chamber #11

[c]arvings of
Demons & other
wretched creatures
adorn each side
of the entrance

Tomb of Horrors

by caulkhead

Desiccated
Temple of Locha

Guardian of Locha

Attacks: ... flap, dash

Flap. Dash

Stats:
Appears:
Wants:
Armour:
HD: 6
Morale: 12

Bell of Locha

Priest of Locha – Dried Fisheries Statues

HD1
AC 13
Morale 5

Spells

Priest of Locha

Mask of Locha

Hods
2 Hundred Fishes

Ethereal Planes
Plane of Dreams
Far Realms
The Abyss

Celestia
Dimestris
Mechanus
Arborea
Sylphs
Arenia Sol
Valledon
Vesen

Limbo
Gehenna
Schism
Caceres
Hades
Nine Hells

Elemental Plane of Fire
Expanse of Smoke
Elemental Chaos
Outer Sea
Astral Sea
Inner Sea
Drax Domain
The Reed
Elemental Plane of Earth
Elemental Plane of Water
Sea of Ice
Tesselate Veil

Outer Sea
Far Realms
Ethereal Planes
The Abyss

A Survey of the Lands of Eastfall, granted to Lord Law of Karmuk and Lord Graz Duhne of Rockford, by the power of Baron Uhtred Ashdown.

Lake Antrimar

Northern Island

Beldamara Mountain

■3

5

4

Eastcry Mountain (Unexplored)

Waterfall

Antrium Barony Boundary

Barony Boundary

Markers of Note

✗ Towns
✗ Large Villages
🌲 Major Forests & Woods
⚒ Mines (Abandoned)
■ Ruins
Establish Roads
Grass & Farmable Lands
Notable Lakes
Rivers

← 10 miles

Ruins by Aerial View

1. Ancient Riverside watchtower
2. Reclaimed Ancient Fort
3. Underwater Complex
4. Abandoned Mining Town
5. Crumbling Structures
6. Mountain Top Citadel & Caves
7. Ancient Lakeside Town
8. Ancient Watchtower

EXTERIOR

EXTERIOR

DEMON BEAST

TO THE LOWER LEVELS

DF 8
HP 12
ATT 1 (2d6)

PIT HORROR

DF 9
HP 18
ATT 3 (2d6)

6

LOCKED

5

STRENGTH

SECRET DOOR

SHRINE

THRONE

SHRINE LOCKED

FALLING DEBRIS (1d6)

POISONED NEEDLE

1d2 + POISON

4

TRAP OPEN

OPEN

TRAP OPEN

A

B

C

"DO NOT ENTER!"

LOCKED

THIS IS ONE OLD ENTRANCE TO THE UNDERGROUND FORTRESS OF BHALIGUND, A GREATER SON OF SKANDR.

2

PIT
3

LOCKED

HORROR FROM THE PIT

LOCKED

12 ARROWS (POISON)
24 SILVER

CURSED SWORD

LOCKED

1

CHAIN MAIL

LEATHER GLOVES

CURSED HELMET

ROTKO

P5 M3 L3

HORKIAN RAIDER (42 YEARS OLD)
* AXE
* KNIFE
* SHIELD

ABE SHAY

P3 MS L3

ZIMBALIAN ASSASSIN (24 YEARS OLD)
* DAGGER (POISONED)
* CALTROPS

~~ZENDRA~~ **ZENDRA**

P2 M4 L3

NIMIRIAN SORCERESS/PRIESTESS (36 YEARS OLD)
* SCROLLS
* DAGGER (CURSED)

~~XXXXXX~~ **CYMIR**

P4 M3 L3

NIMIRIAN ROGUE (30 YEARS OLD)
* ROPE
* PULLEY
* KNIFE

(A)

BURN
TO THE
TOUCH

~~xxx~~ "TO THE
SERFS AND
SLAVES"

(B)

"NO LIGHT CAN REFLECT
THE DARK IRON FROM SKANDIR"

(C)

BINDING
FLASH

GOLD SILVER

"ONLY
DARKNESS
WILL OPEN
THE GATES
OF SKANDIR
DEMON"

1 - By **Sean Stone.**

This map was an effort by me to try to fit everything about the dungeon on the map other than the encounters. The Ss in room VI were skeletons coming from the floor, the G's in IX were guardians of the master undead in there, and the pools in room X were magical with random effects charts (good & bad). The dungeon is three levels deep with more teleporters and gates as you go deeper. A lot of the idols and traps paid homage to original dungeons, modules, and artwork by the masters.

2 The Tomb of Horrors - By **Adam Bloomfield**

The Tomb of Horrors is one of those classic locations I could easily walk through in my mind, but one I would never wish to visit. It's a donation scheme where players contribute their helpless characters' treasure and soul to Acererak. It's a sandbox challenge to be approached from each and every angle; find safe ways to test challenges and hopefully everything «should» go your way... It's way harder than it has any right to be but it wasn't designed for your average players: it was designed for Gary's players and they really knew how to fuck with the game.

3 - **Desiccated Temple of Locha** - by **Andrew Duvall**

The Great Old One Baldeemor demands the Bell of Locha, his long forgotten rival's Icon, as a personal trophy. Sealed deep under a cracked and dry ancient lakebed, the adventurers must brave this former Aquatic Temple and retrieve the sacred Singing Bell of Locha. Grabbing the bell causes the temple to flood, reanimating the clergy for the frantic escape!

Drawn digitally in Krita with a $50 Huion drawing tablet based on randomly rolled adventure seeds from a few old books (Judge's Guild's "Ready Ref Sheets" *chef's kiss*). Started with 2e but quit ~3.5e. Got the 5e starter box ~2015, finally got a game going during the 2020 quarantine. Youtube and reddit led to OSR led to Knock#1. Now I'm in it!? WTF, life is a wild random encounter table.

4 - By **Caleb Burks**

Left: The Cosmos is wide and full of wonder, beckoning travelers from systems far and wide. Surrounded by the Far Realm, Realm of Dreams, and the Elemental Planes, the Astral Sea provides the nexus for all mortal life to exist. Who will chart its many waters?

Right: This map was a custom piece done for a close friend of mine whose character was awarded the lands shown as a reward for killing a tyrant who had ravaged the land. Eastfall is usually a gentle place, home to only a handful of villages, though mysterious noises can be heard echoing from the mountains at night!

5 - By **Gus L.**

Left: A map of the interior of a Crystal Tomb from *Tombrobbers of the Crystal Frontier*, published in 2021 and introducing the setting of my current home campaign to a larger audience. As an Isometric map for a very traditional one-level dungeon it's more a way to help referees visualize the space than a map for careful exploration-based play.
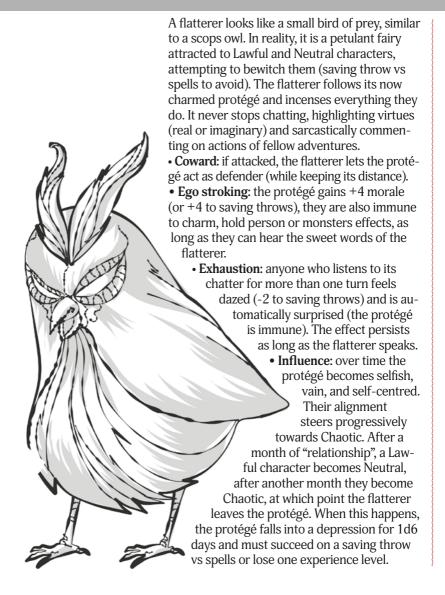
Right: a regional map of the Livid Fens for Anomalous Subsurface Environment. If you look closely you will find two adventure locations detailed on *Dungeon of Signs*: the Red Demon and the Wreck of the Anubis. It expands the default overland map for Pat Wetmore's famous megadungeon southward and was used during my last G+ ASE campaign in 2014.

6 - By **Gustav Sokol** This is an ancient and forgotten entrance to the cold underground fortress of Bhaligund, the son of an evil deity called Skandir. This place is guarded by other Sons of Skandir and the offsprings of that treacherous god, creatures that vaguely resemble humans. The Gryms are small and vicious, the Vordaks are slim and vengeful, and the Varogs are brutish and tall as the giantfolk of Voskur. Of course, shadows and demons are lurking over there too. Terrible aberrations and undead can be encountered in its dark passages and winding tunnels.

MENA GERIE OF MONSTROSITIES

by **Danilo Moretti** (art & design)

Flatterer

AC 2 [17], **HD** 1*** (5 hp), **ATT** none, **THAC0** 19 [0], **MV** 60′ (20′) flying, **SV** D12 W13 P13 B15 S15, **ML** 6, **AL** Chaotic, **XP** 19, **NA** 0 [1], **TT** none

A flatterer looks like a small bird of prey, similar to a scops owl. In reality, it is a petulant fairy attracted to Lawful and Neutral characters, attempting to bewitch them (saving throw vs spells to avoid). The flatterer follows its now charmed protégé and incenses everything they do. It never stops chatting, highlighting virtues (real or imaginary) and sarcastically commenting on actions of fellow adventures.

• **Coward:** if attacked, the flatterer lets the protégé act as defender (while keeping its distance).

• **Ego stroking:** the protégé gains +4 morale (or +4 to saving throws), they are also immune to charm, hold person or monsters effects, as long as they can hear the sweet words of the flatterer.

• **Exhaustion:** anyone who listens to its chatter for more than one turn feels dazed (-2 to saving throws) and is automatically surprised (the protégé is immune). The effect persists as long as the flatterer speaks.

• **Influence:** over time the protégé becomes selfish, vain, and self-centred. Their alignment steers progressively towards Chaotic. After a month of "relationship", a Lawful character becomes Neutral, after another month they become Chaotic, at which point the flatterer leaves the protégé. When this happens, the protégé falls into a depression for 1d6 days and must succeed on a saving throw vs spells or lose one experience level.

by **Adrian Hammer**

Pywawa

AC 5 [14], **HD** 2* (9 hp), **ATT** 1 × bite (D8) and WAWA WAWA WAWA, **THAC0** 18 [+1], **MV** 90′ (30′) flying, **SV** D12 W13 P14 B15 S16, **ML** 9, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 25, **NA** 2D6 [4D6], **TT** L

A lone farmer on arid land buries their sole goat, dead in the drought. Out of fear of catching the disease that killed it, or new ones attracted by the carcass, a quick hole on the ground suffices. Foolery, as the pywawas grow and thrive in hot and dry climates, and fresh meat underground is the ideal breeding pot. The next morning, the farmer will find their field brimming with half-planted pineapple weeds… Our poor farmer is in for a treat, and should run away, pronto.

Rather quickly, this field will witnness the birth of full-grown pywawas. They'll come out of the earth, flying with their bat-like wings, shouting WAWA WAWA WAWA in perfect unison. A pywawa's upper body resembles a pineapple above their lone eye. Yet that shell is much sturdier. Their hard teeth can tear through leather, flesh, and tendons, and they stop at bone, iron, or stone. These flying fuckers seek hot flesh. Eat, eat, and eat some more, and never know when to stop.

Pywawas are ferocious, carnivorous, with the cunning and intellect of a dog. They remember individual faces and locations, have keen vision , and are able to open door handles with their teeth (although more complex mechanisms will fly by them).

Pywawas are attracted to light and heat. They will go after bonfires, torches, and candles first.

• **Infravision:** 90′
• **Heat attraction:** pywawas attack torchbearers first, moving towards victims carrying heat sources.
• **WAWA WAWA WAWA:** anyone bitten has to shout WAWA WAWA WAWA on their next turn. This prevents them from casting spells or command hirelings, although they can still gesture. In addition, failing to save vs poison forces the victim to attack the nearest creature with their teeth (ignoring weapons or other abilities), as the hunger for flesh consumes the victim's will.

Bladewarden

AC 2 [17], **HD** 4* (18 hp), **ATT** 1 x sword (1d8), 1 x special blade (see below), **THAC0** 16 [+3], **MV** 90' (30'), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14, **ML** 11, **AL** neutral, **XP** 1125, **NA** 1d4 [1d4], **TT** none,

Bladewardens are magical and crytal constructs wielding two swords. One of these has magical properties depending of its color. This chromatic blade makes it a formidable foe. because of this they are often created to protect an objetc or place (like a treasure vault), or even a living being - in which case it acts as a bodyguard. The subject of its protection can be changed using a keyphrase established during its creation.
• **Chromatic blade.** Of the two blades carried by a bladewarden, one has acolorful sheen to it, hinting at its special properties. This

blade has a magical effect on those struck by its edge. To determine the color and properties of the second blade, roll on the table below.
• Immunity. unaffected by sleep spells.

