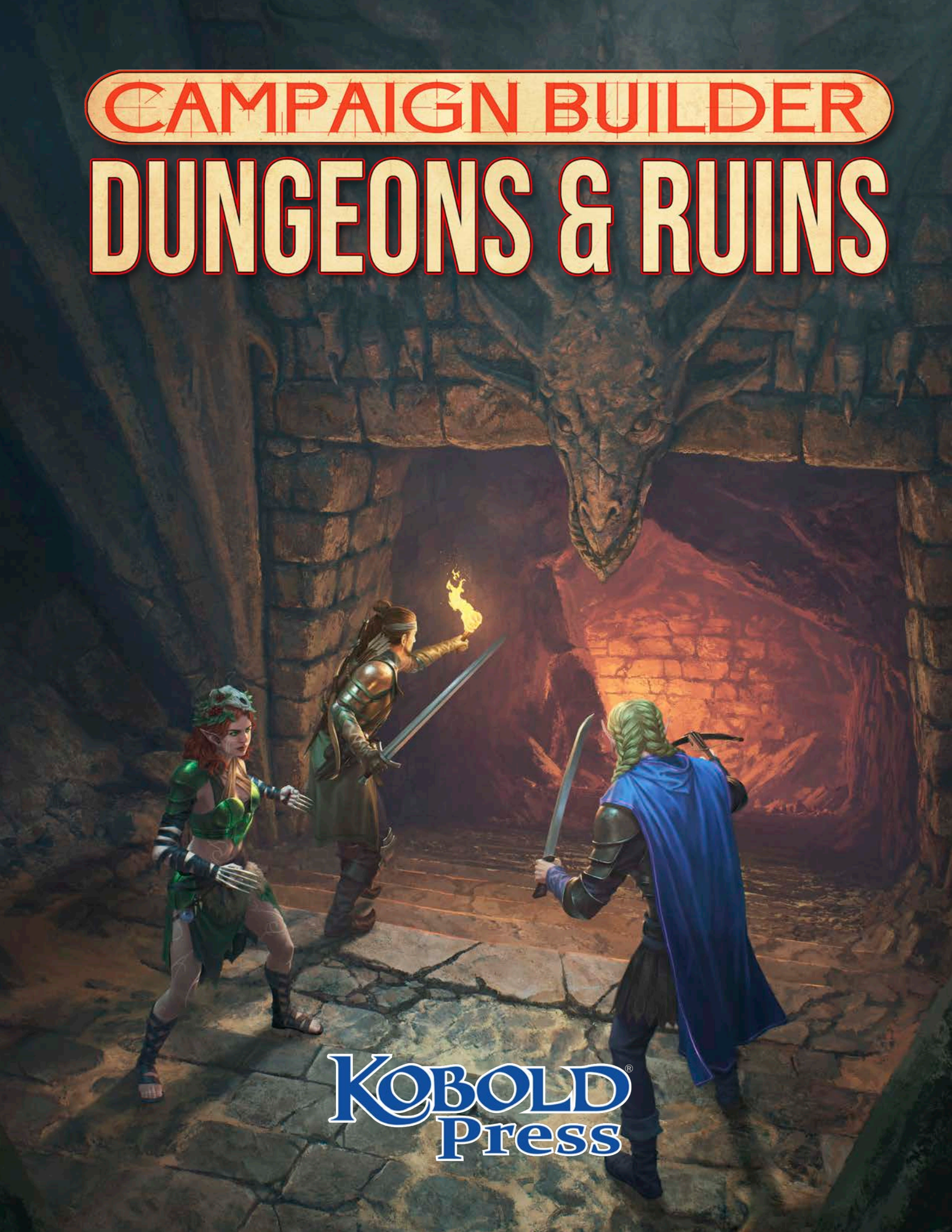
CAMPAIGN BUILDER

DUNGEONS & RUINS



KOBOLD® Press



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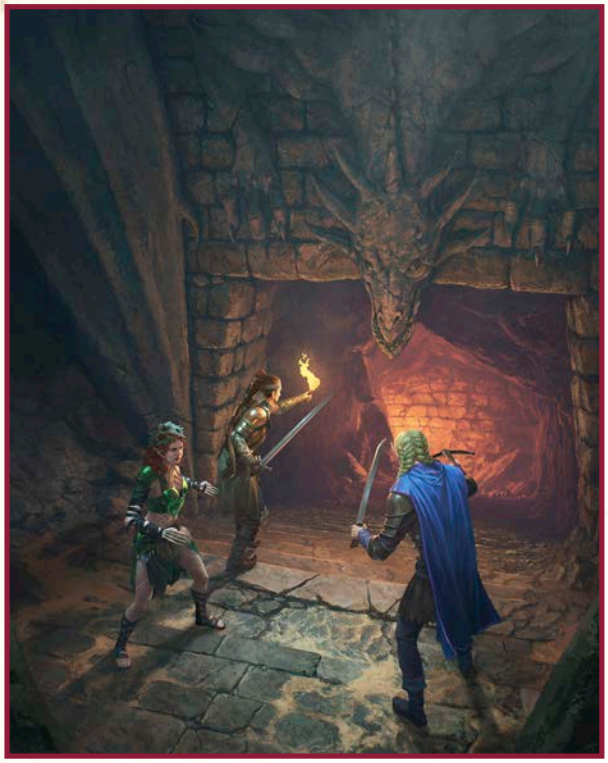
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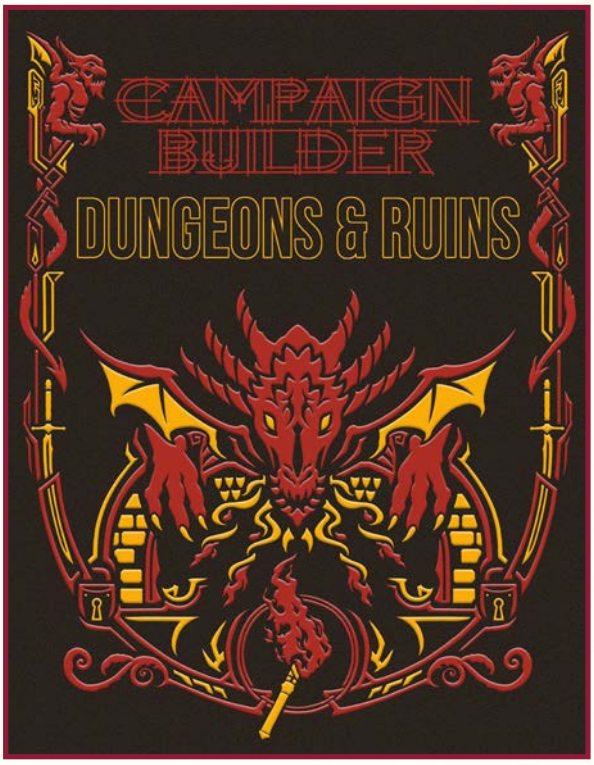
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ON THE COVER

An adventuring party steels themselves at the entrance to the fabled dungeon, their growing excitement pushing back a lingering terror, in this art by Lie Setiawan.



ON THE LIMITED EDITION COVER

A mighty dragon stands defiant, fiercely defending its dominion and the hoard it's amassed, in this art by Addison Rankin.

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www.koboldpress.com

PO Box 2811 | Kirkland, WA 98083

Printed in China

ISBN: 978-1-964506-04-3

Limited Edition ISBN: 978-1-964506-05-0

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1



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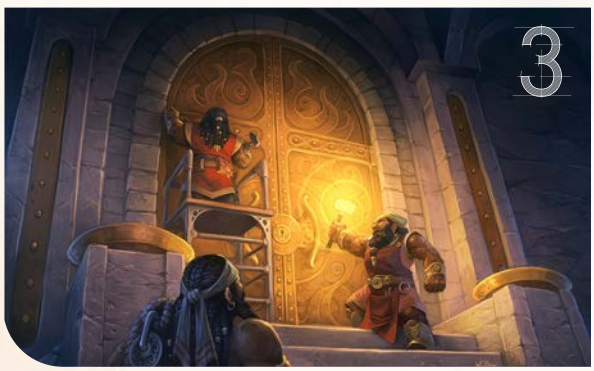
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DELVING INTO THE UNKNOWN

Below the earth lie countless treasures and untold mysteries, their magics and storied pasts buried alongside them. Dungeons and ruins lie scattered around the world, perhaps standing as imposing monuments to a history lost to time or cataclysm or perhaps hiding away from a world that doesn't even realize they exist. Relics of legend lie sealed in haunted citadels guarded by undying kings. Hoards of coins and jewels shine and sparkle in cyclopean vaults watched over by drowsing dragons. Secrets of the multiverse long to be found beyond the reaches of all that is known. Such sites hold fantastic rewards for adventurers brave enough—and cunning enough—to survive the journey.

USING THIS BOOK

Campaign Builder: Dungeons and Ruins provides a complete toolkit for creating, expanding, and enhancing the dungeons and ruins of the **Tales of the Valiant**® roleplaying game—perfect for fleshing out all the as yet undiscovered dangers and secrets of any game world.

Whether building trap-filled treasure vaults, adding defenses to a villain's lair, or depositing clues within the crumbling corners of an abandoned city, this book ensures GMs a continuing supply of both delight and dread for players:

- **Chapter 1: Dungeoneering Heroes** provides new character options related to exploration and dungeoneering, including subclasses, heritages, backgrounds, and talents. This chapter also includes a variety of new magic items and spells designed to aid the most daring of delvers.
- **Chapter 2: Running Exploration** presents optional rules to expand the exploration pillar of the game. Use these pages to enrich locations, create rich maps for PCs to explore, and transform travel into an adventure unto itself.
- **Chapter 3: Designing Dungeons & Ruins** details the anatomy of dungeons and ruins, providing guidance to build compelling sites into environments that feel truly extraordinary.



- **Chapter 4: Malign Magic & Mechanisms** contains an array of new curses, diseases, hazards, and traps to surprise and terrify unwary heroes.
- **Chapter 5: Puzzles & Skill Challenges** explores alternate ways to spice up exploration with puzzles and skill challenges. In addition to discussing best practices for their use, this chapter contains a variety of examples, ready to plug right into the game.
- **Chapter 6: Combat in the Depths** discusses strategies for populating locations with thematic and interesting monsters. Look within for guidance when crafting random encounter tables, building threat trackers, or determining the most effective boss monsters.
- **Appendix A: Dungeon Denizens** provides stat blocks for unique monsters that would love to meet the PCs.
- **Appendix B: Random Tables** presents a variety of random encounters as well as other helpful tables, such as for adding intriguing trinkets, descriptive details, and adventure hooks.
- **Puzzle Handouts** provides player-friendly graphics to pair with the puzzles included in **Chapter 5**.
- **Dungeon Character Sheet** provides a character sheet perfect for cataloging and tracking the details of each dungeon or ruin.



DEFINING DUNGEONS

When talking about dungeons, most fantasy lovers imagine a very specific vision: dark underground passages and the scores of roaming monsters that thrive there. While that concept is still absolutely supported, *Campaign Builder: Dungeons and Ruins* embraces a wider definition. The term *dungeon* in the context of this book refers to any self-contained location that contains many areas to explore and challenges to face. Simple as that. A given dungeon might be a series of subterranean rooms and hallways, but it could also be a sprawling palace in the clouds, an abandoned city in the heart of an ancient forest, or anything else befitting the game world.

Dungeons can, and should, possess all manner of unique features and details to make them feel completely different from one to the next. However, there are some common elements of every dungeon:

- ***Dangerous.*** Dungeons are filled with secret knowledge and lost treasures—which also means that they are filled with protective guardians and all manner of traps to strongly discourage intruders.
- ***Full of Secrets.*** Dungeons aren't created on a whim. They exist for a reason—even if that reason has been lost to time. A great deal of the fun of dungeoneering comes from uncovering the mysteries of what a dungeon was intended to hide, protect, or imprison.
- ***Isolated.*** Whatever creatures or entire communities thrive within a dungeon, it remains isolated for a reason. Something about it makes it inhospitable to the outside world, whether that's due to its remote location, extreme environmental conditions, wandering monsters, dark magic, or any number of other reasons.
- ***Self-Contained.*** The dungeon is distinctly separate from its surroundings, such as by physical terrain, constructed walls, or magical barriers. As such, it is also able to support the needs of whatever creatures exist there—though adding even just a party of adventurers to the balance might affect that.

ELEMENTS OF EXPLORATION

In most roleplaying games, it's easy to identify what constitutes either a combat encounter or social encounter—since rules around fighting are typically well defined and in-character discussions are often a part of every single game session. However, the third pillar of the game, exploration, defies tidy definitions and often gets overlooked. Truly though, exploration is the unsung powerhouse of the game. Learning to build and harness the fun of exploration encounters is a great storytelling skill to nurture.

INTERACTING WITH ENVIRONMENT

Exploration is a unique element of the game because it focuses on interactions with the environment, with the terrain and structures and objects occupying the game world. Combat and social encounters, by their natures, are all about interactions with other creatures, whether that be dastardly villains, scary monsters, or helpful NPCs. So in many ways, this allows for exploration encounters to be conceived with a much grander scope. After all, they include the entire rest of the world—everything but the creatures.

Exploration provides a hands-on way to learn about the game world and to experience an adventure. By confronting natural phenomena, touring settlements, and discovering fantastical details firsthand, players better understand what makes each location distinct from the next, and they are better able to immerse themselves within the story.

NOT JUST DESCRIPTION

Simply inventing and describing fantastical locations does not constitute true engagement with the exploration pillar of the game. For meaningful interaction, there have to be rules associated with it. Describing mushroom-lit caves is not exploration—but using checks to navigate that cave system is.

To be meaningful, exploration encounters must have stakes similar to those presented in combat or social encounters. So when designing satisfying exploration encounters, consider incorporating some of the game mechanics contained within this book (and within the *Player's Guide* and *Game Master's Guide*) to make it that much more exciting, such as traveling and difficult terrain, mounts and vehicles, travel between planes, curses, diseases, hazards, and traps, and puzzles and skill challenges, to name a few.

And when in doubt, a good dungeon crawl is always a fantastic way to insert exploration into adventures—interspersed, to one's taste, with the requisite combat and social encounters.







1: DUNGEONEERING HEROES

Negotiations break down between dungeoneers and an invading goblin tribe.

First things first, let's talk about your player character. This chapter provides guidance for creating and equipping PCs suited to delving into the deepest dungeons or exploring the ruins of civilizations lost to time. New subclasses, heritages, backgrounds, talents, adventuring gear, mounts, vehicles, magic items, and spells are presented.

Talents and spells marked with an asterisk (*) appear in this book.

SUBCLASSES

Some classes have a specialization better adapted to the rigors of subterranean adventure, more suited to exploring dungeons and ruins. A new subclass is presented for the barbarian, bard, mechanist, monk, ranger, and wizard.

BARBARIAN SUBCLASS: MYCELIAL

Barbarians who walk the Mycelial path deliberately infest themselves with fungal spores, cultivating a fungal membrane, a second fungal skin that grows over their own, letting the mycelium penetrate throughout their bodies. Some barbarians choose to keep the presence of their second skin secret, keeping any

visible signs beneath clothing, while others cultivate artistic patterns that resemble tattoos that they display proudly. As a Mycelial barbarian grows in power, their fungal membrane becomes more pronounced and prominent. Veteran Mycelial barbarians are entirely crusted over with fungal growths.

When a Mycelial barbarian enters a rage, their fungal membrane releases spores that remain active for the duration. These spores power some of their abilities but become quiescent when the barbarian isn't in rage.

Certain sects of Mycelial barbarians revere mycolid culture and go on pilgrimages to mycolid settlements hoping to gain a better understanding of the fungi they are in symbiosis with. Savvy mycolids take advantage of this reverence, often setting tasks for the barbarian that help the mycolid collective.

MYCELIAL PROGRESSION

Barbarian Level	Features
3rd	Spore Aura
7th	Devour Death
11th	Empowered Spore Aura
15th	Fungal Rebuke

SPORE AURA

3rd-Level Mycelial Feature

While raging, the fungus on your skin releases an invisible cloud of spores that extends 10 feet from you in every direction, but not through total cover. This aura has an effect, based on the type of spores you emit, that activates when you begin raging, and you can activate the effect again on each of your turns as a bonus action. When you enter your rage, choose one of the following spores to emit for the duration of the rage:

Bolstering Spores. One friendly creature you can see within the aura has advantage on the next attack roll it makes before the start of your next turn. Each time you activate this feature, you can choose a different creature.

Phrenic Spores. One creature you can see within the aura has disadvantage on the next attack roll it makes against you before the start of your next turn, and you have advantage on the next save you make against its spells and other effects before the start of your next turn. Each time you activate this effect, you can choose a different creature.

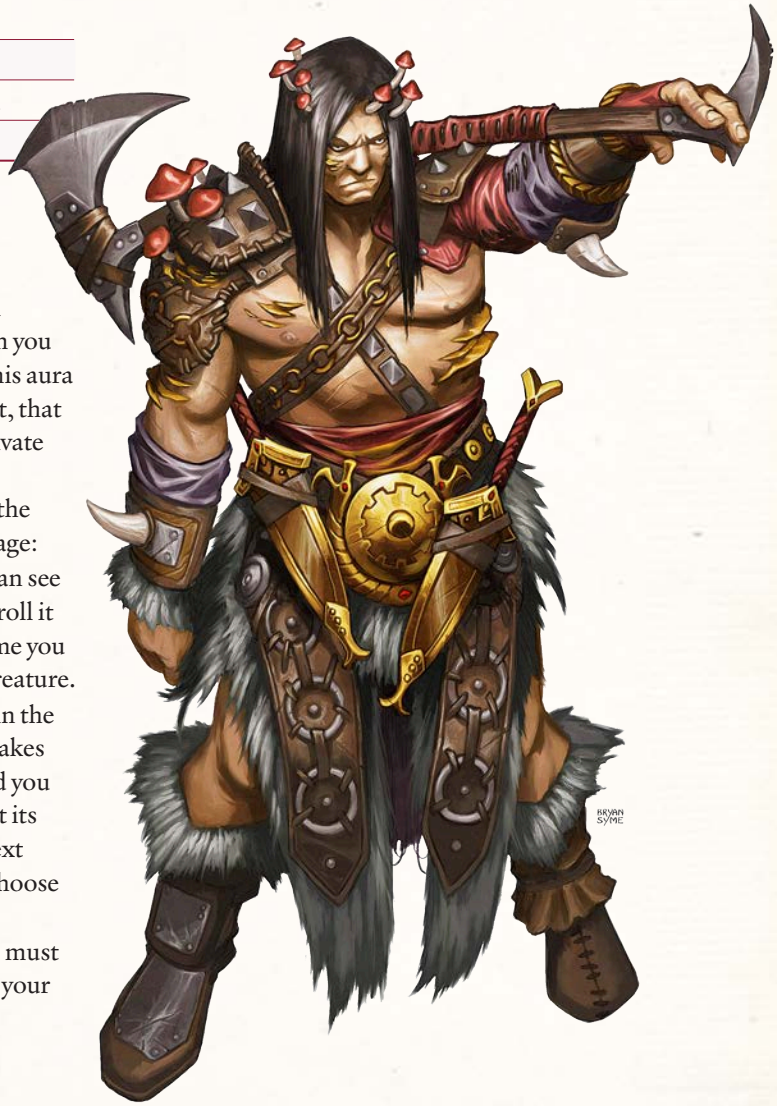
Necrotic Spores. Each creature within the aura must succeed on a CON save (DC equals 8 + your PB + your CON modifier) or take necrotic damage equal to your PB.

DEVOUR DEATH

7th-Level Mycelial Feature

Your fungal membrane makes you resistant to necrotic damage and allows you to gain some vitality from death around you. If you start your turn with 0 HP and you are within 10 feet of a creature that died no less than 1 hour ago, you have advantage on any death saves you make. If you are at 0 HP and become stable while within 10 feet of such a creature, you also regain HP equal to your PB, as your fungal membrane absorbs nutrients from that creature's corpse. If you regain HP in this way, that creature is no longer a valid target for this feature.

In addition, if you expend one or more hit dice during a short rest to regain hit points, and you are within 10 feet of a creature that died no less than 1 hour ago when you do so, you regain additional hit points equal to your PB.



EMPOWERED SPORE AURA

11th-Level Mycelial Feature

The cloud of spores you emit becomes more potent. The effect of this potency changes depending on the type of spores you are emitting.

Bolstering and Phrenic Spores. When you emit bolstering or phrenic spores, you can now choose a number of creatures up to your PB, and those creatures can be within 30 feet of you rather than within 10 feet of you.

Necrotic Spores. While you are emitting necrotic spores, you can choose for your melee weapon attacks to deal necrotic damage instead of their normal damage. In addition, when a creature in this aura is reduced to 0 HP, you gain temporary hit points equal to your PB. If necrotic damage reduced the creature to 0 HP, you gain temporary hit points equal to double your PB instead. These temporary HP last until expended or until you finish a short or long rest.

FUNGAL REBUKE

15th-Level Mycelial Feature

Your fungal spores can react to mortal danger. When a creature hits or misses you with an attack while within 10 feet of you, you can use your reaction to deal necrotic damage equal to half your barbarian level to that creature.

BARD SUBCLASS: ELEGY

Bards who align with the college of Elegy seek to discover and chronicle the lives and histories of the dead. They form a direct spiritual connection to the realms of the dead and can call on spirits and other passed souls. When not interacting with a spiritual presence, they search for the stories of those long lost and forgotten. When they find such stories they treasure and protect them, so that such histories are never forgotten. In addition to learning these stories, they share them with members of their order and others so that their death does not consign those stories to the past once more.

ELEGY PROGRESSION

Bard Level	Features
3rd	Bardic Performance: Channel Spirits, Student of History, Witness for the Dead
7th	Power from the Grave
11th	Inspired Improvisation
15th	Spiritual Protection



BARDIC PERFORMANCE

3rd-Level Elegy Feature

You gain the following Bardic Performance option.

Bardic Performance: Channel Spirits

You put on a performance dedicated to reaching across the veil into the realms where spirits reside, weaving word and song to draw them through and power your performance. Enemy creatures within Bardic Performance range must make a WIS save vs your spell save DC. On a failure, a creature is frightened until the start of your next turn.

STUDENT OF HISTORY

3rd-Level Elegy Feature

The stories of the dead are the stories of the past. You gain proficiency in the History skill if you don't already have it and learn two languages of your choice.

WITNESS FOR THE DEAD

3rd-Level Elegy Feature

You know the *speak with dead* ritual. It counts as an Arcane spell for you and doesn't count against the number of rituals you know.

POWER FROM THE GRAVE

7th-Level Elegy Feature

Even apart from a specific spirit, you can call on the dead to empower your attacks. You can use a bonus action to deal extra necrotic damage equal to your CHA modifier when you hit a creature with a melee weapon attack. This effect lasts for 1 minute or until you dismiss it (no action required). You can use this feature a number of times equal to your CHA modifier and regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

INSPIRED IMPROVISATION

11th-Level Elegy Feature

You can draw on the knowledge of the spirits of the dead. As a bonus action, choose one skill that you aren't proficient with and one language you don't know. You gain proficiency in the chosen skill and know the language for 1 hour. In addition, the first ability check you make with the chosen skill is made with advantage. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your PB and regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

SPIRITUAL PROTECTION

15th-Level Elegy Feature

When you must make a save and have at least one use of your Bardic Inspiration feature available, you can use it to roll a Bardic Inspiration die and add the number rolled to your save. If you succeed on the save, you get to keep the Bardic Inspiration die, but if you fail the save, the die is expended.

MECHANIST SUBCLASS: DEMOLITIONIST

Mechanists who pursue the Demolitionist's craft use their knowledge to destroy, dismantle, and disrupt the functioning of items and objects around them. To protect those in the range of their work, demolitionists are also experts at using both technological and magical shielding to control the spread of damage and limit unintended harm.

DEMOLITIONIST PROGRESSION

Mechanist Level	Features
3rd	Augment: Unmake, Shard of Destruction
7th	Disruptive Force
11th	Greater Destruction, Catastrophic Force
15th	Total Destruction, Unseen Augment

AUGMENT

3rd-Level Demolitionist Feature

You gain the following unique effect for your Augment feature. This effect can't be replaced and doesn't count against the number of effects that you know, as shown in the Augment Effects Known column of the **Mechanist Progression** table.



Augment: Unmake

Item Requirement: Large or Smaller Item that Isn't Being Worn or Held

You imbue an item with the ability to break down into its component pieces in one of several ways. While you touch the item, you can use an action to set or change the item's trigger and unmaking effect.

When the item is within 60 feet, you can use a reaction to trigger its unmaking effect. You can also set the item to trigger when a creature you specify comes within 30 feet of it, at a specific time, or when a specific environmental condition is met. Your GM has final say on what is reasonable for a trigger.

The item can react in one of the following ways. At your GM's discretion, an item might be able to react in other comparable ways.

Break Down. The item separates into its base components. You may designate one of these components as the key material in the item; this material instantly teleports into your hand with no action required if you are within 60 feet of the item.

Disintegrate. The item crumbles into fine dust. The area in a 10-foot cube surrounding the object is lightly obscured by the dust for 1 round.

Explode. The item explodes into pieces. Any creature within a 10-foot radius of the item must succeed on a DC 12 DEX save or take 2d4 bludgeoning damage.

SHARD OF DESTRUCTION

3rd-Level Demolitionist Feature

Your shard of creation gains two additional properties.

Demolish

While touching the shard to a nonmagical object of Medium size or smaller that isn't being worn or held, you can use an action and expend one charge from the shard to permanently destroy that item. If there are no witnesses, a slight residue in the aftermath of the destruction gives those in the area a sense that something is missing, and a successful INT (Investigation) check reveals what it was (GM's discretion): DC equals your augment save DC (see **Augment Effects** for the mechanist class in the *Player's Guide*).

Depower

When touching the shard to a magic item with charges, as an action, you can remove 1d4 charges from the item. If the item loses its final charge because of Depower, it isn't destroyed.

DISRUPTIVE FORCE

7th-Level Demolitionist Feature

Your commitment to the demolitionist's craft grants you the ability to temporarily disrupt the functionality of an item used by another. Choose one of the following abilities:

- **Drain.** As an action, you can make a melee spell attack using your augment attack modifier (see **Augment Effects** for the mechanist class in the *Player's Guide*) against a magic item within reach. On a successful hit, the item loses all functionality until the start of your next turn. In addition, any creature within 10 feet of the item must make a DEX save against your augment save DC, and on a failure, that creature can't cast magic until the start of your next turn, as if under the effects of an *antimagic field* spell.
- **Glitch.** As an action, you can make a melee attack using your augment attack modifier (see **Augment Effects** for the mechanist class in the *Player's Guide*) against a mechanical item within reach. On a successful hit, the item loses all functionality until the start of your next turn. In addition, any creature within 10 feet of the item must make a DEX save against your augment save DC, and on a failure, that creature is stunned until the start of their next turn.

GREATER DESTRUCTION

11th-Level Demolitionist Feature

Your growing insight into the nature of demolition gives you greater control over your Shard of Destruction feature. You receive the following enhancements to its given properties.

Demolish

You can now use the shard to destroy any Large or smaller nonmagical object, including objects being held or worn.

Depower

You can now use the shard to remove 1d6 charges from a charged item (instead of 1d4).





CATASTROPHIC FORCE

11th-Level Demolitionist Feature

Your commitment to the demolitionist's craft allows you greater control over your Disruptive Force ability. You may either choose the Disruptive Force ability that you do not yet possess at its original level or augment your chosen ability as follows:

- **Drain.** On a successful hit, the affected item loses functionality for 1d4+1 rounds. Any creature that fails its DEX save can't cast magic as long as it is within 10 feet of the nonfunctioning item.
- **Glitch.** On a successful hit, the affected item loses functionality for 1d4+1 rounds. A creature that fails its DEX save is knocked prone in addition to begin stunned.

TOTAL DESTRUCTION

15th-Level Demolitionist Feature

Your growing insight into the nature of demolition gives you greater control over the Shard of Destruction feature. You receive the following enhancements to its given properties.

Demolish

You can now use the shard to destroy any Huge or smaller nonmagical item, including walls, structures, and vehicles.

Depower

You can now use the shard to remove 1d8 charges from a charged item (instead of 1d6).

UNSEEN AUGMENT

15th-Level Demolitionist Feature

You can now use your Ranged Augment feature on items you can't see, as long as they are within 120 feet of you and you are aware of their general position or location.

MONK SUBCLASS: PSYCHIC ECHOES

Monks who follow this way develop the ability to read the psychic imprints on items, even if they were last touched by a living creature decades or even centuries ago. These imprints, essentially echoes of the item's past, can inform a practitioner of how an item was used, who used it, and when. These monks begin with vague feelings and suspicions, but as their abilities grow, they see into the past through these psychic echoes.

Psychic Echoes monks primarily read the impressions on unattended items or inanimate forms, but also train to read items held or worn by other creatures, or even the dirt and detritus that cling to creatures without gear. This allows them to detect weaknesses in their enemy's armor or forms, striking at weak points. These monks typically avoid handling weapons (their own or others') outside of combat because of the echoes of violence and death that cling to them. They often make gifts of weapons they have used, opting for newly made weapons to avoid such dark echoes.

PSYCHIC ECHOES PROGRESSION

Monk Level	Features
3rd	Read Echoes, Sense Secret
7th	Read Foe
11th	Item Communion
15th	Exploit Weakness

READ ECHOES

3rd-Level Psychic Echoes Feature

You can use an action to read the psychic echoes of an item by touching the object with your bare skin. You learn one piece of information about the item such as who created it, what it is used for, who used it last, or when it was last used or touched by a living creature. If you spend a minimum of 1 minute touching the item, you learn two more pieces of information about it, and you have advantage on INT checks related to it.

In addition, you can expend 1 technique point to cast the *identify* ritual, without the need for components.

SENSE SECRET

3rd-Level Psychic Echoes Feature

Your ability to read items helps you detect hidden passages, traps, and secret doors. When you touch the surface of a structure, such as a wall or floor, you have advantage on checks to notice or detect hidden passages, secret doors, and traps connected to that

surface and within 30 feet of where you are touching the surface. If you detect a trap in this way, you have advantage on any checks made to disable or disarm it and on saves to avoid or mitigate its effects.

At the GM's discretion, you can detect traps not connected to the surface you are touching if the surface's memories hold other evidence of the trap's presence, such as an ancient memory of an exploding trap blowing a victim against a wall you are touching.

READ FOE

7th-Level Psychic Echoes Feature

A creature's equipment or even the detritus that clings to it can reveal secrets about the creature to your fine-tuned senses. When you hit a creature with an unarmed strike, you can expend 3 technique points to give yourself advantage on attack rolls against that creature for 1 minute.

ITEM COMMUNION

11th-Level Psychic Echoes Feature

Your ability to read items elevates to an almost spiritual connection with any item you touch. When using your Read Echoes feature and touching an item for at least 1 minute, you can learn a number of facts about its properties and history equal to up to twice your PB. Also, your unarmed strikes against the item treat its damage threshold as 10 lower (to a minimum of 0) than it actually is.

In addition, attuning to a magic item takes you only 1 minute instead of 1 hour, and if an item has charges, its maximum number of charges increases by an amount equal to half your PB while you are attuned to it.

EXPLOIT WEAKNESS

15th-Level Psychic Echoes Feature

When you hit a creature already affected by your Read Foe feature with an unarmed strike, you can expend 4 technique points to deal an extra 8d8 force damage to the target.



RANGER SUBCLASS: SPELUNKER

While rangers are known for exploring and traversing the natural world, it takes a certain kind of individual to focus on the dark, underground, cramped places of the world. Spelunkers excel at navigating caves, caverns, tunnels, dungeons, and any similar environments. To such rangers, the smell of minerals and fungi, the sound of water dripping, the gleam of a luminescent crystal formation, and even the scraping of stone against one's body are all reassuring sensations.

SPELUNKER PROGRESSION

Ranger Level	Features
3rd	Friend of Darkness, Shadowy Ambush, Spelunker Calling Spells,
7th	Cave Crawler
11th	Friend of Darkness
15th	Subterranean Master

FRIEND OF DARKNESS

3rd-Level Spelunker Feature

You gain darkvision out to a range of 60 feet. If you already have darkvision from your lineage, its range increases by 30 feet.

In addition, when viewing a lightly obscured area, as a bonus action you can tune your senses to ignore the normal disadvantage on WIS (Perception) checks that rely on sight for 10 minutes. Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

SHADOWY AMBUSH

3rd-Level Spelunker Feature

You use the shadows to ambush your foes. When you attack from dim light, darkness, or magical darkness and hit a creature with a weapon attack, you deal extra damage. The extra damage is equal to the amount your Mystic Mark feature deals at your level and is of the same damage type as the weapon. You can deal this extra damage only once per turn.

SPELUNKER CALLING SPELLS

3rd-Level Spelunker Feature

You gain calling spells at the ranger levels listed in the **Spelunker Calling Spells** table. See the Ranger Subclass class feature for how these spells work.

SPELUNKER CALLING SPELLS

Ranger Level	Spells
3rd	*feather fall*
5th	*darkvision*
9th	*water breathing*
13th	*freedom of movement*
17th	*passwall*

CAVE CRAWLER

7th-Level Spelunker Feature

You are adept at moving through subterranean spaces, no matter the terrain. As a bonus action, you can choose one of the following options for 1 hour:

- You gain a climb speed equal to your base movement speed. If you already have a climb speed, it increases by 15 feet.
- You gain a swim speed equal to your base movement speed. If you already have a swim speed, it increases by 15 feet.
- Your jump distance is doubled.
- You take half the usual damage from falling.



You can do this a number of times equal to your PB, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. The abilities granted by multiple uses of this feature can overlap, so for example, you could have both a climb speed and reduced damage from falling for whatever time remains on the first one activated.

In addition, you suffer no penalties for squeezing into a smaller space.

FRIEND OF DARKNESS

11th-Level Spelunker Feature

Your time in the dark lets you energize yourself when hidden in shadows. When you use your Stalker's Step feature, you gain temporary hit points equal to your PB.

SUBTERRANEAN MASTER

15th-Level Spelunker Feature

Your skill at navigating subterranean spaces grants you the following benefits:

- The range of your Keensense class feature increases to 20 feet.
- You have learned to make quick adjustments in perilous situations. Once per turn, when you miss with a weapon attack, you can immediately reroll and use the results of the new roll. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your PB, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

WIZARD SUBCLASS: RECLAIMER

Wizards in the Reclaimer tradition devote themselves to seeking out and recovering lost and forgotten magical knowledge, whether that be in the form of items, spells, or other applications. This devotion often drives wizards from this tradition to explore ancient ruins and delve into dangerous dungeons in search of such magical knowledge. Many see the risk as justified if they find a new form of magic.

RECLAMATION PROGRESSION

Wizard Level	Features
3rd	Expanded Talent List, Habituated Arcana, Magic Acumen
7th	Countermanding Incantation
11th	Expansive Attunement
15th	Magic Item Paroxysm

EXPANDED TALENT LIST

3rd-Level Reclaimer Feature

When you gain a new talent, you can select it from either the magic or the technical talents list (see **Talents** in *Player's Guide*).

HABITUATED ARCANA

3rd-Level Reclaimer Feature

You've studied obscure magical lore closely enough that it comes to you unbidden. You gain proficiency in the Arcana skill. If you are already proficient, double your PB instead for Arcana checks. In addition, you learn the *identify* ritual, and it doesn't count against your number of ritual spells known.

MAGIC ACUMEN

3rd-Level Reclaimer Feature

Your Magic Sense class feature is sharpened to danger. When you use your Magic Sense feature and sense a magic trap, a magic item, or an area inflicted with a curse, you have advantage on saves against it and on checks to disarm, suppress, or otherwise avoid or circumvent its effects.

In addition, Magic Sense now lasts up to 1 minute when you use it, instead of until the end of your next turn.

COUNTERMANDING INCANTATION

7th-Level Reclaimer Feature

Your exposure to ancient, sometimes malfunctioning magic has taught you how to unweave it. When you cast the *dispel magic* spell, you can add your PB to the check.