1. Violet
Blinds the victim for 2d4 turns.

2. Magenta
The gravity become reversed for the victim for 1d4 turns.

3. Green
The victim is turned to stone (save vs. petrification).

4. Orange
The victim bursts into flames as if doused in burning oil.

5. Cyan
The victim is phased out from this reality for 1d6 turns.

6. Yellow
The victim becomes paralysed for 2d4 turns (save vs. paralysis).

• **Chromatic Blade Dust** When bladewarden is destroyed their magical blade turns to a colored dust. This dust can be used for all kinds of interesting application. In its unprocessed state a handful can be blown at monsters to replicate the effects of the original blade. Alchemists and artificers are still discovering their uses in, but not limited to, potions, special ammunitions and magical item creation. Players and referees are encouraged to come up with new flavorful uses for these colorful powders.

by **Eric Nieudan**

Cafetière Assassin

AC 2 [17], **HD** 1+1* (5 hp), **ATT** 2 × blades (1d4) or steam cloud (3d6), **THAC0** 18 [+1], **MV** 120' (40'), **SV** D8 W9 P10 B13 S12 (D1), **ML** 12, **AL** Neutral, **XP** 40, **NA** 1 [1], **TT** None (black nectar)

Since coffee first appeared in the known realms, wars have been fought over the miraculous beans. Dwarven golemancers found a way to tap into the power of the precious nectar to animate mechanical golems, provided a steady amount of coffee runs through the machine to charge their inner workings with mystical energy. The cafetière assassin is their most common creation, given as a present to foreign dignitaries and personages of power, and remotely activated from a distance should the need arise to make a diplomatic statement. A cafetière assassin is a precious item, worth at least 2000 GP to a noble or magic-user.

• **Mundane damage immunity:** Can only be harmed by magical attacks.

• **Immunity:** Unharmed by gas; unaffected by *charm, hold*, or *sleep* spells.
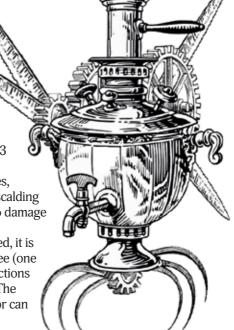
• **Mystical accumulator:** The cafetière assassin must spend a charge from its mystical accumulator each round it is active. It gains one charge per week of daily use, to a maximum of 13 charges.

• **Charged attack:** The golem can spend up to five mystical charges to receive a +1 modifier to hit and damage per charge spent. This modifier lasts for 1d3 round.

• **Steam Cloud:** Using three mystical charges, the cafetière assassin produces a cloud of scalding steam in a 10' radius around it, causing 3d6 damage (save vs breath for half).

• **Black nectar:** Once defeated or neutralised, it is possible to drain the cafetière from its coffee (one dose per remaining mystical charge). It functions as a potion of speed lasting only one turn. The drinker is also impervious to *sleep* spells nor can they sleep naturally either) for a day.

Dreamcrawler

AC 4 [15], **HD** none, **ATT** Special **THAC0** 9+1d10 [+1d10-1], **MV** 120 (40), **SV** D10 W11 P12 B13 S14, **ML** 12, **AL** Chaotic, **XP** 500, **NA** 1, **TT** None

If a group of adventurers spends the night in the ruins of an ancient battle-field or under the burial mound of a famed fighter, there is a good chance they attract the attention of a dream-crawler.

Dreamcrawlers are warriors whose spirit could not find its way to Valhalla. They haunt their resting places, des-perately trying to call on the gods who have forgotten them by challenging mortals to fight them honourably. They can only do so by entering their chosen opponent's dreams.

The dreamcrawler haunts the warrior with the highest Charisma. When the character falls asleep, they must roll three saves vs. death.

- If all three are passed the dream-crawler gives up and returns to obli-vion.
- If all three saves are failed the charac-ter is drawn into a duel (see below).
- Otherwise the dreamcrawler is now haunting the character. They will have to repeat the process every time they go to sleep.

The duel

Shortly after falling asleep, the charac-ter dreams of a gloomy luminescent warrior rushing at them with weapons drawn. The character is wearing armour and carrying their usual weapons. Roll initiative and run a round of combat.
- **if the dreamcrawler is hit first** the dream ends.

- **if the character is hit first** they lose1d100 x level XP, and the dream ends.

In any case, the duel happens again the next time the character goes to sleep. There are **only two ways to break free:** beat the dreamcrawler three nights in a row or have a *remove curse* spell per-formed at the location where the first haunting occurred.

There is a **significant benefit** to being haunted by a dreamcrawler, as the spirit passes on some of its knowledge to its host. Each time the haunted character fights in the real world they gain a +1 bonus to hit and damage. This advan-tage disappears as soon as the haunting is lifted.

1-in-6 chance that the haunting occurs during a bad dream. Roll 1d6:

1. The character is only wearing their shoes. An audience in the shadows laughs: AC 9 [10], to hit -2.

2. The dreamcrawler wears the crying face of the character's mother. They must pass a WIS check to be able to attack.

3. The character is exhausted, arms devoid of strength: they lose initiative, -4 to hit.

4. The character runs away to find them-selves in a maze. Turning a corner, they run into the dead warrior: there are two dreamcrawlers.

5. The character falls into a bottomless pit along with the dreamcrawler: they must pass a DEX check before being able to attack.

6. The character is paralysed by fear: can-not fight, save vs Death or die of a heart attack.

by **James Maliszewski** - Art: **Jason Sholtis**

D is for Demons

«Demon» is a term used to describe a wide variety of intelligent Chaotic beings native to the otherworldly dimension called the Great Void or the Abyss.

Unlike most other beings, who are believed by humans to have been created by one or more gods, demons have no such divine origin although their exact relationship to the gods and to Creation itself is a matter of debate among sages and priests. One popular theory holds that demons are spontaneously generated by Chaos itself, while another suggests that demons are the inadvertent consequence of the gods' attempts to bring order out of Chaos. For their part, demons explicitly deny both such theories for they also deny the existence of the gods themselves, claiming them to be merely the fancies of mortals. Regardless of the truth, **demons are potent agents of Chaos, possessing a wide range of powers and abilities from the lowliest imp to the mightiest lord.**

Despite this, no demon can set foot upon Telluria* unbidden, which is why they rely heavily on a network of cults and secret societies to provide them with the means to do so. Demons are renowned deal-makers, offering mortal beings power in exchange for services. Of course, some mortals believe themselves superior to demons and dare to employ dark sorceries to command rather than serve them. Though possible, such a path is risky and many a would-be black magician found themselves destroyed rather than aggrandized by their actions.

Demons admit no true hierarchy among their own kind except that of power. In general, greater demons rule over lesser types by strength alone, with even more powerful demons—styling themselves kings, dukes, presidents, and other fanciful titles—ruling over them all. Two of the most well-known and influential demons are Bael and Vephar, both of which are described in greater detail below. Demons are also known for their ability to twist and shape living things according to their whims, a talent others learned from them and put to good use in the creation of beastmen and similar abominations. Many monsters found on Telluria are in fact demonic hybrids or the result of demonic experimentation upon existing creatures.

* **Telluria?** Throughout the descriptions of the demons presented here, there are occasional references to Telluria. Telluria is the name of my campaign world, home to the megadungeons of Dwimmermount and Urheim, among other notable locales. Telluria is one of the Four Worlds that make up Creation, beyond which are the Demon Worlds of the Great Void. Telluria is inhabited by numerous intelligent creatures with Men, Dwarves, and Elves being the most prominent. In most respects, it's very much like any fantasy campaign setting. Referees are encouraged to substitute their own settings for Telluria in making use of any of the monsters in this article.

Bael

Bael is a great demon king, arguably the most powerful of his kind. From his citadel on the dark side of Aido in the Sixth Shell he commands 66 legions. Though capable of assuming many guises, his preferred form is that of an eight-legged creature with three heads—his right one looking like a **cat**, his left like a **toad**, and his central one like a **cadaverous human king** wearing a two-tiered crown. When Bael speaks, it is through the mouth of his human head which possesses a harsh and haughty voice. Bael may only be struck by +3 or better weapons. His human head has a charm gaze (no saving throw) that affects all creatures within 300' for 1 turn. The number of creatures affected is determined by their hit dice, as follows: 3 HD or fewer, 1d10×10; 4–6 HD, 5d8; 7–9 HD, 3d8; 10–12 HD, 2d6; and 13+ HD, 1d4. Creatures possessing 15 or more hit dice are entitled to a saving throw versus spells. His toad head has a breath attack identical to the effects of a wand of cold. His cat head causes fear as a wand of fear. These two attacks are usable at will. Both the toad and cat heads may also bite, but Bael rarely stoops to such attacks, deeming it beneath him. Bael may use the following spell-like abilities at will: *clairvoyance, continual darkness, detect invisible, detect magic, dispel magic, ESP, invisibility, levitate, polymorph self, read languages, read magic, telekinesis* (5,000 coins per head), *wall of ice, water breathing, web,* and summon (with an 85% chance of success) any demon of the first through sixth shells. Once per day, he can use *feeblemind* or *projected image.*

All spiders do Bael homage, as do Chaotic felines and batrachians. The *Grimoire Major* (which designates Bael 06-02 Red*) claims there is a rivalry between the King of the East and Duke Vephar regarding the Ranine with both demon lords asserting dominion over them. On Telluria, cultists and witches make pacts with Bael to gain the powers of suggestion and invisibility.

* After Jack Vance's nomenclature, you ignorant!

Vephar

AC −2 [21], **HD** 22**** (132HP), **ATT** 2 × CLAWS (1D10), 1 × TAIL SLAP (1D6), **THAC0** 5 [+14], **MV** 360′ (120′), **SV** D2 W2 P2 B2 S2, **ML** 12, **AL** CHAOTIC, **XP** 10,500, **NA** 1, **TT** I, K, N, O

Vephar is a duke whose watery domain can be found on Demon World Dawo within the Fifth Shell. His 29 legions include many cohorts of aegaei, as well as even more terrible aquatic demons. Vephar's preferred form is an emaciated humanoid whose grotesquely distended belly reveals his viscera. Instead of legs, he has a fish-like tail. His gangly arms end in large, clawed hands. Vephar's designation in the *Grimoire Major* is 01-23 Blue. Vephar may only be struck by +3 or better weapons. While in contact with water, he regenerates 2 hit points per round. He has the following spell-like abilities, usable at will: *cause fear, control weather, detect invisible, detect magic, dispel magic, feeblemind, polymorph self, read languages, read magic, teleport*, and *wall of ice*. Vephar can summon (with 60% chance of success) 1–6 aegaei. The damage dealt by his claws does not heal unless the spell cure disease is first applied.

Vephar claims suzerainty over all Chaotic marine life, including amphibians. This latter point is a source of contention between himself and Bael, as both demon lords regard the Ranine as their subjects alone. Evil mortals sometimes beseech Vephar to cause storms at sea, an appeal he is only too happy to oblige.

Aegaeus

The aegaeus is a blasphemous hybrid of fish and frog standing only slightly taller than a human. Its skin is scaled and slimy and radiates a noisome stench whose effect is similar to that of a troglodyte, except that it is more potent (-2 saving throw). The aegaeus prefers to haunt watery locales both above and below the surface of the world, but is little impeded by dry land. Wherever it goes, the aegaeus remains wet and drips fetid water. A demon of the Fourth Shell, the aegaeus is immune to ordinary weapons. It can employ all of the following spell-like powers at will: *cause fear, continual darkness, detect invisible, detect magic, dispel magic,* and *read languages*. Likewise, an aegaeus may summon (65% chance of success) a single demon from the first four shells (determined randomly).

Aegaei serve the demonic duke Vephar and often act as his emissaries and generals. It is therefore not uncommon to find an aegaeus leading a group of Ranine or troglodytes, to name but two terrestrial races who serve the Lord of the Sail Road.

Phlogerus

AC −2 [21], **HD** 8+7*** (43HP), **ATT** 2 × SWORD (1D8+1), 1 × BITE (1D6), 1 × CONSTRICT (2D4), **THAC0** 12 [+7], **MV** 60' (20') / 150' (50'), **SV** D8 W9 P10 B10 S12, ML 10, **AL** CHAOTIC, **XP** 2300, **NA** 1D3 (1D6), **TT** F

The phlogerus is a 12-foot tall demon, whose serpentine lower half is surmounted by a humanoid torso with a frightful reptilian head.
Although capable of doing so, it rarely deigns to set "foot" on the ground, preferring instead to float aloft. The demon's scaled skin radiates intense heat and light, making it difficult to look directly at it (-2 to all attack rolls against it unless the attacker's eyes are somehow shielded). The phlogerus wields two +1 swords in battle, but is equally fond of employing its teeth and tail in battle. An opponent grabbed by the tail is constricted and drawn toward the demon's body, and so exposed to the heat emanating from its hide (dealing 3d6 damage). The phlogerus is immune to ordinary weapons, like all demons of the sixth shell. At will, it can use the following spell-like abilities: *cause fear, detect invisible, detect magic, dispel magic, feeblemind, mirror image, read languages*, and *read magic*. Also, it can summon (70% chance of success) a demon from the first five shells.

Like the amenus, the phlogerus is rarely found on Telluria. It is more common in the upper air and even in astral space. It is claimed (in the *Kenomicon*, among other volumes) that phlogeri existed in vast numbers during the time of the Great Ancients, when travel between the Four Worlds was commonplace.

Amenus

AC −6 [25], **HD** 7+6*** (37HP), **ATT** 2 × FRONT CLAW (1D6), 2 × BACK CLAW (2D4), 1 × BITE (1D6), **THAC0** 12 [+7], **MV** 90′ (30′) / 120′ (40′), **SV** D8 W9 P10 B10 S12, **ML** 10, **AL** CHAOTIC, **XP** 1650, **NA** 1D3 (1D6), **TT** G

The amenus is a frightening demon sporting bristly fur and four wings. It is rarely seen on Telluria except when summoned by foolhardy magicians or on an errand for its lord the demonic president Camio. Its coming is preceded by a powerful blast of cold air that extinguishes all unprotected flames within 80' of itself. The amenus prefers to fight while flying so that it can use all four of its claws as well as its powerful bite. Being a demon of the fifth shell, it is immune to ordinary weapons. All of the following spell-like abilities are available to it, usable at will: *cause fear, control weather, continual darkness, detect invisible,* and *projected image.* An amenus can summon (75% chance of success) a single demon from the first five shells (determined randomly).

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Ranine

Ranine are degenerate subterranean creatures who divide their loyalties between the great demons Bael and Vephar. They are of broadly batrachian appearance but possess small bat-like ears in addition to vicious fangs and, in many cases, small horns as well. Ranine are drawn to underground locations suffused with Chaotic energies and establish their lairs in these areas.

Ranine shy away from sunlight and suffer a −1 penalty to their attack rolls and saving throws when they operate above ground. If given sufficient room in combat, these creatures can hop at enemies granting them a +1 bonus to both attack and damage rolls. When fighting in close quarters, they try to bite opponents in order to inject them with a paralyzing poison. Failure to save against it results in paralysis for 3d6 turns. Ranine in groups larger than six typically include a leader with 3 HD (16 hp), who can cast clerical spells as if it were a cleric of the same level as its hit dice.

Precisely how the Ranine reproduce is a mystery as they appear to be completely asexual. Given that these beings prefer to take opponents prisoner rather than slay them outright, some sages postulate that the Ranine somehow «convert» their prey into new frog-things to swell their ranks. If true, these creatures pose an even more terrible threat to civilization than is commonly supposed.

RETE

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By **Nobboc** Art: **Li-An**

Errant Friars (or Sisters) are idealistic and adventurous young monks (or nuns) who leave the monastery to experience the world and its hardships. They often join a band of promising adventurers who they hope will help them to spread their sense of charity, justice and good.

The Errant Friar

Requirement: Minimum WIS 9
Prime Requisite: WIS
Hit dice: d6
Maximum level: 14
Armour: see below
Weapons: see below
Languages: Common, Alignment language, plus one dead (or ancient) language.

• Alignement: an Errant Friar must be lawful. If the character's alignment ever changes (for any reason), he immediately becomes an NPC.

Combat
• Armour heavier than chainmail is incompatible with the Errant Friar's lifestyle. In addition, the Friar's humility encourages him not to place too much importance on his own person and safety, and prevents him from wearing leather armor before level 3 and chain mail before level 6.
• They can use any weapon except the crossbow (which, as everyone knows, is the Devil's weapon).
• Walking Staff Expertise:
- In the hand of an Errant Friar or Sister, a staff is not considered a slow weapon
- When rolling damage with a staff, they roll two dice and keep the best result.
- Every 4 levels, Errant Friars and Sisters gain +1 to hit with a staff.

Scholar
The formative years of Errant Sisters and Friars were incredibly studious.

They have a basic chance of recalling facts about the following topics:
- Flora & Fauna: 1-in-6
- Politics & Heraldry: 1-in-6
- Philosophy & Cosmology: 1-in-6
- Religions & Demonology: 1-in-6
- Legends & Monsters: 1-in-6
- Common Knowledge: 2-in-6
Characters with Intelligence 13 or more can add 1 to one of these domains.
Every 4 levels, an Errant Sister or Friar adds 1 to one of these chances.

Healer
• Errant Friars and Sisters have a 1-in-6 chance to identify diseases or poisoning and to know an antidote or remedy.
• With an hour of work, they can heal themselves or others for a total of 1 hit point + 1 per level.

Miracles
Errant Sisters and Friars can perform one miracle per day starting at level 2. They gain one additional miracle per day every 3 subsequent levels.
A miracle's duration is 1d6 rounds +

Errant Friar Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	Miracles	Staff Exp.
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	12	-	
2	1,200	2d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	12	1	
3	2,400	3d6	19 [0]	11	12	14	16	12	1	
4	4,800	4d6	19 [0	11	12	14	16	12	1	+1
5	9,600	5d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	10	2	
6	20,000	6d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	10	2	
7	40,000	7d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	10	2	
8	80,000	8d6	17 [+2]	9	10	12	14	10	3	+2
9	160,000	9d6	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	8	3	
10	280,000	9d6+1*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	8	3	
11	480,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	8	4	
12	520,000	9d6+3*	14 [+5]	6	7	9	11	8	4	+3
13	640,000	9d6+4*	12 [+7]	3	5	7	8	6	4	
14	760,000	9d6+5*	12 [+7]	3	5	7	8	6	5	

1 round/level + Charisma modifier. The character must concentrate (doing nothing else) at all times or the miracle ends. It also ends if the character takes damage or fails a save.

• **Holy Beacon:**
- Turn undead like a cleric of same level.
• **Holy Sanctuary:**
- Nobody can attack or be attacked in a radius of 30' around the Friar or Sister.
• **Holy Rest:**
- Lawful and Neutral creatures in a 30' radius recover 1 HP per round.
• **Holy Anger:**
- Chaotic creatures in a 30' radius: 1 damage per round, -2 morale.
• **Holy Truth:**
- All traps, secret doors, and invisible creatures or objects within 30' are revealed.

Magic Antagonism

• Errant Sisters and Friars have mixed feelings toward arcane magic. They refuse to use or come under the influence of spells or magic items. However, they accept holy relics, blessed objects, and divine magic.
• When encountering faerie denizens, roll reaction with a -2 penalty if an Errant Sister of Friar is present.

Vow of poverty

Errant Friars may not keep wealth and possessions that they cannot keep on their person (or on a donkey at level 5 and after).
Excess treasure must be donated to worthy causes.

After reaching 9th level

An Errant Friar or Sister finds a modest dwelling to expand on and turn into a holy refuge. They welcome the needy, the orphan, the fugitive... The refuge also attracts scholars, errant knights, Lawful priests and former adventurer friends who stay for a while when in need of help or in the mood to lend a hand to a good cause.

by **Nobboc**

Brownies are about one foot tall with large pointed ears, a protruding nose, golden-yellow eyes, and a weird little cap. A bad brownie is one who was banished from the Seelie Court after doing something particularly odious. Their magical powers taken from them, they must redeem themselves with high deeds of daring adventure.

The Bad Brownie

Requirement: Minimum CHA 9
Prime Requisite: CHA and DEX
Hit dice: d4
Maximum level: 4
Armour: none
Weapons: all (appropriate to size, 1d3 damage)
Languages : Common, Faerie speech.

- **Ventriloquism:** Once per day, can cause voice to appear to come from any location or source within 60'.
- **Dancing lights:** Once per day, can conjure bobbing lights within 60'.

Sneaky
Bad brownies are naturally good at the following thieving skills: Hide in Shadows, Move Silently, and Pick Pockets. See the class table for chances of success per level.

After Reaching 4th Level
At any time, a bad brownie can appear before the Seelie Queen and present their achievements. If these are not deemed satisfactory, they are turned into an earth worm for eternity. If the Queen is impressed, the brownie can either return to the Seelie court (becoming an NPC) or be reincarnated as a mortal (usually a halfling or a gnome). The player creates a new 1st level character, who retains 1d3 of their magical brownie powers, as well as one of their thieving skills (which will improve as if a thief of the same level). That, and golden eyes.

Designer's note: I designed this class using the Brownie entry in the Monsters book for *Old-School Adventures: Advanced Fantasy*.

Combat
• Bad brownies can use all type of weapons appropriate to their stature. Their weapons never cause more than 1d3 damage, with no STR bonus allowed. They gain a +1 bonus to attack when throwing stones or darts. Bad Brownies wear no mundane armour.

• Defensive Bonus
Due to their small size and quick reflexes, bad brownies gain a +2 bonus to Armour Class, and +4 when attacked by large opponents (bigger than human-sized).

• Faerie powers
From level 2 onwards and at each subsequent level, bad brownies get one of their old powers back. Choose from:
- **Surprise:** Never surprised.
- **Dimension door:** Once per day, can teleport to a known location within 360'.

The Bad Brownie Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	HS	MS	PP
1	0	1d4	19 [0]	6	7	9	11	9	40	45	50
2	1,500	2d4	19 [0]	6	7	9	11	9	50	55	60
3	3,000	3d4	19 [0]	6	7	9	11	9	60	65	70
4	6,000	4d4	17 [+2]	3	5	7	8	7	70	75	80

by **Leander Elwischger** - Art: **Li-An**

A small (2- to 3-foot tall) limp, grey-skinned creature from outer space who has lost contact with the Mothership. Stranded on this primitive world, they travel it in search of a way to contact the base and return to their distant home.

The Grey

Requirement:
Minimum INT 12
Prime Requisite: INT
Hit dice: d4
Maximum level: 8
Armour: none (see below)
Weapons: all (appropriate to size)
Languages : Common (learned through observation).

Combat

• Greys can use all types of armour but it must be tailored to their strange anatomy. Finding the right crafts-person is a quest in itself. Price will be triple. Greys can use any weapons appropriate to their stature.

Defensive Bonus

Due to their small size, Greys gain a +2 bonus to Armour Class when attacked by large opponents (bigger than human-sized).

Science Beyond Human Understanding

Greys have 3-in-6 chance of instinc-tively knowing how to handle all kinds of futuristic or outer space machinery.

Set Phasers To...

The Grey starts with a small phaser (a ray gun, implant, wand...) which can be used as many times a day as their character level. See tables below for effects.

The Grey Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	Phaser
1	0	1d4	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	1d4
2	1,500	2d4	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	1d4
3	3,000	3d4	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	1d6
4	6,000	4d4	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	1d6
5	12,000	5d4	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	1d6+1
6	25,000	6d4	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	1d6+1
7	50,000	7d4	14 [+5]	4	5	6	8	8	2d4
8	100,000	8d4	14 [+5]	4	5	6	8	8	2d4

Electric Shield

Greys can charge an electric shield for a number of hit dice equal to their own HD. The charging process takes a day of downtime per hit die. They must spend a round activating any number of available hit dice, which they roll as temporary hit points. The temporary HP disappear after a day.

Call Home

Provided they have the sufficient technology, a Grey can build a telephone to call the Mothership to ---ebring them back home whenever they wish. Stay safe out there, Greyling! Will we ever meet again? Alternatively, the referee may use this opportunity to launch the campaign into outer space.

Phaser Effects

- Roll according to level (see table above).
- Targeted creatures are allowed a Saving Throw.
- The Player may choose the effect of a lesser roll if they wish

1. No Effect

2. Fear

3. Paralyzed (cannot act for 1d4 rounds)

4. Random Mutation (see p. 101)

5. Life Zap (1d6 damage on creature, added to character's HP)

6. Shrinking Ray

7. Mind Control

8. Disintegrate (6th Level MU-spell)

Platyfolk are smaller than dwarves, weighing about 60 lb and only reaching a height of about 3 feet. They have a furry body, a duck bill, a long flat tail, and webbed feet and hands. Platyfolk have a gentle nature, and value simple things like swimming, fishing, and boxing. Adventurer platyfolk will often engage in playful activities when not on an expedition.

The Platyperson

Requirement:
Minimum WIS 9, CON9
Prime Requisite: WIS and CON
Hit dice: d6
Maximum level: 8
Armour: any
Weapons: see below
Languages: Alignment, Common, Platypi, and some rudiments of Duck or Beaver.