In addition, when you see a spell or other magical effect, you can use a reaction to ward yourself against its effects. You have advantage on saves against that spell or magical effect for 10 minutes. You can do this a number of times equal to your PB and regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.





EXPANSIVE ATTUNEMENT

11th-Level Reclaimer Feature

Your mission to reclaim lost magical knowledge extends to magic items. Attuning to an item takes you only 1 minute instead of 1 hour. At the end of each long rest, you can choose an item that requires attunement. You become attuned to that item, but it doesn't count against the total number of items you can attune to. You are proficient with that item if it is a tool or a weapon. This special attunement lasts until the end of your next long rest.

MAGIC ITEM PAROXYSM

15th-Level Reclaimer Feature

In a pinch, you can use an action to detonate the power within a magic item, destroying the item and causing a magical explosion around it. To detonate a magic item, you must be touching it if you aren't attuned to it, or within 30 feet of it if you are.

If another creature is attuned to the magic item, that creature can make a WIS save against your spell save DC to prevent the detonation. The size and damage of the explosion varies based on its rarity (see the Item Paroxysm Effects table). Each creature in the radius must make a DEX save against your spell save DC, taking the full damage on a failure, or half the damage on a success. You have advantage on the save if you are within the radius. Once you detonate a magic item, you must finish a long rest before you can do so again.

You can't detonate artifacts or fabled magic items, and attempting to detonate a sentient magic item immediately causes conflict (see Sentient Magic Items in Game Master's Guide). If the sentient magic item wins the conflict contest, it doesn't detonate, and you might suffer other effects of the item's displeasure (such as those noted in the Game Master's Guide), at the GM's discretion.

ITEM PAROXYSM EFFECTS

Rarity	Force Damage	Radius
Common	4d6	20 ft.
Uncommon	6d6	30 ft.
Rare	8d6	40 ft.
Very Rare	10d6	60 ft.
Legendary	14d6	120 ft.

HERITAGES

This section contains descriptions of the heritage options available to PCs. If you're not sure what to choose, or if you want something that reflects common fantasy archetypes, choose a recommended heritage listed on the **Common Heritages by Lineage** table. For instance, if you want to play a dwarf from a dwarven society, select a heritage option listed next to the dwarf entry.

However, you can choose any heritage, regardless of lineage. For example, if your PC has one human parent and one elven parent, you could choose the human lineage to represent your dominant hereditary traits and a common elven heritage to represent being raised in a predominantly elven society.

COMMON HERITAGES BY LINEAGE

Lineage	Recommended Heritages
Any	Smoke
Any	Unmoored
Dwarf	Pathways Clan
Elf, Orc	Ashlayer
Gnome, Kobold	Wallbreaker

ASHLAYER HERITAGE

Ashlayer heritage characters were raised with the values and traditions of ashlayer communities, which are built on the ruins of lost civilizations and tap into the power of lost artifacts.

Ashlayer communities make their homes on and within fallen kingdoms, lost cities, and buried sanctuaries. Scavengers more than preservationists, ashlayers seek the power contained in each place, demolishing portions of ruins to gain access to their secrets and artifacts. While they are often hated by those who see them as a force of destruction, they view themselves as a necessary clearing away of the past to make room for the future.

Ashlayer communities are accustomed to danger. They defend their homes against the incursions of those who seek their found power, while avoiding falling prey to the protections that the relics themselves often come with. Of course, the monsters that inhabit these areas are as much a threat to the ashlayers as the adventurers who stumble across them. Quick to explore hidden areas and use the artifacts around them even when they barely understand them, ashlayers who aren't careful can be easily lost to ancient traps, crumbling ruins, and the power of items they have yet to identify.

Arcane Wisdom. You have proficiency in either the Arcana or History skill. When you make a check to locate, identify, or recall lore about a magical artifact, add your PB to the roll. If you already have proficiency in the skill being used, double your PB for the check.

Careful Exploration. While in a ruin or other abandoned location, you have advantage on all checks to disarm traps, open doors, and overcome hazards, even if you aren't proficient with the tools to do so.

Languages. You know Common and one additional language of your choice. Typical ashlayer heritage characters choose Elvish or Orcish.

PATHWAYS CLAN HERITAGE

Pathways heritage characters were raised with the values and traditions of the intermittently nomadic pathways clans.

The locations of the ancient dwarven cities were not chosen by accident; each was scouted, marked, and briefly settled by the pathways clans, who continually move through the underground passageways created during the making of the world, mapping them so that other clans know where it is safe to venture and build.

Pathways clans face many dangers in their quest to understand what is to be found beneath the surface of the world. In addition to the creatures who lurk in the hidden caverns and corners they travel, pathways clan members must watch for the hazards created by the narrow passageways they travel, from lack of air to poisonous plants to cave collapse.

Members of the pathways clans treat it as a calling to take on these risks and accept death while tracing the path as a near-inevitability, making little distinction in honor or purpose between those who still carry a path forward and those who fell along the way. If asked, they can usually recount every single member of the clan who helped to trace or build a pathway, even if that work took place generations ago.

Subterranean Navigation. While underground, you treat areas of dim light as if they were brightly lit, with no penalty to Perception, and can squeeze into small spaces with no disadvantage to attack rolls or DEX saves.

Underground Speed. While underground, your walking speed increases by 10 feet in normal terrain and is unaffected by difficult terrain, including difficult terrain caused by hazards, traps, or magical effects. You also gain a burrowing speed equal to half your walking speed.

Languages. You know Common and one additional language of your choice. Typical pathways heritage characters choose Dwarvish.

SMOKE HERITAGE

Smoke heritage characters were raised with the values and traditions of the hidden Underworld trading communities known as smoke cities, where deals and secrets are a form of currency.

Typically run by traders who have amassed enough illicit wealth and connections to set up their own little fiefdoms, smoke cities are difficult to find, hidden from anyone who isn't there to do business. Most voluntarily disband and scatter if their location becomes well-known. The traders who run them are not warriors. They would generally rather rebuild in a new location than waste resources fighting an outside threat.





Smoke cities are highly transactional by nature, with deals and contracts used for nearly every aspect of daily life. Those who thrive within them consider all deception to be fair play as long as it does not break a contract clause or a thrice-made promise. Speaking carefully to avoid lying while retaining the upper hand is standard practice. The acquisition and trade of secrets about everything from personal loyalties to new sources for goods is considered both a necessity of business and a form of self-expression.

No Secrets Between Us. You have advantage on WIS (Insight) checks to determine whether someone is lying. If you succeed on a check against deception, you may make a second check at a DC 5 higher than the original check in order to learn what is being hidden from you. On a second success, you glean the truth without it having to be said.

Silver-Tongued. You have proficiency in the Deception skill. When you make a CHA (Deception) check during a sale, deal, or other transaction, add your PB to the roll. If you already have proficiency in this skill, double your PB for the check.

Languages. You know Common and one additional language of your choice. Typical smoke heritage characters choose Undercommon.

UNMOORED HERITAGE

Unmoored heritage characters were raised in an isolated community that is separated from the rest of society by an external danger, magical force, or unfortunate event.

Unmoored communities can grow out of adventuring parties that suffered an emergency that cut them off from much of the rest of the world or small societies cast away by a planar disruption. Whether they are doomed to never leave a magically-cursed village, stranded on an island in an ocean, or trapped within the ruins of a lost civilization, these communities rose to an impossible challenge, finding resilience and a sense of purpose as they moved from surviving the ordeal to thriving as a group.

Within an unmoored community, connection to life before the community was separated from the world is deeply prized, whether this connection is maintained through detailed records, oral storytelling, or a religious tradition. But while the lessons of the past are important, adaptability in the present is what helps an unmoored community survive long enough to one day rejoin the world around them.

Always Learning. During a long rest, you can pick a single skill that you aren't proficient with and spend 1 hour training in it. When you make checks using that skill, you can add your PB to the roll.

Stronger Together. When you are within 10 feet of an ally, you can't be surprised.

Languages. You know Common and one additional language of your choice, typically a variant of the language dominant in your group before they became trapped and isolated.

WALLBREAKER HERITAGE

Wallbreaker characters were raised with the values and traditions of the wallbreaker tinkering communities. These small, insular family-style communities construct dungeons and then test their durability by throwing destructive parties in them.

Wallbreaker communities care about their work more than anything else. They are willing to build or repair dungeons for anyone, no matter the intent. All that matters to wallbreakers is that the request is new and interesting, their methods aren't questioned, and whoever hires them has a large enough budget.

In creating these places, wallbreakers stretch the limits of both the physical and arcane to build new marvels from a combination of illusions, mechanical components, and natural elements. Once they finish with construction or repairs, wallbreakers try everything in their power to destroy their own work by hosting a lengthy celebration designed to put the location through its paces. If the dungeon survives, the wallbreakers spend the next few years converting its wonders into sturdy dungeon defenses. If it does not, they abandon it and consider it to be cursed forever.

Novel Approach. After failing an ability check, you have advantage on the next ability check that you attempt while addressing the same problem or situation, but only if you use a different skill or tool on the subsequent attempt.

The Right Tool. Once per long rest, you can select a tool that you possess as your primary tool. You have proficiency with that tool until your next long rest. If you choose the same tool with this feature for 30 straight days, you can regain proficiency with the tool after a short rest instead of a long rest.

Languages. You know Common and one additional language of your choice. Typical wallbreaker heritage characters choose Draconic or Gnomish.

BACKGROUNDS

Your background helps define your PC's personal history before becoming an adventurer. It gives you access to additional proficiencies, talents, equipment, or languages.

ARCHAEOLOGIST

Before you began adventuring, you sought wisdom in the ruins that the past left for you to find. You learn more about ancient cultures and abandoned sites by exploring their remnants firsthand.

Perhaps you were an educator in search of artifacts that would unlock new knowledge, a fortune hunter who used your work to find treasures that would make you rich, an artisan who wished to improve your craft by learning age-old techniques, or a solitary wanderer more at home with the ghosts of the past than the places of the present. Whatever drove your passion for this work, you rely on your ability to survive and your knack for piecing together knowledge from fragments of information to propel your path forward.

Skill Proficiencies: History and choose one from Arcana, Athletics, Investigation, or Survival.

Additional Proficiencies: Learn one additional language of your choice and gain proficiency with one tool of your choice.

Equipment: A backpack, a book of artifacts and writing implement of your choice, a lamp, a shovel, a magnifying glass, 10 sheets of parchment, 10 days of rations, and 50 feet of rope.

TALENT

As an archaeologist, you thrived in remote locations, puzzling out the nature of objects long removed from their use. Choose a talent from the following list to represent this experience: Artifact Expertise*, Dungeoneer, or Scrutinous.

ADVENTURING MOTIVATION

While archaeologists and adventurers have much in common, many who choose the former path prefer to work alone, making discoveries at their own pace and for their own purpose. When you begin your adventures, consider why you left this lifestyle behind for one of exploration and camaraderie.

CARTOGRAPHER

You traveled far and wide with a singular purpose: documenting the landscapes and locations of the world so that others could safely follow in your footsteps.

Perhaps you were a war strategist whose maps informed the military movements of your nation, a storyteller whose maps were accompanied by tales of everyday life, an artist who earned more as a mapmaker

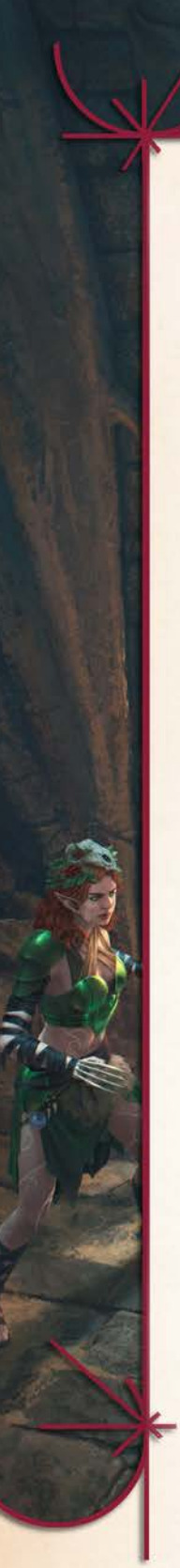


ADVENTURING MOTIVATION (ARCHAEOLOGIST)

d8	Adventuring Motivation
1	Adventuring allows me to make practical use of the knowledge I've learned in my research.
2	Adventuring gives me a more well-rounded understanding of the world that I can take back to my research.
3	Adventuring helps me find new hidden places that I can explore in the future.
4	Adventuring helps to fund my next expedition.
5	Adventuring is atonement for a mistake I made that forever destroyed a historic site.
6	Adventuring is the only way to stay ahead of the work of a long-time rival with unlimited resources.
7	Adventuring means that I always have someone watching my back in case I run into danger.
8	I stole a powerful artifact from one of my sites. Adventuring keeps the consequences of that decision behind me.

ADVENTURING MOTIVATION (CARTOGRAPHER)

d8	Adventuring Motivation
1	Adventuring gives me a chance to get closer to dangerous places on the map I might not otherwise be able to document.
2	Adventuring lets me be part of the changes happening in the world instead of simply observing them.
3	Adventuring pays better than cartography ever could.
4	An error I made on a map caused great harm to an innocent; I hope that adventuring allows me to atone.
5	I am becoming less talented as a cartographer as I age; adventuring is a new opportunity to see the world.
6	I mapped everything I ever wanted to; adventuring is a new challenge.
7	My approach to cartography requires on-the-ground knowledge that an adventurer's life provides.
8	My life has been solitary. I want to travel the world again, but this time with companions.



than they ever could painting landscapes, or an academic who wished to fully document every aspect of the physical world. Regardless of your reasons, you were both adaptable and precise, able to survive your journeys off the beaten path and bring back a reliable record of the world around you.

Skill Proficiencies: Perception and choose one from Investigation, Nature, or Survival.

Additional Proficiencies: Gain proficiency with artist tools and navigator tools.

Equipment: Artist tools for your cartography style of choice, backpack, bedroll, map case, lamp, navigator tools, spyglass, a set of traveler's clothes, waterskin, and 10 days of rations.

TALENT

As a cartographer, you turn your observations of the world into a resource that others can use. Choose a talent from the following list to represent this experience: Eidetic Memory, Far Traveler, or Scrutinous.

ADVENTURING MOTIVATION

Cartographers generally focus on documenting the world around them rather than affecting it directly. When you begin your adventures, consider why you decided to adventure while you work on your craft (or instead of it).

RUIN WATCHER

For years, you watched over a fallen city, crumbling temple, ancient village, or other set of ruins. You dedicated your life to protecting it against those who would rob it, destroy it, or seek its power.

Perhaps you were the sole survivor of a tragedy that destroyed your home, one of a group of stalwarts who protected a single site for generations, a traveler who found a place that resonated with you, or an acolyte of a god or religion that viewed a particular place as a holy site. Whatever you chose to protect, you have a deep knowledge of the importance of the past and how to survive in the present.

ADVENTURING MOTIVATION (RUIN WATCHER)

d8	Adventuring Motivation
1	After nearly losing the place I was protecting to outside forces, I want adventuring to help me become a better guardian.
2	I believe the place I once guarded is hiding a secret that adventuring will give me the means to uncover.
3	I have the chance for vengeance on the forces that originally destroyed the place I guarded. I've chosen adventuring to get the resources I need.
4	I want to visit places like the one I guarded and learn from those who fill a similar role.
5	I was thrown out of the place I guarded by those I trusted. I've sworn to prove myself to regain my position.
6	I've gotten bored of guarding the same old places and want to adventure to new and exciting locations.
7	The place that I swore to protect has been lost to me. I hope adventuring gives me a new sense of purpose.
8	Years of guarding an isolated site made me feel lonely; I want the companionship of an adventuring party.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose two from Acrobatics, History, Religion, or Survival.

Additional Proficiencies: Gain proficiency with either construction or tinker tools and one additional tool of your choice.

Equipment: Basic hunting trap, bedroll, construction and/or tinker tools, lamp, 10 pitons, two-person tent, and 50 feet of rope.

TALENT

You know how to protect what is important to you. Choose a talent from the following list to represent this experience: Hard Target, Mental Fortitude, Stalwart*.

ADVENTURING MOTIVATION

Ruin wardens are usually tied to a specific location and have dedicated their lives to its protection. When you begin your adventures, determine what has made you leave this place for the adventuring life.

TRACKER

Sometimes people don't come home, and no one knows why. Did they die on their journeys? Settle down far abroad? Become stuck somewhere that they need rescue from? You've been the one to follow the trail and return with the truth, no matter how long or winding the path might be.

Perhaps you helped families gain closure by bringing home the final effects of their loved ones, worked as a bounty hunter for those avoiding the military of a local despot, collected overdue bills for a popular tavern or crime lord, or fed information to local town criers. Whatever made you a tracker, you developed the social and investigative skills to get leads on your target and the hardiness to survive long enough to find out what became of them.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose two from Investigation, Persuasion, Stealth, or Survival.



ADVENTURING MOTIVATION (TRACKER)

d8	Adventuring Motivation
1	Adventuring gives me a chance to have the types of experiences that I usually only learn about second-hand.
2	I know I can be a better adventurer than any of the ones I've had to track down and I'm ready to prove it.
3	I tracked down someone who was killed, and as a result, I must finish their final quest.
4	I've always wanted to be an adventurer, but only now have I raised the money needed to achieve that goal.
5	I've seen what can befall people who travel alone and want a party to adventure with.
6	There's evidence that someone is now tracking me; an adventure gives me an opportunity to get away.
7	There's one target I've never found; only adventuring takes me to the places needed to finally locate them.
8	While tracking a target, I discovered something that I want to use my adventures to investigate further.

Additional Proficiencies: Gain proficiency with navigator tools and a vehicle of your choice.

Equipment: A backpack, a bedroll, book of assorted local maps, navigator tools, a set of traveler's clothes, and a pouch containing 50 sp.

TALENT

You have substantial experience finding exactly who you're looking for. Choose a talent from the following list to represent this experience: Far Traveler, Quick, Scrutinous.

ADVENTURING MOTIVATION

Trackers focus on the adventures of others and follow in their footsteps. When you begin your adventures, consider what has made you stop your work pursuing others to take on the danger of adventuring for yourself.



TALENTS

Talents represent the specific ways your PC improves over the course of their adventures. Talents are divided into three categories: magic talents, martial talents, and technical talents. Your class typically determines which talent lists you have access to. Talents are gained in two main ways:

- When you choose a background during character creation, select one talent from a list of options provided in that background. You must still meet a talent's prerequisites.
- When a class grants an Improvement, you can choose to select a talent from the list specified by their class or subclass features—assuming you meet any necessary prerequisites.

These talents supplement the ones found in the *Player's Guide*.

MAGIC TALENTS

Most magic talents affect a character's spellcasting abilities, but they also include features that strengthen the mind and defend against harmful magic effects.

ARTIFACT EXPERTISE

Your experience with magical artifacts helps you quickly identify and use them. You gain the following benefits:

- You can identify a magic item by spending 1 minute with it instead of 1 hour.
- When you use a magic item with charges, you gain 2 additional charges.
- If a magic item you are using would be destroyed when it is depleted of charges, it remains intact instead.

PARTING SHOT

Prerequisite: Ability to Cast Cantrips, Access to 3rd-Circle Spell Slots

You have practiced quick spellcasting. You may do each of the following once per long rest:

- When you cast a spell from the 3rd circle or above, you may use a bonus action to cast a cantrip you know.
- When you cast a cantrip, you may use a bonus action to cast the same cantrip a second time.

In each case, the decision to use the talent must be made as the first spell is being cast and occurs regardless of the outcome of that spell.

SOURCE RESISTANCE

Prerequisite: Spellcasting Class Feature

Your study of a specific source of magic has given you some resistance to spells that draw from it. Choose one of the four sources of magic (Arcane, Divine, Primordial, or Wyrd) and gain the following benefits:

- When you are targeted by spells from your chosen source of magic, you have advantage on all saves.
- When you take damage from a spell or item using this source of magic, you can reroll the highest damage die, but must keep the new result.

You can select this talent twice, selecting a different source of magic each time.

MARTIAL TALENTS

Martial talents affect a character's combat abilities, including enhancements to overall fitness and the ability to wield weaponry.

SIDE BY SIDE

You gain strength from fighting alongside an ally. While within 5 feet of an ally, you gain these benefits:

- You can't be surprised.
- During combat, you gain temporary hit points equal to your PB that last for 1 minute, until expended, or until you end your turn more than 5 feet away from an ally. Once you have gained temporary hit points in this way, you can't do so again until you finish a short or long rest.
- If an ally within 5 feet of you can make an opportunity attack against a creature, you can also make an opportunity attack against that creature, even if it does not trigger an opportunity attack for you normally.

STALWART

Thanks to your training, once you set your feet, it's hard to move you. You can take an action to plant your feet, gaining the following benefits until you move to a new location (either voluntarily or through the actions of another):

- You have advantage on saves to avoid being shoved or grappled.
- When an attack or effect would push or pull you away from your current position, you can use a reaction to reduce the distance you are pushed or pulled by 10 feet.
- If an attack or effect would knock you prone, you can use a reaction to negate the effect, remaining upright. Once you have negated an attack or effect in this way, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

TECHNICAL TALENTS

Technical talents affect a character's noncombat abilities, granting utility-based improvements to social encounters, exploration, and object interactions.

BREAKER

You are adept at breaking down objects and structures. As an action, you can inspect an object or structure for weaknesses. Make a WIS (Perception) or INT (Investigation) check (your choice), using the object's AC as the DC for the check. On a success, you gain the following benefits against that object or structure for 1 hour:

- You gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls against the object or structure.
- You can add your PB to damage you deal to the object or structure.
- If the damage you deal to the object or structure is below its damage threshold, you can reroll the damage. You must take the new result. You can do this a number of times equal to your PB, regaining expended uses when you finish a short or long rest.

SKEPTIC

You question the world around you, making it difficult for others to deceive you. You gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on checks to discern something is an illusion, such as the image created by the *major image* spell or a creature disguised by the *disguise self* spell.
- You have advantage on checks to determine if a creature is attempting to mimic another, such as a green hag using its Mimicry trait to sound like an injured animal.
- If you fail a save against an effect that would charm you, you can reroll the save and must take the new result. Once you have rerolled such a save, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

EIDETIC MEMORY

You remember every place you've been, creature you've encountered, and object you've come across with absolute accuracy. You gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on INT checks to recall knowledge, and if you fail, once per short rest, you can reroll the check and take the new result.
- You have advantage on WIS (Perception) checks in any location you have previously visited.
- You have advantage on CHA (Persuasion) checks with any creature you've previously encountered unless it is hostile toward you.

INDEFATIGABLE

You have trained yourself to continue moving forward, even on little to no sleep. You gain the following benefits:

- Once each day, you can gain the benefits of a long rest during a short rest.
- When you take a long rest, you regain all expended hit dice instead of half of your maximum.

STRONG STOMACH

You have consumed enough poisons and intoxicants that you are aware of their presence, and they have a lessened effect on you. You gain the following benefits:

- When using a consumable of any type, you may take 1 minute to examine its contents for curse, disease, hazard, or poison. You detect the presence of any damaging effect caused by the consumable before consuming it and can identify any poison within it.
- You are resistant to poison damage.
- You are immune to the poisoned condition.

TUNNELER

You are skilled at moving through underground spaces. You gain the following benefits:

- You gain a burrowing speed equal to half of your walking speed.
- You move at normal speed across difficult terrain while underground.
- You treat dim light as bright light.
- The number of minutes you can hold your breath increases from 1 + CON modifier to 1d4 + CON modifier.

ADVENTURING GEAR

PCs have a wide range of mundane equipment they can use to make their dungeon exploration easier, even if they limit their shopping choices to the *Player's Guide*. The **Adventuring Gear** table lists additional gear that PCs might find for sale to assist during their subterranean journeys.



Air Bladder. You can fill this leather sack with air and reseal it to make it airtight. The bladder has a tube you can extend to breathe the air within it, providing 30 minutes of air to a Small or Medium creature. You can also use an air-filled bladder for flotation, and the bag typically has straps for this purpose. You don't need to take any action to remain afloat, but it is taxing. After 8 hours afloat, a creature must make CON checks to avoid suffering exhaustion, as the forced march rules in the *Player's Guide*.

Clockwork Badger. This copper clockwork device made for digging looks like a Small badger. It has 1 charge.

The clockwork badger has a burrowing speed of 10 feet and can be set to dig a furrow up to 5 feet deep in a 20-foot square, or a 5-foot-wide hole measuring 100 feet deep. The device has AC 12 and 33 HP. A creature can use the clockwork badger as an improvised weapon, dealing 1d6 slashing damage with its claws. A creature can rewind the key on the badger to recharge it during a short or long rest.

Clockwork Canary. This clockwork safety device is made to look like a feathered canary and includes functional wings. It is made to signal to miners if the air has gone foul. It can operate for 8 hours.

The clockwork canary has a flying speed of 30 feet. Its yellow color changes to orange and its chirping changes from high and upbeat to low and slow to indicate the presence of toxic or flammable fumes within 30 feet of it. The bird flies in a predictable pattern and can avoid obstacles, allowing others to follow it to safety. The clockwork canary also has a toggle to silence it. The device has AC 14 and 12 HP. After 8 hours, the clockwork canary falls silent and lands. A creature can rewind the key on the canary to recharge it for another 8 hours during a short or long rest.



Color-Changing Parchment. This alchemically treated paper blackens when exposed to poisonous or flammable gases and gradually lightens when the exposure ends. Devious owners of this parchment use it to send hidden messages by exposing the parchment to a gas that provokes its color change.

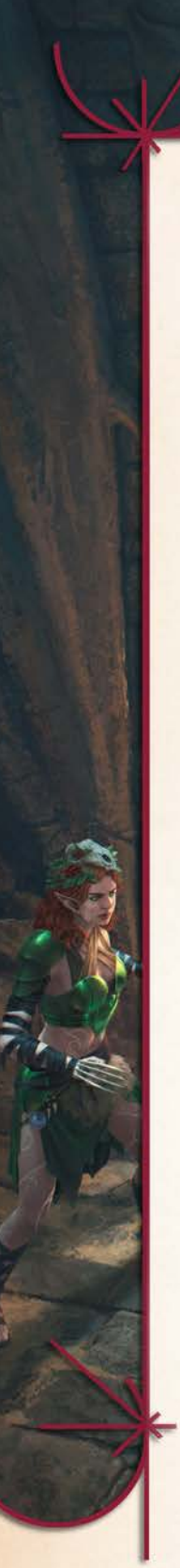
Drill. A drill is a hand-cranked device that bores a hole through wood or stone. The hole measures one inch wide by up to ten inches deep. A creature can drill through 1 inch of wood in one round and 1 inch of stone in three rounds. An iron drill dulls relatively quickly, requiring a successful DC 10 INT (Construction Tools) check to resharpen it after a month of use. An adamantine drill functionally never needs sharpening. Drills can be noisy and attract unwanted attention when used carelessly.

Glow Worm. Glow worms are giant fire beetle larvae that produce a gentle glow until they mature. With minimal care, a glow worm provides a constant light source, equivalent to a candle, for three months. Afterward, the larva reaches maturity and becomes a **fire beetle**. A glow worm has AC 8 and 2 HP.



ADVENTURING GEAR

Mount	Cost	Weight
Air bladder	3 gp	1 lb.
Clockwork badger	400 gp	40 lb.
Clockwork canary	100 gp	1/2 lb.
Color-changing parchment	2 gp	1/2 lb.
Drill, adamantine	1,000 gp	60 lb.
Drill, iron	200 gp	30 lb.
Glow worm	1 gp	1/2 lb.
Grappling hook	20 gp	4 lb.
Helmet, mining	10 gp	2 lb.
Phosphorescent fungi	1 gp	1/2 lb.
Pulley	50 gp	10 lb.
Saddle, secure	30 gp	35 lb.
Undersuit	5 sp	1 lb.



Grappling Hook. This metal device has two or three prongs and a ring through which you can tie a rope. Simpler versions are generally part of a climber's kit (see *Player's Guide*), but a creature using a purpose-built grappling hook has advantage on a STR (Athletics) check when climbing.

Mining Helmet. While wearing this helmet, you have advantage on a save against damage during cave-ins or collapses. After the helmet's effect has been used once, it is nonfunctional until repaired.

Phosphorescent Fungi. These underground fungi provide a constant light source, equivalent to a candle. They glow in a number of eerie colors. If these fungi are your only source of light for 8 hours, you must succeed on a DC 10 WIS save each hour afterward or suffer a random, short-term dread effect (see **Dread** in *Game Master's Guide*) or *confusion* spell effect for 1 minute.

Pulley. This simple machine has a wheel that can be mounted to a surface. A coil of rope can then be supported by the wheel, allowing you to pull on the rope and move or lift heavy objects, up to your lifting capacity (30 times your Strength score). Using a second pulley doubles the amount you can lift.

Secure Saddle. Some underground mounts have unusual movement styles, requiring extra precaution when the mounts start climbing walls or burrowing into stone. This cumbersome saddle requires two rounds to properly secure on a mount. Once the saddle is ready, you have advantage on checks or saves you make to remain mounted.

Undersuit. You wear this form-fitting suit under your clothing. It keeps you dry and warm in damp, chilly conditions. When wearing it, you have advantage on saves to resist the effects of natural cold hazards.

MOUNTS

Mounts that PCs take for granted on the surface—horses, ponies, mules, and large dogs—are unsuited for travel in dungeons, even with special training or gear. However, this doesn't leave the PCs without options underground. Lizards and some large insects respond to training nearly as well as aboveground quadrupeds and provide access to an essential dimension in underground travel, as they scale vertical surfaces or dig through the earth. You can find giant lizards and giant spiders in *Monster Vault*. The giant earthworm and giant round beetle, which also serve as excellent underground mounts, receive stats in this section.

Though these mounts use unusual modes of travel without concern, the same doesn't hold for their riders. When a mount climbs or burrows, the rider must succeed on a WIS (Animal Handling) check with a DC equal to 10 + 1 per 5 feet of movement or be thrown off.

Earthworm, Giant — CR 1/2

Large Beast

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 22
Speed 40 ft., burrow 20 ft.
Perception 10 **Stealth** 11
Immune prone
Senses keensense 30 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.
Languages —

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+1	+3	−5	+0	−4

Water Aversion. The earthworm won't enter bodies of water. If the earthworm is burrowing and water fills its tunnel, it must take the Dash action on its next turn to move away from the water.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Thrash (Recharge 4–6). The earthworm sweeps its body back and forth. Each creature within 5 feet of it must make a DC 13 DEX save, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success. A creature that fails its save by 5 or more falls prone.

REACTIONS

Reflexive Writhe. When a creature the earthworm can see attacks it, the earthworm can shift its bulk from the attack, increasing its AC to 14 against that attack.

UNDERGROUND MOUNTS

Mount	Cost	Speed (Per Round)	Carrying Capacity
Giant earthworm	500 gp	40 ft., burrow 20 ft.	480 lb.
Giant lizard	125 gp	30 ft., climb 30 ft.	420 lb.
Giant round beetle	200 gp	30 ft., climb 30 ft.	480 lb.
Giant spider	300 gp	30 ft., climb 30 ft.	420 lb.

Round Beetle, Giant **CR 1/4**

Large Beast

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 14
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.
Perception 10 **Stealth** 11
Senses keensense 10 ft.
Languages —

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+1	+2	−5	+0	−4

Knockdown Charge. If the beetle moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature, it can force the creature to succeed on a DC 12 STR save or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the beetle can make one Bite attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Poison Spit. When the beetle takes damage, it can spit a 15-foot line of digestive fluid. Each creature in the area must make a DC 12 DEX save, taking 1d6 poison damage and becoming poisoned for 1 minute on a failure, or half as much damage and not be poisoned on a success. A poisoned creature can attempt a DC 12 CON save at the end of each of its turns, ending the poisoned condition on a success.

VEHICLES

Underground conditions and terrain slow down vehicles made for surface conditions. This section contains a supplementary selection of vehicles, including their descriptions and stat blocks. These vehicles are suited for dungeon travel but can be useful in many different situations, even aboveground.

VEHICLE BASE COST

Vehicle	Cost	Travel Speed (Per Hour)
Iron Wombat	15,000 gp	2 mph
Kayak	75 gp	3 mph
Mining Cart	20 gp	2 mph

IRON WOMBAT

This vehicle's first designs featured a nonfunctional head and tail to give it the appearance of its namesake, though builders on a budget often skip this aesthetic touch. The crew operate winches to maneuver the iron wombat's claws, which can dig through most stone.





Iron Wombat

Huge Land and Burrowing Vehicle (15 ft. by 15 ft.)
Armor Class 16 (damage threshold 10)
Hit Points 150
Speed 15 ft., burrow 20 ft., 2 mph (48 miles per day)
Initiative 10
Immune Vehicle Resilience
Crew 4 **Passengers** 4
Cargo Capacity 800 lb.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+4	+0	+3	—	—	—

Armored Vehicle. Creatures inside the iron wombat have one-half cover from attacks outside the vehicle.

ACTIONS

On its turn, the iron wombat can take two actions, choosing from the options below (unless otherwise noted, it can take the same action multiple times). It can take only one action if it has fewer than 3 crew. It can take no actions if it has 1 or no crew.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Power Burrow. The iron wombat immediately moves up to its burrowing speed in a straight line. This action can be taken only once per turn.

KAYAK

Kayaks are one-person watercrafts powered by paddling and the current. Paddling against the current is difficult, but kayaks are light enough to allow a reasonably strong person to fight a current. A kayak weighs 50 pounds for portage purposes.

Kayak

Large Water Vehicle (10 ft. by 5 ft.)
Armor Class 13
Hit Points 40
Speed 30 ft. (maneuverable), 3 mph (72 miles per day)
Immune Vehicle Resilience
Initiative 13
Crew 1 **Passengers** 0
Cargo Capacity 50 lb.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+3	+1	—	—	—

Lightweight. If the kayak is going downstream, add the speed of the current (typically 30 feet per round, or 3 miles per hour) to its speed. The kayak's speed is 10 ft. while traveling against any significant current.

Maneuverable. The kayak can move up to its speed and make one 90-degree turn.

Waterproof. The kayak is treated with oil to prevent leaking, and it forms a seal around its rider such that capsizing won't force the kayak to take on water.

ACTIONS

Paddle Hard. The kayak takes the Dash action.

MINING CART

Designed for transporting equipment into a mine and extracted materials out of it, this wheeled cart has a metal frame to reinforce it while pushed through a mine's uneven tunnels. These carts often run on tracks to facilitate their travel.

Mining Cart

Large Land Vehicle (10 ft. by 5 ft.)
Armor Class 11 (damage threshold 5)
Hit Points 90
Speed 20 ft., 2 mph (48 miles per day)
Immune Vehicle Resilience
Initiative 9
Crew 1 **Passengers** 2
Cargo Capacity 500 lb.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	−1	+1	—	—	—

Designed for Tracks. If the mining cart is on a track, its speed becomes 30 ft. or 3 mph (72 miles per day), and it can move up to its speed and make one 90-degree turn. If the mining cart is on a track and not crewed, it moves on its own along the track (increasing or decreasing speed at the GM's discretion) and can make Ram attacks with advantage against targets on the track. If the mining cart makes more than one 90-degree turn during its movement, it must succeed on a DC 11 DEX save or leave the track. If the mining cart leaves the track, by toppling over or reaching the end of the track, each creature inside the cart must succeed on a DC 11 DEX save or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and fall prone. The save is made with disadvantage if the cart's speed is greater than 30 feet.

ACTIONS

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

MAGIC ITEMS

Magic items are the most prized of treasures. The ones found in dungeons and ruins tend to be more storied than those found on the surface.

Amulet of Random Resistance

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *2,500 gp*

This amulet contains a prismatic polyhedral gemstone with 10 sides in a gold setting. The gemstone sparkles in different colors. Once per day you can spin the stone in its setting to give yourself resistance to one type of damage for 1 hour. Roll on the **Random Resistance** table to determine the side the stone lands on, the type of resistance you gain, and the associated color.