Prime Requisites

A platyfolk with at least 13 in either prime requisite gains a 5% bonus to experience. With at least 13 in both prime requisites, they gain a 10% bonus to experience.

Combat

• Because of their small size and webbed hands, platyfolk may not use large or two-handed weapons, but they are proficient with all other weapons and all armour, including shields.
• When really threatened, they may use their venomous talons, which are located under their feet, with a -4 penalty to hit. Anyone hit (damage 1d4)

by **Nicolas Dessaux** - Art: **Letty Wilson**

Platyperson Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
2	2 035	2d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
3	4 065	3d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12
4	8 125	4d6	19 [0	6	7	8	10	10
5	16 251	5d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
6	32 501	6d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10
7	65 001	7d6	17 [+2]	4	5	6	7	8
8	130 001	8d6	17 [+2]	4	5	6	7	8

must save against poison, or suffer a -4 penalty to hit for 1d6 days, due to partial paralysis.

Defensive Bonus

Due to their small size, platyfolk gain a +2 bonus to armour class when attacked by large opponents (bigger than human-sized).

Natural born swimmers

Platyfolk are very good swimmers and are able to stay up to ten minutes underwater. They have an uncanny ability to disappear when swimming. When immersed in a large body of water such as a river, platyfolk can hide with 90% ability.

Electrolocation

Platyfolk have a sixth sense called electro-location: even in complete darkness, they can feel living beings by the electricity produced by their muscles. This makes a platyfolk very hard to surprise: the chance to surprise them is decreased by 1 in 6.

After reaching 8th level

When a platyfolk reaches 8th level, they can build a riverside stronghold. It should be built by a serene, beautiful river where platyfolk will come from great distances to settle. The character becomes the leader of the people and must rule them wisely.

by **Eric Nieudan** - Art: **Zhu Bajiee**

The autnagrag are contemplative, peaceful giants with a strong connection to the wilds they love so much. They evolved away from the brutish ways of their parents, the ogres, possibly by interbreeding with humans, which explains why they are sometimes called half-ogres. They are 7 to 9 feet tall and weigh 400 lb on average. Being of a shy nature, they live in their own isolated familial settlements, though some rare individuals find a place in towns and cities.

The Autnagrag

Requirement:
Minimum CON 9,
minimum WIS 9
Prime Requisite:
WIS
Hit dice: d8
Maximum level: 9
Armour: Leather,
including shields
Weapons: Any
Languages : Alignment,
Common, Ogre, Giant

The Autnagrag Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THACO	D	W	P	B	S	Spell Level
1	0	1d8	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	1
2	2,000	2d8	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	1
3	4,000	3d8	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	2
4	8,000	4d8	19 [0]	6	7	8	10	10	2
5	16,000	5d8	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	3
6	32,000	6d8	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	3
7	64,000	7d8	17 [+2]	4	5	6	8	8	4
8	120,000	8d8	17 [+2]	4	5	6	8	8	4
9	240,000	9d8	14 [+5]	4	5	6	8	8	5

Prime Requisites

An autnagrag with at least 13 WIS gains a 5% bonus to experience, and a +10% bonus with 16 or more in WIS.

Combat

Autnagrags are used to the rough life of the wilderness. They are trained to use all weapons and shields, and can wear leather armour.

Wisdsom of the Wilds

Autnagrags intuitively know the language of natural and magical beasts with hit dice equal or inferior to their own hit dice.

Magic of the Stones

The autnagrag have learned to tap into giantkind's link to the wilds and elemental earth. Once per day, they can ask nature for a favour, effectively casting a cleric spell of their choice. The spell can be of a level up to half their character level, rounded up.

After Reaching 9th Level

An autnagrag can settle in a remote area, where other autnagrags, ogres, and all types of humanoids will gather to receive the character's teachings. With time, the place will become a monastery of the wilds where anyone who seeks wisdom is welcome.

Designer's note: As the well informed may have guessed, this class is a response to James Maliszewski's Gargantua (published in *Carcass Crawler* #1). I like the Gargantua a lot, but I wanted to see if I could produce another take of the giantkin adventurer. You be the judge.

by **James Maliszewski** - Art: **Luigi Castellani**

Beggars are adventurers who survive by their wits and fortitude. Though similar to thieves, with whom they are often confused, beggars bring a number of unique skills to a party that make them worthy companions in many circumstances.

The Beggar

Requirement: None
Prime Requisite: CON
Hit dice: d6
Maximum level: 14
Armour: Leather, no shields
Weapons: all
Languages: Common, Alignement

Combat

Beggars cannot wear armor heavier than leather and cannot use shields. They can use any weapon.

Back-stab

When attacking an unaware opponent from behind a beggar receives a +4 bonus to hit and doubles any damage dealt.

Beggar Skills

Beggars can use the following skill, with the chance of success shown in the table below:

• **Disguise** (DS): A beggar can disguise themself as a human, humanoid, or demihuman of similar height and build.

• **Hide in shadows** (HS): Requires the beggar to be motionless–attacking or moving while hiding is not possible.

• **Pick pockets** (PP): If the victim is above 5th level, the beggar's roll is penalized by 5% for every level above 5th. There is always at least 1% chance

The Beggar Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S	DS	HS	PP	SC
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	10	10	20	50
2	1,200	2d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	15	15	25	55
3	2,400	3d6	19 [0]	8	9	10	13	12	20	20	25	60
4	4,800	4d6	19 [0	6	7	8	10	10	25	25	30	65
5	9,600	5d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	30	30	35	70
6	20,000	6d6	17 [+2]	6	7	8	10	10	35	35	45	75
7	40,000	7d6	17 [+2]	4	5	6	7	8	45	45	55	80
8	80,000	8d6	17 [+3]	4	5	6	7	8	55	55	65	85
9	160,000	9d6	14 [+5]	4	5	6	7	8	65	65	75	90
10	280,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	2	3	4	4	6	75	75	85	95
11	400,000	9d6+4*	14 [+5]	2	3	4	4	6	85	85	95	96
12	520,000	9d6+6*	14 [+5]	2	3	4	4	6	90	90	105	97
13	640,000	9d6+8*	12 [+7]	2	2	2	2	4	95	95	115	98
14	760,000	9d6+10*	12 [+7]	2	2	2	2	4	99	99	125	99

of failure. A roll of more than twice the percentage required for success means that the attempted theft is un-noticed. The referee should determine the reaction of the victim (possibly using the reaction table under En-counters).

• **Scrounging** (SC): Once a day, a beggar can locate useful mundane items equal in value to 10 gp × level provided the beggar is in an urban environment*.

Trust

A beggar is adept at playing on the sympathies of Lawful and Neutral aligned beings, gaining a +2 bonus to reaction rolls in dealing with them. This bonus is in addition to any bonus from Charisma. The beggar need not share a common language with the being but the being must be intelligent.

After Reaching 9th Level

A beggar can establish a beggar's court, attracting 2d6 apprentices of 1st level. These beggars will serve the character with some reliability; however should any be arrested or killed the PC will not be able to attract apprentices to replace them. A beggar might use these followers to challenge the position of the current King or Queen of Beggars.

* I for one want to make things interesting by (sometimes) having the former owner of these items track down or run into the beggar's party - Eric

by **Emiel Boven** (Art& design)

The followers of the the Path of Dust believe most religions have a grain of truth to them, even more so when those re ligions teach of some form of "End Times". These apocalyptic warrior-cultists travel the lands in search of slivers of forgotten lore and religious dogma regarding the Final End.

The Prophet of Ruin

Requirement: Minimum WIS 11
Prime Requisite: INT
Hit dice: d6
Maximum level: 14
Armour: Any forged from metal.
Weapons: Any forged from metal.
Languages : Alignement, Steel Script, Common.

Combat

Prophets can use all types of weapons and armor as long as they are primarily made out of metal.

Speaker of Prophecy

Each day a prophet may speak a number of apocalyptic truths. The level progression table shows the number of prophecies the prophet can proclaim each day. The prophet must choose a creature that can hear them to direct the prophecy at. While the prophet speaks these truths they become a vessel for the primal powers of entropy. Roll on the Prophecy Table to determine the effect the words have on the listener. When a prophet reaches 5th level, they can meditate at dawn to choose one prophecy to speak during the day. This increases to two prophecies when they reach 9th level.

The Prophet of Ruin Level Progression

Level	XP	HD	THAC0	D	W	P	B	S	Prophecies
1	0	1d6	19 [0]	10	13	13	15	15	1
2	1,500	2d6	19 [0]	10	13	13	15	15	2
3	3,000	3d6	19 [0]	10	13	13	15	15	3
4	6,000	4d6	19 [0	10	13	13	15	15	4
5	12,000	5d6	17 [+2]	8	11	11	13	12	4 (+1)
6	25,000	6d6	17 [+2]	8	11	11	13	12	5 (+1)
7	50,000	7d6	17 [+2]	8	11	11	13	12	6 (+1)
8	100,000	8d6	17 [+3]	8	11	11	13	12	7 (+1)
9	200,000	9d6	14 [+5]	6	8	8	10	9	7 (+2)
10	300,000	9d6+1*	14 [+5]	6	8	8	10	9	8 (+2)
11	400,000	9d6+2*	14 [+5]	6	8	8	10	9	9 (+2)
12	500,000	9d6+3*	14 [+5]	6	8	8	10	9	10 (+2)
13	600,000	9d6+4*	12 [+7]	3	4	6	7	7	11 (+2)
14	700,000	9d6+5*	12 [+7]	3	4	6	7	7	12 (+2)

Scholar of Forgotten Oracles
A prophet of any level may spend time and money researching ancient lore and religious dogma. Doing so may expand or change the prophecy table for this specific character (at the referees discretion).

After Reaching 9th Level
After a prophet reaches 9th level they attract 2d4 acolytes which are all 1st level prophets or clerics of a suitable deity.
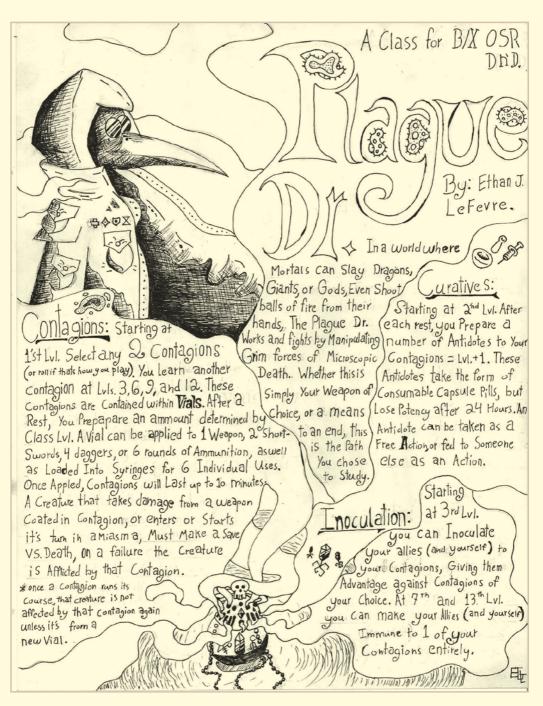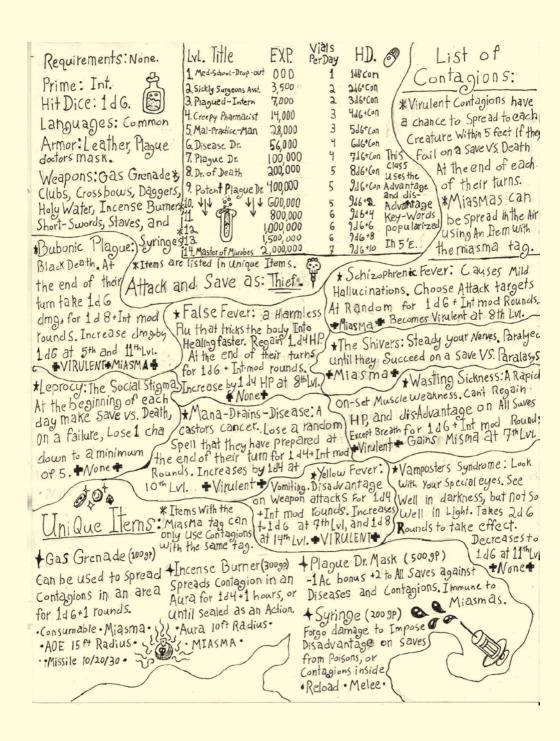
d6 Prophecy Table (Undead and constructs are not affected.)

1 **All Light Will Fade.** The listener becomes blinded for 1d4 + level turns.

2 **Bonds Will Be Broken.** The listener becomes hostile towards other creatures in the area.