Random Resistance

1d10	Resistance	Color
1	Acid	Purple
2	Cold	Blue
3	Fire	Red
4	Force	Orange
5	Lightning	Yellow
6	Necrotic	Black
7	Poison	Green
8	Psychic	Pink
9	Radiant	White
10	Thunder	Indigo

Arcane Whetstone

Wondrous Item, Uncommon *1,000 gp*

This whetstone has 3 charges. You can use a bonus action to expend 1 charge and use it to sharpen a nonmagical melee weapon that deals slashing damage. For 1 hour, the sharpened weapon has a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. The whetstone regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the whetstone's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the whetstone loses its enchantment, but it can still be used as a nonmagical whetstone.

Armor of the Bear King

Armor (Hide), Very Rare (Requires Attunement) *9,500 gp*

This armor is made from the skin and pelt of an enormous bear, complete with a helmet made from the bear's head. While wearing this armor, you gain a +2 bonus to AC. In addition, you have a climbing speed of 30 feet, and you have advantage on checks made to grapple and to prevent a creature from escaping your grapple.

Basilisk Ring

Ring, Rare (Requires Attunement) *18,000 gp*

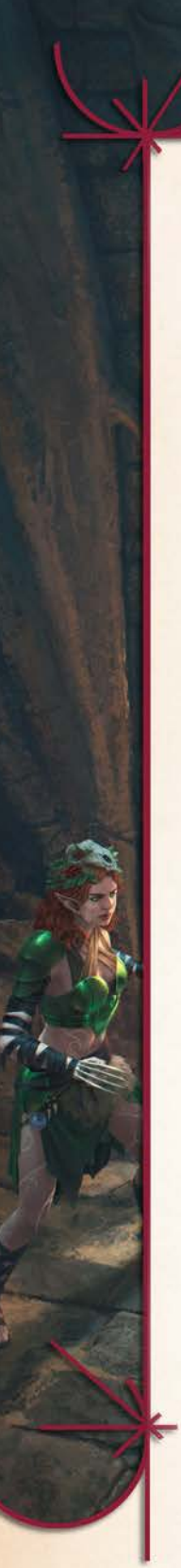
This ring has 3 charges and regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. While wearing this ring, you can use an action to target a creature within 30 feet that you can see. That creature must make a DC 15 CON save. On a failure, the creature magically begins to turn to stone and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the save at the end of its next turn, becoming petrified for 1 minute on a failure, or ending the effect on a success. The *greater restoration* spell or similar magic ends the petrified condition.



Bolt of Banishment

Weapon (Ammunition), Rare *60 gp*

You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic crossbow bolt. When you successfully hit a creature with this bolt, it must make a DC 15 CHA save. On a failure, the creature suffers the effects of the *banishment* spell. After a successful hit, the bolt becomes a nonmagical piece of ammunition.



Cameo of Communication

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *3,000 gp*

When discovered, the background to this cameo is blank. If you attune to the cameo, a detailed portrait of your profile appears on the background. If another creature holds the cameo, they can communicate telepathically with you as long as you are within 1 mile of the cameo's location. Your attunement to the cameo ends if the cameo is more than 100 feet away from you for 24 hours.

Celestial Mote

Wondrous Item, Very Rare *4,000 gp*

This mote of concentrated celestial energy is contained within a marble-sized sphere that appears to be made of a substance resembling amber, only golden in color. You can use a bonus action to press the mote against a melee weapon and imbue it with divine celestial power, causing the mote to burn up in the process. For 1 minute, the weapon deals an extra 4d8 radiant damage. If the weapon isn't already a magic weapon, it becomes one for the duration.

Claw Gauntlet

Wondrous Item, Rare *15,000 gp*

This gauntlet is adorned with claws on each of its fingers which can be extended and retracted by using a bonus action. With the claws extended, the gauntlet can be used to make an unarmed strike with a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls. When you hit with the gauntlet, it deals 1d6 + your STR modifier slashing damage instead of the bludgeoning damage normal for an unarmed strike.

The claws can also be used to climb, granting you a climbing speed of 20 feet.

Additionally, the gauntlet can be used to grip onto nearby surfaces, giving you advantage on DEX checks and DEX saves made to avoid falling.

Explorer's Hat

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *14,000 gp*

These hats come in many styles from large, wide-brimmed hats to simple caps, but all have a range of features that help in dungeon exploration.

As a bonus action you cause a visor to descend from the front of the hat which grants you darkvision to a range of 60 feet. In addition, a set of pins in the band of the hat function as thieves' tools for the purpose of picking locks and disabling traps.

The hat has 3 charges. While wearing it, you can use them for the following purposes:

- ***Breathe Freely.*** You can use a bonus action and expend 1 charge to activate a breathing tube that allows you to breathe underwater or in other airless environments for 1 hour.
- ***Detect Secrets.*** With the hat's visor down, you can use a bonus action and expend 1 charge to see traps, secret doors, and invisible creatures and objects within 20 feet of you for 1 minute.
- ***Enhanced Senses.*** With the hat's visor down, you can use a bonus action and expend 1 charge to have advantage on WIS (Perception) checks for 1 hour.
- ***Slow Fall.*** You can use your reaction and expend 1 charge to cast the *feather fall* spell.

The hat regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

Figurine of Wondrous Power

Wondrous Item, Rarity by Figurine *Price Varies*

A figurine of wondrous power is a statuette of a beast small enough to fit in a pocket. If you use an action to speak the command word and throw the figurine to a point on the ground within 60 feet of you, the figurine becomes a living creature. If the space where the creature would appear is occupied by other creatures or objects, or if there isn't enough space for the creature, the figurine doesn't become a creature.

The creature is friendly to you and your companions. It understands your languages and obeys your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, the creature defends itself but takes no other actions.

The creature exists for a duration specific to each figurine. At the end of the duration, the creature reverts to its figurine form. It reverts to a figurine early if it drops to 0 HP or if you use an action to speak the command word again while touching it. When the creature reverts to a figurine, its property can't be used again until a certain amount of time has passed, as specified in the figurine's description.

Jade Owlbear (Rare, 65,000 gp). This jade statuette of an owlbear can become an **owlbear** for up to 6 hours. Once it has been used, it can't be used again until 5 days have passed.

Opal Cat (Rare, 10,000 gp). This opal statuette is carved in the likeness of a cat. It can become a black **cat** for up to 12 hours. The cat has an INT score of 8 and can communicate telepathically with you up to a distance of 1 mile. Once during the 12 hours, you can speak the command word again to cause the cat to become

a **panther** for 1 hour. Once it has been used, it can't be used again until 3 days have passed.

Ruby Hound (Rare, 60,000 gp). This ruby statuette of a hound can become a **hellhound** for up to 6 hours. Once it has been used, it can't be used again for 6 days. Each time you use it, the figurine has a 6 percent chance to ignore your orders, including a command to revert to figurine form.

Fishscale Armor

Armor (Scale Mail), Rare *1,600 gp*

This armor resembles typical scale mail armor except that it consists of iridescent fish scales atop a thin, rubbery coat and leggings. While wearing this armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC. When you are in water deep enough to swim in, fins unfurl from the arms and legs of the armor, granting you a swimming speed of 20 feet.

Flareseed Pair

Wondrous Item, Common *10 gp*

This pair of combustible seeds are magically linked, and the seeds retain that link at a distance of up to 1 mile. A creature carrying one of the seeds can use a bonus action to activate it, causing the seed to combust. This combustion does not cause damage but does emit bright light out to 20 feet for 1 minute. If the paired seed is within one mile of its mate, it simultaneously combusts with the same effect. This consumes both seeds.

Goggles of Blasting

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *11,000 gp*

These goggles have opaque surfaces, though while attuned to them you can see through them as though the lenses were clear. While wearing them, you are immune to the blinded condition. The goggles have 6 charges. You can use an action for one of the following effects:

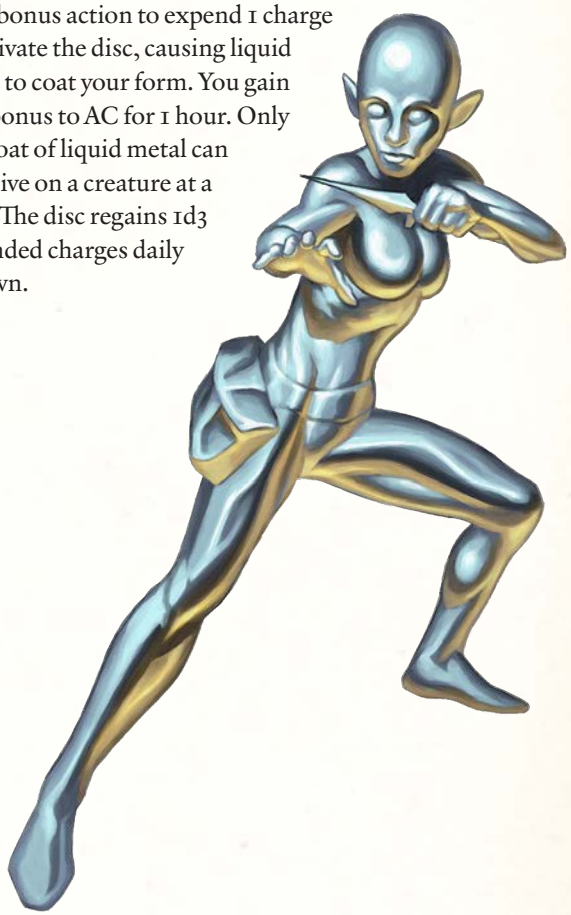
- You can expend 1 charge to fire dazzling beams of light from the lenses at one creature you can see within 60 feet of you. That creature must make a DC 15 DEX save. On a failed save, it takes 4d10 force damage and is knocked prone. On a successful save it takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.
- You can expend 3 charges to emit a wide beam in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 15 DEX save, taking 2d10 force damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

The goggles regain 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn.

Liquid Metal Skin

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *10,500 gp*

This item begins as a polished metal disc that can be affixed to clothing or armor. It has 3 charges. You can use a bonus action to expend 1 charge to activate the disc, causing liquid metal to coat your form. You gain a +2 bonus to AC for 1 hour. Only one coat of liquid metal can be active on a creature at a time. The disc regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.



Liquid Metal Weapon

Weapon (varies), Rare (Requires Attunement) *1,500 gp*

When found, this weapon has a 50 percent chance of being in the shape of a polished metal sphere or a 50 percent chance of being in the form of a melee weapon. After attuning to the weapon, when you finish a long rest, you can select any simple or martial melee weapon as its form. You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls with this weapon, regardless of its form.

Mummy Rod

Rod, Very Rare (Requires Attunement) *50,000 gp*

This rod has a magically preserved mummy's hand affixed to its tip. It functions as a magic mace that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. On a hit, the rod deals an extra 2d6 necrotic damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 CON

save or be infected with the putrefying flesh disease. A putrefied target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 3d6 for every 24 hours that elapse. If the putrefaction reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, it dies, and its body turns to dust. The effect lasts until removed by the *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Mycelial Net

Wondrous Item, Common *50 gp*

This item begins as a simple mushroom, a pale, ghostly green in color. You can use an action to place the mushroom on solid ground, causing it to melt into the surface and spread mycelial filaments underground. When you do, choose any number of creatures within 30 feet of you. For 1 hour, you and all chosen creatures can communicate telepathically as long as you are all within 1 mile of each other. At the end of the hour, the net disintegrates.

Orbs of the Jongleur

Wondrous Item, Uncommon *5,000 gp*

These orbs come in a pouch. When you use a bonus action to speak the command word to activate them, three orbs emerge from the pouch and begin to orbit your body. For 1 minute, you can expend an orb, which disappears back into the pouch after, to select from the following options:

- You can use a bonus action to cause an orb to fly at a creature you can see within 30 feet of you. The target creature must make a DC 15 DEX save, taking 2d10 bludgeoning damage on a failure, and half as much damage on a success.
- When you are hit by a melee attack, you can use your reaction to cause one of the orbs to intercept the attack reducing the damage you take by 1d10 (to a minimum of 0).

Once the three orbs are expended, or the minute elapses, the orbs can't be used again until the next dawn.

Potion of Fortitude

Potion, Uncommon *50 gp*

When you drink this potion, you gain advantage on CON saves and ability checks for 1 hour. You are also immune to the poisoned condition, and you gain resistance to poison. This potion's deep blue liquid shimmers with silver flecks.

Potion of Ooze Embodiment

Potion, Rare *200 gp*

When you drink this potion, you gain the effect of the *ooze embodiment** spell for 1 hour (no concentration required) or until you end the effect as a bonus action. This potion's container seems to hold a bright green viscous substance.

Potion of the Polyglot

Potion, Rare *200 gp*

When you drink this potion, you gain the effect of the *tongues* spell for 1 hour. The potion's green liquid reveals ribbons of pink when swirled.

Potion of the Worm

Potion, Rare *650 gp*

This potion presents itself as another type of potion, complete with all its normal effects, except that it has a tiny, transparent worm inside of it. The worm's presence is revealed by an *identify* spell, but it is otherwise undetectable. When you drink the potion, you swallow the worm. You gain the effects of the appropriate potion, but thereafter the worm burrows into you and begins growing. At the end of the first day, before a long rest, reduce your maximum hit points by 1d6. At the end of each successive day, reduce your maximum hit points by 1d6 + the number of days since you swallowed the worm (so 1d6 +1 on the 2nd night, 1d6 + 2 on the 3rd night, and so on). If your maximum hit points are reduced to 0, you die, and a large worm erupts from your abdomen. It uses the stats of a **lantern hagfish**. Once swallowed, the worm can only be destroyed by a *remove curse* spell. If the worm is destroyed, your maximum hit points are restored after you finish a long rest.

Razor of Bloodletting

Weapon (Razor), Rare *3,000 gp*

This razor resembles a typical implement used for shaving hair except that it is imbued with the spirit of a dead murderer. You can use the razor as a weapon (it has the statistics of a sickle), and you gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls when you use it in this way. When you hit a creature with the razor, it must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or take 1d4 necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Ring of Throwing

Ring, Uncommon *4,500 gp*

While wearing this ring, double the range of your thrown weapons (including improvised thrown weapons). In addition, when you hit with a thrown weapon, you deal an extra 1d6 damage of the weapon's type.

Rod of Replacement

Rod, Rare *10,000 gp*

This rod has a silver sphere on one end and a golden sphere on the other. You can use the rod to swap one Small or Tiny object that isn't being worn or carried with another object meeting the same conditions that is within a mile of the first object. You must spend 1 minute holding the silver sphere in contact with the first object. Within the next hour, you must then hold the gold sphere in contact with a second object for 1 minute. At the end of the minute, the first object appears in the second object's space, and the second object appears in the first object's space. If an object contains other objects, the object and all of its contents are transported. The rod has no effect on creatures or items worn or carried by creatures.

Savvy Whip

Weapon (Whip), Rare *1,500 gp*

You have a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

If you successfully hit a creature with this whip, you can choose to forgo the usual damage and instead force the creature to make a DC 16 STR save. On a failure, the creature is grappled and restrained for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending both conditions on a success. If you use the whip in this way, you can't use it to attack unless the grapple is released, ending both conditions (no action required).

Additionally, the whip is exceptionally good at grasping and gripping. It can attach to even the smallest protrusions giving you a climbing speed of 20 feet.

Scarab Armor Amulet

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *12,500 gp*

This amulet is shaped like a scarab with a glossy, black carapace. You can use a bonus action to activate the amulet, causing magical scarabs to swarm from it and cover you for 1 hour. While the scarabs are active, you gain a +2 bonus to AC. At the end of the hour, the scarabs return to the amulet. Once used, the amulet can't be used again until the next dawn.

Scimitar of the Sirocco

Weapon (Scimitar), Rare *18,000 gp*

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. The scimitar has 5 charges. While wielding the scimitar, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of it charges to cast one of the following spells from it: *gust of wind* (1 charge), *wind wall* (2 charges), or *scouring wind** (3 charges). The scimitar regains 1d4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the scimitar dissolves into sand and blows away on a magical wind.

Seed of Adaptive Terrain

Wondrous Item, Common *100 gp*

Typically, these seeds are found in bags of 2d6 + 2 seeds. As an action, you plant one seed in firm earth. Roots from it spread instantly into the ground, rearranging the terrain in a 30-foot radius, negating the effects of difficult terrain. After 1 minute, or if the effects are dispelled, the terrain returns to its original form.

Staff of the Weather Witch

Staff, Rare (Requires Attunement by a Spellcaster) *45,000 gp*

This staff can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. The staff has 10 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it, using your spell save DC: *fog cloud* (1 charge), *gust of wind* (2 charges), *call lightning* (3 charges), *sleet storm* (3 charges), or *ice storm* (4 charges).

The staff regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff shatters into splinters which blow away on a magical wind.

Superlative Shovel

Wondrous Item, Uncommon *5,000 gp*

This magic shovel functions as a magic mace that grants a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. When you deal damage with the shovel, you can choose for the damage to be bludgeoning or slashing. In addition, you can use an action to magically manipulate terrain within 10 feet of you. This functions as the *move earth* spell, except it can affect an area of terrain no larger than 10 feet on a side, and its duration is concentration, up to 1 minute, allowing you to choose a new area of terrain to affect at the end of each round. Once used, the *move earth* effect can't be used again until the following dawn.



Toolkit of the Great Maker

Wondrous Item, Uncommon *2,500 gp*

This toolkit appears as an expensive box, chest, or satchel of leather, brass, and wood. The toolkit has 3 charges. You can use a bonus action to expend 1 charge and activate the toolkit. You name a set of tools when you open the toolkit, and that set of tools is inside. The tools last for 1 hour and checks made with the tools are made with advantage. The toolkit regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

Torch of the Restless Flame

Wondrous Item, Rare *9,000 gp*

This torch has gold bands reinforcing the handle. While holding it, you can speak the torch's command word as a bonus action to cause it to produce a flame that provides bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet without consuming the torch.

While lit, you can use a bonus action to place the torch on solid ground and widen its flame into a campfire, suitable for cooking food and providing warmth. The campfire fills a 5-foot-square area and lasts until you dismiss it (no action required).

The torch also functions as a club. Whether ignited or not, if you make a melee weapon attack with it and hit, it deals 1d6 fire damage.

In addition, the torch has 3 charges which can be used for the following properties while it is ignited:

- While holding the torch, you can use a bonus action to expend 1 charge and shoot a bolt of fire at an enemy. Choose a creature you can see within 60 feet of you. The target creature must make a DC 15 DEX save, taking 4d6 fire damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.
- While within 30 feet of the torch, you can use a bonus action to expend 3 charges and cause the torch's flame to become a fiery explosion in a 10-foot radius. A creature in the area must make a DC 15 DEX save, taking 2d6 fire damage on a failure, and half as much damage on a success.

If you expend the torch's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the torch is consumed by fire and destroyed. The torch regains 1d3 charges daily at dawn.

Verdant Ladder

Wondrous Item, Common *50 gp*

When found, this item is a glossy green seed the size of a human fist, with a hard exterior. You can use an action to place the seed on solid ground and against a vertical surface to activate it, causing a ladder of green, interweaving vines to burst from the seed. The vines cling to the surface and extend upward along it for up to 100 feet. The ladder remains for 1 hour, after which the vines shrivel away and die, causing the ladder and the seed to disintegrate.

Wand of Darkness

Wand, Rare (Requires Attunement by a Spellcaster) *8,000 gp*

This bronze and ebony wood wand has 7 charges for the following properties.

Spells. While holding the wand, you can use an action to expend charges to cast one of the following spells (save DC 15): *darkness* (2 charges), *darkvision* (2 charges), or *wall of darkness** (4 charges).

Piercing Sight. While holding the wand, you can use a bonus action to expend 1 charge to give yourself the effects of the *darkvision* spell, with the additional benefit of being able to see even in magical darkness, for 10 minutes.

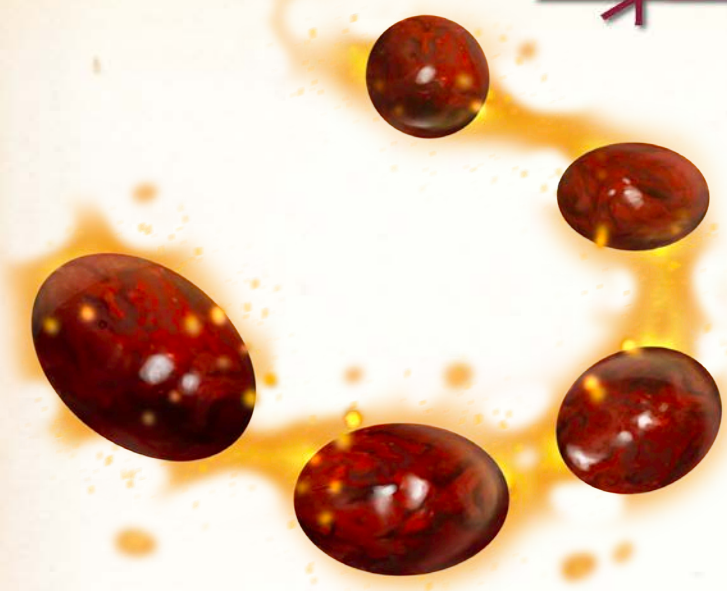
The wand regains 1d6 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the wand's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand crumbles into ashes and is destroyed.

BLOODSTONES

Bloodstones are magical blood-red stones about 1 inch in diameter which draw on the power of blood, weakening the bearer to produce magical effects. When you attune to a bloodstone, it embeds itself in your flesh. A bloodstone can't be used by a creature that doesn't have blood.

Rather than expending charges to power the bloodstone's abilities, you instead spend one or more hit dice. For each hit die spent in powering a bloodstone, you roll the die, add your CON modifier, and lose hit points equal to the result. Hit dice spent this way can't be used to regain hit points during a short rest. You regain spent hit dice as normal.

Different kinds of bloodstones exist, each with a distinct cut and carving.



Bloodstone of Accuracy

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *10,000 gp*

As a bonus action, you can expend 2 hit dice to give yourself advantage on attack rolls for 1 minute. You can't activate this ability again until the current effect ends.

Bloodstone of Fortitude

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *6,000 gp*

As a bonus action, you can expend 1 hit die to give yourself resistance to poison and advantage on CON saves and ability checks for 10 minutes.

Bloodstone of Shielding

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *10,000 gp*

As a bonus action, you can expend 1 hit die to gain a +2 bonus to AC for 1 minute as a spectral red field surrounds your body. You can't do so again until after the current effect ends.

Bloodstone of Speed

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *7,000 gp*

As a bonus action, you can expend 1 hit die to double your movement speed for 1 minute. You can't activate this ability again until the current effect ends.

Bloodstone of Strength

Wondrous Item, Rare (Requires Attunement) *11,000 gp*

As a bonus action, you can expend 2 hit dice to give yourself a +2 STR score bonus for 1 hour. You can't activate this ability again until the current effect ends.

FABLED MAGIC ITEMS

This section presents descriptions of fabled magic items, each a unique and storied relic that has seen more adventure than can be easily imagined. Such fabled items grow in power along with their owner.

Diadem of Psychic Mastery

Wondrous Item, Fabled *Priceless*

(5th-Level and Higher Properties Require Attunement)

This diadem is made of delicate filigreed silver with pink gemstones adorning it. When using the diadem's powers, the gemstones glow. While wearing this diadem, you can cast the *message* cantrip.

Mental Mastery (Requires Attunement). As your level increases, you gain the following benefits while wearing this diadem.

5th Level. You have resistance to psychic damage as well as charm and fear effects. In addition, the diadem has 7 charges. You can cast the following spells from the diadem, expending the necessary number of charges: *charm* (1 charge), *detect thoughts* (2 charges), *suggestion* (2 charges), or *fear* (3 charges). The diadem regains all expended charges at the next dawn.

9th Level. You can use an action to expend 1 charge and fire a psychic blast from the diadem, targeting a creature you can see within 60 feet of you. That creature must make a DC 15 INT save. On a failure it takes 4d6 psychic damage and has disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and CON saves to maintain concentration until the end of its next turn. On a success, it takes half as much damage and doesn't have disadvantage.

13th Level. In addition to the previously listed spells, you can cast the following spells from the diadem, expending the necessary number of charges: *confusion* (4 charges), *dominate* (5 charges), or *telekinesis* (5 charges).

17th Level. You have immunity to psychic damage. In addition, once per day you can cast the *feeblemind* spell.





Ring of the Lightning Lord

Wondrous Item, Fabled *Priceless*

(5th-Level and Higher Properties Require Attunement)

This ring is made of silver metal with bright threads of gold and set with a bright blue sapphire. While wearing the ring, you can cast the *shocking grasp* cantrip.

Electrical Essence (Requires Attunement). As your level increases, you gain the following benefits while wearing this ring. For any spells that allow a choice of element type, you must choose lightning.

5th Level. You have resistance to lightning damage. In addition, the ring has 7 charges. You can cast the following spells from the ring, expending the necessary number of charges: *elemental blade* (2 charges), *call lightning* (3 charges), or *lightning bolt* (3 charges). The ring regains all expended charges at the next dawn.

9th Level. You can use a bonus action to give yourself the ability to move with the speed of lightning for 1 minute. On each of your turns when this ability is active, you can use a bonus action to transport yourself to an unoccupied space you can see up to 60 feet away. The ring can't be used again in this way until the next dawn.

13th Level. In addition to the previously listed spells, you can cast the following spells from the ring, expending the necessary number of charges: *elemental shield* (4 charges), or *chain lightning* (6 charges).

17th Level. You have immunity to lightning damage. In addition, once per day, you can use a bonus action to speak the ring's command word and assume an electrically charged form. While in this form, your melee weapon attacks deal extra lightning damage equal to your PB, and when a creature hits you with a melee attack, they take lightning damage equal to your PB. This change lasts for 1 hour, until you use a bonus action to revert to your normal form, or until you drop to 0 HP or die.

SPELLS

This section presents descriptions of spells commonly cast by dungeoneers and other specialized explorers.

ALTER AURA

2nd-Circle Arcane and Primordial (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You change a creature's essential nature.

You touch a creature and select a creature type. For the duration, the creature loses its original creature type and gains the new creature type with regard to effects and conditions that reference this information. It retains resistances or immunities it had in its original type.

ANGELIC ASPECT

5th-Circle Divine (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You endow a willing creature with an angelic appearance.

You touch a willing creature and give them the form of a **deva**, though not a specific, individual deva. The creature retains its personality and all of its game statistics, but its size changes to Medium and its type becomes Celestial (Angel). In addition, the creature gains resistance to radiant damage and sprouts shimmering wings that give it a flying speed of 60 feet. The creature's melee attacks deal an extra 1d6 radiant damage. In addition, the creature has advantage on CHA checks when interacting with creatures in service to gods of good and order.

AURA OF ALERTNESS

1st-Circle Arcane and Divine (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You emit an aura that increases the alertness of your allies.

Stimulating energy radiates from you in an aura with a 20-foot radius. Each creature in the aura that isn't hostile to you (including you) has advantage on initiative rolls and WIS (Perception) checks.

BECOME SHADOW

4th-Circle Arcane and Wyrd (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You turn a willing creature into a two-dimensional shadow.

A willing creature you touch, along with all the equipment it carries, becomes a two-dimensional shadow on a flat surface within 30 feet of you. The shadow is visible in bright light but is hidden in dim light and darkness. Like normal hiding, a shadow can give away its position in the dark by speaking or casting a spell with verbal components. If seen, it appears to be a regular shadow, though without a clear source.

In shadow form, a creature can't see, but it can hear, and it gains keensense to a range of 30 feet. The shadow form is immune to all damage except for force and radiant damage. The creature can speak and cast spells that don't require material components. It can move along its original surface at its base movement speed, and move onto connected surfaces, but it is stopped if there are no suitable surfaces nearby. The target can't manipulate objects, and any objects it was carrying or holding can't be dropped, used, or otherwise interacted with. The target can't make weapon attacks. The creature can use a bonus action to return to its normal form in an unoccupied adjacent space, which ends the spell.

If the surface the shadow form is on receives enough structural damage to damage its integrity (such as a wall being destroyed), or if a significant change to its shape that would disrupt the shadow, the creature returns to its normal form, takes 4d6 force damage, and falls prone in an unoccupied space closest to where its shadow form was.

DEVILISH ASPECT

5th-Circle Divine and Wyrd (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You endow a willing creature with a devilish appearance.

You touch a willing creature and give it the form of a devil of CR 8 or lower, though not a specific, individual devil. The creature retains its personality and all of its game statistics, but its size changes to Medium and its type becomes Fiend (Devil). The creature gains resistance to cold, fire, and poison damage and is immune to the poisoned condition. The creature's melee attacks deal an extra 1d6 fire damage. In addition, the creature has advantage on CHA checks when interacting with creatures in service to gods or fiendish lords of evil and order.

ELEMENTAL PERFUSION

4th-Circle Arcane and Primordial (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

A creature takes on an elemental physique.

You touch a willing creature and suffuse it with elemental power. Choose one of the following options:

Air. The creature gains a flying speed of 60 feet. When it hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, it can push that creature 5 feet away.

Earth. The creature is immune to the prone condition and ignores difficult terrain. It gains resistance to nonmagical bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.

Fire. The creature has resistance to fire damage and deals an extra 2d6 fire damage when it hits with a melee attack.

Water. The creature can breathe underwater and gains a swimming speed of 60 feet. In addition, it gains resistance to cold damage.

FALLING SKY

2nd-Circle Primordial (Evocation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a dried leaf which is crumbled in the casting)

Duration: Instantaneous

You solidify a section of air and drop it on your enemies.

Choose a 20-foot-cube area within range. A square of condensed air forms at the top of the cube and slams to the bottom. All creatures within the area must make a STR save. On a failure, a creature takes 3d8 bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone. A flying creature falls to the ground and takes an extra 1d8 bludgeoning damage.



HUNGRY EARTH

4th-Circle Primordial (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 Feet

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of loose earth)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

The very earth swallows up your enemies.

Choose a point you can see on the ground within range. A 20-foot square of earth centered on that point churns and pulls down those within the area. A creature standing in the area must make a STR save. On a failure, a creature takes 2d12 bludgeoning damage and is restrained. On a success, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't restrained. A restrained creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the condition on a success.

After the spell ends, the affected area remains difficult terrain until cleared, with each 5-foot-diameter portion requiring at least 1 minute to clear by hand.

INCREASE MASS

1st-Circle Arcane (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You increase the mass of weapons or armor.

Choose an item you can see within range. You cause the item to increase in mass, quadrupling its weight until the start of your next turn.

If you target a weapon or another item held by a creature, the creature must make a STR save. On a failure, it takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage and drops the item. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and doesn't drop the weapon.

If you target armor or another item worn by a creature or carried on their person (such as within a backpack), the creature must make a STR save. On a failure, it takes 2d6 bludgeoning damage and falls prone. On a success, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't knocked prone.

OOZE EMBODIMENT

3rd-Circle Primordial and Wyrd (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a vial of preserved ooze)

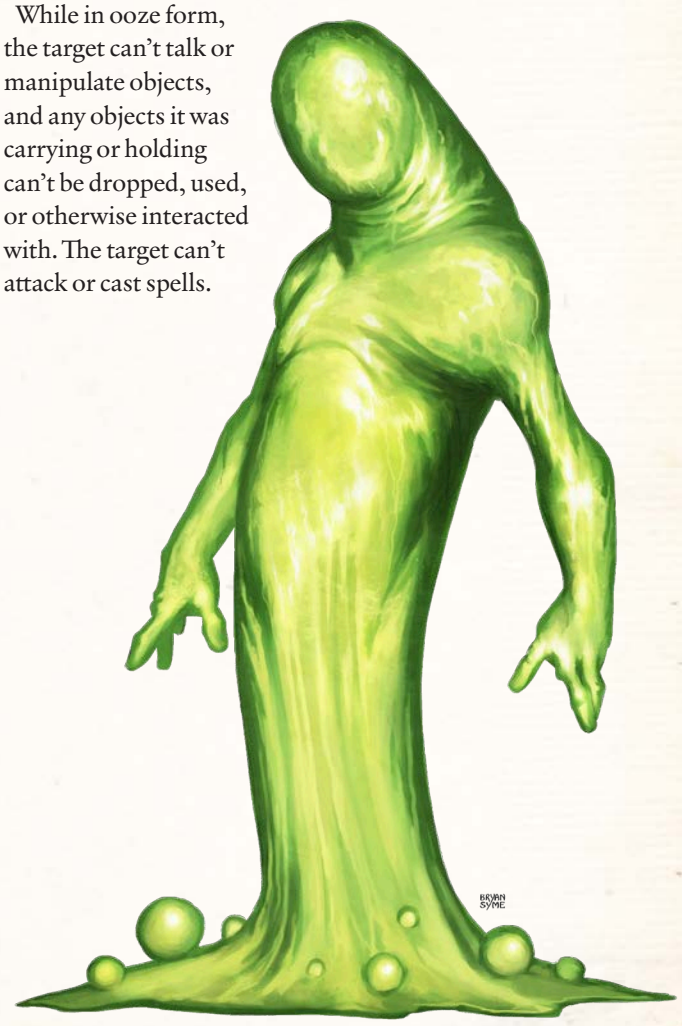
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You transform a creature into an ooze form.

You transform a willing creature you touch, along with everything it's wearing and carrying, into a pool of ooze for the duration. The spell ends if the creature drops to 0 HP. Oozes aren't affected.

While in this form, the target has a base walking speed of 15 feet, and a climbing speed of 15 feet. The target has resistance to the restrained condition, is immune to acid damage, and immune to exhaustion and to the blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, and prone conditions. The target can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. If the target is hit by a melee attack, the attacker takes 1d8 acid damage. The creature can use a bonus action to return to its normal form, which ends the spell.

While in ooze form, the target can't talk or manipulate objects, and any objects it was carrying or holding can't be dropped, used, or otherwise interacted with. The target can't attack or cast spells.



RAINING FIRE

6th-Circle Primordial (Evocation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of sulfur)

Duration: Instantaneous

You cause fire to rain down from the sky.

Fire rains down in a 40-foot-radius, 20-foot-tall cylinder, centered on a point you can see within range. A creature in the area must make a DEX save, taking 10d6 fire damage on a failure or half as much damage on a success.

The fire damages objects in the area and ignites flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried.

RISING TIDE

4th-Circle Primordial (Conjuration)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a water-polished pebble)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You cause a whirlpool of water to appear and rise upward.

A swirling vortex of water appears in a 20-foot radius centered on a point you can see within range and surges upward, creating a cylinder of water up to 60 feet tall. The point must be on the ground or in a body of water. A creature within the cylinder must succeed on a STR save or rise with the surface of the water. A creature can choose to intentionally fail this save. A creature that succeeds on the save remains in its space but is submerged in the water. A creature that can't breathe water follows the normal drowning rules.

SCOURING WIND

4th-Circle Arcane and Primordial (Evocation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (60-foot line)

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of sand)

Duration: Instantaneous

You create a blast of wind filled with dust and sand.

A line of scouring, hot wind shoots from your hands in a 60-foot-long, 10-foot-wide line. A creature in the line must make a DEX save. On a failure, it takes 4d8 slashing damage plus 2d6 fire damage and is pushed 10 feet away from you in a direction following the line. On a success, it takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

The wind disperses gas or vapor, and extinguishes candles, torches, and similar unprotected flames in the area. It causes protected flames, such as those of lanterns, to dance wildly and has a 50 percent chance of extinguishing them.

SUDDEN SWAP

3rd-Circle Arcane (Conjuration)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You swap places with another creature within range.

You target a creature within range that you can see and force it to make a CON save. On a failed save, you swap places. The creature is transported to your location, and you are transported to its location.

SURE-FOOTED

1st-Circle Primordial (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a leg from an animal that can cling to surfaces)

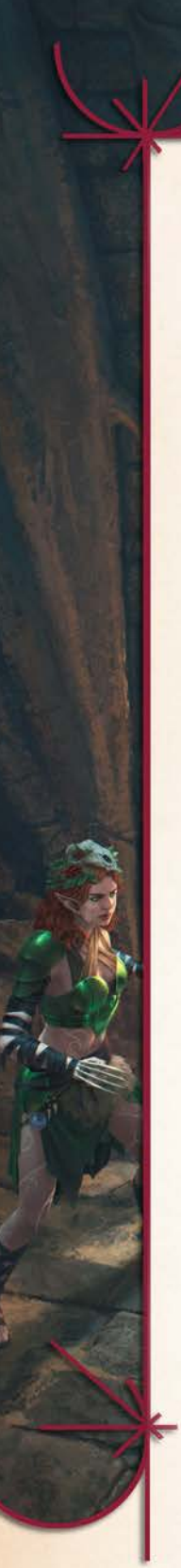
Duration: 1 hour

You imbue a creature with the balance and sure-footedness of a goat.

You touch a willing creature, imbuing it with the sure-footedness of a mountain-traversing goat. For the duration, the target has advantage on STR and DEX saves made to avoid being knocked prone. In addition, if an effect moves the target against its will along the ground, the target can use its reaction to reduce the distance it is moved by up to 10 feet.

At Higher Circles. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd circle or higher, you can target one additional creature for each spell slot above 1st.





TIME SKIP

7th-Circle Arcane (Transmutation)

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you can take when you are reduced to 0 HP, suffer a condition, or are moved against your will

Range: Self

Components: V

Duration: Instantaneous

You skip yourself 6 seconds back in time.

You reverse time for yourself, undoing some effects of the previous round. Any damage you took in that round is undone. Any conditions or harmful effects that began during that round end, but any ongoing effects from earlier rounds remain, as well as any beneficial effects that you choose to retain. You teleport to the space you occupied at the start of your previous turn or the nearest unoccupied space if it is currently occupied. Any damage you dealt or actions you took in the previous round are not reversed, and any items or features you consumed, expended, or dropped are not returned to you.

WALL OF DARKNESS

4th-Circle Arcane (Evocation)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a bit of pitch)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You call into existence a wall of magical darkness.

A wall of shadowy darkness appears at a point you choose within range. The wall appears in any orientation you choose as a horizontal or vertical barrier or at an angle. It can be free floating or resting on a solid surface. The wall can be up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high, and 5 feet thick. The wall blocks line of sight, but creatures and objects can pass through it.

When the wall appears, each creature in its area must make a CON save. On a failure it takes 4d8 cold damage and is blinded for 1 minute. On a success, it takes half as much damage and isn't blinded. A blinded creature can make a CON save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

A creature in the wall's area suffers the effects of magical darkness.

WALL OF SPIRITS

5th-Circle Arcane and Divine (Necromancy)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of debris from an ancient site)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You call on the spirits of a location to coalesce into a ghostly wall.

A wall of ghostly apparitions flickers into being at a point that you choose within range. The wall appears in any orientation you choose as a horizontal or vertical barrier or at an angle. It can be free floating or resting on a solid surface. The wall can be up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high, and 5 feet thick. The wall blocks line of sight, but creatures and objects can pass through it. It emits dim light out to 30 feet.

When the wall appears, each creature in its area must make a CON save. On a failure, a creature takes 4d8 necrotic damage and is frightened for 1 minute. On a success, it takes half as much damage and isn't frightened. A frightened creature can make a CON save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

A creature that ends its turn in the wall's area takes 4d8 necrotic damage.

Until the spell ends, you can use an action to cause ghostly figures to stream out of the wall at one creature you can see within 60 feet of it. Make a ranged spell attack. On a hit, the target takes 4d8 necrotic damage. Whether you hit or miss, reduce the length of the wall by 10 feet. If the wall's length drops to 0 feet, the spell ends.



2: RUNNING EXPLORATION

Explorers second-guess whether they're reading the map correctly.

Exploration is a key pillar of adventure, encompassing all manner of challenges and unique gaming opportunities to fill the need for discovery. This chapter provides guidance on effectively running dungeon delves and useful details for exploring caves and ruins—expanding on options for expeditions into the great unknown.

DUNGEON DELVES

The dungeon delve is the epitome of fantasy roleplaying: a ragtag collection of adventurers decides to save the day (or get rich) by grabbing torches and plunging into the sunken domain of a vast dungeon or ancient ruins, pitting themselves against unspeakable horrors and finding treasures along the way. This is the delve, where hours of careful design and thoughtful game preparation meet the glorious havoc of an excited band of players. So in the ensuing adventure, don't think of the dungeon or ruins as merely the setting but instead as the antagonist, there to challenge the PCs.

A delve hits its stride when the players have the agency to decide their own fates, to make meaningful choices—to act and then deal with the consequences. However, this can have its challenges for GMs, so it is very helpful to learn how to be flexible, to accept that PCs will inevitably poke holes in the most elaborate plans, even accidentally, and that's totally normal and nothing to worry about. The extreme



options as a GM are to either embrace the chaos, merely reacting to the PCs' actions and adjusting on the fly by adjudicating/creating rules as needed, or to plan ahead, trying to account for every possibility. Each GM will need to find their own comfort zone, likely somewhere on a spectrum between those two extremes, balancing experience with the rules, time to prepare, and comfort with making quick decisions and changing expectations. Trial and error is everyone's friend for this, and a better understanding of how given PCs (and players) interact in situations will come over time. But if nothing else, whenever something doesn't resonate with game play or actively hinders the fun at the table, whether related to the rules or the story, try simply removing it.

RUNNING A DELVE

The scope and timing of a given delve will vary, depending on complexity, PC objectives, and gaming group preferences. Shorter delves might be preferred for quick, intense sessions while longer ones can contribute to an epic, immersive campaign. Presented here is a general overview of different types, from shortest to longest:

- ***Single Encounter.*** This delve consists of a single encounter or area with a specific challenge, and it resolves in one gaming session. Most single encounters are short and don't run longer than an hour. They are best used to introduce PCs and launch a new campaign (or introduce players to a new GM) as a brief introductory encounter, following a session zero.
- ***One-Shot or Side Quest.*** A one-shot or side quest involves a compact dungeon with a few interconnected rooms. PCs should be able to complete a one-shot delve in a single gaming session, often with pre-generated PCs designed for the adventure. Conversely, a side-quest delve often breaks from the dominant narrative of a long-running campaign and might span one to two sessions, lasting a few hours each.
- ***Dungeon Crawl.*** A crawl consists of a single adventure set in a moderately sized dungeon with multiple levels or sections that feature various encounters, including puzzles and skill challenges. Most published modules set in dungeons fall into this category and often require several gaming sessions to complete.
- ***Campaign Arc.*** The dungeon contains crucial story elements woven into the campaign's narrative. Throughout the campaign, PCs must delve into the dungeon to interact with essential NPCs and recover important secrets or artifacts. Exploring the dungeon spans multiple gaming sessions, potentially taking several weeks or months to complete.
- ***Megadungeon.*** A megadungeon is a massive, multi-level dungeon with extensive exploration possibilities, diverse environments, and many challenges. The dungeon provides the focus for an entire campaign, taking months or even years to explore and conquer fully.
- ***Living Dungeon.*** The living dungeon is a dynamic setting that reacts to PC choices and campaign events. Integral to a long-term campaign or even multiple campaigns, the dungeon's rich history and distinct personality build, evolving and providing new challenges for the party.

KEEP THINGS INTERESTING

Anyone who's ever run a lengthy dungeon adventure understands the importance of maintaining group focus. A group that falls into a pattern of traveling from room to room, kicking down doors, fighting monsters, and taking their stuff begins to lose interest in the repetition. The secret to maintaining interest is to continually give the PCs autonomy in decision-making and stress their accountability for whatever results occur from their actions.

Presented here are a few tricks for maintaining player focus during an extensive delve:

- ***Active Perception.*** PCs should understand that they must actively search for clues, lore, items, secret doors, and traps. Reward those that actively search and investigate by ensuring their efforts do not go unrewarded.
- ***Alternative Paths.*** Create the option for PCs to choose different routes to navigate the dungeon. Make sure they understand the consequences and benefits of their options.
- ***Evolving Opposition.*** The dungeon should adapt to the PCs. After facing off against them,

DUNGEONS AND RUINS

As a general note for this book, throughout the text, the term *dungeon* will often be used to denote both dungeons and ruins, for convenience. So you should assume that, unless it's explicitly stated otherwise, any references to dungeons will be generally applicable to both.

creatures should adjust their tactics to improve their effectiveness in future encounters. Evolving opponents force PCs to reconsider their own tactics and how they approach potential threats.

- ***Faction Conflicts.*** Introduce rival factions within the dungeon. This makes the use of diplomacy and alliances—and manipulating relations between rival factions—a real option, and such social interactions break the monotony of repeated combat encounters and encourage the use of a greater diversity of magic, skills, and tactics. This also provides greater depth to the narrative and opens the adventure to a wider array of possible outcomes.
- ***Illusions.*** Toy with the PCs' perceptions. Incorporate illusions or deceptive environments that force them to second-guess their actions and be more cognizant of immediate consequences. Overusing this option might have players becoming overly cautious at each and every decision, which can slow play and throttle fun.
- ***Living Dungeons.*** Most creatures cannot exist in isolation. Instead, creatures inhabiting the same territories interact with one another in some capacity, so add encounters that allow perceptive PCs to observe such interactions. Understanding these relationships provides insight that might influence future encounters and present new possibilities.
- ***Mind Games.*** Puzzles, riddles, and encryptions require creative thinking and problem-solving, which can also encourage both cooperation and thoughtful consideration, especially benefiting those accustomed to leading with their swords.
- ***NPC Relationships.*** Establish the relationships of all the NPCs with a stake in the dungeon: any intelligent creature that lives in the dungeon, relies on the dungeon, or is inextricably tied to it in some way (such as guides, mentors, mercenaries, prisoners, rivals, and intelligent monsters) should all have defined motivations and goals. Use these individuals as opportunities for PCs to forge alliances, creating potential instances of assistance or betrayal.
- ***Parallel Realms.*** The dungeon might hide portals to parallel dimensions, offering potential clues, lore, resources, side-quests, or alternative paths.
- ***Shifting Realities.*** A curse might be triggered, or a powerful entity might intercede during exploration in a way that alters reality, perhaps temporarily suspending the current actions and focusing on a new surreal or dreamlike sequence that challenges the PCs' perceptions. The sequence might be a flashback, actual time travel to a living history, a dream, a higher plane, or a near-death experience. Players might even be asked to roleplay different characters during the sequence.
- ***Time Constraints.*** Time-sensitive challenges force PCs to make quick decisions and manage their resources efficiently. When well designed, such challenges maintain the PCs' ability to make meaningful choices.
- ***Transmutations.*** Incorporate areas where magic produces strange transmutative effects, which might simply temporarily alter a PC's abilities or appearance or might instead alter their entire form, such as turning them into a frog or a bear. A transmutation might be a choice, such as whether to drink some font's water and turn into a specific or random creature, offering a risk-reward situation that forces them to consider the consequences. Or the transmutation might not be a choice, but even then, there can be benefit in dealing with a new and strange situation: it takes adaptability and ingenuity to survive as a frog in a hostile environment, let alone still be useful to one's allies.
- ***Unpredictable Encounters.*** Surprise the players (not just the PCs) with unexpected opponents, such as creatures they haven't encountered before or unique variations of familiar monsters.
- ***Varied Environments.*** Employ a variety of dungeon structures and terrains. A dungeon can and should still have an identifiable theme without suffering from a monotonous sameness due to the overuse of the same recurring elements.

THINKING IN 3D

When building dungeons, we are inclined to perceive the world, including our game environments, in two-dimensional terms—commonly creating flat maps. While this supports our spatial understanding, using a three-dimensional approach expands our options and allows for more creativity in our design (see also "Vertical Dungeons" in *Kobold Guide to Dungeoneering*).

LAYERED DUNGEONS

A layered or stacked dungeon design traces its origins back to the game's own origins, where increasing dungeon depth would correspond to an increasing difficulty or danger in dungeon encounters. This method creates loosely connected layers stacked from top to bottom (or bottom to top) and is conveniently mappable on single sheets of paper. It is typified by artificial



construction and intelligent design, locations built or carved out by the hands of humanoids or monsters. This design allows for a structured progression that caters to the PCs' attainment of new class levels, providing a clear sense of achievement and challenge, though it tends toward more linear adventures.

The vertical nature of the dungeon, however, is typically not fully utilized in encounter design—but there's no reason it can't be. Exploring vertical shafts between floors, fighting on hidden staircases, and navigating twisting, mazelike passages, for instance, are easy ways to take advantage of the vertical potential of the dungeon, incorporating the fullness of the PCs' three-dimensional environment and keeping the players engaged and on their toes.

VERTICAL DUNGEON ELEMENTS

d100	Description
1–3	***Air Shaft.*** Vertical shafts that bring air into the dungeon are wide enough for PCs to squeeze into and climb to other locations.
4–6	***Balcony.*** Any large room can have a balcony well above ground level to provide a place for snipers, speechifying villains, or fireball-flinging mages to stand. The addition of a solid wall provides partial cover.
7–9	***Beam.*** Horizontal stone or wooden beams might cross a mine shaft, an air shaft, or simply a sizeable vertical hall or space, and vertical beams support those higher beams, and in turn the roof of the cavern or mineshaft. Slanted beams can lead to new spaces and can be lifted by ropes, creating makeshift elevators.
10–12	***Bridge.*** Use a vertical bridge to connect two levels. Common building materials include rope, stone, or wood. More fantastic bridges are made from dragon bones, magical steel, or ever-burning timber.
13–15	***Catapult/Engine.*** A catapult hurls goblins, skeletons, or other foes at a party. Or a clever PC with acrobatic skills might use such a device to move around between areas.
16–18	***Cavern Chimney.*** Small cracks in cavern walls allow PCs to climb to greater heights. They might also provide routes for those shapeshifted or in gaseous form.
19–21	***Chasm.*** A bottomless pit or open-air cavern creates a barrier or a method of travel.
22–24	***Cliff.*** A cliff wall makes an impressive barrier or monster lair.
25–27	***Elevator (Magical).*** Add a dungeon elevator room that moves without PCs noticing. Or perhaps it's controlled by manipulating runes or colored crystals.
28–30	***Elevator (Mechanical).*** Standard elevators can require particular keys or might be traps that a villain uses to catch adventurers halfway up or down.
31–33	***Floating Platform.*** With magic, any flat surface becomes a flying platform subject to magical commands or maneuvered by a controlling circlet, wand, or other item. Once the party decides to go up or down via a platform, they are subject to its ability to lift or drop them. Another option is to weaken the platform, so it only has enough magic power to transport the PCs to one location.
34–36	***Fungus.*** Massive mushrooms can be used as steppingstones. They might provide a safe landing space for dropping from above or produce floating spores that allow PCs to glide on or to slow their fall.
37–39	***Handholds.*** Climbing holds for hands and feet make vertical travel more accessible to PCs with less natural athletic ability or who are encumbered by armor.
40–42	***Ladder.*** Ladders enable free passage from level to level. Leaving an abandoned ladder in a dungeon encourages PCs to think about ways they might put it to use.
43–45	***Ledge.*** Larger caverns or massive chambers might have ledges placed at different levels, which opponents use as missile platforms or spellcasting redoubts. Clever monsters might keep oil or rocks on the platform to use in discouraging climbers.
46–48	***Mine Shaft.*** Straight up or winding down in slow ramps, mines are naturally three-dimensional as miners follow a seam of ore.
49–51	***Moonbeam/Radiant Stairs.*** A set of glowing, translucent stairs adds a magical touch to a location. The stairs might vanish at any moment. A GM might use disappearing stairs to split the party, isolating PCs who charge ahead.

NATURAL CAVE SYSTEMS

In contrast to the layered dungeon, natural cave systems can more organically offer irregular and challenging vertical elements. Chasms, stalactites/stalagmites, ledges, and uneven floors provide challenging tactical options in combat. Unlike the layered design, cavern systems are less limited to finding stairs or passages and are instead guided by the ability to navigate rugged terrain. Low-level PCs, for instance, might have to rely on rope and climbing skills (not yet possessing flight or teleportation), making the exploration of deep caverns a challenging reward.

Embracing the irregularities of natural structures introduces a design approach in which the environment is more organic and unpredictable. Vertical elements add a layer to discovery as players must navigate complex, three-dimensional spaces—also filled with potential surprises. To enhance the design, consider

d100	Description
52–54	***Pillar.*** Heavily carved pillars are easy to climb, and even smooth ones can be flat-topped. A dungeon hermit might live atop a pillar as an underground stylite.
55–57	***Pipes.*** Dwarven boilerworks or human aquatic engineering can result in pipes that allow PCs to travel like vacuum-driven mail systems or that can be walked along or climbed on the outside.
58–60	***Pit.*** Instead of using a pit as a trap, use it as an entrance to other chambers or a series of passages that access a different dungeon level.
61–63	***Platform.*** Elevated platforms, such as a raised stone slab or a natural cavern plateau, provide a perfect stage for archers or monologuing villains.
64–66	***Portal.*** While a portal does not need to shift someone vertically, it is undoubtedly entertaining when it does, especially to some precarious upper end or some crowded and dangerous lower destination.
67–69	***Quarry.*** A quarry is used to mine stone and might be the source of material for magical statues.
70–72	***Ramp.*** While the ramps themselves are not exciting, they allow for pouring out burning oil, pitch, or marbles and watching them run down. Rolling down boulders or barrels could also work.
73–75	***Rope.*** A rope just out of reach is a spur to curiosity. One leading down into a chasm or a pit is at least a suggestion or a hint to dungeon explorers.
76–78	***Stairs.*** The classic stairs work not only as an enclosed linear set of dungeon stairs but also as a spiral, a ring around a circular space, or even along a cliff or wall with open space on the other side. Stairs can provide the perfect structure for staging a dangerous combat encounter, especially when PCs face the possibility of falling damage on open stairs.
79–81	***Stepwell.*** The open many-staircase step well, as found in Indian architecture, seems ready-made for reinvention as a dungeon watering hole, underground ritual site, or simply an elegant location to surprise adventurers.
82–84	***Switchbacks.*** A narrow, winding switchback path traverses the face of a steep escarpment or descends into a deep chasm. Increase the threat level by staging an ambush encounter with a flying foe.
85–87	***Tower.*** Some caverns or dungeon chambers are vast enough to contain a tower. A narrow archer's perch, a ship's mast, or a minaret-style tower provides for lookouts, archers, and battle mages.
88–90	***Tree.*** Massive trees or other plants can be hollowed out or otherwise arranged into a flight of stairs. They might be intentional or merely coincidental, such as a fallen log, which could also be potentially repositioned or retooled as a float for an underground waterway.
91–93	***Vines.*** Allow PCs to use roots, vines, and similar plant life as ladders, paths, and stairs to travel vertically.
94–96	***Webbing.*** Numerous dungeon creatures spin webs. Giant webs might also be strong enough to allow PCs to use them for climbing and maneuvering.
97–99	***Well.*** A well with rope and bucket can also provide a straight descent to lower regions of a dungeon.
100	Roll again twice and incorporate both (ignoring a roll of 100).

the limitations imposed by such terrain and encourage players to experiment and explore, perhaps placing a greater focus on their equipment and skills.

DESIGNING VERTICAL DUNGEONS

Balancing challenge and engagement in vertical dungeons involves incorporating specific design elements to challenge players. Concealed passages, collapsing bridges, and various environmental hazards are great examples. The concealed passages might then uncover shortcuts to other areas or hidden chambers, encouraging exploration. The collapsing bridges offer a physical challenge, testing the PCs' agility and teamwork. The environmental hazards, such as falling rocks or flooded rooms, add complexity and force players to adapt. These elements are especially effective when realizing that they can very effectively accommodate and incorporate three-dimensional spaces.

These kinds of challenge considerations can also be used in combat, such as limited visibility and a general tactical use of the terrain through special combat maneuvers, further enriching the gaming experience. Limited visibility, whether simply in darkness or maybe in a mist-filled chasm, creates tension through an enhanced dependency on light sources or magic items, also making the input from a PC's other senses that much more impactful, such as the sudden trickle of water from above or the sounds of something underground. And special combat maneuvers make the most of the space and might come in the form of flying adversaries or advantageous positioning on higher ground. Tactical use of the terrain by adversaries encourages the players to do the same.

Encounters should be designed where PCs can make use of the terrain to gain tactical advantage. Claiming a higher-ground position might offer valuable sightlines, alternate travel routes, or new access points. Adding elements like ladders, ropes, and carved handholds hint that other creatures move vertically and encourage the players to start thinking three-dimensionally with regard to how they consider their surroundings. Setting ambushes from above, escaping by dropping into a chasm, using crude pully systems, riding mine carts, bouncing on giant mushrooms—if the foes can do it, the PCs can too.

By intricately weaving these elements into the narrative, each level of a vertical dungeon becomes a unique and memorable experience. PCs face physical challenges while they also uncover pieces of the overarching story as they ascend/descend, transforming the dungeon into a living, breathing entity where the vertical dimension becomes a narrative tool that shapes the journey. This approach delivers a richer and more immersive gaming experience by breaking from traditional "flat" layouts and offering new tactical and strategic opportunities.

To add an element that takes advantage of the three-dimensional space, consult the **Vertical Dungeon Elements** table or choose something appropriate.

PACING GAMEPLAY

Moving the adventure along smoothly and effectively is one of the most challenging aspects of running a dungeon delve. During combat, time management is easily codified, but once PCs shift their focus to exploration, it's not as straightforward. Typically, an arbitrary approach of estimating time—based on the narrative events, the PCs' actions, and the overall flow—is the approach adopted. This method doesn't tend to detract from gameplay, and in fact, it can lend itself well to a more fluid and immersive storytelling that organically fits wherever it's needed. However, it can lack a sense of urgency and structure, which can make players feel challenged to make prompt decisions.

Presented here are additional ideas for how to better control the pacing:

- ***Consequences.*** Create tension by delineating consequences for PCs that fail to meet certain objectives within a set timeframe. The hard deadline creates a sense of urgency, encouraging PCs to keep on task. This requires careful management and communication to safeguard from players being excessively rushed or herded. Example scenarios include situations dealing with poison, lycanthropy, disease, or any other effect with a specific onset and time-dependent effect.
- ***Non-Combat Rounds.*** Certain non-combat scenarios might still benefit by using the structure of combat, where PCs have restrictions on their movement and actions each round. This can be useful when timing and tactical thinking are still important, such as navigating a complex trap that spans an entire room, a multi-stage skill challenge like a masquerade ball, or sneaking past the guards to eavesdrop on the council. This should be limited to special scenarios, swapping one in for a combat scenario occasionally. They also tend to sacrifice some narrative immersion.
- ***Real Time.*** Old-school competition modules at conventions frequently use a real-time mechanic. This creates a fast-paced gameplay and tends to

generate a high level of tension. Literally, the game world's time simply mimics real-world time, only occasionally suspending this under certain conditions. All players should be in agreement when deciding to play in real time.

- ***Set Structure.*** Time is based on a chart that outlines approximately how long the PCs should take to complete various sections of the delve. The chart provides a clear structure and greater predictability, allowing encounters to be increased or decreased as needed. This structure provides a framework for messaging specific events or world changes to the players, enabling a heightened sense of urgency. However, an overly structured pace can result in gameplay that feels especially forced or restrictive.
- ***Story-Driven Progression.*** Time might advance in response to significant story developments, creating a natural ebb and flow. Integrating time into the narrative helps drive home that the PCs' actions impact the game world. To be effective, the adventure requires a rich story for the PCs to engage with, and the thread of that narrative needs to be apparent at all times.

Player Agency. As a counterpoint, the players can also be empowered to dictate the pace based on their choices and actions. This strategy encourages player-driven storytelling and exploration without the constraints of a predefined timeline. However, it's still important to intervene when pacing becomes a problem or if players become indecisive or excessively focused on non-essential activities.

Hybrid Approach. Most games will combine a variety of pacing methods into a hybrid approach. Major narrative events might unfold organically while specific deadlines and time-sensitive situations are managed more arbitrarily. Finding the right balance creates a gameplay that feels in tune with the narrative, and this will in part depend on the gaming group's preferences, the campaign's tone, and the desired level of player agency. Experiment to find a balance that suits everyone's needs.

CLUES

A clue is a piece of information or physical evidence that allows PCs to speculate about the actions of NPCs or about the developing narrative. A clue often connects seemingly unrelated variables or else notes atypical behavior or items that seem out of place. PCs determine a clue's significance through investigative interpretation and then respond as they deem appropriate.

The discovery of a clue frequently incites a call to action, and a good one creates player engagement by appealing to the PCs' curiosity. The trick to creating a compelling clue is identifying what plot objectives the PCs are expected to complete and anticipating the obstacles that might hinder them from their goals in order to determine one or more alternative paths around or through the obstacle. What persons, objects, information, or situational conditions might have influence over the obstacle? It's then just a matter of distilling that into an in-game clue for the PCs should they need it.

Don't worry about making the clue too obvious. While it might be tempting to challenge players with complex or cryptic clues, it's more important to make sure everyone is having fun—and the PCs must still interpret the new information and get to decide if and how they respond to it. (Save the complex and cryptic elements for in-game puzzles. For more on puzzles, see **Chapter 5**.)

Clues fall into two main categories: those that provide information to help resolve an immediate objective and those that reveal information that unlocks part of the overarching narrative. For the former, clues are typically simple and few. For example, PCs searching for a secret passage in a library might discover a note with the title of a book (the clue), which when found and manipulated reveals a secret door behind its shelf.





When unfolding the narrative though, many clues should be used, scattered about and each providing some small piece of information that constructively strings together with the next. Expanding on the previous example, the secret door might lead to a room where the PCs discover a box of robes associated with a secret order of assassins, and at the bottom of the box is a curious medallion carved with an insignia that bears an uncanny similarity to a tattoo on the wrist of the captain of the royal guard. The clue resolves a mystery within the overarching plot of the campaign while simultaneously creating new questions, opening new paths of adventure.

Types of Clues

Incorporate a diverse array of clues to immerse players in the mystery. Introduce physical elements, like statues or tools, as key objects to examine. Pay attention to the placement of objects, seeking irregularities or incongruities that might hint at hidden meanings. Implement linguistic clues in the form of cryptically worded messages, adding an extra layer of complexity to an investigation.

Engage multiple senses to enhance the gaming experience. Provide visual clues through symbols, markings, or images that the PCs must decipher. Introduce auditory elements, like whispers or mysterious sounds, prompting the PCs to rely on their hearing. Use olfactory clues, like distinct scents associated with specific locations or objects, to guide the PCs. Tactile clues might involve the texture or temperature of objects, encouraging the PCs to explore their surroundings thoroughly.

Personalize Clues for the PCs. Secrets connected to a PC's former associate, mentor, or sibling feel more relevant—so mine those PC backstories for potential clues. Perhaps bury the secrets within a family's history, such as the nefarious acts of a sibling or the inheritance of a mysterious heirloom.

Placing Clues

Clues should follow a progression that slowly reveals the underlying influences and machinations that drive critical events in the narrative. Strategically scattered throughout the game world, they tie together various locations, NPCs, and objects. They must then be assembled and interpreted by the PCs, like solving a jigsaw puzzle.

As always though, player choices should inform the narrative. The PCs investigating a mystery where they receive only limited or even contradictory information, or else they misinterpret a clue, can cause them to branch from the dominant narrative. Consider this then an opportunity to expand or create new storylines. New clues can always connect back to the main narrative later.

For suggestions on how to introduce clues, consider the following:

- ***Interactive Environments.*** Design environments that encourage exploration and interaction, that allow for the PCs to use Investigation checks or clever roleplaying to reveal new clues.
- ***NPC Involvement.*** Populate the game world with NPCs who possess valuable information. They will of course have their own motives, alliances, and fears, making interactions with them crucial for obtaining clues.
- ***Puzzles and Skill Challenges.*** Integrate interactive elements, such as puzzles or challenges that require problem-solving skills to unlock hidden information (see puzzles and skill challenges in **Chapter 5**).
- ***Skill Checks.*** Tie the discovery of clues to skill checks. Though not ideal for important clues, failed checks could still provide some minimum information while successes simply provide something extra.

Pressure and Tension

To create a sense of urgency with clues, implement in-game events, deadlines, and the evolving actions of key NPCs. Emphasize that inaction also has consequences, and if PCs fail to follow up on a clue or solve a mystery within a specific timeframe, the situation could worsen, or new challenges might arise.

Information is valuable, so to increase tension, consider introducing opposing forces or competing factions that seek the same information. Situations might arise where PCs need to form unexpected alliances or suffer betrayal from once-trusted allies. Use red herrings and false leads to keep players on their toes, though in moderation, to add unpredictability and prevent the storyline from becoming too linear.

Sample Clues

Presented here are several examples of flavorful clues to incorporate into an adventure:

- ***Alchemical Secrets.*** A rare and enigmatic plant only grows in specific conditions. Or an alchemical lab holds a collection of rare components associated with a unique magical effect.
- ***Codebreakers and Enigmas.*** PCs find an encrypted pattern in a collection of mundane-looking notes. Or puzzle pieces left by a mysterious figure interconnect to reveal a secret.

- ***Cryptic Maps.*** An ancient map unveils a series of interconnected clues. Or the pieces of a torn map leads to a place with a surprising revelation.
- ***Family Mysteries.*** A family heirloom contains a hidden compartment with a letter that uncovers long-buried family secrets. Or an old family painting reveals a hidden legacy that is connected to the ancestry of one of the PCs.
- ***Haunted Artifacts.*** An antique with a dark history contains hidden inscriptions or markings that expose a supernatural secret. Or deciphering clues hidden in a collection of small carved statuettes reveals the secret to breaking a powerful curse.
- ***Hidden Messages.*** A weathered note stuck between the pages of an old book sheds new light on an old mystery. Or a coded message hides within a handwritten note or in the symbols that decorate a seemingly ordinary object.
- ***Invisible Ink.*** An ordinary-seeming letter has additional text scribed in invisible ink, which reveals critical information. Or a series of paintings hold hidden details visible only under a special light and that suggest a correlation between several variables that the PCs are already tracking.
- ***Lost Languages.*** Uncovering a lost language provides a fundamental understanding of a forgotten history. Or a PC encounters a civilization with a unique language that holds the answers to a mystery.
- ***Lost Memories.*** A PC wakes up with amnesia, and piecing together the past reveals hidden truths about their identity and deliberately erased memories. Or PCs receive a mysterious letter sealed with an unknown symbol.
- ***Parallel Realities.*** Deciphering vivid dreams reveals clues about events in the waking world. Or a being easily identified by its personality always appears with a different aura or physical visage.
- ***Symbols.*** Curious glyphs haphazardly scattered throughout a city suggest a connection to a secret hermetic society. Or an unknown rune appears in several seemingly unrelated dungeons in distant and remote locations
- ***Time-Locked Secrets.*** PCs uncover a time capsule that hides clues relevant to the narrative. Or an ancient artifact reveals its secrets only during a specific celestial event.
- ***Whispers in the Wind.*** Rumors among a small town's residents mention a secret passage. Or a PC hears mysterious voices that beckon toward a lost secret.

Clue Cards

Consider creating a set of clue cards as a simple and effective prop for disseminating clues. Simply write each clue on a separate index card and organize them by how and when PCs would be able to access them, rather than keying each to a specific location, object, or individual. With this added flexibility, the clue card can appear at a point when its inclusion will encourage the PCs to drive the narrative. And make a chart of all the clues to make organization easier.

Hand the clue cards directly to players when they discover the information. The tangible bit of information builds a sense of interactivity with the game world and provides the players with an easy resource to review.

Use visual cues on the cards to make them easily distinguishable, perhaps different colors, symbols, or borders for various types of clues. Consider having a physical or digital "clue board" where players can pin or arrange the clue cards. This visual aid helps players see connections and draw conclusions.

At a minimum, clue cards should provide a description of the clue and identify the general types of NPCs (rather than specific NPCs) most likely to possess the information:

- ***Clue Description.*** The card contains a brief but informative description of the clue. The description also clarifies the importance or relevance of the clue to the overarching mystery or plot.
- ***NPCs.*** Multiple NPCs possess essential information, providing a handful of opportunities to have an NPC introduce the clue to the PCs. Tailor the delivery of clues to match the personalities of the NPCs. A nervous character might drop subtle hints while a confident one might outright share information.

Use a variety of clues on the cards to keep the investigation dynamic. Scatter physical evidence, such as notes or objects, across the game world for PCs to discover. Populate the narrative with verbal cues from NPCs, including overheard conversations or rumors that might lead to valuable information. Integrate visual clues strategically, making symbols, markings, or images integral to unraveling the mystery. Introduce location-based clues as well to prompt discoveries in specific areas, creating a sense of exploration and of progress in the story. Ideally, the PCs should employ a variety of skills and abilities as they piece together the unfolding mystery.



DOOMSDAY CLOCKS

A doomsday clock is a mechanic used to represent a situation in which PCs have a limited time to prevent some catastrophic event. To implement, simply initiate a countdown during gameplay that culminates in some impending doom. The increasing pressure of the looming catastrophe drives PC action and creates a fast-paced game of high stakes.

1. Define the Threat. First, the PCs must be presented with the relevant knowledge of some impending catastrophic threat beyond their abilities to deal with directly. Present this in such a manner that makes the PCs infer that their best shot of overcoming the crisis is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Alternatively, depending on the threat, they might instead need to spend their time preparing for the challenge, acquiring new means of defeating the challenge, or altering circumstances to weaken the impending threat significantly. The threat should feel a little overwhelming, but still, keep it appropriate to the level of play:

- In a low-level game, the threat might require finding parts of the mechanism that stops a portion of the dungeon from flooding.
- In a mid-level game, the threat might require a race to recover a phylactery also sought by agents of a powerful lich.
- In a high-level game, the threat might require the recovery of a series of stolen artifacts in order to seal a planar rift that threatens to swallow the entire dungeon.

2. Consequences. Make clear to the PCs that there are consequences for failure—catastrophic consequences—using clues and NPCs to provide needed information. This should convey the gravity of the crisis, forcing them to ruminate on the dreadful events triggered when the clock reaches its critical point. But it should also provide some shred of hope, enough to incite the PCs to action, highlighting that they still have a chance, no matter how small.

3. Live Countdown. Create a physical or virtual representation of the doomsday clock to display the active countdown during the game. This can be a handmade prop, a clock, or simply tally marks on a countdown board. Break the countdown into increments and identify significant events that trigger as the clock advances. Maintaining the progression ensures that players feel the pressure of time working against their efforts.

4. Encounters. Run encounters that directly impact the progression of the doomsday clock. Include interactions that force PCs to make decisions that contribute to either the advancement or delay of the looming catastrophe. Challenges should escalate as the conclusion creeps closer.

5. Doom. The doomsday clock reaches midnight, critical mass—time runs out and the narrative culminates in a climactic moment. PCs must finally confront the unleashed doom, and the final calculation of their efforts to prevent the disaster determines the outcome. PCs that effectively worked to prevent the cataclysm decrease the threat while those who were unsuccessful in their actions face a more dire situation.

6. Conclusion. As the results of battling catastrophic doom remain uncertain, a range of potential outcomes should be prepared for:

- ***Disaster.*** The PCs fail to prevent calamity. Perhaps they die or perhaps they flee, and history might view them as tragic heroes or base villains. If any path forward even remains possible, everything will be radically different.
- ***Failure.*** It absolutely could have been worse, but the PCs' efforts fail to prevent the inevitable, and this alters the future of the campaign. PCs likely make many enemies, and they might become outcasts or even viewed as enemy agents of whatever doom resulted. But perhaps they still pull themselves from the wreckage and figure out how to deal with what comes next.
- ***Mixed.*** The resolution is bittersweet, and the cost of that success makes the PCs question everything. Perhaps it even came at the sacrifice of a PC or beloved NPC. It will take time to heal and rebuild, and that might mean significant changes as the game world adjusts and those involved come to terms with the new reality.

DIGITAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

At present, there are numerous digital tools to help manage the various resources built into the game. Many virtual tabletops provide or allow for scripts that can track time, weather, moon phases, spell durations, torches, movement, and just about anything else one might want to track. A digital campaign log can also help in organizing a game world's history and the party's exploits.