3 **Civilization Will Crumble.** The listener must make a successful morale check or flee in terror.

4 **All Will Wither.** All vigor is drained from the listener's body, making them fall unconscious until they die or receive magical healing.

5 **The Tools of Men Will Not Save Them.** All nonmagical metal items and gear worn or held by the listener crumble to rust.

6 **The Rivers Will Run Red With Blood.** The listener's eyes start to bleed and they take 2d6 damage.

7 **Famine Will Take The Survivors.** The listener must make a save vs. petrification. On a fail they take damage equal to half their current HP.

8 **Oh! Hear The Cries Of The Forsaken.** The listener hears spectral voices crying out for mercy for 1d4 turns. These distractions give them a -2 penalty to hit rolls and morale.

by **Ethan Lefevre**

A Class for B/X OSR DnD.

Plague Dr

By: Ethan J. LeFevre.

✧ In a world where Mortals can Slay Dragons, Giants, or Gods, Even Shoot balls of fire from their hands, The Plague Dr. Works and fights by Manipulating Grim forces of Microscopic Death.. Whether this is Simply Your Weapon of Choice, or a means to an end, this is the Path You chose to Study.

Contagions:
Starting at 1'st Lvl. Select any 2 Contagions (or roll if that's how you play). You learn another contagion at Lvls. 3, 6, 9, and 12. These Contagions are Contained within **Vials**. After a Rest, You Prepapare an ammount determined by Class Lvl. A Vial can be applied to 1 Weapon, 2 Short-Swords, 4 daggers, or 6 rounds of Ammunition, aswell as Loaded Into Syringes for 6 Individual Uses. Once Appled, Contagions will Last up to 10 minutes. A Creature that takes damage from a weapon coated in Contagion, or enters or Starts it's turn in a miasma, Must Make a Save vs. Death, On a failure the Creature is Afflicted by that Contagion.

❋ once a Contagion runs its course, that creature is not affected by that contagion again unless it's from a new Vial.

Curatives:
Starting at 2ⁿᵈ Lvl. After each rest, you Prepare a number of Antidotes to Your Contagions = Lvl.+1. These Antidotes take the form of Consumable Capsule Pills, but Lose Potency after 24 Hours. An Antidote can be taken as a Free **A**ction, or fed to Someone else as an Action.

Inoculation:
Starting at 3rd Lvl. you can Inoculate your allies (and yourself) to your Contagions, Giving them Advantage against Contagions of your Choice. At 7ᵗʰ and 13ᵗʰ Lvl. you can make your Allies (and yourself) Immune to 1 of your Contagions entirely.

Requirements: None.

Prime: Int.

Hit Dice: 1d6.

Languages: Common

Armor: Leather, Plague doctors mask.

Weapons: Gas Grenade ✦, Clubs, Crossbows, Daggers, Holy Water, Incense Burner, Short-Swords, Staves, and Syringes.

Lvl. Title	EXP.	Vials Per Day	HD.
1. Med-School-Drop-out	000	1	1d6+Con
2. Sickly Surgeons Asst.	3,500	2	2d6+Con
3. Plagued-Intern	7,000	2	3d6+Con
4. Creepy Pharmacist	14,000	3	4d6+Con
5. Mal-Practice-Man	28,000	3	5d6+Con
6. Disease Dr.	56,000	4	6d6+Con
7. Plague Dr.	100,000	4	7d6+Con
8. Dr. of Death	200,000	5	8d6+Con
9. Potent Plague Dr.	400,000	5	9d6+Con
10. ↓↓ ☺ ↓↓↓	600,000	5	9d6+2
11.	800,000	6	9d6+4
*12.	1,000,000	6	9d6+6
*13.	1,500,000	6	9d6+8
14. Master of Microbes	2,000,000	7	9d6+10

This class uses the Advantage and disAdvantage Key-Words popularized in 5'E.

*Items are listed in Unique Items.

Attack and Save as: Thief.

List of Contagions:

✱ Virulent Contagions have a chance to Spread to each Creature Within 5 feet if they Fail on a Save vs. Death At the end of each of their turns.

✱ Miasmas can be spread in the Air using An Item with the miasma tag.

✦Bubonic Plague: Black Death. At the end of their turn take 1d6 dmg, for 1d8+Int mod rounds. Increase dmg by 1d6 at 5th and 11th Lvl. ✚VIRULENT✚MIASMA✚

✦Leprosy: The Social Stigma. At the beginning of each day make save vs. Death, on a failure, lose 1 cha down to a minimum of 5. ✚None✚

✦False Fever: A Harmless Flu that tricks the body Into Healing faster. Regain 1d4 HP. At the end of their turns for 1d6 + Int-mod rounds. Increase by 1d4 HP at 8th Lvl. ✚None✚

✦Mana-Drains-Disease: A castors cancer. Lose a random Spell that they have prepared at the end of their turn for 1d4+Int mod Rounds. Increases by 1d4 at 10th Lvl. ✚Virulent✚

✦Yellow Fever: Vomiting. Disadvantage on Weapon attacks for 1d4 +Int mod rounds. Increases to 1d6 at 7th Lvl, and 1d8 at 14th Lvl. ✚VIRULENT✚

✦Schizophrenic Fever: Causes Mild Hallucinations. Choose Attack targets At Random for 1d6 + Int mod Rounds. ✚Miasma✚ Becomes Virulent at 8th Lvl.

✦The Shivers: Steady your Nerves. Paralyzed until they Succeed on a Save vs. Paralasys. ✚Miasma✚

✦Wasting Sickness: A Rapid On-Set Muscle Weakness. Can't Regain HP, and disAdvantage on All Saves Except Breath for 1d6 + Int mod Rounds. ✚Virulent✚ Gains Miasma at 7th Lvl.

✦Vamposters Syndrome: Look with Your Special eyes. See Well in darkness, but Not So Well in Light. Takes 2d6 Rounds to take effect. Decreases to 1d6 at 11th Lvl ✚None✚

Unique Items: ✱Items with the Miasma tag can only use Contagions with the same tag.

✦Gas Grenade (100gp) Can be used to Spread Contagions in an area for 1d6+1 rounds.
• Consumable • Miasma •
• AOE 15ft Radius •
• Missile 10/20/30 •

✦Incense Burner (300gp) Spreads Contagion in an Aura for 1d4+1 hours, or until sealed as an Action.
• Aura 10ft Radius •
• MIASMA •

✦Plague Dr. Mask (500gp) -1 Ac bonus +2 to All Saves against Diseases and Contagions. Immune to Miasmas.

✦Syringe (200gp) Forgo damage to Impose Disadvantage on saves from Poisons, or Contagions inside.
• Reload • Melee •

NAME

AL

Class _____ Level _____ XP _____ + ____ %

Description _____

Before leaving for adventure, I was.... _____

Ability Scores

STR _____ ....
INT _____ ....
WIS _____ ....
DEX _____ ....
CON _____ ....
CHA _____

Saving Throws

D _____ Death, Poison
W _____ Magic Wands
P _____ Paralysis, Petrification
B _____ Breath Attacks
S _____ Spells, Magic Rods & Staves

+/- WIS vs. Magic ....

Armor Class

+/- DEX ....
Armor _____
AC _____
Unarmored _____

Movement

( )

Health

HD _____
+/- CON ....
HP _____
Max _____

Combat & Encounters

THACO _____   +/- FOR mod. to melee att./damage

+/- DEX mod. to Initiative ....   +/- DEX mod. to ranged attacks ....   +/- CHA mod. to reaction rolls

Abilities

Equipment

Cp	Sp	Ep	Gp	Pp

Encumbrance

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩ ⑪ ⑫ ⑬ ⑭ ⑮ ⑯   x 100 coins

Achievements and Dark Secrets: _____

EXTRAORDINARY EXCURSIONS

by **Vagabundork**

OBSOLETE SEWER RADIOPASTEURIZATION

Obsolete Sewer Radiopasteurization is a pointcrawl dungeon. It uses silver where others use gold. Change the metal, keep the numbers.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

1. The workers abandoned the treasure they had accumulated during their years of work.

2. A mad scientist will pay 150 silver for each weird science gadget you can get your hands on.

3. A wanted bandit is hiding inside. There's an 800 silver reward if taken alive.

RUMORS

1. A recently abandoned sewer.

2. It was used to experiment with technologies not from this world.

3. A ghostly apparition scared off the workers.

Room 1: Entrance. Portcullis partially open, you have to crawl to enter. The room is covered with mud, wires hang from the walls. When you step into the mud, an electric current runs up your skeleton: save vs. paralysis or all your rolls receive a -1 penalty for 30 minutes.

Room 2: Rat Shrine. A rat and 1d4+1 mice live here. See descriptions overleaf.

Room 3: Storage. Abandoned camp objects. 1-in-6 chance: the disembodied circulatory system of a humanoid runs across the room, disappearing through the door (cannot be damaged or seen outside this room). Only seen once.

Room 4: Screen room. A soundless screen constantly plays the same scene: a man in a locked laboratory (room 5) screams in desperation; the white light of the laboratory increases in intensity until it is impossible to see anything but the silhouette of the man, and then only absolute whiteness; when the light goes out after a few seconds, the room is empty. The scene lasts for half a minute.

Room 5: Ionizer. The doors close with a «click» and the ionizer activates, filling the room with a blinding light emitted by the white walls. Save vs. death; the survivors undergo a random mutation (see below); the dead dissolve like slime. Doors open with a «clack». Aluminum Man (see room 10) is immune, but if a minion is liquefied, he will inject the slime into himself, gaining one hit die.
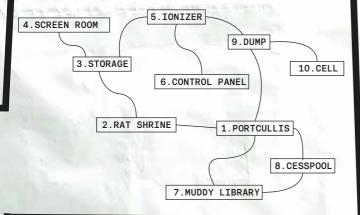
Room 6: Control Panel. Controls to deactivate the Ionizer. Also good loot: 563 silver, 126 copper; the Ion Maiden (ray gun, d12 damage; save vs. magic device for half damage); a disk that emits a pale green light when a button is pressed, enough to illuminate a room but almost invisible from a distance; a valuable book (100 silver); a box containing instruments for experiments with gases (800 x d100% silver to a magic-user with a good lab; 4 encumbrance slots are needed to transport it).

Room 7: Muddy Library. Empty bookshelves. In the mud, a sheet of paper: «If there is aluminum, the chances of surviving the exposure are greater».

Room 8: Cesspool. The ground is covered with mud and feces. The air is warm and fetid. A bandit is hiding here with 3 henchmen. One of the henchmen is willing to switch sides if the PCs offer him protection.

Room 9: Dump. Full of junk (make a search roll for a diamond worth 300 silver). A man and a woman are here. Roll d4 to find out what they're doing: 1: Napping (the PCs automatically win surprise). 2: Arguing aggressively (initiative at -1). 3: Prepared to ambush the PCs (they win surprise automatically). 4: Scavenging (PCs' initiative at +1).

Room 10: Cell. Requires a tinkering roll. Two bronze ceiling lamps illuminate the room (100 silver each). The Aluminum Man is locked in here. He doesn't remember who he is, only that he wants to leave and not come back. He thinks he's a machine. Grants all PCs a +1 bonus to their saving throws in room 5, if he is present.

```
4.SCREEN ROOM          5.IONIZER
                                    9.DUMP
     3.STORAGE
                  6.CONTROL PANEL        10.CELL

  2.RAT SHRINE       1.PORTCULLIS
                                    8.CESSPOOL
            7.MUDDY LIBRARY
```

RANDOM MUTATIONS - Roll 1d6

1. Your skin becomes aluminum and you are immune to radiation and spells (even beneficial spells), your base AC is as plate and you cannot wear armor. Those near you get a +1 bonus to their saving throws against radiation and magic

2. 1d10 of your mites increase in size considerably, causing you 1 damage each. The next round, they explode, leaving several red spots on you.

3. Your head shrinks to 30% of its size; however, your facial hair doesn't. You speak with a chipmunk voice and your Intelligence is reduced by 2.

4. Your heart rate accelerates. Recover 10% extra HP when you rest. However, you are now more susceptible to poison and sudden death (-2 to your saving throws vs. poison or death).

5. Roll 1d4; you develop cancer in 1: your brain (-2 Int). 2: a femur (-2 Dex). 3: your blood (leukemia; -2 Con). 4: your throat (can't speak or cast spells). You need a barber surgeon* to take care of it or you will die in 1d4+2 weeks. (*When undergoing surgery, you must save vs. death; if you succeed, you have overcome the disease but are weak and have only 1 HP; if you fail, the referee must decide the consequences, though it usually means you are dead).