- ***Success.*** The PCs' actions successfully stave off the threat, perhaps becoming legendary heroes to those saved or perhaps no one ever even knows what they accomplished. Either way, they move on to a new chapter in the campaign.

LOCKS AND WARDS

Locks and wards create situational barriers that alter the speed at which PCs and other creatures can travel through a dungeon. They do not prevent access but simply make access more difficult. A lock is always mechanical in nature while a ward is a magical barrier—and the combination of a mechanical barrier held fast by magic is a warded lock.

Using such barriers on locations or objects limits general access to them and also stresses their value or importance. PCs are far more likely to search a room or chest when someone has locked it. With this in mind, a GM can set the pace of the game and stress important features by locking or warding only those areas or items of importance, which will focus the PCs' attention. Conversely, not having locks or wards on less important areas encourages the PCs to move through them at a faster pace.

Simple Fasteners

Simple fasteners generally fall into two categories: either latches or drop bars. Both are considered standard construction, so they are common, or they can be built from makeshift materials with little to no expertise.

Latches. Latches often consist of a small chain or lever with a peg or metal hook or another fastener, either affixed to or embedded within a barrier to keep it in place, such as preventing a door from fully opening. Most latches are relatively weak and can be forced open with a DC 5 Strength (Athletics) check. Room occupants typically use latches for privacy, preventing guests from dropping in unexpectedly. A PC can disable a latch without specialized tools but only if they can reach it. Opening the door or breaking the latch risks alerting the room's occupants. Latches typically require someone to set them.

Drop Bars. A drop bar is a thick wooden or metal bar that slots within brackets on either side of a door frame—or just braces against the door and the ground or other solid surface. The pressure holds the bar tightly against the door, preventing anyone on the opposite side from forcing it open and providing a high level of security.

Keyed Locks

Keyed locks include padlocks and locks embedded within the object itself. The correct key, when inserted into the lock and rotated, triggers a mechanism, such as a series of tumblers that move a metal rod, that effectively locks the object in place. Turning the key in the opposite direction unlocks it. Successfully picking a keyed lock requires proficiency with lockpicks, also called thieves' tools.

Combination Locks

A combination lock requires users to manipulate the lock's tumblers into the correct positions according to a specific pattern or code, such as by rotating a numbered wheel. Before placing such a lock, a GM should decide how the PCs can acquire the combination. Was it written in a journal, hidden within a tattoo on someone's wrist, or recovered through the interrogation of some dungeon denizen? Which NPCs know about the code, and which might have access to it? For a more advanced system, perhaps several individuals each only know one component of the combination, or perhaps riddles provide the clues to correctly determine the combination. Combinations can consist of numbers, letters, or other symbols—even random colors, sounds, smells, or other distinguishable sensations.

Combination locks can often be cracked by listening to the tumblers as they fall into the correct order. A PC proficient with thieves' tools can pick a combination lock with a successful Wisdom (Perception) check.

Puzzle Cipher

A puzzle cipher consists of a multi-stage combination lock, where manipulating the mechanism involves assembling various puzzle pieces. The lock opens when all the pieces are correctly aligned. Puzzle ciphers are typically impossible to pick. (For more on puzzles in gerneral, see **Chapter 5**.)

TO KEY OR NOT TO KEY

Keys are incredibly effective tools for directing PCs toward specific locks. If you want them to find a clue in a locked strongbox, for instance, simply provide them with the key to the strongbox during an encounter. They might also be able to use their abilities or skills to determine something about the key's purpose or significance.



Wards

Wards are powerful abjurations placed upon portals, rooms, and items to secure and protect them. Wards might simply hinder intruders' movement when triggered, but just as likely, they can be set to do most anything when triggered:

- ***Banishment Ward.*** As a creature steps within the area of effect, the ward forces it to return to its original plane.
- ***Eldritch Seal.*** The door or portal can only be opened under specific conditions.
- ***Elemental Glyphs.*** Those affected objects or creatures are immune or resistant to one or more energy types.
- ***Guardian Wards.*** Magical constructs or summoned entities guard a specific area or object.
- ***Invisibility Ward.*** Placing this ward on a specific object makes it invisible to the naked eye, allowing it to be hidden in plain sight.
- ***Mind-Shielding Ward.*** This ward protects against divination spells, scrying, and types of magical detection.
- ***Protection Circle.*** This ward prevents creatures of a specific type from entering a designated area, perhaps set by a magical circle on the ground in chalk, paint, or salt.
- ***Temporal Lock.*** Time within the warded space doesn't move. Any creature or object entering the area appears frozen.
- ***Ward of Negation.*** These wards negate or suppress the effects of any spell of a certain circle or lower that is cast within the area.
- ***Ward of Reflection.*** The ward reflects harmful spells back upon the caster.
- ***Ward of Shielding.*** The ward blocks or deflects attacks within its area of effect

Lockpicking

Picking a lock refers to any method of opening a lock without a key or combination. The DC and time required varies, depending on a lock's quality (see the **Lock Quality** table). A PC can subtract a number of minutes from a lock's picking time equal to the ability score modifier used to pick the lock.

A PC can use brute force to open a lock by succeeding on a STR (Athletics) check equal to the lockpicking DC + 5. A lock can be broken in a single round (requiring the Use an Object action) but makes considerably more noise than lockpicking.

LOCK QUALITY

Quality	Lockpicking DC	Time Required (Minutes)
Poor	10	1
Standard	15	2
High	20	5
Superior	25	8

REST AND SUPPLIES

Rest and sufficient supplies are vital to the wellbeing of adventurers. While encounters or other challenges that interrupt rest periods or break supply chains can be an exciting occasional shakeup, these should be kept to a minimum to avoid both overly bogging down the game and threatening the fun. Stress after stress without adequate recourse will take its toll on PC and player alike.

Resting

Provide locations within the dungeon that PCs can secure as safe resting zones. Whether because of some inherent characteristic of the location, such as advantageous terrain or divine intervention, or because the PCs have been able to fortify it, this site is guaranteed to provide safe rest.

Conversely, instead of a safe zone, perhaps the PCs are able to determine when other locations are unsafe for taking rests. Diligent appraisal of potential locations can infer the likelihood of threats and other interruptions, and PCs will get in the habit of actively seeking out resting spaces, of managing their rest periods strategically, rather than just trying to rest anywhere when they're already bloody and exhausted.

Resupplying

Keep track of consumable supplies, such as food, water, torches, and ammunition. While there are reasons the GM might take on this task, such as to offload the need for players to track food and water consumption, this can also be easily managed by the players, especially for combat reliant equipment and gear like ammunition, torches, and consumable magic items, such as potions. Either way, PCs will require opportunities to resupply, whether that's by foraging/salvaging within the dungeon or by discovering outposts of civilization that offer opportunities for purchase or barter.

Foraging. Allow PCs to forage for food or water during rests. Skill checks and the availability of resources will, of course, vary based on the dungeon environment. Some dungeons might simply be foraging wastelands, with no available food or water in



a given area, but things are rarely so dire, especially in areas that once supported civilization, such as ruins. While perhaps not delicacies, insects, rodents, and fungus can be perfectly edible—and maybe the monsters that the PCs have been killing are secretly delicious. Allow PCs with relevant skills to make ability checks to determine success.

Salvaging. Allow PCs to salvage materials for creating or repairing equipment or for trade. This might include creature parts, such as sinew for bowstring, tusks for weapons, or hides for clothing, valuable gems, plant materials, or other valuable supplies from defeated enemies or the dungeon environment. Encourage creativity in the improvising of salvaged goods for the crafting of makeshift equipment. Allow PCs with relevant skills to make ability checks to determine success.

TIME AS A RESOURCE

Emphasize time as a valuable resource. For instance, time constraints can be used to drive action and keep the game moving steadily, and consequences for delays can establish a sense of urgency. Consider delays on the PCs' part, such as too frequent resting

RANDOM EVENTS

d12	Event
1	***Alarm.*** The PCs must succeed on DEX (Stealth) checks or be spotted by a patrol. Successful WIS (Perception or Survival) checks can also spot the patrols or their tracks.
2	***Ancient Mechanism.*** Spending too much time in one area activates a clockwork/magical mechanism designed to clear the area of debris/vermin, perhaps taking the form of animated statues. Alternatively, a passive mechanism activates at certain times or signals to clear and maintain areas, and this might take the form of an unintended hazards or trap, such as flame jets or scrubbing oozes.
3	***Collapsing Tunnel.*** Running water or extensive burrowing has undercut the surrounding material. Lingering in a single location increases the risk of getting caught in a collapsing tunnel or similar barrier.
4	***Curse.*** The angry dead suffuse the area, and lingering PCs risk becoming the target of a curse. Continued exposure could even worsen the effects.
5	***Dwindling Oxygen.*** The area has a limited air supply. If the exploration takes too long, PCs risk suffocation.
6	***Lost Trail.*** Conditions reduce the efficacy of tracking and might even change the territory, such as by rising water levels or magically shifting corridors, and intended paths might disappear over time.
7	***Regenerating Enemy.*** Monsters regenerate or respawn at a certain rate, so the more time PCs remain in an area, the greater the power of their opponents.
8	***Tactical Loss.*** Enemies have taken advantage of the delay to reinforce their positions or form alliances.
9	***Temporal Warp.*** Magical anomalies might mess with time and space, affecting the PCs' abilities and movement.
10	***Timed Mystery.*** The evidence the PCs need is available only temporarily, and they might never have such an opportunity again.
11	***Unstable Magic.*** The PCs' mere presence disrupts the stability of various magical wards, perhaps triggering unwanted effects despite their care in avoiding them.
12	***Wandering Monster.*** Waiting increases the risk of encountering wandering monsters.



or spending too much time in a particular location, to be opportunities for random events designed to spur forward momentum. Added combat encounters might be counterproductive on this front, so such events might instead take the form of environmental changes, such as sudden cave-ins or weather shifts or the arrival of unexpected friendly NPCs.

For a readymade event, consult the **Random Events** table or choose something appropriate. Take care though to also consider that some slowdowns are natural and that an added event now might feel heavy-handed: PCs need to be able to leisurely engage with the narrative and setting once in a while, and players need to not be going full throttle at all times. And if everyone's having fun with their stolen moments, maybe the added pressure of a random event is not needed after all.

Tracking Time

Tracking time is often crucial, such as for determining the usage of various resources and the frequency of random encounters. It might also be important to know how long the PCs explore a given room, traverse a trap-laden corridor, or rappel down a deep chasm. Outside of combat, exploration typically happens on a scale of minutes and can be broken out into 10-minute periods.

Since there are six 10-minute increments in an hour, it's easy to track the time using a d6. Place the die with the 1 facing up, and after each increment passes, simply flip the die to the next-highest number. On reaching 6, an hour has passed. Repeat this process with two d12s to track hours.

Presented here are just a few examples of actions that typically take 10 minutes:

- Casting a ritual (always a 10-minute minimum and sometimes longer).
- Disabling a complex trap.
- Searching an entire room for traps or secret doors.
- Traveling a third of a mile (about 1,800 feet) at a slow pace. (Note that traveling stealthily can typically only be done at a slow pace.)

PLAYER ADVICE

Many actions that can be taken outside of encounters have defined rules stating how long they take. See the *Player's Guide* and *Game Master's Guide* for more details.

Automatic Resources. An automatic resource refers to any resource for which usage is generally a given but that can still be potentially expended or decreased in effectiveness over time. Common examples include air, food, torches, and water. PCs can attempt to extend the utility of such resources, when the situation demands it, by rationing or intermittent use, and while this does slow the resource's expenditure, PCs should feel the effect of the decreased usage. Some options for this include slowing the party's travel times over long distances or making them feel the effects of exhaustion sooner than average. If needed, use plastic chips, glass beads, or similar markers to represent these various resources.

Conditions and spells are different from depletable resources because their effects have set durations.

ESTABLISHING ENVIRONMENT

The environment is going to contribute to the atmosphere of the adventure—where the setting and the narrative meet. Is the air hot and sticky, a chorus of frogs reverberating in the twilight? Does the tight space feel like it's closing in, the stagnant air harder and harder to breathe? Did something just move in that wretched-smelling pool of murky water, and can no one else hear that constant dripping?

What the PCs experience in their environment will dramatically influence how they interact with the adventure, and in a fantasy setting, the possibilities are enormous. Within the confines of a dungeon or ruins, the environment can be even more profound, owing to an often-limited ability for the PCs to remove themselves from the situation and forcing them to push through any problems.

This section presents options for more intentionally incorporating the environment, through air, light, sound, and water.

AIR

When in an enclosed space, air becomes an increasingly valuable resource. Underground chambers aren't always known for their effective air circulation, and this can compromise the air quality. Natives of such areas might long ago have acclimated to the conditions, but interlopers might not be so capable or lucky.

Emphasize the impact of poor air quality in the narrative. Heighten tension by having the PCs experience symptoms like dizziness, shortness of breath, or blurred vision in such areas. The air quality might even be a central plot element. Perhaps the

source of the dungeon's compromised air is tied to a mystical artifact or a creature, and solving this problem is a crucial step in progressing through the dungeon or fulfilling a larger quest.

Bypass/Mitigation. The PCs might have opportunities to bypass or mitigate any air quality concerns in meaningful ways:

- ***Protective Gear.*** From goggles to portable air supplies, mundane or magic items can act as protection against toxic air. PCs might need to search for or craft items to more easily interact with or traverse challenging environments.
- ***Survival Skills.*** PCs proficient in Survival might excel when dealing with air quality challenges, perhaps even having advantage on related skill rolls. Allow them to use ability checks to identify signs of poor air quality, to locate alternative routes, or even to fashion makeshift protective gear from available materials.
- ***Ventilation Systems.*** For longstanding or pervasive environmental issues, such as areas with volcanic activity or structures built underwater, PCs might discover and activate existing mechanisms to temporarily alleviate the situation. Perhaps some fixing or enhancing is first required.

Creatures. The dungeon's denizens should be considered experts at surviving in the dungeon, assuming they're not recent transplants or otherwise brand new to the area. Those living is areas of compromised air quality should have adapted to it, whether evolving naturally or by magic—or if intelligent, perhaps by artificial or behavioral means, such as by either developing a slow but steady mechanism for purifying the air or understanding the warning signs of when the air quality worsens, staying low and taking shelter. Similarly, creatures might instead know to avoid certain areas, and their absence might prove a marker of bad air. Creatures that already have little or no need to breathe might also concentrate in such areas, whether because they prefer it or simply because there's less competition.

Hazards. This is a great opportunity for air-based environmental hazards. For some examples, perhaps there are random pockets of explosive gas, maybe detonating when a source of fire or sudden noise is too close (or a more esoteric trigger like psychic energy or being of the wrong faith). Perhaps poisonous fumes are continuously fed into the area through vents in the floor, either naturally occurring or artificially created, such as to simply clear one area of bad air by putting it somewhere else. Perhaps the air is actively harmful,



maybe corrosive to the skin or even necrotic in nature, so simply holding one's breath or somehow having some extra air to breathe doesn't fully negate the danger. (For some quick ideas, consult the **Hazardous Air Effects** table, and for in-depth guidance on using and creating full hazards, see *Game Master's Guide*.)

Limited Resources. PCs exploring such areas of bad or limited air, whether in ancient crypts or primordial forges or any area that might see such conditions—and whether it's a perpetual effect, periodic, or once in a lifetime—might have a race against time or other resources on their hands. Consider implementing a system where they must carry air canisters or enchanted items that provide a temporary, breathable atmosphere or simply where a time limit is in place for crossing an

HAZARDOUS AIR EFFECTS

d8	Effect
1	***Caustic Fumes.*** Caustic particulates infuse with the air, irritating the flesh of creatures unaccustomed to it. Affected PCs develop a rash or hives and make all DEX checks at disadvantage.
2	***Foul Stench.*** The air is thick with the stench of rot or another foul substance. It is so pungent that living creatures in the area make all CON checks at disadvantage.
3	***Hallucinogenic Spores.*** Hallucinogenic mold spores alter the ability to perceive and interpret reality. While breathing the spores in an affected area, PCs must fight off mild visual and auditory hallucinations, making all Wisdom checks at disadvantage.
4	***Soporific Air.*** Compounds in the air produce a soporific effect that makes living creatures drowsy. At the end of each hour within the affected area, a PC must make a DC10 CON save to avoid falling unconscious. Those affected can be revived by being violently roused, doused with water, given smelling salts, or similar methods. A roused creature remains conscious for 1d10 minutes + its CON modifier, after which it falls unconscious again if still in the affected area. A *restoration* spell or similar magic ends the effect, and creatures removed from the area regain consciousness after a few minutes.
5	***Sweet Air.*** The air within this area causes breathing creatures to burst into unprovoked fits of laughter. Every 10 minutes a PC spends within the area, they must succeed on a DC 10 WIS save or burst into laughter until the end of their next turn. While laughing, the PC can't move and is incapacitated.
6	***Tainted Leak.*** Necrotic energies infuse the air. When a creature would regain hit points from magical healing, it regains 1d4 fewer hit points.
7	***Thin Air.*** Areas with poor air quality can provide less oxygen, making every activity more strenuous and reducing mental clarity. PCs that spend more than 4 hours in such a location recover more slowly from injuries. During their next short or long rest, treat their total hit dice as a level lower than their actual level (minimum 1).
8	***Toxic Gas.*** Toxic gases taint the air. Each creature in the area for at least 10 minutes must succeed on a DC 10 CON save or be poisoned until it spends at least 10 minutes outside the area.

area based on them holding their breaths. Running out of air would then have serious consequences, ranging from exhaustion to suffocation.

LIGHT

Light is one of the primary considerations for adventures in a dungeon. Lack of light imposes severe and potentially dangerous complications for sight-dependent PCs without some form of heightened senses that either bypass the darkness or compensate for it. Once a PC descends into a sunless dungeon, they relinquish all guarantees of a consistent or sustainable light source. Instead, they must rely upon torches, lanterns, spells, and magic items to provide light when no other options exist. However, even while the default setting for light in a dungeon is darkness, circumstances can always deviate from this, no matter how far one descends.

Light Sources

When creating new light sources, be sure to account for the intensity and range of the emitted light. Generally, when an object emits bright light, it also emits dim light twice as far as the radius of the bright light. Consider the following types of light sources:

- ***Artificial Light.*** Whether as simple as a periodic brazier or mounted torch or as complex as requiring magic, alchemy, or lost technology (see **Magical Light Sources** table), the necessity for light for so many living creatures can't be overstated. These might be active in surviving cultures or merely derelict and non-functioning apparatuses of past inhabitants—though perhaps they could function again with a little effort. PCs might at least be able to salvage fuel, such as alcohol spirits, coal, oil, or magical stones, and other resources, such as cloth, rope, or wax.
- ***Bioluminescence.*** Some organisms naturally produce light. Sessile organisms that grow on dungeon walls, such as mushrooms and other fungi, might give off light continually or only in certain

conditions. Slow-moving slimes or jellies might produce light or leave behind a phosphorescent trail. Insects like fire ants or giant fireflies have glands that emit light. Generally, bioluminescence is only ever a dim glow, though some creatures might be able to intensify it as short, blinding flares, such as when disgorging the substance to the air or when a spore cloud is set ablaze.

- ***Natural Light.*** Traces of sunlight might leak into a cavern through natural or artificial vents or through tiny cracks leading to the surface. Some underground chambers are constructed close enough to the surface or to a cliff face to make window slits an option. And of course, magic makes access to actual sunlight more achievable in even the darkest depths. Going deep enough, however, or in volcanically active surface areas, magma/lava might become the dominant source of natural light.

Light Quality

The quality of a source's light is also important:

- ***Blinding Light.*** This light is so powerful that when it activates, all sighted creatures within the area must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save to avert their eyes or become blinded for 1d4 rounds.
- ***Intermittent Light.*** Some light sources might function intermittently, whether blinking, flashing, or turning on and off by a switch or trigger. For example, a slow-moving magma flow might agitate the contents of an underground lake, creating a shifting lighting effect. A strange glowing ash might appear to sparkle and dissipate when PCs ignite a series of alien webs threaded across a cavern ceiling. Throwing reagents on a burning brazier might release a sudden burst of very bright light that fades slowly. When creating an intermittent light source, consider the light's intensity, duration, and reset time between flashes.
- ***Triggered Light.*** The lighting effect only activates in response to a trigger, which might be from movement, sound, certain types of energy, almost anything. Certain factors might also increase or decrease the effect, such as a light source that grows brighter in the presence of a good-aligned creature. Proximity is another factor that influences a trigger. Allow PCs to discover lighting triggers while searching for secret doors or traps. These triggers can be either mechanical or magical.

SOUND

Dungeons are vast structures with reflective stone walls that can cause the slightest sounds to reverberate and echo. Some structures and passages amplify sounds while others break them apart, mutating noises into whispers, angry shrieks, or strange warbles. It's difficult to move quietly in a dungeon. Boots scrape on stone, and even well-oiled armor and equipment tend to always be clanking on something. A dungeon's layout and the structures of individual chambers can significantly affect how sound propagates within a dungeon.

Sound Changes

One way to give sound a more dominant influence in a dungeon is to assign rooms and corridors specific properties on how they affect sound:

- ***Amplification.*** A sound's volume is amplified to be twice as loud and carry twice as far as it ordinarily would. When in an area of amplification, all DEX (Stealth) checks have disadvantage, and all WIS (Perception) checks have advantage.
- ***Deadening.*** The opposite of amplification, a deadened sound is half as loud and carries half the distance as it ordinarily would. When in an area of deadening, all DEX (Stealth) checks have advantage, and all WIS (Perception) checks have disadvantage.

MAGICAL LIGHT SOURCES

d8	Light Source
1	Burning globe of arcane flame that hovers in the center of the chamber.
2	Eerie phosphorescent fluid flows through long, tubular glass columns that run from floor to ceiling.
3	Large angular crystals sit propped upon metal pedestals, filling the chamber with bright light.
4	Magic torches rest in iron sconces and ignite autonomously as soon as any creature enters the room.
5	Series of runes radiate with an eldritch power.
6	Statues' eyes cast beams of oddly hued light.
7	Tiny glass orbs hover about the chamber, their soft, scintillating light perpetually shifting in color.
8	Unholy shrine of an ancient deity radiates with an ominous violet glow

- ***Distortion.*** Distorted sounds change as they move through the dungeon, altering or breaking apart as the sound waves bounce from one surface to another. When in an area of distortion, all INT checks made to identify sounds have disadvantage.
- ***Echoing.*** Echoing sounds repeat a number of times, each instance diminishing in volume from the previous. When in an area of echoing, all WIS (Perception) checks made to pinpoint sounds have disadvantage.

WATER

Unlike many dungeon features, water is typically not static: a subterranean sea, surging and receding to its own tidal beat; blood spilling into an underground river or stream, only to alert those lurking downstream; sloshing and splashing from rippling footsteps through a flooded chamber. Its presence literally shapes the dungeon—both physically, by carving paths and eroding foundations, and ecologically, by providing the basis for life to thrive. When creating a dungeon, determine how much water exists there, identify its sources, how it travels, where it collects, and what or who depends on it.

The presence of water has a profound and far-reaching impact on the local environment:

- ***Debris and Sediment.*** Moving water carries all sorts of debris and sediment. Determine how different deposits alter the appearance and characteristics of certain chambers and passages over time. These can also affect the color and clarity of the water.
- ***Magical Influence.*** Magic can alter the properties of water to varying effect. For example, it might change the temperature of the water in a fountain, change the viscosity of a pool, or change the direction of a stream or waterfall. Portals to the elemental planes can introduce even more widespread effects and new forms of life.
- ***Secondary Effects.*** Water often extends beyond its obvious limits. For example, increased humidity in the surrounding air can create conditions for steam or fog, which limits visibility. Surfaces slick with condensation become slippery and difficult to navigate. Persistent moisture can rot wood, rust iron, and facilitate the growth of various fungi, slimes, and oozes.
- ***Soundscape.*** Incorporate the sounds of water into the dungeon atmosphere, such as rushing currents, dripping trickles, or ripples of something moving through still waters. Loud waters, such as rapids and waterfalls, might interfere with a PC's ability to communicate effectively or hear threats. (See also **Sound** in this chapter.)
- ***Sources and Endpoints.*** Identify where waterways begin and end, whether fully contained within the dungeon or simply passing through: these might be underground rivers, natural hot springs, or surface seepage or runoff. Determine where the water enters, pools, and exits the dungeon, allowing this to guide the dungeon's construction. Or in the case of the dungeon existing before the coming of the water, the dungeon's structure will help to determine the water's flow and distribution. Water naturally follows the least resistance from higher to lower elevations, so consider the natural gradients of the dungeon's passages and the makeup of its surfaces and structures.
- ***Velocity and Current.*** Water volume and the paths available to it determine its speed and direction. Narrow passages might create fast-flowing waterways, increasing the risk of PCs slipping, being swept away, or drowning, while more expansive caverns might slow the water down, creating sluggish pools that might present difficult-to-navigate eddies and obstacles like logs and rock formations—or even the perfect spot for a water-based lair.



Water Quality

Given the necessity of water for so many creatures, its quality is often extremely important:

- ***Clean Water.*** The water is clean, fresh, and safe to drink.
- ***Magical Properties.*** The water has magical properties. Consuming it has an effect similar to a potion, such as healing. It might also reverse the effects of a specific curse, provide divine insight, or grant eternal youth. If water has magical properties, these are lost if the water is transferred to another container.
- ***Mineral Content.*** Mineral deposits in dungeons can affect the water. For example, an area with significant iron deposits might give a reddish-orange tint to water. Other minerals might support the growth of bioluminescent algae or bacteria, might make the water cloudy, or might increase the water's salinity or acidity. Differences or changes in the mineral content within the same dungeon might serve as a clue to determine different water sources, discern direction, or identify changes in the dungeon's composition or structure. This mineral content might or might not affect how safe it is to drink.
- ***Stagnant Water.*** When water collects underground, it tends to evaporate more slowly—even pooling in the same place for years. These conditions can lead to the proliferation of bacteria, parasites, and insects (such as mosquitoes) and can concentrate dangerous run-off (occasionally alchemically polluted). Stagnant water typically reeks of rotting biomass. In areas with stagnant water, all WIS (Perception) checks based on smell have disadvantage, and PCs coming into contact with the water must succeed on a CON save or suffer the effects of exposure, which can carry a variety of mundane or magical consequences (see **Risk of Contamination** and **Effects of Exposure** tables).

Water Depth

Pooling or seeping water can lead to a variety of environmental conditions, depending on depth. The following effects are cumulative as water levels rise (though they also depend on a creature's size as, for instance, "up to knees" for one PC might be "up to waist" for another):

- ***Damp/Slick.*** Trace levels of water coat the floor and/or walls. There might be accompanying mud and scattered puddles. If surfaces are especially slick, PCs might need to make STR or DEX checks when climbing or moving, respectively, to avoid falling prone. Persistently damp spaces also support blooms of mold.
- ***A Few Inches.*** The floor lies submerged beneath 1–2 inches of water. If the water is murky, it might conceal obstacles or hazards, such as sticking mud or open pits. All DEX (Stealth) checks have disadvantage.
- ***Up to Knees.*** The water is deep enough to conceal aquatic or amphibious creatures. Treat area as difficult terrain.
- ***Up to Waist.*** The water soaks clothing and gear unless specific measures are taken to prevent it (such as holding backpacks overhead). PCs and other creatures have half cover from attacks originating above the water. Individuals knocked prone or unconscious are in danger of drowning.
- ***Up to Neck.*** A PC can't avoid their clothing and gear becoming soaked—short of magical intervention. PCs cannot take the Dash action (unless they have a swimming speed).
- ***Submerged.*** The area is completely filled with water, and PCs must submerge themselves to enter. Air-dependent creatures must hold their breath or find a magical or technological means to continue breathing.

Water Features

Consider the following examples of natural terrain and artificial structures in which water might collect and move in a dungeon or ruin:

- ***Aqueducts, Canals, and Sewers.*** Dungeons and ruins sometimes contain structures designed specifically to move water, waterborne craft, or waste. Some might retain some or all of their full, intended functionality while others might no longer have the capacity, whether due to lack of water, failing infrastructure, or some other reason. These passages might present the primary means of navigation for the area or they might offer simply alternative routes or side excursions.
- ***Aquifers.*** Aquifers form when groundwater collects between rock layers, creating large stores of fresh water entirely encased in stone. In dungeons, these can serve as sources of clean drinking water for those with the intelligence and means to access it. More strategically, unseen aquifers can be used to create dynamic encounters, such as by placing them in areas where damage from spells or physical force might cause sufficient damage to unleash torrents of water into the surrounding chambers. Condensation on the ceiling or walls might be an indication of the



looming danger—or opportunity. A drained aquifer might hide secret passages, treasures, or access to unknown areas.

- ***Cisterns, Lakes, and Pools.*** Water collects in large quantities in cisterns, lakes, or pools. Cisterns are deliberately built to capture and store vast amounts of water, usually as a supply for a city or other settlement. Lakes might serve a similar purpose but form naturally in large caverns. Pools are generally smaller but can collect water enough for swimming or bathing. Most such reservoirs also have one or more points where excess water flows, such as in flooding conditions. It's important to note that water levels of such structures can change drastically as they are dependent on the conditions at their source: heavy rains might cause a cistern to overflow while a drought might diminish a lake to little more than a foot of water on a muddy plane.
- ***Fonts, Fountains, and Watering Holes.*** Water is essential for most creatures, and those that exist in dungeons and ruins are no different. Ruins might have numerous vessels and structures for storing and delivering water, remnants of its previous inhabitants. Structures built to honor deities might have decorative fountains surrounding statues. Perhaps there are stairs descending into a recessed pond or porcelain-lined bath. Magical fountains might enchant their waters to bestow a curse or restore lost or forgotten memories. Structures designed for religious purposes often fill fonts and basins with holy water. Even a dungeon's natural watering holes might have been incorporated into the local denizens' domain, perhaps even elevated in importance by those with a religious bent.
- ***Rivers and Streams.*** Moving waters carve away soil and rock, forming natural rivers and streams. Perhaps a river forms when waters find a path through existing chambers and passages, dictated by either ancient structures or natural caverns. Or perhaps it's a combination of the two. Such a waterway might also crosscut the dungeon or ruin, bisecting passages and blocking them off or else forging alternative routes. The fresh water also attracts a variety of creatures reliant on it.
- ***Waterfalls.*** Underground waterfalls make spectacular dungeon terrain. They can create dead ends, hide or block entrances to passages, form structures, obscure vision, or create difficult, three-dimensional terrain. Dungeon waterfalls form when a waterway spills into a lower level. But they need a source, such as a river, for they don't just appear out of nowhere—unless by magic. Waterfalls also create a lot of noise. This will affect any creatures living or passing nearby. Consider where and how PCs might interact with the waterfall: are they at risk of going over the falls or else hit by falling water from above? Is the fall a veritable "death drop," descending several stories into a deep pool, or is it as a gradated descent, possessing several terraces of slippery, rocky terrain?
- ***Walls.*** A thin curtain of water flows down the walls, flush against the stonework. It falls from tiny openings in the ceiling and might mask a door or

EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE

d6	Effect
1	***Biofilm.*** A slimy film of bacteria or fungus coats the water and bonds with and coats anything that comes into contact with it. Coated items or PCs reek of the same odor as the stagnant water. PCs drinking the water must succeed on a CON save or take 2d6 poison damage. Additionally, creatures moving through the biofilm create an obvious trail in their wake.
2	***Caustic Slime.*** The water smells of alchemical waste. Metal objects coming in contact with the slime begin to corrode, taking 1d6 points of acid damage per minute until they are washed clean of the slime.
3	***Disease.*** The water smells of biological wastes or decaying flesh and harbors disease. PCs must succeed on a CON save or contract a disease (see *Game Master's Guide*).
4	***Flammable.*** A flammable substance slicks the surface of the water. If an open flame is present within 5 feet of the water for 2d4 rounds, it combusts, and PCs in contact with the water take 1d6 fire damage per round of exposure at the end of their turn.
5	***Insect Swarm.*** The area above the water's surface, and 10 feet beyond on all sides, is filled with mosquitoes (use multiple **swarms of insects** with a 20-foot flying speed).
6	***Parasites.*** Parasites infest the water. Tiny unseen creatures, such as leeches, start to swarm as the water is kicked up (use multiple **swarms of quippers**, 1d2 rounds after a PC enters the water).

window into another room, a magic portal, a small alcove or shrine, or runes carved into the stonework. The water might be designed to create a soothing burble or even to strike various chimes, or it might fill a fountain. In a frigid chamber, the water might freeze during its descent to form icicles while a hot chamber might convert it to steam.

- ***Wells.*** Wells are long vertical shafts that descend to a source of water. The bottom of a well might be an enclosed area, such as an aquifer, cistern, or lake, but it could also reach into a stream or river. The well might also have dried up long ago or no longer be viable for some reason. Perhaps it simply offers PCs another way to access different layers in the dungeon. And maybe there's treasure at the bottom.

RISK OF CONTAMINATION

Exposure	Save DC
Splashed	5
Doused	10
Submerged	15
Consumed	20

BUILDING ENCOUNTERS

Key encounters are typically tied to specific areas in a dungeon, such as where a creature lairs or toils, and this provides a great baseline for the adventure. But dungeon ecologies are not truly that static: denizens move around, perhaps following the routine of their daily job, such as rat rouster or stewpot stirrer, which might require any number of activities before they can catch some sleep, or perhaps hunting for food during prime hours in order to feed their young. Even if they never leave the dungeon, they have things to do. And this is where wandering monsters come in.

Wandering monsters break the static presumptions fostered by focusing on the map and ignoring the dynamic ecology it represents. They are an easy way to give the sense of this constant activity within the dungeon, plus the unexpected challenge of the random encounters helps build excitement. Unfortunately, if not built explicitly for the dungeon in question, random encounter tables can also create discontinuity by presenting encounters inappropriate for the area, poorly timed, or excessively overpowered.

This section presents options for more effectively using random encounters.

ENCOUNTER TRIGGERS

Instead of encounters occurring at purely random intervals, use triggers based on the PCs' decisions or location, on time passing, or on specific events within the dungeon. Triggers create a sense of cause and effect, and when tied to random encounters, they can add depth and context:

- ***Action Response.*** A specific action (such as lighting a torch or making a loud noise) triggers an encounter.
- ***Arcane Surge.*** An unknown source of powerful magic ripples through the fabric of reality, unleashing unexpected encounters.
- ***Backlash.*** A specific encounter might have a lingering impact, attracting attention or retaliation from affected factions or creatures.
- ***Disturbances.*** Disturbances caused by the PCs or other factions within the dungeon draw attention and must be investigated. Examples include triggering traps, breaking barriers, or activating magical wards.
- ***Environmental Changes.*** A change in the environment triggers an encounter, such as a shift in weather, time of day, air pressure, seismic activity, or alterations in the magical field of the area.
- ***Events.*** An event triggers an encounter, such as cultists performing a ritual, a faction gathering, or a power struggle among dungeon inhabitants.
- ***Lingering/Resting.*** Spending a significant amount of in-game time in one area increases the odds of dungeon denizens passing through that space.
- ***Time.*** Encounters occur after a certain amount of in-game time has passed.
- ***Valuables.*** The discovery of a rare resource, valuable treasure, or powerful item incites an influx of greedy NPCs that seek wealth and power.

FORTIFIED ENCOUNTERS

Intelligent dungeon inhabitants do not sit idly by as adventures invade their territory. As PCs make their presence known, intelligent denizens should respond by actively preparing defenses, laying traps, and setting ambushes. They might move supplies and treasures and, when possible, call for reinforcements.

After PCs clear a level and move onward, any survivors (or reinforcements that arrived too late) might be setting traps and ambushes and establishing strategies for the PCs' return trip. In extreme cases, they might even attack the PCs or their associates outside of the dungeon.