6. Your blood turns a glowing toxic green. If an animal or person (but not you) drinks your blood they get intoxicated as though they had eaten berserker shrooms: 3 attacks per 2 rounds for the duration of the encounter.

ALUMINUM MAN
AC: as plate, HD: 2 (8 hp), Mv: 120' (40'), Att: Punch (d8), Att Bonus: +2, Morale: 10
• Aluminum skin, immune to radiation and spells (including beneficial spells). People nearby get +1 to saving throws

BANDIT
AC: as mail, HD: 1 (4 hp), Mv: 120' (40'), Att: Club (d6), Att Bonus: +1, Morale: 7
• Wanted by the authorities, desperate, will do anything to escape. 45 silver pieces.

HENCHMAN
AC: as unarmored, HD: 1 (3 hp), Mv: 120' (40'), Att: Knife (d4), Att Bonus: +1, Morale: 8
• The bandit forced them to join, *"Join me or I kill your family"*. 2d6 copper.

MOUSE
AC: as unarmored, HD: 1 (4 hp), Mv: 120' (40'), Att: Knife (d4), Att Bonus: +1, Morale: 10
• Humanoid mice the size of a child, with a cartoonish appearance. Loyal and cunning.

RAT
AC: as leather, HD: 6 (27 hp), Mv: 180' (60'), Att: Bite or Claws or Mace (d6 or d12 or d8), Att Bonus: +6, Morale: 12
• Humanoid rat, horrific appearance. Never surrenders. She's loyal to her henchmice.

TREASURE HUNTER, MAN
AC: as leather, HD: 3 (12 hp), Mv: 120' (40'), Att: Crossbow or Dagger (d6 or d4), Att Bonus: +2, Morale: 9
• Skillful but cowardly. 17 silver. Silver dagger (50 silver).

TREASURE HUNTER, WOMAN
AC: as mail, HD: 3 (13 hp), Mv: 120' (40'), Att: Sword or dagger (d8 or d4), Att Bonus: +3, Morale: 10
• Strong and brave. 8 silver, 15 copper. Silver dagger (50 silver).

by **Islayre** - Map: **P. Perret**
Translation: **Aan**

A war torn hexcrawl
for low level adventurers

Fort Levant

"At first, it was a mere rumor: 'A Gnoll invasion in the North'. But our leaders dismissed it. After all, if this tale was true, the creatures were said to be attacking the goblinoid barbarians we'd been warring against. But then the goblinoid clans fell, followed by the Wizard's Tower out there in the East, and the folks of the Great Forest. We realized then that the gnolls were a portent of an even greater evil, one whose dark, cursed standard had once flown over our lands. Should we have paid more attention to the old legends? How lost had we become?"

Hex 3

The tower of **the powerful wizard Bran Hornraven** (7th level magic-user) rises above cultivated plains. Bran isn't interested in politics and believes the region's recent troubles won't hinder his mystical studies. However, he does care about his servants' well-being (**a dozen noncombatants**). Bran is also enamored of his "neighbor", Ielenia the dryad (hex 4), who he's been wooing for years.
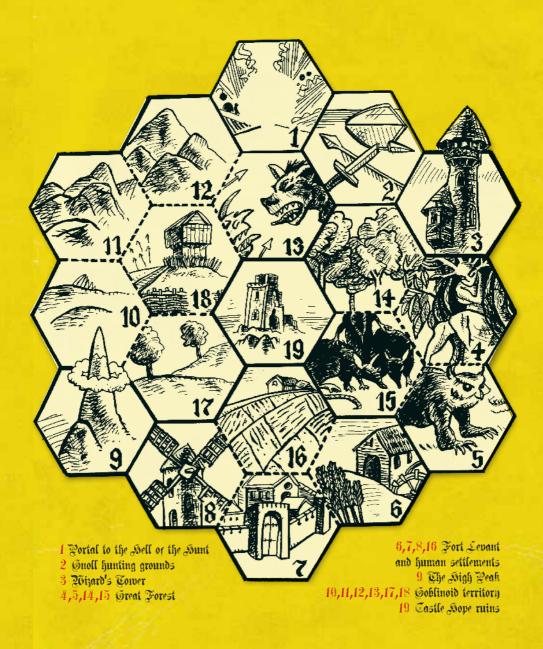
The wizard has partially domesticated **a colony of giant fire beetles**, which protects the entire area. The great insects treat Hornraven and his servants as members of their own colony, thanks to the wizard's clever use of alchemical pheromones.

Hexes 4,5,14,15

A great, untamed forest grows here. It is home to **the dryad Ielenia**, who holds court in a lovely clearing located right at the center of Hex 4.

The dryad seldom exerts her power over her subjects, preferring to wallow in serene self-indulgence. Those who dwell in her territory are therefore left to fend for themselves, for better or for worse. Case in point, a violent confrontation recently took place between a solitary testy old **Owlbear** who controls hex 5, and a mischief of expansionist giant rats holding sway over hex 15.

Following the recent gnoll incursions in the area, the forest's inhabitants have built **a good number of traps** in hex 14.

1 Portal to the Hell of the Hunt
2 Gnoll hunting grounds
3 Wizard's Tower
4,5,14,15 Great Forest

6,7,8,16 Fort Levant
and human settlements
9 The High Peak
10,11,12,13,17,18 Goblinoid territory
19 Castle Hope ruins

Hex 1

The hill where **Jillian Goodbarrel, Fort Levant's burgomaster**, buried the first of two cursed pendants, which opened **the portal to the Hell of the Hunt**. Through it came the gnolls. Through it came horror and destruction. From here, plague-like, **the scornful heralds of the Devourer** spread in all directions hunting, killing, and consuming everything and everyone in their path. The gnolls do not negotiate or take prisoners. When faced with a stronger opponent, they simply withdraw to find either an easier path or a weaker target. In the end, they always return in greater numbers. Treat their pack lord as a werewolf. To close the portal one must kill him before throwing his carcass through it.

Hex 2

The gnolls have set up camp in this area, which they patrol between raids and use as hunting grounds. Although they've started launching small-scale attacks against hexes 3 and 14 as a means of testing defenses, they really are focused on hex 13 which leads directly into goblinoid territory.

Hexes 10,11,12, 13,17,18

A fearsome goblinoid army known as **the Chimera Battalion** controls this vast territory. This force made up of **goblins, hobgoblins, and bugbears** stands as the region's preeminent military and political force. It is led by three leaders in uneasy alliance: **Gaartai**, a goblin matriarch; **Kodard**, a hobgoblin war-chief; and **Dreegus**, a bugbear champion.

The "capital" of this small kingdom is a **fortified camp** located in the plains of hex 18. The goblinoids have also dug secret caves and tunnels in the mountains of hexes 11 and 12 which they may use as fallback positions .

The violent clashes that have opposed the Chimera battalion and the **gnoll packs** in hex 13 have turned this region into a no-man's land. These battles have increased in frequency just as the numbers of marauding gnolls have grown.

Although relatively calmer, the hills of hexes 10 and 17 have nonetheless been the theater of pillaging and skirmishes between the Chimera warriors and Fort Levant's inhabitants (hex 7). **Warg-riding goblins** use these hills to launch their attacks on the nearby human farms.

Hex 9

High Peak mountain looms over this area. Two ancient beings have somehow managed to share its slopes for ages: **Qondae**, a great she-wyvern nesting northward at the mountain's highest point; and **Brenyr, a giant** whose eastward-looking cabin can be found halfway up the peak.

When mountain prey is scant, the voracious Qondae strikes both goblinoid and human territories alike. The leaders of the Chimera Battalion have been negotiating with the wyvern for months in the hope of securing an alliance – the fate of Fort Levant (hex 7) might very well hinge on this outcome.

Unlike his fearsome neighbor, self-reliant Brenyr enjoys a carefully crafted life of solitude. Between the dread winged reptile and the venerable warrior-poet, a strange form of attachment has grown over the course of many duels waged over the years.

Hexes 6,7,8,16

These areas stand for **Fort Levant** itself (hex 7), its districts, and the nearby cultivated plains. Fort Levant is a fast-growing human settlement that has seen its expansion curtailed as it pushed against the regions held by the Chimera Battalion.

Hexes 6, 9, 16, and 17 are borderlands over which human colonists have gradually increased their control. In these areas where skirmishes with the goblinoids occur regularly, villages are fortified.

The player characters will likely wander off to these regions after learning of Fort Levant's need for mercenaries and adventurers to fight off the pillagers. This is exactly what **Sergor-of-the-Axe** (4th level fighter) set out to do. An infamous soldier of fortune, Sergor reached the city at the head of a rag-tag group of armed men (mainly normal humans and a handful of 1st and 2nd level fighters) a few days before the party.

The city's burgomaster is one **Jillian Goodbarrel**, a female halfling with a good reputation thanks to her calm and effective demeanor in carrying out her mayoral duties. Crucially, despite her seeming good-nature, Jillian is in fact a psychopath of the highest order, one entirely devoted to **the Devourer, Demon-Prince of the Hunt, Hunger, and Cannibalism**. Enhanced by her dark lord's powers, Jillian's stats are those of a wight's even though she's not undead.

Hex 19

The ruins of **Castle Hope**. This stronghold once headquartered a holy order of warriors, the **Sisters of All Battles**. They were decimated many centuries ago battling the first incursion of the Devourer and his hordes. The Sisters narrowly managed to stop the infernal invasion by closing the portal (hex 1). This legendary heroic deed which Ielenia (hex 3), Qondae, and Brenyr (hex 9) remember well, is also known to the warriors of the Chimera (hex 18) who have kept away from the ruins of Castle Hope out of respect.

Jillian Goodbarrel buried the second cursed pendant here. The souls of Castle Hope's **dead warrior-nuns** have become restless after Jillian buried the jewel in the rubble: they now prowl the ruins in the form of skeletons, attacking anyone who trespasses in a desperate and clumsy attempt at protecting the castle's remains. **If the gnolls succeed in killing enough people** in the name of the Devourer, the Demon-Prince will once more make his way to the world of mortals, appearing where he was first vanquished at the head of his infernal troops.

by **Chris Tamm**

THE DARK ISLAND IS IN A GREAT FLOODED CAVERN DEEP BENEATH
THE EARTH. AT TIMES THE QUEEN RULED AN UNDERLAND KINGDOM.
AT OTHER TIMES DRAGONS BRED HERE. ADVENTURERS STILL COME TO
SEE IF THERE IS ANY TREASURE LEFT.

THE DARK ISLAND

Deep in the earth in a great flooded cavern is a small rocky island. The Dragon Queen built the island as a lair and capital of her underland kingdom. Over many centuries the island has gone through various phases, from the centre of a pocket empire to a mostly empty and haunted place.

Some periods were dominated by the Dragon Cult while the queen lived in human form. Other times, dragonfolk reigned supreme. Occasionally, the queen has left for a few decades, cleansing the island from its invaders upon her return. Concerned for the future of her race, she has also been known to operate a spawning pit with several dragons. Over the years, she has ruled over various slave races including gnomes and hobgoblins.

Mostly these days she lives alone with a handful of servants, having lost interest in the outside world. Pathetic albino cave gnomes worship the queen out of fear, but also because she keeps enemies away. Dragon cultists are welcome by the queen's servants when they come to learn and study. Occasionally prisoners escape the queen's slave pits, but most get eaten on the beaches, or trying to cross the dark waters.

The Dark Island is feared by underland folk. For aeons the Dragon Queen has dwelled here, possibly the oldest of her kind.

Nowadays thieves, spies, and adventurers want to explore it again in case the dragons have gone and left their treasure. Dangerous dreams like these will end when they confront the queen.

Some Past Residents

• Cultists in the old days came to learn from dragons and help them spread. Less come now but the queen enjoys conversing with them and dozing off to their worshipful chants.

• Dragonfolk were spawned by the queen when she was in one of her imperialistic moods and their descendants come on pilgrimages still. Once they were common here serving as guards and elite troops.

• There once were three ordinary dragons here, as the queen enjoyed the company of at least one consort. There were times many young dragons lived here. Today it still happens that one of the ancient eggs hatches and a young dragon crawls about.

• Subterranean lizards have increasingly moved into areas dragons once lived in. The gnomes do their best to avoid them.

The Gnome Folk

• These lumpy albino gnomes farm fungus, catch fish, and generally look after the place. Nowadays they are mostly left alone as long as the food keeps coming.

• The gnomes craft boats of various sizes, from the mushroom cap coracle to the larger skiff used to ferry passengers. Making the latter requires an expedition to a fungus forest in search of appropriate shroom timber.