INTEGRATED ENCOUNTERS

Making random encounters feel more organic and less arbitrary involves weaving them into the narrative and ensuring they contribute meaningfully to the overall story and gameplay. It should be relatively evident to every participant why each encounter exists in that specific environment. Anything markedly atypical (even if intentional) for the environment or narrative should be an obvious cue for investigation and provide attainable clues, so PCs can connect it to the adventure's narrative.

For example, a random encounter with a flight of cockatrices in a tunnel will likely feel random without additional context, so adding a bunch of broken cages and three paralyzed goblins, either in the immediate area or not far away, gives the encounter some narrative weight. If PCs search the goblins and find a note that reads, "Bring these birds to Gronik," then it completely masks the fact that the encounter was random.

Presented here are a few ideas for more effectively integrating random encounters into an adventure:

- ***Avoid the Purely Random.*** Design encounter tables to align with the dungeon's theme or the adventure's narrative, and then use random encounters to introduce clues or reveal more about the dungeon's history, factions, or other mysteries. Tailor the tables to different dungeon levels/sections or specific narrative arcs, making encounters more purposeful.
- ***Foreshadow.*** Provide subtle hints or clues about potential encounters beforehand through NPCs, environmental details, or lore scattered throughout the dungeon. Foreshadowing helps build anticipation and makes an otherwise random encounter feel like a natural progression rather than an arbitrary event.
- ***Incorporate Backstory.*** Create a random encounter table that incorporates the PCs' backstories, planting one or two NPCs for each PC. Each NPC should have clear motivations and objectives for a given encounter.
- ***Introduce Story Hooks or Side Quests.*** Overcoming an opponent might reveal new information about a more significant threat or provide a backstory that supplies the PCs with clues they need to uncover a lost treasure.
- ***Source Local Creatures.*** Using patrols of local inhabitants allows PCs to piece together clues about the dynamic relationships between the region's different power groups. The frequency of encounters also provides information about the presence of patrols from dominant factions or from those looking to increase their standing in the dungeon. Similarly, spying on or interrogating patrols can provide information about struggles for control, territory, or resources within the dungeon ecosystem.
- ***Tie Encounters to the Environment.*** Consider the dungeon's ecology and history, for encounters that make sense in the context of the environment will naturally feel less random. For example, earth elementals might make a fine encounter almost anywhere underground, but fire elementals might be better for caverns near a massive magma pool—and if that magma feeds into a forgotten forge, then there's a natural connection to instead use angry azer ghosts.

NON-COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

Not all random encounters need to involve combat. Consider social encounters with creatures that have the potential to serve as allies—or at least not enemies—rather than immediate threats. Provide the opportunity for an encounter to de-escalate if the PCs take a peaceful or non-confrontational approach.

Additional non-combat encounter options that are especially effective in dungeons are hazards and traps (see **Chapter 4**) and puzzles and skill challenges (see **Chapter 5**), any of which can make for a great change of pace from combat encounters.

NOT-SO-RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Sometimes, there is a clear need for an extra encounter, and it might come from a random table, or it might be one extemporaneously built for the context:

- ***Acclimation.*** Perhaps because of a new mechanic that hasn't been used before or a new style of play or something else that just needs some extra time to adjust to, an extra low-stakes encounter can be helpful. For example, a PC acquires a new magical item or ability, and it's something new to everyone at the table. Perhaps the encounter is even structured as a training fight, where the PCs fight one another (or NPCs), but any damage is ignored at the end of it.
- ***Encounter Balance.*** Random encounters can help balance the challenge of a dungeon, and increasing the number of encounters prevents PCs from too quickly passing through a dungeon level.
- ***Introductions.*** An encounter might be needed to introduce NPCs or other elements of the narrative. These can also help guide PCs by providing clues or triggering events. For example, a fight with the main villain's minions might reveal clues leading their boss's lair—or humiliating them might bring their boss out of hiding.

- ***Leveling.*** If PCs aren't progressing fast enough to prepare them for the challenges in the next part of the story, a random encounter might give them the XP they need to level up.
- ***Pacing.*** Adding some low-stakes random encounters can help to alleviate the pressure of back-to-back deadly encounters or to spice up an especially dry stretch. If the previous session didn't already end with an imminent encounter, then starting a session with a flavorful random encounter can be effective at getting the blood flowing—despite where the previous session ended.
- ***Resource Management.*** Additional encounters can pressure PCs to better consider their resources, such as ammunition, potions, and spells. They can face big problems in the current encounter if they underutilize their options, but they can face big problems in a future encounter if they use too many resources now.
- ***Stalled Adventure.*** Sometimes, gameplay stalls, maybe it's the players or maybe the GM that feels a little stuck, but something needs to nudge things forward. When this happens, consider inserting a random encounter to provide a quick change of pace and something to draw focus.

SCALING ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTY

Build flexibility into the difficulty of random encounters to allow for the PCs' preparations and tactics by, for instance, reducing the encounter difficulty for effective scouting, ambushing, monster baiting, setting alarms and traps, and the like. This could result in something as simple as the PCs' gaining surprise in the encounter or having fewer foes to contend with or perhaps the foes face a setback, such as reduced movement or any numbers of possible effects or conditions. Conversely, of course, PCs engaging in reckless behavior might quickly find themselves in a disadvantageous position.

Combining the encounter with a hazard or trap (see **Chapter 4**) or puzzle or skill challenge (see **Chapter 5**) is also an easy way to quickly ramp up its difficulty on the fly.

GIVING OUT REWARDS

PCs expect to find treasure, and for some, it's the primary reason they take up adventuring in the first place—and the accumulated piles of gold and gems, chests filled with treasures, ancient relics, and artifacts just whet the appetite. That wealth then allows them to continue on as an adventurer, enabling them to buy resources, such as better equipment and weapons, even henchmen. Perhaps someday they'll buy some property, maybe even retire on their vast stores. But today, they still go adventuring.

Ultimately, it's the GM that controls the amount of wealth PCs can accrue. So before deciding how much loot to scatter in a dungeon, determine how vital the acquisition of wealth is to the narrative. Do PCs need a massive fortune to affect events in the campaign, perhaps needing to buy access to NPCs or to compete with exceptional foes? Wealth can also raise a PC's social position and boost their ability to influence people. To what extent does wealth affect political and social status in the game world, and how much do the PCs need?

NON-MAGICAL TREASURE

Treasures include any items collected for their value during the adventure. Any mundane item has a quantifiable value, though it might be valued to a greater or lesser extent by others. This subjectiveness can be in part determined by the item's cultural significance, rarity, and situational circumstances. For example, a

GREED VS. NEED

Greed is a pedestrian plot device. While using the lure of wealth to drive PC motivation might work initially, in and of itself, it is uninspiring and unreliable. Repeatedly storming dungeons, killing monsters, and taking their loot can quickly stagnate gameplay, only serving to distance players from the setting.

After all, most things are reevaluated in the face of mortal peril, and a reward must carry great significance to outweigh the value of an individual's life. After all, only a living PC benefits from wealth. A second issue arises when new acquisitions are no longer motivation enough, and the GM must offer increasingly valuable rewards for the same response from the PCs.

Still, greed can be a useful motivator, especially when the reward is undeniably more significant than the risk. It also works well if PCs are pressed to come up with a lot of gold quickly, such as needing the riches to hire NPCs or pay for services.



starving PC can't eat gold, so the value of food becomes greater than that of their gold, and items vital to the adventure might be less valuable in a different context:

- ***Currency.*** Copper, silver, gold, and platinum all have base values determined by weight and are minted into currency, or coins. This is typically the most abundant loot found in dungeons.
- ***Transferable Goods.*** PCs should expect to be able to sell or barter these items, and though the value is not set, it is usually predictable within a range for a given region. Gemstones fall into this category, varying in value based on cut, finish, size, and purity, as do the more subjectively valued categories of jewelry and art. Jewelry (unlike art) will never slip below the value of its base materials. PCs can expect relatively few problems exchanging such items, assuming the subjective value isn't greater than what is on offer.
- ***Special or Unique Goods.*** For other items, value can be truly subjective. A rare book of elven lore holds far more value to a wizened elven historian than it does to an illiterate gladiator. Such items include antiques, collection pieces, cultural heirlooms, historical artifacts, instruments, tools, and reagents. To the proper buyer, these items can fetch unusually high prices. However, it can be a chore to track down a buyer both interested and able to offer an item's potential worth. The rarity and condition of the item can also be a factor, and an expert might be required for appraisal.

TREASURE PLACEMENT

While treasure functions primary as reward (or motivation) for PCs, it's also a dungeon component, affecting both the pacing and narrative of the game. Placing a sack of gold on a table in plain sight robs PCs of the opportunity to use their skills to find and retrieve it. On the other hand, PCs forced to tediously spend excessive time digging around for rewards can slow the game to a halt. So the best way to ensure that treasure acquisition remains at the appropriate level of challenge—or fun—is to vary it from one to another.

Create a Scavenger Hunt. Instead of finding the treasure directly, PCs could be set on a "scavenger hunt" to find clues, such as cryptic codes or riddles, that lead to the treasure and along the way solve puzzles, navigate traps and hazards, and defeat or evade guardians. Perhaps even create a treasure map.

Hide in Plain Sight

Camouflage treasure to look like mundane structures or items or else place valuable items in mundane settings:

- Disguise the treasure as functional objects or tools, such as hiding valuable gems within the hilt of a sword or concealing jewels within the intricate mechanism of a clock.
- Hide valuables within seemingly mundane containers, such as barrels of flour or grain, sacks of potatoes, or crates of vegetables.
- Incorporate treasure into architecture or room features, such as embedding jewels into the intricate designs of floor mosaics or in statues' eyes or else plate decorative armor and weapons with precious metals.
- Magical concealments, such as illusions or enchantments, can make treasure appear mundane or even invisible.
- Place treasure in concealed compartments within furniture or fixtures, such as secret drawers in desks, hollowed-out sections in chair legs, or containers with false bottoms or linings.
- Redirect attention with mirrors or other reflective surfaces to conceal valuable items within a seemingly empty space.
- Use decoy items that appear valuable but aren't, and then hide valuable items among the decoys.

Make It Hard to Reach

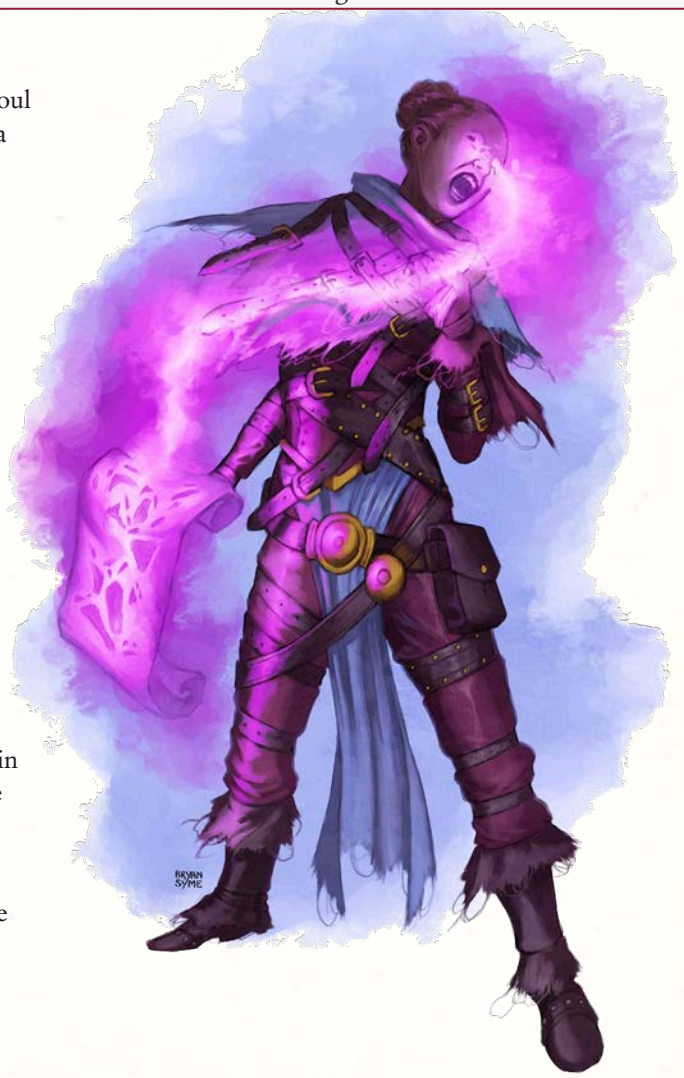
Place treasure in precarious or tricky or somehow dangerous locations that require PCs to think strategically and use skills and special equipment. Accessing the treasure might require the PCs to cross a worn or poorly constructed rope bridge, descend rusted rungs, or use magical means to prepare against environmental factors like cold or poison:

- ***Collapse.*** The treasure lies in a collapsed zone. Dangers include falling rocks, snow, crystal shards, and steep drops.
- ***Corrosion.*** The treasure lies within a room or cavern filled with caustic radiant energies, poisonous gases, hypnotic patterns, or hallucinogenic spores.
- ***Drop.*** The treasure lies at the bottom of a deep trench, crevasse, or well.
- ***Isolated.*** The treasure is set apart somehow, such as in a locked vault or behind puzzle-operated force fields.
- ***Lair.*** The treasure is on a corpse in the center of a monster's nest or breeding ground. Or maybe it's just decorating the lair.

SAMPLE KEY ITEMS

d6	Item
1	Ancient wedding ring that placates the fury of an angry ghost.
2	Bottled imp who knows the secret names of three devils responsible for an ancient curse.
3	Magical weapon crafted from a rare material that can pierce the flesh of an otherwise invulnerable nemesis.
4	Mysterious scroll that contains the missing half of a ritual to stop a terrifying prophecy.
5	Necklace with a medallion that glows within 60 feet of the secret door that leads to an unknown crypt.
6	Strange metal device that can be inserted into a mechanism to activate a magical elevator.

- ***Stewpot.*** The treasure lies at the center of some foul or hazardous substance, such as a geyser, magma pool, quicksand, swamp, or tar pits—or a literal stewpot in a hag's hut.



PLOT REWARDS

Completing an event or discovering clues can also advance the narrative by helping the PCs better understand the setting and NPC motivations and other plot elements. It allows them to better participate in the storytelling, and it helps create opportunities to incorporate their PCs' own backstories and motivations.

Key Items

A key item serves an essential function within the greater narrative. The item acts as a key (perhaps literally) that PCs must utilize to unlock some culminating event. The role of the key item might not be evident at first, but PCs should receive some hint that the object is destined to play a critical part in the future. For a quick key item, consult the **Sample Key Items** table or choose something appropriate

Plot Reveals

A plot reveal is a moment in the adventure where the PCs uncover information that significantly alters or

SAMPLE PLOT REVEALS

d6	Reveal
1	A deceased nemesis from a PC's past is revealed to be alive and plotting their revenge.
2	A PC realizes their own blood can activate an eldritch portal (linked to their backstory).
3	A prophecy believed to foretell the dawn of a new age of liberation for humanity has an alternate interpretation that exposes the supposed liberator as a demon lord.
4	PCs discover that the one who hired them to recover an artifact intends to use it for a nefarious purpose.
5	The horrifically malformed creatures that hunt the ancient ruins of the lost civilization of Xarantros are actually its accursed descendants.
6	The revelation finally exposes the hidden location of an item or NPC.

THE MACGUFFIN

An item of particular import to a story is often called a MacGuffin. Screenwriter Angus MacPhail originally coined the term to represent a concept or item that motivates characters to engage in a plot. Typically, an author introduces a MacGuffin early in the narrative, and its significance tends to wane as events unfold. They are also very effective at drawing PCs into adventure.

expands their interpretation of the narrative. The reveal should explicitly disclose previously hidden or unknown details that allow the PCs to make decisions and move forward. To advance scenes, resolve mysteries, or shift the narrative's direction, consult the **Sample Plot Reveals** table or choose something appropriate



CAVES

Caves are naturally occurring underground passages or voids formed through a variety of geological processes, including dissolution, erosion, and volcanic activity. Whereas artificial structures like castles tend to have an obvious aesthetic and logic to their construction, caves have no such intentionality (barring magical intervention). They simply follow the laws of physics, resulting from natural movements of sediment, water, or other forces over prolonged periods. Some come about more quickly under special circumstances, such as an earthquake or a structural collapse, perhaps due to gigantic burrowing creatures.

Natural formations called speleothems develop in many caves as mineral deposits accumulate over time, such as stalactites, stalagmites, stalagnates (when the previous two meet to form a column), and flowstone. In the real world, different movements of elements and the diverse structures of different minerals create hundreds of different kinds of formations. In a fantasy world, there's no need to feel any limitations—use different shapes and sizes, placements, textures, compositions, and arrangements as desired. Example formations might include those formed from calcified skeletons of giant creatures, pits or passages filled with intermittently vibrating crystals (perhaps activated by natural airflow or nearby pressure), and glass-like tubular thermal vents that hum in eerie tones.

COMMON ROCK

Taking inspiration from the real world is a great way to anchor a setting in something the players know. More fantastical features can then be sprinkled into the mix as desired, but here are some natural rocks from which to carve out cave systems:

- ***Basalt.*** Basalt is a dark-colored igneous rock that forms in regions of volcanic activity. Basalt forms when cooling lava solidifies in massive hexagonal columns of staggered height. Some columns only stand a few feet tall, while others can grow to over a hundred feet. Caverns form when water, tectonic movements, and other forces erode weaker columns, creating mazes or hollows within columns. Basalt is a dense stone, dark in color with a definite hexagonal crystalline shape.
- ***Granite.*** Granite is a solid, dense igneous rock. Caves form from gaps within massive piles of granite boulders deposited by glaciers, avalanches, and other powerful forces. Granite is resistant to erosion, so instead, external forces wear away weak points or deposits of soil and sediments wedged between the boulders, creating caves and passages of negative space. Granite ranges from gray to pink and in various combinations and patterns, depending on its mineral composition.
- ***Gypsum.*** Gypsum is a chemically formed sedimentary rock that forms like limestone. Deposits form crystalline structures on cave walls and floors as water evaporates. Unlike limestone, gypsum is water soluble, making gypsum caverns sensitive to erosion and easily destroyed.
- ***Limestone.*** Limestone is a sedimentary rock formed from the accumulation of organic remains, such as shell and coral, which solidify into various crystalline compounds. It is a soft rock, susceptible to dissolution by water, and as a result, limestone caves and caverns are carved by moving water and related processes like chemical weathering. The majority of limestone is white or gray, though areas mixed with sediments containing minerals like iron or copper might have a reddish or blue-gold tint. Eroded limestone breaks into fine sediment, which turns to mud or creates stalagmites, stalactites, calcite pillars, and other fantastic and alien rock formations. Limestone caves sometimes have identifiable fossils, providing evidence to those curious about the past.

- ***Marble.*** In some cave systems, limestone undergoes metamorphism, transforming into marble. Marble is superior in strength to limestone and is known for its swirling patterns and various colors.
- ***Sandstone.*** Sandstone is another common sedimentary rock formed from the compaction of sand-sized particles of silica or other minerals. Carved by moving water and wind, most sandstone caves have worn, asymmetric passages with few, if any, notable formations. They tend to be small, feeling cramped, and often sit close to the surface. They are favorite locations for cave-dwelling humanoids, offering excellent shelter from harsh environments. Tools and glyphs, paintings, mummified corpses, and other artifacts remain well preserved in the cool, dry climates these caves predominantly occupy.
- ***Shale.*** Shale is a fine-grained sedimentary rock composed of clay. It is usually gray but can vary in color, depending on its mineral composition. The smooth stone forms in obvious layers, which can be somewhat brittle. Varying hardnesses in these layers can lead to erosion at different rates, creating rough horizontal grooves in the rock face. Shale doesn't weather as quickly as sandstone or limestone, so layers of it often rest upon the softer rocks, creating a sort of roof or capstone.

CAVE SYSTEMS

A cave system is a complex network of interconnected caves. These can be created in a game by using passages to link a collection of chambers across a significant stretch of territory. Similarly, two or more dungeons might be connected using passages that wind through natural cave systems. Alternatively, an expansive subterranean culture might erect vast metropolises or temples within massive cave systems. Dungeons might share connecting passages that lead to natural cave systems or be structures built by subterranean cultures within the cave system.

Such systems vary in size, shape, and complexity and might include chambers of various sizes, narrow passages, shafts, and tunnels (which are typically excavated by creatures). Connecting passages can vary, ranging from small, tight squeezes to large, expansive chasms or causeways. Arrangements of caves interconnected by such outlying passages and tunnels can create a complex cave system. Any given cave system typically shares the same distinct geological formations throughout, such as stalactites and stalagmites, unless there is a distinct shift in the underlying rock through which the caves extend. PCs with pertinent skills might be able to interpret the nature of a cave and its features.

Water flows in some capacity through many cave systems. Underground rivers, lakes, and pools are common features and are often the result of a cave's formation or the active driver of it, shaping the local environment. The unique ecosystems within are home to specialized cave-dwelling creatures, commonly including insects, bats, lizards, and other specialized fauna adapted to the dark, subterranean environment.

Caves also introduce environmental challenges that differ from surface environments, exhibiting many diverse features, such as different types of rock formations, mineral deposits, and archeological evidence. Getting lost is easy, and the rigors of dungeoneering—dealing with the occasional verticality of passages, darkness, subterranean denizens, and various hazards, which can range from cave-ins to extreme heat, from flooding to toxic gas—require tools, knowledge, and expertise.

CAVE FORMATION

There is a great variety in how caves are formed, and they are most certainly not all alike. Here are some of the different geological processes that give rise to natural caves.

ABRASION CAVES

The repeated force of moving water, wind, or ice wears away rock surfaces, forming winding passages and strange amorphous pockets within the bedrock. Caverns excavated by pounding waves, scouring sediments, or grinding ice tend to have compact or vertical structures with adjacent caves and shorter interconnecting passages:

- ***Sea Caves.*** Wind and wave pound against cliffs and escarpments along rocky shorelines, carving twisted passages and caverns into the surrounding rock. The mouths of sea caves face the ocean, and waters flood into the interior, winding through the passages below sea level—or at least below the high-water mark. Even those formed by groundwater or run-off must eventually connect to the sea, and as the waters meet, it becomes brackish, which can help to introduce new creatures or hazards in the shifting ecosystem. Especially massive sea caves might boast entrances and passages large enough to accommodate boats or even small ships.

- ***Wind Caves.*** The abrasive action of wind-blown sand can scour large pockets or chambers into soft rock formations. This is most apparent in desolate lands, such as badlands and deserts, where tree cover is scarce and drastic temperature changes can create fierce winds that whip up the coarse and arid sediments. Over time, wind can carve out cave-like features—often small but occasionally extensive—into the sides of plateaus, cliffs, and rocky escarpments. They rarely descend into the earth. Natural hazards might include wind-filled passages or hurricane chambers. The wind might prevent specific movements or pelt explorers with blasts of burning sand. Wind moving through tunnels or cracks might also create strange sound effects that summon supernatural beasts at different hours of the day or produce sonic effects that incite madness or rage in those who fail to plug their ears.

ICE CAVES

Internal erosion and rapid melting and refreezing within glaciers or ice sheets can sculpt meandering tunnels and intricate formations—resulting in ice caves. Their structures and layout, when in areas that experience seasonal changes, can shift or even fully melt and reform as entirely new passages over the year. They might even have hidden chambers or sections that, under different conditions, freeze over or become cut off. Conversely, ice caves constructed by artificial or supernatural means might serve a specific purpose, such as creating a passage through a frozen rift valley or imprisoning some terrible creature.



Light. The refractive and reflective qualities of ice, snow, and water can create interesting effects. For example, light passing through thin ice might create blinding glare, errant reflections, glowing panels, or twisting shadows. Color might also be shifted, tinting everything in subtle shades of blue.

Movement. Glacial caves in particular are unique in that they move. Giant swaths of glacial ice glide slowly across the land, grinding into the earth and displacing massive amounts of stone and sediment. This slow but inexorable movement can transport strange and wonderous materials and remains, cover and uncover entrances to other underground caverns or rifts, or enable creatures to migrate to areas previously inaccessible. Glaciers forming near oceans and other vast bodies of water might calve icebergs, massive barges of ice set adrift on the tides. A floating dungeon might have multiple access points, including external entrances accessible by vessels or even underwater passages. Floating ice caves might also be at greater risk of melting and sinking—allowing for "ticking clock" scenarios for PCs exploring its icy secrets.

Temperature. While ice caves must always remain cold enough to stay frozen, external weather conditions do not typically affect its passages, keeping its internal temperature largely constant, and like subterranean caverns, they offer protection against harsh weather include temperature extremes, wind, and precipitation. Alternatively, an ice cave created by magic or under the effect of an icy curse might exhibit its old extreme cold or have similarly hazardous environmental conditions contained with its walls.

Given the low melting point of typical ice, PCs might have the power to manipulate an ice cave's structure using fire, perhaps creating escape routes or triggering collapses. Ice's brittle nature also makes it susceptible to fracture by force or loud noise. Similarly, physical manipulation allows the ice to be sculpted, perhaps creating new formations, hiding flawed structures, or even repairing damaged structures.



NATURAL STRUCTURES

Integrating natural structures with more typical dungeons/ruins allows for the introduction of physical challenges and diverse ecological systems that might not otherwise be supported. Access hatches or tunnels, cesspits or sewers, collapsed walls or crevices—any of these might connect dungeons/ruins with natural caves beneath or alongside them. Similarly, natural caves might provide secret entrances to subterranean cities or structures, such as crypts or mines. And entire adventures might occur within a naturally formed "dungeon."

LAVA CAVES

Lava caves are formed when the surface of a lava flow cools and solidifies while the still molten interior continues to flow, and when the lava drains away, it then leaves behind a tube-like cave. Similarly, massive flows of magma can pool belowground to form vast, hollow chambers. Scarring, or step marks, can be found on the walls of such caves and chambers, once everything has cooled, denoting the decreasing levels of molten rock.

Similar to water, molten rock can form rivers that excavate new passages or settle into magma seas dotted with jagged rocky islands. Fantastic locations might boast molten waterfalls or flash floods of roiling liquid metal. Alternatively, when the surface of a lava/magma flow cools, it hardens, forming a solid crust. Expanding heat beneath the crust then builds pressure, and stress in these areas can cause the crust to crack, creating small explosions that spew gouts of molten rock. Similarly, tectonic movements can cause eruptions as the overflow spills out, potentially leading to the creation of new chambers or passages.

Lava/magma caves are often labyrinthine, consisting of extensive networks of interconnected passages. They are commonly found along fault lines in volcanic regions, but they might also lie along "thinnings" between worlds—especially rifts that lead to one of the hells or to the Plane of Fire. PCs might need to navigate platforms, find heat-resistant gear, or contend with fire-based creatures. Such adventures might be tied to ancient forges or workshops, powered by volcanic activity, that allow for the creation of powerful magic items or the repair of ancient artifacts.

Temperature. Enclosed spaces trap heat, creating potentially dangerous environmental conditions, and this places PCs at risk. Similarly, lava can release metallic or sulfurous gases, which might fill passages or chambers with toxic air. Narrow vents formed by vertical tubes might create an escape route for gases or serve as skylights while wider vents might serve as ambush points or escape routes.

SOLUTIONAL CAVES

Extensive cave systems with complex networks of passages and chambers often form in soluble rocks like limestone, as the substrate is removed. Cavern structures mimic the shapes created by the movements of groundwater runoff, rivers, and streams. Similarly, the deposition of dissolved minerals creates a variety of strange and wondrous structures, such as stalactites and stalagmites:

- ***Arch Caverns.*** Arch caves appear following the collapse of underground chambers or passages. Natural arches and bridges form when softer layers of stone and sediment break down and erode, leaving portions of the cave roof intact.
- ***Canyons.*** Canyons form when rivers tear through the earth, creating massive trenches. These are similar to solutional caves but follow a single, central corridor that leads through a reasonably linear path carved by the moving water, whether



POWERFUL CRYSTALS

d8	Property
1	Can be used to scry or send telepathic messages.
2	Can be used to talk with the deceased.
3	Can heal wounds.
4	Glow in the presence of intelligent beings, providing illumination.
5	Keyed to activate a magic item or relic.
6	Patterns, runes, or mental images within the crystals unlock secret lore.
7	Place in different arrangements, can open portals.
8	Store arcane energies, spells, or captured souls.

river or glacier. Canyon walls allow for vertical "levels" with connected ladders, handholds, vines, ropes, scaffolding, or footpaths that climb and descend to various outcroppings and cave faces.

- ***Crystal Caves.*** Mineral solutions solidify and crystalize, creating massive caves filled with quartzite, halite, and other crystals, which can range from less than an inch to many yards—even larger with magic. Natural crystals tend to be brittle, smooth, and highly reflective. Some crystal caves can be dangerously fragile, and some might even risk dissolving if flooded with water. Still, crystals create an enticing lure for adventurers, especially those rumored to have magical properties (see **Powerful Crystals** table).

GEOTHERMAL ACTIVITY

d10	Activity
1–3	Nothing happens.
4–5	***Tremor.*** A tremor shakes the cave. For the next minute, any creature in the area can move at only half its speed.
6	***Vent.*** Gouts of steam spew into the area. Cave temperatures increase by +1d12 degrees, and the area becomes lightly obscured for 10 minutes.
7	***Geyser.*** A shower of scalding water erupts 20 feet into the air. All creatures within a 10-foot radius of it must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save or take 1d6 fire damage.
8	A tremor and vent are triggered (see above).
9	A tremor and geyser are triggered (see above).
10	A tremor, vent, and geyser are triggered (see above).

TECTONIC CAVES

The violent shifting of a planet's crust creates faults and fissures in its bedrock that can widen over time, forming caves. Continuing seismic activity at geological fault lines or fissures then increases the subsequent risk of those caves collapsing. Wider fissures and faults serve as both obstacle and opportunity. Those that open vertically might allow PCs to ascend or descend to different levels. A tectonic cave system can also create connections to other cave systems, possibly connecting seemingly disparate types—and it isn't unusual for tectonic cavern systems to interconnect with lava caves:

- ***Fault Caves.*** These caves form along geological fault lines where rocks have moved relative to each other. Fractures created by such faulting can provide pathways for water, assisting in the cave's formation. Such caves scar the earth with deep rifts and suffer from frequent tremors, which can splay rubble across passages, slow movement, and stir up choking dust clouds. Especially violent earthquakes can collapse entire sections of the caves, crushing PCs and sealing escape passages.
- ***Geothermal Caves.*** These caves sit above areas with high geothermal activity. They tend to have higher-than-average temperatures and high humidity. Water often slicks the walls and floor, and their surfaces are painfully hot to the touch. Water heated to extreme temperatures by geothermal activity builds in pressure until it bursts through the rock as scalding geysers or explosive steam vents, which spew boiling water, steam, and toxic gases—and the tinge of sulfur forever taints the air. PCs entering a geyser field must succeed on a DC 10 Survival check to identify the potential danger. Geysers (or ocean vents if underwater or fumaroles if ejecting only gas/vapor) activate at odd intervals. The earth shudders and is followed by a sharp hissing whistle before a shower of scalding water and steam erupts. At the end of each PC's turn, consult the **Geothermal Activity** table to determine the results.
- ***Talus Caves.*** Following the movement of massive amounts of earth, such as by avalanches or rockfalls, erosion then sculpts caves from the gaps between the large boulders or rock debris (talus), often at the base of cliffs or other large slopes. Talus caves are subject to flooding, ice, and mudslides due to runoff from heavy rains. Adverse weather conditions can cause individual boulders to shift, potentially weakening the overall structure, which makes talus caves prone to cave-ins. They also tend to be close to

the surface, making them good shelter for various creatures. It's not uncommon for such caves to cover more stable caverns beneath, so PCs might need to navigate and excavate a cave-in to gain access to lower dungeon levels.

BIOGENIC CAVES

Living structures can also factor into dungeon design, such as a massive, hollowed-out tree—its interconnected root systems carved into passages and chambers—which can provide unique challenges:

- ***Biogenic Erosion.*** One or more subterranean creatures might create a cavern system as a byproduct of their ability to move through the earth. For example, giant worms might leave a series of shallow, twisting boreholes; elemental fire creatures might melt deep through the earth, leaving seamless, glass-lined passages; or oozes might create pock-marked chambers in abandoned mines as thy feed on the iron deposits.
- ***Symbiotic Relationships.*** Giant insects, fungi, or plant creatures might live symbiotically with the structure. This might create unique circumstances or hazards, such as passages blocked by walls of fungus or carpeted with the swarming of a massive colony of ants. Doorways or entire passages composed of fungus or plants might react to the presence of different creatures. Perhaps PCs must utilize the native creatures to traverse the area or bypass certain features, such as using floating mushrooms as steppingstones, giant geckos as mounts, seedpods as gliders, or pheromone-producing insects to open a secret passage.

MAGICAL CAVES

A cave formed with the aid of magic or from a magical substance can present almost any assistance or challenge desired. Perhaps it allows passage through another dimension or through a supernatural environment, protecting those within from certain



MAGICAL HAZARDS

d20	Hazard
1	***Astral Tide.*** Pools of shimmering liquid transport PCs to the Astral Plane.
2	***Bridge of Dreams.*** An illusory bridge only appears when a PC truly believes in its existence. Sceptics fall through the illusion into a pit below.
3	***Elemental Glyphs.*** Glyphs on the floor react to elemental magic. PCs must cast the correct spell to unlock doors or disable traps, and casting the wrong spell triggers hazardous consequences.
4	***Ethereal Mirror Maze.*** A corridor is filled with portal mirrors that reflect images infused with alternate realities. PCs must discern the correct path by identifying which mirror reflects their world.
5	***Golem Garden.*** An enchanted garden where plant golems react to specific magic. PCs must selectively utilize their abilities to pacify or control the constructs.
6	***Inverted Gravity Chamber.*** Gravity is reversed in the area, and PCs must adapt to the changing gravitational pull, leading to unique challenges for combat and movement.
7	***Living Shadows.*** Heroes' shadows detach and transform into malevolent creatures, and the PCs must find a way to reclaim them.
8	***Mana Drain Vortex.*** A swirling magical vortex devours magic, and the more spells cast in its vicinity, the stronger it becomes.
9	***Mimicry Murmurs.*** Strange whispers mimic the voices of allies and enemies alike, leading PCs into potential ambushes or causing confusion.
10	***Mind Field.*** Those caught within swap their minds with other PCs or creatures.
11	***Mirror of Truth and Lies.*** A magical mirror reflects all the disturbing hidden truths of a soul.
12	***Reality-Warping Riddle.*** Rooms continually shift, and PCs must solve the riddle to stabilize the space.
13	***Spectral Web Corridor.*** PCs must decipher the web's mystical pattern to avoid the attention of its spectral spider guardians.
14	***Spellbound Statues.*** Animated statues cast random spells. Deciphering the magical auras around each statue can predict its spellcasting.
15	***Teleportational Roulette.*** Glyphs teleport PCs to random locations within the dungeon.
16	***Temporal Remnants.*** Ghostly remnants replay crucial information or warnings. Interacting with them causes unpredictable consequences.
17	***Transmutation Pool.*** PCs entering the pool are transformed into another creature.
18	***Undying Light.*** While bathed by the ghostly light, creatures cannot die.
19	***Warping Wells.*** Pools of magical liquid warp space and time.
20	Roll twice and combine the hazards.

dangers. Perhaps it weaves through time or some strange extraplanar locale, like a fire labyrinth beneath the City of Brass or a dungeon of interconnected spheres in the Void, allowing PCs to have an adventure in a space otherwise impassable. Whether the leavings of ancient civilizations, of faulty experiments, of the gods, or of horrors from beyond, strange arcane energies abound, and such anomalies and hazards pose potent challenges for PCs—unconstrained by the limits of what's normal (see the **Magical Hazards** table).

RUINS

Ruins stand as enduring remnants of civilization, perhaps vast cities of ancient peoples or simple lone outposts or villages of existing peoples. While mortals' time is limited by natural course, their cities and artifice often live on well beyond them, keeping a people's truths alive even as time continues to leave its scars. Such sites hide many secrets, enticing explorers that seek scraps of forgotten knowledge, magical artifacts, and lost treasures—and more importantly to some, insights into the mysteries of the past.