• The gnomes are not unfriendly, but they don't let outsiders enter the dragon tunnels (and they will usually inform the queen of the presence of strangers). They have a slave pen for various guests labouring around the island. A slave who doesn't work is butchered and added to the communal meals.

• They will trade for exotic food or treasure their queen might like as a gift.

Lost Treasures

• The Queen's Crown - allows the wearer to speak with any reptilian creature.

• Dragon Robes - are worn by cultists and have the benefit of making dragons check before eating the wearer.

• Gnome Fishing Pole - catches up to three albino fish a day, never attracting the kind of horrible monster who dwell in underground lakes and seas.

• Lamp Shrooms – this glowing fungus grows all over the island. Each shroom lasts a month and illuminates 5ft around it.

• Scalebane - a dragonslayer sword was lost by a hero. It is hidden somewhere in the queen's chambers.

• Green Stones - large chunks of jade can be found all over the island. Not the best quality but good for crafting and worth about 40 GP per pound.

The Dragon Queen

• She has used various names over the course of her long life, including the Serpentine Sorceress, the Green Lady, Queen Akenthane, the Under Queen, the Dread Empress.

• People debate what kind of dragon the queen may be. Most scholars say green or black but no one has seen her outside of her human form in a long time (she can change at will). From an elder lineage, she is smarter than most of her kin and an advanced spellcaster.

• Long gone are her days of victorious conquest, various consorts, and numerous brood. She is now content being cared for by her gnomes and cultists. She does like to talk to visitors and have them at her magnificent dining table. In the past the most interesting guests were charmed and turned into dragon consorts. Now she mostly gets bored and devours her guests — she might spare them if they swear to find treasure for her.

MAP OF THE DARK ISLAND

Consort Dragon Nest

Servants Cave

Marine Cave

North Dragon Nest

Slave Pits

Egg Room

Bathing Chamber

South Dragon Nest

Study

Queen's Court

Cave House

Cave House

Cave House

Cave House

Dining Room

Bed Room

Cave House

Cave House

Cave House

Lagoon Beach

Queen Roost

Cave House

Cave House

Cave House

Cave House

Great Council Hall

Cave House

Temple Cave

Smithy

Priest Cave

Priest Library

Windows are 3 foot wide and hard to reach

Random Encounters

Shoreline		Inside
2d4 Gnomes fishing	1	d4 Gnome Servants
d6 Gnome Guards	2	2d4 Gnome Guards
Free Gnome Spy	3	Gnome Child playing
d4 Marine Ghouls	4	2d4 Dark Elf Traders
d6 Marine Zombie	5	d4 Dark Dwarf Traders
Marine Troll	6	d4 Dragon Cult Wizards
d4 Marine Ogres	7	d6 Dragon Cult Priests
Escaped Prisoner	8	Subterranean Lizard
d6 Fish Men Explorers	9	d4 Dragonmen Pilgrims
Albino Crocodile	10	Party of Adventurers
Plesiosaur hunting	11	Thief exploring
Thief scouting	12	Dragon out for a walk

Lagoon Beach - Often 4d4 gnomes, tending nets and boats. Monthly gnome markets here attract visitors from all over the underlands. Sometimes a boat from visiting dark elves or cultists can also be found on the beach.

Cave Houses - Typical caves where gnomes live, cook, and sleep (d6): 1-2=2d4 gnomes, 3=overgrown with fungus, 4=d4 hobgnomes, 5=gnomebears, 6=old bones and garbage.

Smithy - A forge where 4 gnome smiths work while 2 hobgnomes operate large bellows. Willing to sell and repair weapons and trade goods.

Great Council Hall - The gnomes use this as a common area where the chief holds court with the concubines who live in the small side chambers. The chief has 2 thoul guards, 8 hobgnome bailiffs, and a gnomebear executioner. 3d6 gnome courtiers, servants, and harem members are present as well. 1-in-6 chance of a visiting shaman or priest, and 1-in-6 chance of a visiting ambassador from the underlands.

Temple Cave - Sorcerous temple to the gnome mushroom god and the maggot lord of the underworld. One large statue, several smaller ones, and a dozen small shrines to various spirits and ancestors. A cleric and a d6 servants, d4 fungus zombies, and giant lizard pet are usually encountered here.

Priest Cave - Cleric quarters with d6 servants cooking and sleeping, 1-in-4 chance of a cleric being present. A stone bowl of magic fungus.

Priest Library - Heaps of mouldy crumbling books and scrolls. With an hour of searching one can find either a spell scroll (level 1d3) or an interesting and useful fragment in gnomish or draconic.

Queen Roost - Now an overgrown fungus garden with many edible shrooms. A 10-minute search has a 2-in-6 chance of finding a magical mushroom. Roll for a fungus garden encounter.

Queens Court - Rotting remains of furniture, musical instruments, and a throne where the queen once met visitors. Now another overgrown fungus garden (1-in-6 chance of magical discovery as above). An hour-long search produces scraps of ivory, gold leaf, or semi precious stone worth d4x10 GP. Roll for a fungus garden encounter.

Study -Rotting remains of the queen's study. A solid stone wall created with magic hides a cavity with a thousand years of draconic journals, a magic inkwell, and 2000 GP in coins for when the Queen returns. Roll for a fungus garden encounter.

Dining Room - Huge hall with a pewter dinner set and a crystal candelabra all covered in dust and cobwebs (but fungus-free). A giant intelligent she-spider lives here and the gnomes avoid the room. Bundles of gnome and adventurer bones hang around in web sacs (armour and weapons are well preserved, also 1-in-6 chance of a minor magical item per hour spent de-bundling and searching the bodies).

Bedroom - This room is sealed behind a magically created stone barrier. The bedroom is immaculate, magically lit, with a four poster bed with green spider silk bedclothes where the Queen in human form slept with her humanoid lovers. It is possible that she might be here in one of her deep, decade-long slumbers.

Egg Room - A nest woven of bones and humanoid hair with broken dragon egg shells (which could be worth 3d6x10 GP). Possibly dormant dragon eggs might be sealed behind a magic stone wall.

Consort Dragon Nest - A rotting fungus garden growing on the massive skeleton of an ancient dragon. Gnomes leave their meager offerings here for the dragon (there is a pile of 3600 CP). Roll for a fungus garden encounter.

Servants Cave - Skeletons of gnomes lie among mushrooms and slime. d4 fungus zombie gnomes arise if disturbed

South Dragon Nest - As north dragon nest above, with the bodies of long dead escaped slaves. d4 of which rise as fungus zombies if someone gets close.

North Dragon Nest - A fungus garden has taken over. Many edible shrooms, and a 10-minute search has a 1-in-6 chance of finding a magical mushroom. Roll for a fungus garden encounter.

Slave Pits - A clan of 3d6 friendly meditating fungoids live here. They use spores to communicate with visitors and are willing to trade magic mushrooms for exotic goods. Many huge shrooms grow here as the gnomes never come to harvest. Skeletal remains of chained slaves can be seen among the putrefying fungus heaps. Dog-sized snails abound.

Marine Cave - A fungus cave with several flailsnails grazing. They will happily seek meat for a change of diet.

Bathing Cave - Once a dragon bathing room, now a fungus filled chamber with mould rafts floating on stinky water. The room is mostly avoided because of the gigantic slug living here. d4 obviously magic mushrooms are visible from the doorways. Gigaslug hides in ambush; it moves slowly but spits acidic fluids on any fleeing victims.

Random Encounters

	Lake	Island Ruins	Fungus Garden
1	School of albino cave fish	2d4 gnomes fishing or fungi farming	Gas spore on string led by gnome child like a balloon
2	Giant cave octopus, crab, or snapping turtle	d6 Hobgnome guards on patrol	Yellow mould patch (or other mould)
3	Albino giant pike or piranhas	Gnomebear overseer with whip	Green slime patch
4	Cave lobster or albino crocodile	d4 fungus covered zombies	Violet fungus
5	Hide canoe, raft, or coracle with fishing gnomes	Dark elf visitor come to trade	Ascomoid
6	Underland traders in boat	Wererat adventurer	Grey ooze
7	Albino chaos mermaid hungry for flesh	d6 cultists looking for dragon relics	Ochre jelly
8	Plesiosaur or sea serpent	Gnome shaman and d6 servants	Gelatinous cube
9	Albino fish-men out hunting	d4 mushmen	2d4 gnome farmers
10	Marine ghouls or zombies	3d4 tiny toadstool folk	Gnome cleric and d6 servants
11	Marine ogres or trolls	d4 shrieking fungus	d4 Fungus zombies
12	Hideous cave naiad or marine hag	d4 giant cave crickets	2d4 Giant centipedes

Text, art, title, and map by **Emiel Boven**

the Rot King's Sanctum

A dungeon module for levels 1-3

Somewhere in the sewers under the city of Cliff's End exists a hidden entrance to a forbidden temple. This unholy place is dedicated to Nithis, the god of decay. The cultists in its halls are led by a scheming cleric who calls themselves the Rot King.

Random Encounters

Roll for a random encounter when the PCs make too much noise or when they linger in the corridors between rooms.

1. 1d6+1 cultists - **2**. 1 plague priest + 1d4 cultists - **3**. 2d4 rat swarms - **4**. 1d6 cultist guards
5. Melvin trying to escape (from room 7) **6**. 1d4 mouldy skeletons **7**. 1d4 fly swarms
8. 3d4 giant rats - **9**. Veilclaw and Tar (see room 4) **10**. The Rot King.

Cultist
AC 9 [10], HD 1 (4hp), Att 1x dagger (1d4), THAC0 19 [0], ML 7, AL Chaotic, XP 10

Plague Priest
AC 5 [14], HD 3 (13hp), Att 1x mace (1d6), THAC0 18 [+1],
Spells *cause light wounds* (2), ML 9, AL Chaotic, XP 35

Rat Swarm
AC 9 [10], HD 1hp, Att 1x bite (1d6), THAC0 19 [0], ML 5, AL Neutral, XP 5
Afraid of fire.

Cultist Guard
AC 7 [12], HD 1 (4hp), Att 1x mace (1d6), THAC0 19 [0], ML 7, AL Chaotic, XP 10

Mouldy Skeleton
AC 7 [12], HD 1] (4hp), Att 1x rake (1d4), THAC0 19 [0], ML 12, AL Chaotic, XP 13
Hitting it has a 50% chance of releasing a cloud of yellow spores
(once only; save vs. death or choke within 6 rounds).

Fly Swarm
AC 7 [12], HD 2 (9hp), Att 1x swarm (1 automatic dmg), THAC0 18 [+1], ML 11,
AL Neutral, XP 20
Only harmed by fire, sleep spells, or smoke.

Giant Rat
AC 7 [12], HD ½ (2hp), Att 1x bite (1d4), THAC0 19 [0], ML 8, AL Neutral, XP 5
Afraid of fire.

Tar and Veilclaw, Wererats
AC 7 [12] (9 [10] in human form), HD 3* (13hp), Att 1x bite (1d4) or 1x weapon
(Tar: mace +1 (1d6+1), Veilclaw: dagger (1d4)), THAC0 17 [+2], ML 8, AL Chaotic,
XP 50 *Can summon 1d2 giant rats (arrive in 1d4 rounds).*

The Rot King
See page 219.

Hooks

The Archmage's Crypt
The PCs have discovered a map which leads them to believe one of the nine
fabled Azirian archmages is buried under Cliff's End (see room 16).
The map points the PCs to the area of the temple.

The Missing Merchant
The characters are approached by the gnome Ilda, Melvin's sister (see room 7). When the
PCs ask around about the missing brother, they find out that Melvin had dealings with
the Cult of the Black Tear. Their investigation leads them to a sewer entrance which
Melvin supposedly entered on the day he was last seen.

A Divine Gambit
A priest of the goddess Kcyra has suspicions that his clergy is being infiltrated by agents of the Cult
of the Black Tear. He has hired the party to find out where the cult is hiding and to get proof of this
infiltration (see room 14), before he can bring his suspicions to his leaders.

1. Entrance Hall - 2. Living Area - 3. Storage- 4. Guard Post - 5. Shroom Gardens
6. Grinning Statue - 7. Cells - 8. Central Hall - 9. Empty room - 10. Treasury
11. Crawler Nest - 12. Temple Sanctum - 13. Rat Room - 14. Rot King's Quarters
15. Library - 16. Hidden Crypt

1. Entrance Hall

Heavy bronze doors. Six stone statues of screaming figures line the walls of this room. The **symbol** of Nithis, an open eye crying a single tear, is embossed on the north door.

• Walking over the **pressure plate** in the middle of the room causes a paralyzing gas (*save vs. paralysis* or paralyzed for 2d4 turns) to spray out of the mouths of the statues into the room and the doors to slam shut, alerting the cultists in rooms 2 and 4. The doors can be opened using a lever in the hallway outside of the room.