When creating ruins, it's helpful to start with a theme and then add common structures, challenges, and rewards tied to that theme. To help quickly place structures in the ruins of some settlement, whether an out-of-the-way village, an abandoned castle, or a sprawling city, consult the **Random Structures** tables or choose something appropriate.

RANDOM STRUCTURES

d10	Administrative and Learning
1	Administrative Office
2	Classroom
3	Communication Center
4	Dormitory
5	Hall of Records
6	Laboratory
7	Library
8	Minting House
9	Observatory
10	Workshop

d8	Cultural
1	Arena
2	Artisan's Residence
3	Fountain
4	Garden
5	Meeting House
6	Monument/Statue
7	Public Bath
8	Theater

d8	Defensive and Military
1	Barracks
2	Fortifications
3	Gatehouse
4	Guardhouse/Sentry
5	Palisade
6	Signal Tower
7	Stronghold
8	Watchtower

d12	Economic and Industrial
1	Brewery/Distillery
2	Forge/Kiln/Smelter
3	Granary/Silo
4	Guildhall
5	Industrial Facility
6	Logging Camp
7	Market Square
8	Mill
9	Mine
10	Tannery
11	Trading Post
12	Workshop

d8	Engineering and Infrastructure
1	Aqueduct/Canal/Sewer
2	Bridge
3	Cistern/Reservoir
4	Dam/Weir
5	Road
6	Watch Tower
7	Water Wheel
8	Windmill



STRUCTURES

Adventures that focus on exploration hinge on discovery and on stepping into the unknown, be it an untamed wilderness well past the edge of civilization or a pristine, twisting underground world. But as fulfilling as it is to discover areas of natural wonder, it is no less thrilling to discover a previously unknown artificial structure. The hint of crumbling pillars in the overgrowth, the confirmation of local myths, and that first tentative approach evoke images of a rich, tragic history, lost treasures, and certain fame.

d6	Healing and Medical
1	Almshouse
2	Apothecary/Herbalist
3	Hospitaller Commandery
4	Hospital/Infirmary
5	Quarantine House
6	Asylum/Sanitorium

d8	Maritime
1	Boathouse
2	Fishing Hut
3	Jetty/Pier
4	Lake/Pond
5	Lighthouse
6	Quay/Warf
7	Shipyard
8	Vessel

d6	Religious
1	Convent/Monastery
2	Graveyard
3	Monument
4	Rectory
5	Shrine
6	Temple

d6	Residential
1	Cabin/Longhouse
2	Cottage
3	Guesthouse
4	Hovel
5	Manse
6	Work Camp

TYPES OF RUINS

The shattered remnants of ancient civilizations, the crumbled temples and tombs, the lost cities, and other ruins are a staple of adventures. Ruins offer the perfect opportunity for PCs to explore and to find adventure. The reasons for such a delve depends on the adventure, but the rewards for success can be great: forgotten knowledge awaits in moldy libraries, powerful relics rest in web-shrouded tombs, and glory and renown can be plucked by those with sufficient courage, skill, and luck. And as for those who don't survive, their remains will only add to the rich tapestry of the site's history.

ABANDONED SITES

The village shows no signs of attack or disaster, yet the streets and homes are empty. No families sit around the dinner table, yet plates of spoiled food remain as if left suddenly mid-meal. Nothing appears amiss but for the complete lack of people. Worst of all, the place is utterly silent.

Abandoned sites offer a similar experience to other ruins but with a level of mystery added. The buildings found remain intact and give the appearance of recent occupation, having only recently been abandoned. Such sites can be found in any environment and can range from a campsite all the way up to a city, or even larger. At their core is the question, "Why did the inhabitants leave?" And typically, that answer is revealed in the forces actively trying to keep the PCs away.

Environment. There should be something intrinsically wrong with an abandoned site. The atmosphere should lean toward being unsettling and creepy. How a site



was abandoned determines its condition when the PCs arrive. If the inhabitants fled suddenly, there would be signs of panic, such as spilled baggage, forgotten items, doors left open, and supplies missing. If the inhabitants abandoned the site more methodically, there would be locked doors, cleared-out rooms, few remaining treasures or supplies, and possibly active traps. If the population was abducted, there would be signs of struggle, spilled blood, broken furniture and doors, and a trail of destruction. Perhaps most unsettling, a magical or supernatural event could have caused the people simply to vanish, and in such a case, the site would look as if the inhabitants just stepped away, leaving work, meals, and other activities half-finished.

Exploring. Abandoned sites are typically easy to explore as they are no different than other settlements, minus the people. However, it is useful to use the nature of the site to foreshadow the coming events that will solve the mystery: "Why did they leave?" and "Why this location?" For example, perhaps a lich stole the population of a monastery because they were about to use a ritual to locate its phylactery, and when the PCs come upon the abandoned site, they might find notes about the lich, a half-completed ritual chamber, or something similar.

Creatures and Other Dangers. There could be any manner of foes, depending on why the inhabitants left and who was responsible. Some adventures might benefit from an encounter at the site with the minions of those responsible while others might instead present a trail to follow from the site to a fortress or lair.

Depending on the context of the adventure, various hazards and other dangers might also come into play. Uncontrolled fire is always a danger in urban settings, whether from the panicked toppling of a lantern or from an unattended bonfire or from a deliberate trap. Perhaps the PCs were drawn to the location by smoke on the horizon? Beyond that, there might be leftover magic or still-functioning constructs or inadvertently summoned creatures from an alchemist or spellcaster abandoning their experiments. Depending on how long the site has been abandoned, creatures from the surrounding areas might also have claimed it as their own.

Notable Sites. Abandoned sites can arise in any locale whose inhabitants have disappeared:

- ***Brighthorpe Colony.*** Beyond the borders of so-called civilization, a small town stands empty. Brighthorpe began as a grand experiment. A dozen families of hardy settlers determined to carve a new home from the wilderness. Now, the town remains but every living thing within its walls has vanished. Its buildings show no damage, no sign of attack or struggle. Those who explore the site find evidence that suggests the entire population just left suddenly, leaving meals unfinished on tables and work left undone. On the half-painted wall of the small temple, a crude occult symbol is sketched: a shaking hand. The fiendish, three-horned shape has a stark resemblance to the nearby three-peaked mountain.
- ***Looted Mushroom Plantation.*** Within an underground mushroom forest, the gates to a walled plantation stand open. Inside, the main house and various outbuildings show signs of hurried packing, leaving empty larders and discarded tools, clothing and equipment scattered about. The rear gate of the homestead is broken, smashed inward with great force. Around the area is evidence of attempted looting, such as chests broken into, doors smashed, and walls broken as if searching for something. In the dirt, the tracks of humanoids and drawn wagons exit out of the front gate. Other tracks enter the plantation from the rear gate, wander within the house, and then follow the first group.

Story Seeds. When people disappear, adventure is right around the corner:

- ***Have You Seen This Dragon?*** Tasked by a wizard to bring a gift to an old ally, the PCs arrive at the lair of mighty Valanexerth only to discover the ancient blue dragon is missing. Her kobold minions initially react violently to the party's arrival, thinking they are responsible, but after engaging or subduing the distraught underlings, they soon discover evidence of a powerful transmutation spell and a crumpled carnival ticket. Tracking the eldritch circus down in a nearby city is much easier than confronting and defeating the warlock ringmaster, his monk clowns, and a bevy of transformed monsters.
- ***Keep, Cast in Shadow.*** The kingdom serving as home to the PCs has long maintained a remote fortress to guard a strategic mountain pass against the warrior tribes to the north. After saving a wounded scout, the party takes on the task of warning the keep of a coming barbarian horde. Upon their arrival though, they find the keep deserted with no sign of struggle or conflict. The only oddity is the strange, human-shaped shadows on the walls and floors, as if cast from absent individuals. Arcane investigation reveals evidence of powerful shadow magic. With time running out, the PCs must venture into a realm of shadow to save the soldiers before the horde arrives.





BURIAL SITES

Burial sites are areas of land where the remains of living creatures are interred. Most often the bodies in these sites were buried long ago, and at some point, the location itself was forgotten. The size of burial sites can vary from small plots of land or open fields to raised mounds, towering pyramids, or even whole cities. Depending on its size and composition, the exterior of a burial site might be full of overgrown plant life, marble columns, decorative statuary, and weather-faded metal or stone markers. At night, low wisps of mist might rise to drift between the graves, creatures lurking half-seen as if waiting for intruders. No matter the type of burial site, the magical and spiritual scars from the interred attract supernatural and undead creatures and related hazards.

Environment. Found both aboveground and below, the weather and environment of burial sites can vary, but certain elements are common to all such locales. The presence of death lies close to the living world, and the entire area has an unsettling presence, almost a weight. Travelers exploring a wilderness burial site might experience an unusual frequency of rain, overcast skies, and fog or mist. The flora in the region might be unhealthy or dying, poisoned by the necrotic aura emanating from the dead. Underground burial sites might feel like a dungeon with roots dangling from the ceiling, condensation or seeping runoff from above dripping down the walls, a pungent smell of fungus, and stale air leaking from previously undisturbed tombs. Weather and terrain features can be used to emphasize a looming dread over what's around the next corner.

Exploring. Burial sites often feature paved stone paths between tombs and clear passages, though these routes might become choked with overgrown plant life in places, blocked by collapsed tunnels, or made difficult to traverse by broken masonry. The type of burial site determines its style and contents. The tombs might be of stone construction and iron doors, gates, and locks. Or they might have rectangular recesses that hold the decayed remains of the interred, still grasping their burial goods in skeletal hands. The burial site might be decorated with marble statues or carved grave markers with inscriptions now faded by time.

Creatures and Other Dangers. The primary threat in burial sites is the undead—reanimated by broken oaths, tasks left undone, meddling cultists, or simply the necrotic corruption often generated by the close proximity of so many bodies. Travelers in such locations might encounter **ghosts**, **ghouls**, **skeletons**, **zombies**, and similar creatures. The more mindless undead linger in burial sites as eternal guardians. More intelligent foes might view these locales as a source of power or resources. A **lich**, **mummy**, **vampire**, or necromantic **fanatical cultist** might use them simply as good sources of flesh and bone, whether to build minions or conduct dark rituals.

Some creatures venture into burial sites to search for material wealth, rare components, or lost relics. Call them grave robbers, treasure hunters, or resurrectionists, these intrepid individuals face horrors—and possibly the law—to dig up those bits and bobs. Often fiercely territorial and unwilling to share in their plunder, they are not averse to resorting to violence to protect their interests. Other threats might include dangerous fauna or flora corrupted by necrotic emanations or attracted to the stench of death, such as **shambling mounds**, **sporeborn**, and various types of hazardous fungi.

Aside from the creature threats, burial sites often contain features meant to safeguard the dead. Traps on tomb doors and sarcophagus lids dissuade or punish those who would open what they should not. Those who manage to surpass such defenses might still need to contend with curses and other lingering effects.

Notable Sites. Any burial site can serve as an adventure location:

- ***Mortuary of Memories.*** This cathedral-like structure might be found in any wilderness or underground environment. Despite the passage of centuries, the stone appears solid, though the crumbling remains of decorative towers and spires indicate it was once far grander. The walls are overrun by pale-blue crystalline growths, and at a touch, they trigger what can only be described as fragmentary telepathic echoes. The interior is a single, massive chamber with a vaulted ceiling and no furnishings, just the many orbs—hundreds if not thousands—floating throughout, each a pale-blue crystal about 1 foot in diameter. They drift at glacial speeds, and when two gently collide, a beam of blue light arcs to the nearest surface, creating a patch of moss-like crystalline growth. If a PC interacts with one, their mind is drawn into the memories stored within, forcing

them to relive others' lives. Lost within the spheres is the truth behind the destruction of the civilization that built the place.

Story Seeds. Adventures at burial sites focus on facing undead threats, surviving eldritch horrors, and uncovering fantastic treasures:

- ***Last Ride of MacDoogle.*** The mighty hero Liam MacDoogle is dead, but his victory over a terrible lich saved an entire kingdom. As outlined in his will, the PCs (one of whom might have been a student or relative) are asked to escort the procession bearing the hero's body to its last resting place and to safeguard the funeral rites. Once within the grounds of the large graveyard, strange environmental effects set nerves on edge and mourners at each other's throats. Matters are not improved when the dead begin rising from the surrounding tombs. Fending off these threats would be challenging enough, but when MacDoogle himself is revealed as the newest body to host the ancient lich, will the party survive to feast at the planned wake?
- ***Necromantic Seedling.*** A PC's relative or acquaintance messages for aid. Their town is suffering repeated attacks by undead, which emerge from the tunnel-riddled hills nearby. With the assaults growing in number and strength, heroes are needed. Venturing into the subterranean realm, the party discovers a buried necropolis infested with a strange, vine-like plant that appears to be reanimating the interred corpses. Can the party sneak, battle or trick their way to the center of the necropolis and put an end to the threat?

LOST CITIES

When a city or entire empire falls, whoever settles there next often incorporates and builds upon what remains of the former. Sometimes though, those cities and empires are simply forgotten over time or somehow lost to memory. Legends and ballads frequently recount tales of brave explorers rediscovering these lost settlements, risking life and limb to find fame and untold riches. Such a lost city often displays a mixture of disrepair and ruin, from structures all but demolished to those largely intact, and perhaps a sprinkling of nearly pristine buildings. The passage of the years is obvious though, as nature slowly reclaims everything: plant life erupts from broken masonry and creatures prowl through ruined homes. Still, traps and hazards and other dangers await the unwary alongside untold treasures—enough to feed entire campaigns.

Environment. Lost cities can be found in nearly every environment, including ocean depths, distant mountain tops, or even the surface of a moon or beyond. These sites were once inhabited, were once occupied by creatures living their lives from day to day, and there will be evidence of that—such as abandoned household items, a dust covered table set for a special meal, faded and torn banners still fluttering, and a child's doll lying forgotten in a gutter—along with evidence of whatever tragedy might have befallen them

Exploring. Maneuvering within and mapping lost cities is often physically easier than traversing uncharted wilderness. Streets, though plant choked and rubble strewn, provide quick transit, and structures, even those in ruin, often provide quick and easy shelter from the elements and protection from wandering creatures. But there are also typically a lot of buildings, and the need to explore all of them, or even just the perceived need, can be daunting and tedious. To alleviate this, consider either handwaving repeated checks, especially when time is not an issue, or signaling that only those buildings that are "intact" should warrant extra attention.

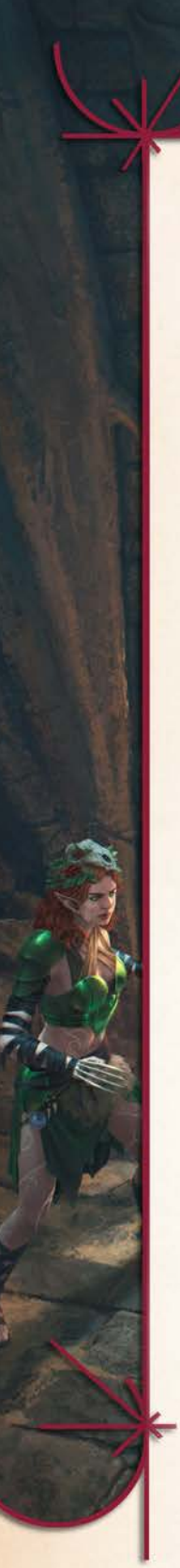
Creatures and Other Dangers. In the ruins of a city, the chances of encountering dangerous creatures are high. Those structures are ready made for occupation by all sorts, sentient and non-sentient alike. These inhabitants might be the original inhabitants of the city—or more likely their descendants or remains—and any creatures that might have been their pets, servants, or guardians, such as **grimlocks** or other humanoids, **shield guardians** or various golems, or various undead. Alternatively, inhabitants might be creatures who came to dwell in the city after it fell, and they could potentially be anything, from **kobolds** in makeshift warrens to various fiends reenacting mortal life—even dragons claiming their spoils.

The area surrounding the city is often itself a hazard or other obstruction, perhaps in the form of a physical barrier, a dangerous region, or a magical effect. The nature of this obstruction might explain why the city has remained undiscovered until now.

Notable Sites. Lost cities run the gamut in terms of terrain and environment:

- ***Kjado, Oasis of Blue Cranes.*** Nomads whisper of a fabulous city that was built where blue cranes nested in fruit trees surrounded by five springs. Called Kjado, the city lay along ancient trade routes across the burning sands, and the inhabitants prospered and accumulated great wealth. But those same riches drew the attention of a warlock and his fiendish





horde, who besieged the city for a year. When Kjado's fall seemed certain, the last mage-king called forth a mighty sandstorm that buried both the city and the invading army. Recent landslides have uncovered a portion of the city, but the remainder lies still buried, where riches and dangers await.

- ***Vandtarne, The Swallowed City of Towers.*** Once heralded as a blessing of the ocean gods, the city of Vandtarne was a center of wisdom where sages and philosophers studied and debated. A magnificent construction of connected towers and canals, the city floated in the center of a wide bay. Over time, they forsook the gods, favoring instead of knowledge and discovery. As divine punishment, a great leviathan rose out of the sea and swallowed the city whole, and now, the ruined city and its inhabitants—evolving amphibious natures—dwell in the gullet of the mighty beast.
- ***Ynys Cadal, City of Sleeping Kings.*** This small island-city is described by many names and in legends from all over the world. Ynys Cadal exists out of phase with the mortal plane, resting between this reality and an adjacent one. When a worthy hero is near death, it is said that the island-city merges with this world for a short while and that priests in blue robes carry the hero to Ynys Cadal to rest and heal until they are needed again. The small population of priests, and their radiant constructs, maintain and protect their patients who sleep in timeless crystalline tombs.

Story Seeds. Tales of lost cities often begin with their discovery:

- ***A Dire Crater, Once Called Imrana.*** Atop a towering mountain, a shattered fortress-city stands at the edge of a deep, lush crater. Long ago, an impact destroyed the city and enshrouded the mountain with a never-ending storm. Hired to accompany a famed and eccentric explorer, the PCs contend with hazards and monsters to ascend to Imrana. Among the ruined streets, they find the city's sentient construct defenders struggling to contain mind-rending horrors that rise from the crater. Ultimately, the elder thing within the crater must be banished, but to do so, the tethers holding it in the mortal plane must be found and broken. Can the heroes accomplish this before their minds are corrupted?
- ***Struggle Beyond the Clouds.*** Activating an ancient relic, the PCs find themselves transported to a ruined city in the clouds where two communities struggle in a centuries-old stalemate: on one side, a sect of cloud giant priests and paladins, and on the other, an order of couatl druids and syderean knights. Each side blames the other for betraying the city to fiends and bringing about its ruin. The arrival of the party destabilizes the situation, plunging the stalemate into outright conflict. Offers to join either side present as great a temptation as searching the city for treasure. Will the PCs broker peace between the groups, leave the combatants to their fate, or perhaps uncover the dark hand working in secret to destroy the floating city?

STRANGE VENUES

Adventurers end up in the oddest of places. Journeys often involve conventional environments, such as castles, dungeons, and medieval cities, but sometimes, things get strange. These "strange venues" are those locations unfamiliar to both PC and player. The resulting possibilities are vast, but three example types include an area of coterminous extraplanar crossover where another reality bleeds into the mortal realm; a non-humanoid site, such as a community of mimics, an aboleth underwater city, or a fungal warren of hive-minded mycolids; or an aberrant settlement established by creatures from another plane/world.

In such a site, the PCs are faced with the unfamiliar. The equivalent of a family dwelling on an elemental plane might be made of fire or swirling winds. A non-humanoid home might be a house-shaped mimic that shelters smaller mimics. An alien home might be a spacecraft, perhaps organically grown from plants not of this world—or even a living creature itself. Adventures set in strange venues serve to unbalance the PCs (and sometimes the players), and they break away the shackles of expectation, allowing the possibility for anything to happen.

Environment and Exploration. Detailing all the possibilities for such environments could fill its own book. Instead, here are some suggestions. In order to function well in an adventure, strange venues should have structures, areas, and features that serve similar functions to those found in "normal" adventuring sites. The difference is how they are presented:

- Change how the laws of reality work: gravity might be stronger/weaker, the barriers between realities could be thin, or one's thoughts can become real.
- Play with the five senses: do one's senses work the same way?
- Use unexpected materials: perhaps the buildings are made of elastic, semi-sentient clay, or dreamstuff.

- Use unorthodox social customs: common greetings or manners might be wildly misconstrued by an extraplanar, non-humanoid, or alien culture.

Use the unknown to advantage. It is rare for the PCs to understand everything they encounter, so include inexplicable objects, effects, terrain, or even language. It's not even necessary for them to have concrete rules since their purpose in the game is simply to build the mystery and the strange atmosphere of the site.

Creatures and Other Dangers. Creatures and hazards encountered in an area should be thematic to the type of site, and using the three types of strange venues listed above, samples are included here.

In extraplanar and non-humanoid locations, monsters should be drawn from those common to that plane or species. If the PCs enter a valley that is coterminous with a plane composed of ice, for instance, they should encounter **ice devils**, **ice mephits**, **frost giants**, **winter wolves**, or other cold/ice monsters. Meanwhile, a valley of oozes might be populated by **gelatinous cubes**, **gray oozes**, **ochre jellies**, and other similar creatures.

Alien locations are where things get really weird. With a little thematic adjustment, almost any monster can work in an alien site. These adjustments can be purely cosmetic, such as giving a bear extra legs and eyes on stalks or letting fish "swim" through air as if it were water. Alternatively, they can be mechanical alterations, giving the monsters new traits and features. The easiest method for this is to simply take an interesting ability from one creature and give it to another, such as making one head of an **ettin** into a **basilisk** or giving an **otyugh** the breath weapon of a **young white dragon**. Consideration should be given to encounter balance, but as an approximation, the features of creatures of the same CR can be swapped without significant impact. The goal is to keep the PCs off-balance by presenting them with the unexpected. One last trick is to use the stat block of a familiar monster but to describe it as something drawn from the imagination (or nightmare) and simply never tell the players the truth. What is behind the GM screen stays behind the GM screen.

Notable Sites. Any geographic type can host a strange venue:

- ***Down to Bulette Town.*** Deep underground lies a massive burrow of tunnels, twisting through the underlying granite, which serves as nesting ground for a sub-species of bulette. Though usually solitary, these bulette come together once or twice every few years to mate and rear young. Small groups actively hunt magic-using creatures, dragging them back into the burrow to feed the new generation. At the very center of the burrow, the matriarch directs the activities of the herd.
- ***Upon the Forbidden Steppe.*** Nestled high within a perpetually snow-covered mountain range, this high altitude, arid region of alpine steppes, jagged peaks, frigid deserts, brackish lakes, and deep crevasses is a fragment of a previous world overlooked by the gods. Upon this wind-swept land, different atmospheric conditions and laws of physics hold sway. The sky runs the color gamut from purple to red, the clouds are pale yellow, and the sun somehow seems larger and far more orange than it should. The weather produces memory-rending rain and bolts of sickly green lightning. Corruption from the plateau slowly poisons and alters the flora and fauna of the regular world. The fabric of reality upon the plateau is thin, fraught with temporary portals that lead to random locations across the area. The inhabitants range from sentient spiderfolk to the descendants of what remains of the region's original population who seek to restore the previous world to its rightful place.

Story Seeds. Adventures in strange venues often focus on otherworldly aspects:

- ***Mechadron Monolith.*** A towering edifice of metal, crystal, and semi-organic material stands in the center of a secluded valley. The terrain in a slowly widening radius around the monolith appears wrong—the flora and fauna, even the atmosphere, warping in strange ways. Living constructs called mechadrons gather materials from four archway portals, set at compass points in the shadow of the tower, and carefully but tirelessly build the structure ever higher. Following their inscrutable "plan," the entire monolith acts as a magical terraforming engine, altering the mortal world to match the conditions on the mechadrons' home plane. Within the monolith, a captured celestial is trapped as part of the arcane engine powering the structure.



LOST CIVILIZATIONS

The remnants of once-great empires or cities now lie shrouded in mystery and decay. Dilapidated structures, collapsed tunnels, and forgotten technologies create a haunting atmosphere. PCs might discover forgotten lore, face magical or technological defenses, and discover the secrets that led to the downfall.

SAMPLE RUINS

Abandoned ruins consist of deserted structures, villages, fortresses, or even entire cities left behind due to war, disaster, or mysterious circumstances. As time passes, nature reclaims parts of the ruins, breaking apart structures, concealing passages, and transforming the site into a new environment. Years of weathering weaken the structural integrity of buildings, leaving them on the precarious edge of collapse. Abandoned ruins often hide secrets or mysteries surrounding their demise.

DEPTHS OF MAAK THURAS DOOM

In the lightless abyss known as the Depths of Maak Thuras Doom lies an underground city shrouded in eerie shadows and infested with flesh-eating fungi. The still active remnants of an ancient, complex, and highly mechanized defense system made of intertwined clockwork ingenuity and rune magic protects this once-great empire.

Thematic Structures. Weird clockwork machinery. Steam works interlaced into architecture. Mechanical foundries. The ubiquitous acrid scent of fungi.

Points of Interest. These locales detail where PCs might gain vital clues to what happened here or else find valuable lore, salvage, or treasure:

- ***Crystalline Archive.*** The archives house vast collections of dwarven knowledge, potentially unraveling the city's history. Crystals illuminate the chamber whenever a living creature enters. *Clue:* Studying the archival texts paints a picture of a once-thriving empire that fell victim to its technological hubris.
- ***Great Citadel.*** Maak Thuras Doom's governance hub features grand halls that react to sound and movement—shifting panels, stairs, and doors animated by clockwork. Walls etched with runes hold clues to the city's enigmatic fall. *Clue:* Cryptic runes serve as warning and provide clues that unlock the secrets hidden within the city's subterranean chambers.
- ***Hall of Engineers.*** A series of interconnecting gears allow entrance to the complex that houses the core of Maak Thuras Doom's clockwork defense system. *Clue:* Manipulating the machinery alters the deadliness of defense mechanisms.
- ***Mausoleums and Crematorium.*** Burial chambers for honored ancestors line the walls of a deep and vast circular well. At the bottom of the well glows a massive kiln once used to cremate the deceased and fashion their remains into spirit orbs. *Clue:* Investigating the crematorium explains the creation and function of spirit orbs as more than merely animated defenders of the city.

Challenges. These challenges represent specific mysteries and obstacles with which the PCs must contend within the ruins:

- ***Active Defense System.*** What remains of the ancient defense system manifests as a multifaceted challenge. Each tier poses distinct obstacles—from mechanical traps triggered by pressure plates to arcane barriers powered by forgotten enchantments.
- ***Mutated Fungal Hosts.*** Amidst the shadows, mutated descendants of the once proud inhabitants lurk, their forms adapted to the harsh conditions of their subterranean existence. These creatures,



shaped by the fungi's influence, instinctively guard the city's secrets. *Clues:* Encounters with these creatures reveal a tragic tale of adaptation and survival in the unforgiving depths.

- ***Pressure Chambers.*** These high-pressure chambers provide the source of power for the entire complex. Toying with them can cause an overload that either simply shuts down all power or else overloads the system, causing a meltdown and triggering parts of the ruins to collapse.
- ***Spirit Orbs.*** Strange, rune-covered spheres of an unknown alloy are fashioned from the remains of the deceased. The orbs possess sentience and allowed the ancient dwarves to communicate with their ancestors for guidance and wisdom. The fungal infection prevents their now-mutated descendants from communicating with the orbs.

DRUUN'S SHROUD

Once a bustling mining town, Druun's Shroud now exists in the grip of a sorrowful emptiness. Local legends carry the eerie mystery of the tragedy that silenced the town. On approach, the skeletal remains of once-vibrant structures emerge from the shroud of mist. Crooked timbers and rusted metalwork reach into the sky, their twisted forms contrasting sharply against a gloomy backdrop. Once lively with activity, vacant windows gaze out like empty eye sockets, reflecting the strange stillness that has befallen the town.

Thematic Structures. Collapsed tunnels, crumbling foundries, decaying beams, and corroded supports. Silent and rusted forges. The scent of mustiness and decay, unsettling darkness, and unnatural mists.

Points of Interest. These locales detail where PCs might gain vital clues on what happened here or else find valuable lore, salvage, or treasure:

- ***Apothecary's Emporium.*** Small wooden shelves are lined with dusty bottles—their contents long evaporated or crystallized. A counter holds a scale, tools for mixing medicinal compounds, and pages of notes. *Clue:* Medical journals, scattered amidst abandoned tools and discarded equipment, tell the stories of miners succumbing to a mysterious malady.
- ***Arcane Observatory.*** This towering structure of stone and slate facilitated the study of local mysteries. *Clue:* Alchemical notes discuss the tools and reagents used to work on an eldritch alloy.
- ***Eldritch Foundry.*** The complex has several buildings, including several open-air structures that house huge iron smelters, crucibles, and other equipment dedicated to metallurgy. *Salvage:* PCs find metallurgical tools and materials and also bars of a strange metal, though anyone coming in contact with the alloy risks exposing themselves to the dangers of its dark, eldritch effects.
- ***Market Square.*** Surrounded by quaint shops and stalls, this cracked-cobble square once stood as a bustling trading hub for precious gems and raw minerals.
- ***Residential Row.*** Copses of thin, wiry trees and thorny shrubs weave around a winding row of tiny timber homes, preventing the rotting structures from toppling. *Clue:* investigating the homes suggests most of the town residents worked in the mines.
- ***Watermills.*** A series of watermills powered the various machinery crucial to mining. Although bent and rusted, they still creak and groan rhythmically as they continue to operate in their endless struggle.

Challenges. These challenges represent specific mysteries and obstacles with which the PCs must contend within the ruins:

- ***Hazardous Mines.*** Delving into the abandoned mines presents a challenge as the tunnels have become unstable. Passages threaten to collapse, and some areas force PCs to rely on a badly damaged minecar.
- ***Malevolent Mist.*** The unnatural mist surrounding Druun's Shroud carries a malevolent force that spawns horrific life-devouring creatures. The creatures only emerge under certain conditions.
- ***Temporal Displacement.*** Exposure to a mysterious eldritch alloy triggers brief episodes of time displacement, afflicting individuals with visions of maddening horror and drawing the attention of the spectral creatures in the mist.



HOUSES OF THE DEAD

Ironically, structures constructed to house the dead often surpass those structures dedicated to the living. The boneyards of a great empire can leave behind vast cities, necropolises of stone monuments, mausoleums, and catacombs. Traversing burial sites requires respect for the dead and a keen understanding of funerary customs to avoid triggering supernatural repercussions.



ECLIPSE CATACOMBS

A mysterious order of mystics carved these burial chambers into the heart of a mountain. The catacombs form an interconnected series of complex ciphers. Hidden passages and chambers only reveal themselves in conjunction with specific astronomical events. As the chambers reveal themselves, they allow access to sacred tablets that hold the secrets of a great prophecy.

Thematic Structures. Long, winding corridors connect to chambers, forming geometric patterns. Chambers shift their appearance in response to astronomical phenomena, and shafts in the ceilings of some chambers allow for the observation of that phenomena.

Points of Interest. These locales detail where PCs might gain vital clues on what happened here or else find valuable lore, salvage, or treasure:

- ***Mountain's Umbral Grasp.*** Intricately carved within the mountain's core, the burial chambers blend with the natural rock. Ancient mystics believed the mountain held a connection to the stars.
- ***Penumbral Chambers.*** Meticulous designs in specific burial chambers align with celestial phenomena. The architecture incorporates symbols and patterns related to the unique dance between the sun, moon, and earth during eclipses, becoming the focal point for burial rites. *Clue:* Secret alcoves within the catacombs contain ancient tomes or eclipse manuscripts, and PCs who uncover them might learn about the mountain's cosmic significance and connection to other realms.
- ***Umbral Watchers.*** A series of circular chambers house hideous statues, each pointing in a different direction and resting below a shaft that allows light from above to shine into the chamber. The placement of the umbral watchers aligns with past astronomical events, providing PCs with visions of the mountain's history. *Clue:* Interpreting the positions of the watchers offers insight, guidance, or warnings concerning the significance of specific astronomical alignments.

Challenges. These challenges represent specific mysteries and obstacles with which the PCs must contend within the ruins:

- ***Ephemeral Eclipse Beings.*** Transient celestial entities inhabit the catacombs during the eclipse. Interacting with these beings might yield valuable information, guidance, or even blessings that aid the PCs.
- ***Guardians of the Eclipse Path.*** A fiendish legion guards the catacombs, only granting access to those who respect the umbral cycles. PCs might need to prove their understanding of the lore or face otherworldly challenges to proceed.
- ***Shadowed Veil.*** A magical barrier guards the heart of the catacombs. PCs must find ways to attune themselves to the umbral vibrations in order to pass through unscathed.
- ***Umbral Ciphers.*** PCs must untangle complex ciphers adorning the catacomb walls, requiring an understanding of the intricate patterns of stars. Successfully decoding these ciphers reveals the history of the entombed or unlocks hidden passages that lead to untouched chambers.
- ***Umbral Guardian's Challenge.*** A guardian associated with the sun's eclipse forces PCs to prove their worthiness. Challenges involve solving riddles about the interconnected nature of celestial events.

HARROW'S END

The ruins of the outpost of Harrow's End stand along the disputed borders of the eastern wilds. Once a thriving military camp, the skeletal frames of rotting buildings now struggle to stand. Eerily, the frozen forms of fleeing soldiers stand amidst the camp, their pain-wracked expressions mysteriously preserved as ashy, cracking statues.

Thematic Structures. Shattered windows, crumbling walls, toppled platforms, and a fallen watchtower. Training grounds, commander's quarters, barracks, and other buildings overgrown with vines and moss. The feast hall has a collapsed roof.

Points of Interest. These locales detail where PCs might gain vital clues on what happened here or else find valuable lore, salvage, or treasure:

- ***Infirmary.*** Near the edge of the ruins stands a small cluster of run-down stone buildings littered with splintered beds, broken glass, and spent medical supplies. Spatters of moss and lichen cover the walls, floor, and furniture. *Clues:* Scraping moss from the walls reveals cryptic messages scrawled in what appears to be blood.
- ***Meeting Hall.*** Near the center of town stands a large wooden structure with a sizable hole in one side. A battered podium lies toppled into a ring of battered conference tables and chairs. A thick ledger encrusted with black mold lies face down on the floor, its contents crumbled to dust. *Clues:* The structural damage, ledger, and toppled furniture suggest the abruptness of the conflict and the hasty departure of outpost inhabitants.

- ***Storage Warehouses.*** These buildings bear evidence of being ransacked. Windows are smashed, and doors hang loose on hinges. Inside, a jumble of wooden crates occupies most of the space. Looters pried the lids to splinters and spilled untaken remains of contents across the floor. *Salvage:* PCs searching through the items can salvage a few mundane items, such as tools, rope, and other non-perishables.

Challenges. These challenges represent specific mysteries and obstacles with which the PCs must contend within the ruins:

- ***Collapsing Structures.*** Unstable buildings pose a risk of collapse. PCs must carefully choose their path, avoiding potential hazards and finding stable routes.
- ***Mystical Ash Residue.*** The mysterious ash that preserves the soldiers' forms possesses magical properties. Interacting with it might trigger visions or reveal hidden clues about the events that lead to the outpost's abandonment.
- ***Nature's Grip.*** Overgrown vegetation and tangled vines create obstacles that require PCs to navigate dense foliage in order to explore the outpost's structures.

LOST ALIEN COLONY

Buried deep within a remote and desolate expanse of rocky wasteland hides the ruins of an ancient alien colony. The remnants of unfamiliar architecture spread across the landscape, and traversing the ruins reveals intricate details of alien construction, an enigmatic legacy left by some extraplanar/extraterrestrial civilization's bold attempt to establish a foothold on this world. Once-grand structures, adorned with strange patterns, stand as silent sentinels. Alien flora now entwines the crumbling structures. The downfall of the settlement remains shrouded in mystery but might be caused by disease, environmental conditions, internal conflicts, or some more cosmic explanation.