• Each statue has **emerald eyes** worth 15 GP each.

2. Living Area

Dimly lit. 2d6 cultists are here at any time. There is a 60% chance of a plague priest being here. The south area of this room contains a small cooking fire (with some mushrooms from room 5 frying in a pan) and a table with some chairs. Bedrolls lay scattered across the northern floor of the room.

• Searching the room reveals **2d8 x 5 GP** and a **brass amulet** in the shape of an eye (20 GP).

3. Storage

This room contains **crates** with root vegetables and dried meat.

4. Guard Post

Dimly lit. Stationed here are 1d8+1 cultist guards. They are led by two black-furred wererats named **Tar** and **Veilclaw.** Tar wields a *mace +1* and Veilclaw wears a *ring of spell turning.* The room is sparsely furnished with some wooden benches and a stone table.

5. Shroom Gardens

The floor of this room is covered with soil and pale green mushrooms. Tending this mushroom garden are 4 mouldy skeletons. The skeletons are not hostile unless provoked by attacking or destroying their garden.

• Searching the room reveals a **decaying body** beneath a patch of mushrooms. The corpse wears a pouch with 2d4 PP.

• Eating the **mushrooms** is deadly (*save vs. poison*) except for when they are cooked. The cooked mushrooms give the effect of a *cure disease* spell, but only while still warm.

6. Grinning Statue

A stone statue of a grinning man holding out a skeletal arm made of copper.

• Shaking the **metal hand** swaps the copper arm of the statue and the arm of the PC shaking it. A living arm grafted onto the statue this way will not decay and will function as normal when swapped back by shaking the hand again. While grafted to a living person, the copper arm works like the original.

7. Cells

Dimly lit. 1d4 cultist guards. This room holds three cells made of iron bars. The cells contain two malnourished prisoners and a small gnome merchant named **Melvin.**
• **Melvin** knows of the secret exit in room 9 and promises the party a reward of 500 GP if they save him. He does not care about the other prisoners.
A **secret door** in the north wall leads to room 14.

8. Central Hall

Dimly lit. This large room is split by a **channel** filled with a slow shallow stream of **yellow green acid**. It flows down the west wall and disappears into a copper grate at the east end of the room. Two **metal bridges** hang over the channel from long metal chains that go through small holes in the ceiling. The entrance to room 12 is flanked by two statues and guarded by 2 cultist guards.
• In the acid-covered west wall is a **secret passage** to the crypt of Barinzar (room 16).
• A **copper pull ring** can be seen through the acid at the bottom of the channel next to the western bridge. Pulling this ring stops the acid from flowing down the west wall and opens a **secret door** to room 16.
• Both **statues** at the guarded entrance can be turned. Doing so pulls the bridges up to the ceiling.

9. Empty Room

This room is empty except for a **secret door** in the east wall.
• A sharp eye can discern footprints leading to and from the east wall.

10. Treasury

Locked iron doors. Both hallways are trapped with a 25′ deep **pit trap** leading to room 11 (the carcass crawler there has learned to expect meals from the pits). The room contains **4 antique vases** (55 GP each), **two chests**, a shelf with two potions: *speed* and *gaseous form*, a small **silver and amethyst statue** depicting the dream goddess Saphria (200 GP), a locked **ivory case**, a rough **stone box,** and a **metal octahedron** with faintly glowing runes on each side.
• One of the chests holds a sack filled with 500 GP and 2300 SP. The other contains a **jeweled sword** (150 GP) and a pouch containing **five gems** (45 GP each).
• The locked ivory case contains a **small pouch** with 3 PP, two scrolls: *fire ball* and *dispel magic* spells, a quiver with **8 arrows +1** and a **mithril mask** with eight tiny eyes that grants the effects of *spider climb*.
• The stone box is empty; opening it will release a **cloud of sleeping powder** into the room that will put characters to sleep for 2d4 turns (*save vs. poison*).
• The octahedron is a magic item called a **Melchior box**. Tapping the runes on the side opens the box revealing a semi translucent **black stone**. The stone whispers softly and can be asked a yes or no question which it answers truthfully. After a question has been answered the runes on the box fade for 1d4+1 weeks during which time the stone will not answer any questions.

11. Crawler Nest

This room is filled with the stench of rotting corpses and contains a carcass crawler. In the corner of the room are three decaying bodies, one of which is filled with carcass crawler **eggs**.

12. Temple Sanctum

Brightly lit. This arched room contains a **large pool** filled with a black liquid. Hanging from a chain above the liquid is a **rusted brass eye green with corrosion.** The pupil of the eye slowly drops tears of black liquid into the pool. 1d4 cultists are here at any time and there is a 60 % chance that 1d4 plague priests are present too. There is also a 40% chance of a **ritual** going on here, in which case 2d4 more cultists are present and at least one plague priest (or the Rot King themself) is leading the group in prayer.
• The **black pool** is 5′ deep. A creature touching the liquid takes 1d4 CON damage per round. This damage is healed after a day of rest or through magical healing. If a creature dies while touching the black pool it turns to liquid and mixes with the pool.

14. Rot King's Quarters

Brightly lit. This room is the personal chamber of the Rot King, there is a 60% chance they are encountered here. The room contains a small **desk**, a chair, a bed, a **large mirror** and **two chests**.
• The mirror is placed here to repel intruders. When a creature not accompanied by the Rot King enters the room, a shadow steps out of the mirror and attack.
• The chests both contain robes and other garments worn by the Rot King but hidden inside a **secret compartment** is a pouch containing a **dark emerald** (75 GP), a **potion of healing**, and a **dagger +1**.
• Scattered over the desk are a bunch of papers. Several of them are **letters** between the Rot King and a Nithis agent named Zarek, who infiltrated the clergy of Kcyra, the goddess of healing. He writes about a heavily guarded relic named the *'Tear of Kcyra'* that will be moved between two temples in the coming month.
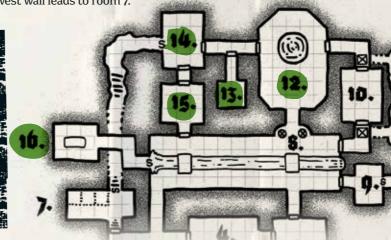• A **secret door** in the west wall leads to room 7.

13. Rat Room

This rubble filled room is the home of 2d4 rat swarms who live in the trash.
• Sorting through the rubble reveals a **gold powderbox** (25 GP, empty), a chewed up book with pictures of farm animals, **2d6 x 30 CP**, and the **skeletal remains** of a small monkey.

15. Library

Locked. Dimly lit. The walls of this room are lined with **bookshelves** except for where metal sconces holding **black candle**s are fixed to the wall. In the middle of the room stands a black iron lectern with a **book** spread open on it.
• The four candles are *gravelight candles*. Creatures holding a burning gravelight candle are invisible to undead monsters with 2 or less HD.
• PCs spending time searching the bookshelves have a 1-in-6 chance of finding **1d3 magic scrolls** (2-in-6 if the PC searching is a spellcaster). These are cleric spells of level 1d4. All spells found here are cleric spells.
The book contains **the will of Nithis**. Non-Chaotic PCs who try to read it must make a *save vs. poison* or take 3d8 damage. Chaotic PCs reading it permanently gain 1d2 Wisdom.

16. Hidden Crypt

None of the cultists know of this room's existence. Cracked black marble tiles line the walls and floors of this chamber. The middle of the room contains a large white marble **sarcophagus** carved with intricate cloud and lightning patterns. The top of the coffin is decorated with a deep-blue glowing crystal and bears the following inscription in an ancient form of common: *BARINZAR, FIRST AMONG THE NINE, HE WHO HARNESSED THE TEMPEST*.

• The **lid** of the sarcophagus is **trapped;** opening it or tampering with the crystal causes it to shoot lightning bolts at each creature within 5′ of the sarcophagus, dealing 2d6 damage (a *save vs. spell* preventing half damage). Casting *dispel magic* on the crystal deactivates the trap.

• Inside the sarcophagus is a **skeleton** dressed in rotten robes. It wears two **silver rings** (15 GP each), an ornamental **gold dagger** (100 GP), and a **golden amulet** (30 GP). Next to the remains are **120 GP**, 3 blue **gems** (25 GP), a *rod of cancellation*, and an ornate **scroll case** containing three scrolls: *lightning bolt, fire ball,* and *wall of ice*.
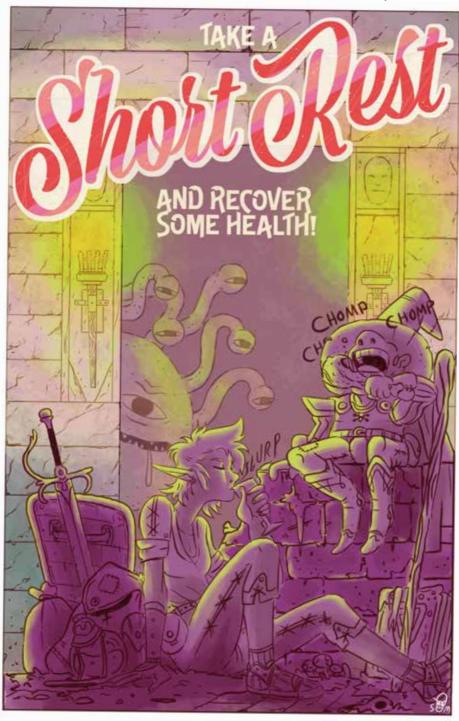
The Rot King

Not much is known about the cleric who bears the name of the Rot King before they rose to power among the followers of Nithis. The Rot King believes themselves to be a vessel through which the god of chaos and disease can shape the world. Under their leadership the Cult of the Black Tear has grown from a niche cult to a force that influences the world above. They have made an alliance with the wererat community in the sewers and implanted a network of agents in the clergies of other deities, showing that the Rot King is a cunning leader who is not afraid of accepting outside influence in order to achieve the goals of their deity. The cleric uses the temple complex under Cliff's End as their primary base to study the will of Nithis and to plan their schemes.

Nithis and Kcyra

In contrast to the worship of his sister Kcyra, the worship of the chaos god Nithis has been outlawed in the city of Cliff's End and most of the surrounding region. Because of this the cultists of the Black Tear have a deep hatred for the followers of the goddess of Healing. Their religious dogma teaches that Nithis was betrayed by his sister when she took the power of life and restoration for herself even though they were promised to Nithis by the Council of Creation, leaving the betrayed god with only the powers to undo and corrupt his sister's works.

AC 5 [14], HD 6* (22hp), Att 1x mace +1 (1d6+1), THAC0 16 [+3], SV D9 W10 P12 B14 S12, ML 9, AL Chaotic, XP 500
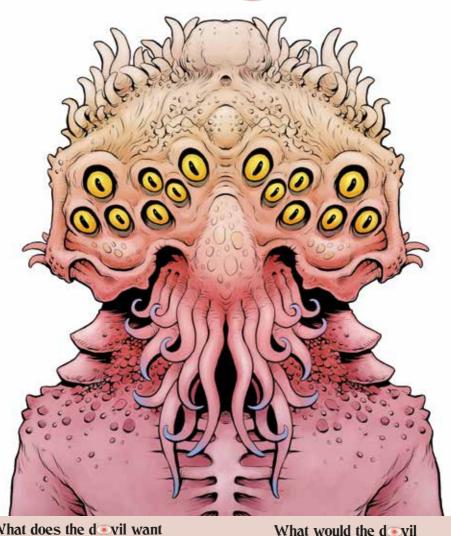**Spells** - *cause light wounds* (2), *hold person* (2), *cause disease* (1), *cause serious wounds* (1).
Special Abilities - Summon Swarm: 1d4 times each day the Rot King can release a fly swarm from the holes covering their forearms.

by **Skufungus**

A pact with the devil

by **Eric Nieudan**. Art: **Tim Molloy**

What does the devil want in exchange for help? (d666)

1. Fealty from
2. The life of
3. Mercy for
4. The help of
5. The blood of
6. The riches of

1. a blind
2. a forgotten
3. a rich
4. a fallen
5. an impostor
6. a destitute

1. friend of yours
2. jewel trader
3. viceroy
4. archmagister
5. birdsong master
6. titan lady

What would the devil do for free? (d666)

1. Save or abduct
2. Find or return
3. Kill or disable
4. Hide or make disappear
5. Curse or uncurse
6. Convince or corrupt

1. an untainted
2. a cursed
3. a lost
4. a willing
5. an evil
6. a betrayed

1. friend, ally, or lover
2. enemy or rival
3. monster or abomination
4. adventurer or rascal
5. godling or petty power
6. possession or treasure