Thematic Structures. Amorphously shaped architecture fashioned from strange materials, including resins, polymers, and unknown alloys. Alien symbols hint at an unknown language or decrypted code. Large bulbous orbs, identified as living quarters, feature unique designs catering to the alien inhabitants' living requirements.

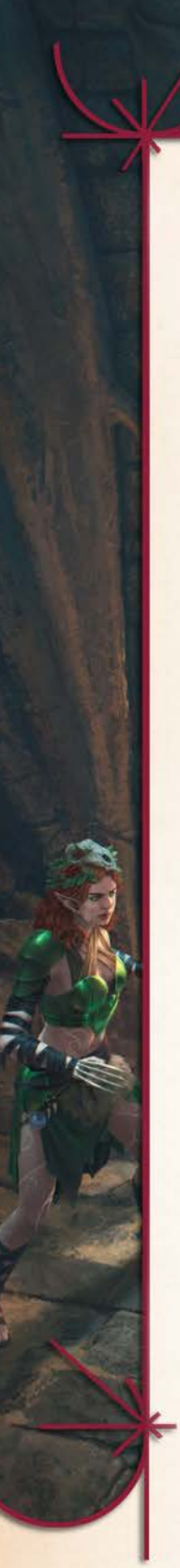
Points of Interest. These locales detail where PCs might gain vital clues on what happened here or else find valuable lore, salvage, or treasure:

- ***Central Hub.*** A communal center for meetings and cultural activities, it's adorned with distinctive alien artwork and symbols. *Clue:* Symbols and writing within the hub provide a foundation for similar writing and symbolism elsewhere, functioning as a Rosetta Stone.
- ***Energy Nodes.*** Unusual structures that harness advanced energy sources might have powered the settlement's technology. *Salvage:* PCs can learn to use nodes to activate and power the technology in various locations throughout the colony.
- ***Memory Archives.*** Dedicated to preserving knowledge, these structures contain holographic or crystalline structures that encode the collected wisdom of the colony. *Clue:* Deciphering the functions of each structure becomes crucial to unveiling the mysteries of the settlement and understanding the technological and societal complexity it once possessed.
- ***Observation Towers.*** Towering structures equipped with advanced technology, they suggest a role in observing celestial phenomena or monitoring the environment. *Salvage:* These dormant technologies are of advanced complexity, their purpose obscured by time.

Challenges. These challenges represent specific mysteries and obstacles with which the PCs must contend within the ruins:

- ***Communication Array.*** An intricately designed interplanar/interstellar communication device links the remote settlement with similar settlements—scattered who knows how far. Activating the device draws the attention of the beings and their nefarious intent.
- ***Robotic Surgeons.*** Laboratories equipped with advanced instruments hint at unheard of technology, medicine, and other scientific breakthroughs. *Salvage:* Several potent instruments activate robotic surgeons capable of performing operations that can physiologically modify the PCs.
- ***Warped Ecologies.*** Over the years, normal creatures exposed to the alien colony have become altered. Genetically warped versions of mundane flora and fauna inhabit the colony and surrounding territories.





SPECTRAL NECROPOLIS OF THULDANOR

The drow of House Thuldanor constructed a sprawling burial site to establish the enduring legacy of their power and nobility. However, they were ultimately crushed by rival houses and their necropolis cursed.

Thematic Structures. A massive underground burial chamber filled with hundreds of sarcophagi. An intricate symbol seals each tomb with dark magic. A grand mausoleum rises at the center where the most influential leaders of House Thuldanor were laid to rest.

Points of Interest. These locales detail where PCs might gain vital clues on what happened here or else find valuable lore, salvage, or treasure:

- ***Ebon Spire.*** A tall tower that once served as the heart of House Thuldanor's power, this twisted tower bends reality and casts illusions to confuse and disorient those who dare to climb its stairs.
- ***Temple of Eternal Gloom.*** Curses taint this former place of worship, sown by rivals. Psychic remnants drawn from pain and suffering echo through the halls. *Clue:* PCs can attempt to endure the anguish caused by the psychic remnants to learn the secrets the torturous rituals attempted to reveal.
- ***Tomb of the Cursed Heir.*** The final resting place of the cursed heir of House Thuldanor is curiously empty. *Salvage:* A secret chamber beneath the tomb hides the "cursed heir's" phylactery.

Challenges. These challenges represent specific mysteries and obstacles with which the PCs must contend within the ruins:

- ***Cursed Heir.*** Resurrected by dark magic, the heir now guards the tomb, seeking to corrupt and recruit the living into the house's cursed legacy.
- ***Veil of Shadows.*** Vengeful spirits ward this magical barrier, trapping trespassers in a shadowy dimension. Those who understand the secret history of House Thuldanor can decipher the riddle of the veil and pass through the barrier unharmed.
- ***Whispers of Betrayal.*** The whispering voices of those that House Thuldanor ritually sacrificed haunt and manipulate the emotions of the living, warping their thoughts with illusions and hallucinations.

HEXCRAWLS

Hex maps and hexcrawls have been used in strategy board games, a predecessor to tabletop roleplaying games, for decades. In fact, the founders of roleplaying games were so familiar with hex maps that they were built into the game from the beginning. From historical overworlds to fantastic underworlds to futuristic outer space, there was a time when most roleplaying games included a hex map as the assumed method for facilitating exploration of the environment. This style of gameplay fell out of mainstream use as major adventure publishers instead adopted a more focused, scripted approach to adventures and settings.

Hexcrawl offers an immersive style of exploration that embraces the finer points of travel and exploration—supplies, travel speed, encumbrance, weather, and many others that are often ignored by modern settings for expediency—as elements to feed the ongoing narrative and enhance compelling drama. While this type of gaming isn't for everyone, it appeals to those who relish realistic settings and digging into the details of their PCs' day-to-day lives.

So why use a hexcrawl? The joy of discovery is a constant source of motivation, and it helps scratch the classic itch of finding lost cities, forgotten treasures, and unexpected dangers. Since the players can't anticipate and prepare for every potential obstacle in their path, how they choose to respond to those surprises keeps the game feeling fresh and exciting. In hexcrawls, getting from here to there *is* the adventure.

WHAT IS A HEXCRAWL?

The hexcrawl is a robust way to simulate "macro-level" exploration in a tabletop roleplaying game. A hexcrawl frames gameplay around a map, traditionally divided by hexagons (or "hexes"), that contain a high density of interesting content to discover and interact with. The contents of each hex are hidden from the players until the PCs discover it, usually via exploration or observation from an adjacent hex. During play, as each new hex is revealed, describe the area to the players as the PCs would perceive it. The PCs then take time to discover and interact with what lies in that area before moving to a new hex. While this serves as an adequate overview, the real beauty of this system is in the details.

THE HEX

Each hexagon on the map represents the same number of miles or, more generally, geographical areas of the same size. The size of each hex depends on the type of area being explored. The hexes in a wilderness or extensive underground hex map are sometimes considered to be 3, 6, 12, or even 24 miles across, depending on the needs of the campaign. On the other hand, a hex map of a ruined city might measure each hex as one square block of buildings. Some players appreciate a specific size for the hexes while others are comfortable with an abstract approach. Make sure that everyone is on the same page in terms of these considerations before diving into a hexcrawl.

When they enter a hex, PCs can spend time exploring to discover locations, NPCs, or situations (all either generated by rolling on a table or pre-determined by the GM). Players have total freedom as they move from one hex to the next. They decide the path they follow as they interact with each location they find there.

THE GOAL

When embarking on this type of exploration, everyone at the table should be clear about the goal of the hexcrawl, which guides not only the PCs' travel speed and other decisions but the type of encounters and obstacles they encounter. A party venturing into an underground warren of tunnels to bypass uncrossable mountains will have a much different experience than a group entering that same area to hunt down an evil cultist who has stolen a holy relic.

MANAGING THE MINUTIAE

When running a hexcrawl, gauge the players' interest in the minutiae of exploration. Some groups enjoy personally handling all aspects of travel and exploration. These players see hexcrawl like generals planning an assault. The map spreads out before them, arming them with information about their surroundings, its landscape, and what it might contain. Which direction do we go? How do we travel? What equipment do we pack? Who will scout ahead? Who will forage as we move? Who will cook tonight at camp?

Other groups want the freedom to explore the map but are less interested in the nitty-gritty of supplies and encumbrance. Consult with the players and use an appropriate level of detail for their needs. The rules presented in this section assume the players want a minutiae-heavy, detailed hexcrawl, though aspects that don't appeal to the players can be ignored.

CREATING A HEX MAP

There are two main ways to create a hex map: pregenerated or procedurally generated. Both offer interesting opportunities for adventure. Regardless of generation method, the contents of a hex depend on the nature of the area being explored or traversed. The tables in this section present elements for inspiration and aren't set in stone.

PREGENERATED MAPS

In this option, the map is created ahead of time, adding geographic and cartographic information for each hex. This information can include type of terrain, such as forests, subterranean tunnels, mountains, rivers, or plains, plus other location notes like ruins, structures, oddities, and mysteries. Some find it easiest to begin with major landforms, such as coastlines, mountain ranges, or large rivers, and then fill in the gaps. One can also begin with a few locations known, such as the lair of the ultimate antagonist of the campaign, major cities, and important landmarks, and then fill in the areas around them. Use results from the **Wilderness Terrain Elements** and **Ruins/Underground Terrain Elements** tables in this section as inspiration for filling the hexes on the map.

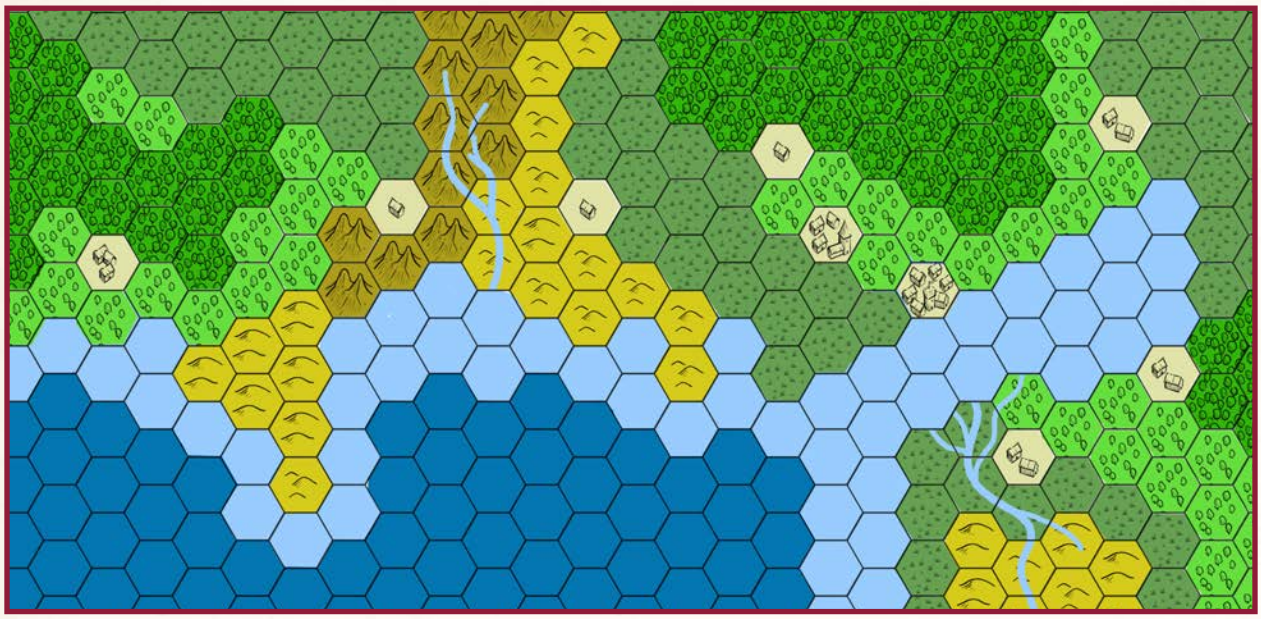
PROCEDURALLY GENERATED MAPS

In this option, the GM or the players roll randomly on tables to create the hex map. This can be done before play, generating the whole map without the knowledge of the players, or during each gaming session, incrementally "uncovering" the map as the PCs progress.

Alternatively, work together with the players. When the PCs enter a new hex, call for a number of players equal to the number of "empty" hexes adjacent to the new hex to roll on the appropriate **Wilderness Terrain Elements** or **Ruins/Underground Terrain Elements** table. Then use the results from those rolls to secretly fill the empty hexes. This method lets everyone experience the thrill of discovering the world at the same time.

MIXED METHODS

A map can be created using a mixture of methods. Certain locations of importance to the campaign can be pre-established along with major landforms like mountain ranges, intact structures, large rivers, or similar elements. Then the rest of the map is determined by rolling on the **Wilderness Terrain Elements** or **Ruins/Underground Terrain Elements** table as the PCs enter each new hex.





MAP ELEMENT TABLES

The tables included in this section offer suggestions for populating a hexcrawl map. Two of them, the **Wilderness Terrain Elements** table and the **Ruins/Underground Terrain Elements** table, are in an unusual shape known as a "hex flower."

A hex flower table is a set of hexagons arranged in concentric rings, like petals from a flower's center. It does many things that a standard table does, but it also has a bit of "memory." Results (after the first) are based on previous results, allowing a more curated flow of outcomes from one hex to another.

The third table, **Distinct Hex Elements**, is a more traditional table containing structures, effects, occupants, or circumstances found within a hex that aren't related to the hex's terrain. These can be landmarks, discoveries, and other distinguishing features of a hex that don't reach landscape scale. For instance, a hex terrain might be forested with giant mushrooms while its distinction is an abandoned shrine. The shrine isn't particularly hidden but also isn't obvious until the hex is entered and explored. Add multiple distinctions to a hex if PCs spend a lot of time there, and some elements might be more obvious than others, providing more opportunities for discovery.

With all elements, attempt to provide logical additions to each hex to make the overall map fit together. If a specific number of structures, landforms, caverns, or other elements are needed, don't wait for a table to put them there. If a table result calls for a major landform, such as a mountain or river, the hex will predominately feature that element but also contain other features to make it a logical part of the landscape. And landscape features like rivers rarely exist in only one hex.

Not every element is appropriate for every map, so feel free to alter results that don't fit. However, don't toss out conflicting results immediately. Thinking about how two or more unusual results can work together is part of the fun of generating a map randomly.

And don't forget that, in addition to generating terrain, hexes still need to be populated. Whatever terrain occupies a hex also suggests an encounter table based on that terrain. See **Appendix B** for random encounter tables (and more in *Game Master's Guide*), listed by terrain and tier.

Wilderness Terrain

The **Wilderness Terrain Elements** table can generate a reasonable flow of overland terrain that PCs encounter when traveling in the wilderness. To use it, roll 2d6 and place a token on the appropriate hex to mark location. Note that this is not the map itself but instead a table that generates the map.

Look at the layout of the table. The arrangement of terrain types puts terrain of lower elevation at the bottom of the table and terrain of higher elevation at the top. This helps avoid drastic elevation changes. One won't ever go straight from mountains to swamps but can still find surprises along the way. Note that the probability distribution of the dice tends to push results toward flat or low ground.

WILDERNESS TERRAIN ELEMENTS

To use the table, place the token on the center hex labeled Start. When generating a new hex, roll 2d6 and move the token in the direction indicated by the dice results. For instance, if the result is a 4, move the





token "northeast" in the 3–4 direction from Start to Forest. For each subsequent hex that the PCs enter, roll again and move the token into a new hex. Apply the directions indicated on Start to any hex the token is in. For instance, if the token is in Badlands, a 12 moves the token up to Hills.

If the token is on the edge of the hex flower and a result would send it off the edge of the table, wrap around to the other side of the flower, staying on the same "line." A line on this table is determined by the hex's facing, so there are three lines extending through any given hex: one line up and down, and two diagonal lines, all three crossing at its center. As example, if the token is in the Desert hex on the left side of the table and a 9 is rolled (the "southwest" facing), instead wrap around on that line and put the token in the Hills hex located in the far "northeast" or top-rightmost hex of that same diagonal line.

Some edges have arrows pointing in a specific direction. If the token is in the Swamp hex and an 8 is rolled, the arrow then directs movement into the Grassland hex instead of wrapping around. Note though that arrows are only one-way though, so if the token is in the Coastal hex and a 7 is rolled, still wrap around to the Hills hex at the top of its line.

If movement returns to the Start hex, use the same terrain as in the previous occupied hex.

Some hexes on this table contain two terrain types. When these are encountered, pick one or roll a d6 and use the first terrain on a 1–3 or the second on a 4–6.

Even more variety can be achieved by assigning outcomes to specific dice rolls. For instance, if doubles are rolled on the 2d6 roll, then roll on the **Distinct Hex Elements** table to place a landmark or discovery in the hex. Temperature variations can also be added: if one die of the roll is a 1, shift the weather colder, and if one die is a 6, shift the weather warmer. After a temperature shift, treat all subsequent results on the hex flower as that temperature until the weather shifts again. (On a roll of 1 and 6 at the same time, bring it back to standard temperate.) With this addition, entire biomes can shift. For instance, a hot Forest can become a jungle, and a cold Desert can become tundra.

The terrain results match the overland terrains from the *Monster Vault*. Here are some notes on each terrain:

- ***Badlands.*** This rocky, arid terrain can be natural or a magically induced wasteland. Roll a d6 to determine additional features: 1–2, tall, rocky outcroppings; 3–4, magic wasteland; 5–6, vivid colorations.
- ***Coastal.*** An expanse of water meets the land here, such as a sizeable river, a lake, or an ocean. Can be passable depending on size and location. Roll a d6 to determine the size of the body of water: 1–2, small; 3–4, medium; 5–6, large.
- ***Desert.*** This arid hex is bereft of water and contains rocky hills or sand dunes interspersed with flat expanses. Roll a d6 to determine the desert's makeup: 1–2, sand; 3–4, gravel; 5, salt flat; 6, exposed bedrock.
- ***Farmland.*** This hex contains cultivated vegetation and is a probable sign of Humanoid life and some kind of civilization in a nearby hex. Roll a d6 to determine what they grow: 1–2, food crops for Humanoid consumption; 3–4, fiber crops; 5–6, feed crops for livestock.
- ***Forest.*** Trees and vegetation grow close together in this hex. Roll a d6 to determine the type of vegetation in the forest: 1–2, deciduous; 3–4, evergreen; 5, fungal; 6, magically altered.
- ***Grassland.*** This hex is filled with a flat expanse of wild, open terrain. Roll a d6 to determine the height of grasses: 1–3, under 1 foot; 4–5, around 3 feet; 6, over 6 feet.
- ***Hills.*** Tall land rising higher than its surroundings dominates this hex, and it can lead to mountainous terrain. Roll a d6 to determine the density of the hills: 1–2, few hills; 3–4, hills and valleys throughout; 5–6, many steep hills.
- ***Mountains.*** The surrounding hills in this hex lead to steep, lofty heights and often icy peaks. This might be part of a chain or a singular peak above the landscape. Roll a d6 to determine how these mountains are formed: 1–2, tectonic movement; 3–4, volcanic activity; 5–6, solitary peak formed by erosion.
- ***Swamp.*** This hex is filled with interconnected rivers, lakes, and wetlands that drain together, featuring damp soil and thick vegetation. Roll a d6 to determine the general depth of the swamp, though areas of varying depth occur: 1–2, shallow, under 1 foot in most places; 3–4, around 3 feet; 5–6, over 6 feet.

Ruins/Underground Terrain

The **Ruins/Underground Terrain Elements** table generates a flow of terrain that PCs encounter when traveling underground or in ruins. Each ruins hex contains various ruined structures, rubble-choked streets or pathways, and whatever flora and fauna dwell there. This is a smaller scale than overland terrain

mapping (see **Map Scale and Hex Turn Measurements** in this chapter), so the hexes will be smaller, but the hex generation still operates using the same principles.

Note that hexcrawls are abstractions. While exploring underground areas, natural passages and minor elevation changes between interesting sites are the norm, and the number of tunnels or caverns in a hex isn't defined. If PCs are in an underground area, describe the entry and potential exits they can see but focus on the primary contents of the hex for encounters and interactions.

RUINS/UNDERGROUND TERRAIN ELEMENTS

To use the table, put the token on the center hex labeled Start. When generating a new hex, roll 2d6 and move the token in the direction indicated by the dice results. For instance, if the result is a 4, move the token "northeast" in the 3–4 direction from Start to Work Ward. For each subsequent hex that the PCs enter, roll again and move the token into a new hex. Apply the directions indicated on Start to any hex the token is in. For instance, if the token is in Work Ward, a 12 moves the token up to Collapse.



If the token is on the edge of the hex flower and a result would send it off the edge of the table, wrap around to the other side of the flower, staying on the same "line." A line on this table is determined by the hex's facing, so there are three lines extending through any given hex: one line up and down, and two diagonal lines, all three crossing at its center. As example, if the token is in the Military Ward hex on the left side of the table and a 9 is rolled (the "southwest" facing), instead wrap around on that line and put the token in the Chasm hex located in the far "northeast" or top-rightmost hex of that same diagonal line.

If a ruins/underground terrain element describes a ward, it can contain one or more ruined buildings or structures that were used for that purpose, depending on the needs of the campaign. If movement returns to the Start hex, the hex becomes Up/Down and represents a passage that allows the PCs to go up or down (GM's discretion).

Here are notes on each result:

- ***Chasm.*** This hex is partially or completely bisected by a deep fissure. Roll a d4 to determine the number of ways across chasm.
- ***Collapse.*** The passageways in this section have seen significant collapse. Roll a d6 to determine how passable this hex is: 1–2, takes twice as long; 3–4, takes four times as long; 5–6, impassible.

DISTINCT HEX ELEMENTS

d100	Element	Description
1–3	Dead End	The navigable terrain in this hex ends in obstructions or natural blockages that don't allow travelers to continue. Explorers must exit the hex by backtracking.
4–8	Fissure	This hex is partially or completely bisected by a deep fissure. Roll a d4 to determine the number of ways across the divide.
9–13	Graveyard	This hex contains a graveyard, barrows, or other memorial to the dead. Roll a d6 to determine its status: 1–2, desecrated; 3–4, empty; 5–6, nothing special.
14–17	Haunted*	The area in this hex is haunted by the spirits of the area's previous inhabitants or the souls of those who perished here. Roll a d6 to determine the severity of the haunting: 1–2, slight; 3–4, medium; 5–6, strong.
18–24	Hazard	This hex contains a large-scale hazard. See **Chapter 4** for potential hazards and choose one appropriate for the terrain.
25–33	Inhabited	This hex is occupied by creatures. This could be an infestation of non-sentient creatures, evidence of a current population (such as a road or monument), or an established community. Roll a d6 to determine the type of habitation in the hex: 1–2, infestation; 3–4, sign; 5–6, community.
34–40	Intact Structure	One or more structures in this hex have withstood the passage of time and nature. They are likely sealed against the weather in some fashion. This could be a wide variety of things such as an abandoned shrine, a remote hunting lodge for rangers or nobles, or a hermit's hut in the wilderness. Roll a d6 to determine how recently it was occupied: 1, long abandoned; 2–3, unused for at least a season; 4–5, signs of recent use; 6, currently occupied.
41–47	Magical Phenomenon	A ley line, fairy circle, floating landmass, or some other magic effect clearly affects the environment in this hex. Roll a d6 to determine how pervasive the phenomenon is: 1–2, localized; 3–4, a mile or two in scope; 5–6, affects entire hex.
48–52	Monster Den	A large, threatening creature appropriate to the terrain lairs in this hex. Roll a d6 to determine the monster's proximity to its lair: 1, gone for over a season; 2–3, signs of recent habitation; 4–5, hunting or moving nearby; 6, currently occupied.
53–61	Natural Feature	This hex contains a distinct natural feature, such as an extremely tall tree, a prominent rock face, or a spectacular waterfall. Magic or intervention might be involved somehow, but the feature itself needs no magical origin.

- ***Government Ward.*** This hex once hosted seats of political power, such as palaces, the offices of leaders, or public buildings used by governmental powers. Roll a d6 to determine how intact the ward currently is: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.
- ***Large Caverns.*** This underground hex contains one or more large unworked caverns with smaller passages leading away.
- ***Library Ward.*** This hex once hosted places of education and study, such as libraries, religious temples, universities, or mage schools. Roll a d6 to determine how intact the ward currently is: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.
- ***Merchant Ward.*** This hex once hosted merchant guilds, marketplaces, trade centers, or small workshops. Roll a d6 to determine how intact the ward currently is: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.
- ***Military Ward:*** This hex once hosted barracks, forts, training areas, or similar locations that catered to warriors, soldiers, or guards. Roll a d6 to determine how intact the ward currently is: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.
- ***Narrow Tunnels.*** The tunnels, streets, or caverns in this hex are narrow for defensive, artistic, or geological reasons. Creatures of Medium size must travel in a single file. Creatures of Large size must squeeze to get through them, and creatures of Huge or larger size can't fit.

d100	Element	Description
62–65	Overgrown	The terrain of this hex overwhelms other discoveries within it. Most of the hex is difficult terrain, and unless the PCs get some elevation, visibility is lightly obscured.
66–68	Portal	A magic teleportation device is in this hex. It might be abandoned or in disrepair. If it is functional, it is probably minded by sentient creatures. Roll a d6 to determine its status: 1–2, nonfunctioning; 3–4, functional, but needs a key; 5–6, fully functional.
69–75	River	A significant flow of water washes through this hex. Roll a d6 to determine its strength: 1–2, easy fording; 3–4, fast river; 5–6, rapids.
76–79	Ruined Structure	This hex contains a large area of ruined structures, such as an abandoned city. If reached from mapping wilderness terrain and players wish to explore further, consider shifting to the **Ruins/Underground Terrain Elements** table at a smaller scale to proceed. If already searching a ruin, this indicates the end of it.
80–82	Spring	An upwelling of clear, drinkable water appears in this hex. It might be the beginning of a stream or collecting in a small pool. Roll a d6 to determine whether anything special about the spring occurs: 1–2, magical healing; 3–4, attracts monsters; 5–6, nothing special.
83–85	Standing Stones	A set of standing stones, such as dolmens or a stone circle, has been raised here. Roll a d6 to determine whether they are in use: 1–3, long abandoned; 4–5, unused for at least a season; 6, signs of recent use.
86–90	Underground Access	This hex contains a cave, fissure, or similar access to the underground. If the hex map is already underground, this element allows access to a significant elevation change.
91–94	Volcanic Activity*	This hex features a volcanically active area. This might include hot springs, geysers, lava pools, or volcanos. Roll a d6 to determine the volcanic activity of the hex: 1–2, slight; 3–4, medium; 5–6, heavy.
95–100	Roll Again Twice	Roll two more times on this table and combine the results. Ignore further rolls of this result.

(*) features some additional rules in **Map Element Terrain Rules**

- ***Recreation.*** This hex contains a park, square, sports field, public bath, or other area dedicated to relaxation or recreation. Roll a d6 to determine its current status: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.



WHAT ABOUT DUNGEON HEXCRAWLS?

You can hexcrawl a dungeon as well as surface terrain, and many early RPGs did just that. It isn't optimal though. For one thing, the ruleset is structured around a square grid. Mostly, this is due to the various mechanics (spells, skills, weapon ranges, and so forth) having been designed to work on a square-grid battle map. In addition, exploration maps often have the point of view zoomed out to give a larger scale whereas dungeon scale tends to be zoomed in for tactical action. Additionally, built structures tend to be rectangular, which matches a square grid more neatly.

But don't let that stop you! Draw out the entire map and only reveal each room one by one as the PCs travel to each hex or generate the map procedurally with random tables. Both methods are valid and fun to play. Some feel that randomly generated dungeons lack a cohesive theme, but others value the excitement of discovering the dungeon for the first time.

The scale of each hex in a dungeon crawl is roughly one room or chamber. The exact size of a room isn't very important. As a guideline, a hex can contain a single large chamber or up to four smaller ones. An especially large chamber can cover multiple hexes.

Use your head to keep the immersion. A thousand-foot-long chamber should occupy more than one hex, for instance. Develop your own table of random map elements to tailor a dungeon with hazards, puzzles, and traps. When the PCs enter a hex for the first time, tell players of obvious exits to adjacent hexes or roll randomly for which hex facing has an adjacent chamber and then place a door on that side of the room.

- ***Residential Ward.*** This hex once hosted the homes of the residents who lived here. Roll a d6 to determine how intact the ward currently is: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.
- ***Up/Down.*** This hex contains a passageway with a significant vertical change. Roll a d6 to determine what kind of passageway: 1–2, carved stairs; 3–4, natural chimney; 5–6, sloping passage.
- ***Water.*** There is an expanse of water in this hex, such as a river, pond, or lake. Might be passable, depending on size and location. Roll a d6 to determine the size of the water: 1–2, small, 3–4, medium; 5–6, large.
- ***Work Ward.*** This was an industrial center or workshop that employed many workers, such as a smithy. Roll a d6 to determine its current status: 1–2, all ruined; 3–4, half ruined; 5–6, mostly intact.

Distinct Hex Elements

The tables so far have given an overview of the general terrain (or use) of the hex. However, hexes also contain creature-scale elements that make one hex of hills different from another. These elements are not the same as encounters, though interesting encounters can be based around each of them. Introduce a distinct hex element when doubles are rolled on a terrain table or place an interesting one any time. It's hard to overdo these.

The **Distinct Hex Elements** table is hardly exhaustive of the kinds of things that adventurous types can find while exploring, but it offers a good springboard for the imagination. An entry with an asterisk (*) features some additional rules in **Map Element Terrain Rules**.

Map Element Terrain Rules

When the adventurers venture into hexes marked by certain map elements, additional rules come into play.

Haunted. Some locations are stained by the horrible tragedies that occurred there. These haunted areas inflict specific effects on those who pass through them. Every hour a creature moves through a hex with a haunted element, it must succeed on a WIS save or be frightened for 1 hour. The save DC is 10 for a slight haunting, 12 for a medium haunting, or 14 for a strong haunting. A successful INT (Arcana or Religion) check (DC equal to the WIS save DC of the haunting) identifies the supernatural danger. A creature that recognizes the danger has advantage on the WIS save to resist the haunting.

A *remove curse* spell or the Channel Divinity class feature can suppress a haunting in a hex for a number of hours equal to the PB of the creature that cast the spell or used the feature.

Volcanic Activity. Areas of geothermal activity present a series of dangerous hazards for the exploring adventurer, such as poisonous gases, burning rain, and lava (see *Game Master's Guide* and **Chapter 4** of this book for appropriate hazards to apply). Apart from those immediate dangers, creatures traversing this area are also exposed to extreme heat (see *Player's Guide*).

RUNNING A HEXCRAWL

The foundation of running a hexcrawl is a procedure based on the classic turn-based rules familiar to tabletop games. But whereas in combat every individual acts in initiative order during a six-second turn, a "turn" in a hexcrawl is a number of hours of movement, exploration, or activity.

The party takes its turn as a whole, acting at the same time but with individual PCs taking on different tasks or combining their efforts to share the load. For example, one PC might scout ahead while two others forage for edible mushrooms and the last examines a carved stone they'd previously located.

These "turns" take much longer than six seconds. The exact length of time depends on the size of the hexes being explored, the type of map used, and how long the PCs keep at a particular task (see the section on **Map Scale and Hex Turn Measurements** in this section). It's not unusual for players to take five to seven turns in a day, but a turn could be an entire day if the players are focused. Players are responsible for keeping track of their rations and other consumable supplies.

After the players take their turn, the GM resolves the PCs' actions while considering the terrain, weather, safety, and anything else that could affect the result. The GM also charts the party's position on the map, tracking the time based on how much time the party's actions would consume, and any other relevant



variables (such as, for example, an unexpected change in the weather). But while the PCs are acting, so too are the NPCs of the world. To represent this, the GM can choose if the PCs have an encounter (or can roll to determine it), which must be resolved before the party can move onto the next turn. When using hexcrawls, carefully track how much time the PCs spend on various activities, bearing in mind that after 8 hours of exploration or travel, a PC begins to risk exhaustion. Each hex turn follows this hexcrawl procedure regardless of turn length:

1. ***New Day Begins.*** The GM determines the weather (if applicable), and the party forms a daily plan (typically including a goal, a route, and their travel pace). If the party didn't eat or sleep, they suffer the relevant penalties now.
2. ***Party's Turn.*** The PCs are free to come up with any action that the GM agrees is reasonable. Some common actions are travel, exploration, investigation, scouting and tracking, or camp activities. Each of these is detailed in the **Hexcrawl Activities** section.
3. ***GM's Turn.*** The GM takes their turn. They keep track of the party's position and the passage of time. They also check for a random encounter or use a pre-set encounter if desired.
4. Steps 2 and 3 are repeated until a new day begins. Most of the time, days are easily divided by the PCs taking a long rest.

HEXCRAWL ACTIVITIES

PCs can engage in several different activities as part of their hexcrawl turn. In general, most actions take a turn to accomplish. However, a GM can rule that multiple camp activities might be accomplished in a single turn.

TRAVEL

To travel, the PCs typically pick an adjacent hex to move into. The GM calculates how long this movement takes, factoring in conditions and obstacles, and keeps a running total, checking for exhaustion if the PCs move for more than 8 hours. How long it takes to cross a hex depends on several factors. First is the party's travel pace, as adjusted by terrain conditions and weather. Next is the choice of map scale and travel method. Finally, stamina naturally imposes its own limitations on even hardy adventurers.

Travel Pace

The party can follow one of three travel paces when they move. In general, the faster a party moves, the riskier it is. Parties that travel at a normal or fast pace are automatically noticed by anyone approaching, and parties moving at a fast pace also increase the likelihood that random encounters become ambushes. If the party isn't traveling by road, they're more likely to get lost the faster they go. The three travel speeds are as follows:

- ***Slow Pace.*** PCs move cautiously but gain the benefits of stealth and careful navigation. A party with some cover traveling at this pace can avoid random

TRAVEL SPEED (HEX TRACKING)

Hex Size	Travel Pace	Normal Terrain (Hexes)	Difficult Terrain (Hexes)
12 Miles or Larger	Slow	1	1/2
	Normal	2	1
	Fast	3	2
Smaller than 12 Miles	Slow	2	1
	Normal	3	2
	Fast	4	2

TRAVEL SPEED (MILE TRACKING)

Time	Travel Pace	Normal Terrain (Miles)	Difficult Terrain (Miles)
Per Hour	Slow	2	1
	Normal	3	1-1/2
	Fast	4	2
Per Day	Slow	18	9
	Normal	24	12
	Fast	30	15

encounters with a successful DEX (Stealth) check, opposed by the highest Perception score among the creatures in the encounter. Moreover, when the party is at risk of getting lost, the PC handling navigation has a +5 bonus on WIS (Survival) checks to stay on course.

- ***Normal Pace.*** PCs move at their usual speed, but they are obvious to other creatures in their path.
- ***Fast Pace.*** PCs move quickly, but every member of the group suffers from a –5 penalty to their passive Perception scores, and the PC handling navigation suffers a –5 penalty to WIS (Survival) checks to avoid becoming lost.

In addition, difficult terrain halves the speed at any pace. See **Traveling** in **Chapter 6** of the *Player's Guide* for more information around traveling.

Certain map elements can impose maximum travel speed limits based on the terrain. The **Adjusted Travel Speed by Map Element** table outlines these limitations.

Map Scale and Hex Turn Measurements

When creating a hex map, decide on the scale for each hex. For overland travel, 6 miles to a hex is a standard that many GMs choose. A 6-mile hex is 6 miles across from face to face, approximately 7 miles from corner to corner (through the center), and a face is approximately 3.5 miles long. It contains about 32 square miles inside, which gives PCs plenty of space to stomp around and discover secrets, and a diligent search can comb the hex in a long day. In terms of travel, 6 miles divides evenly for a normal or slow travel pace. Finally, on Earth, a human can see the horizon about 3 miles away if the land is flat. If the campaign is mostly Earth-like, that means PCs need to get to the middle of a hex before they can see the next one. Other people use 3 miles, 12 miles, or even 24 miles for various reasons, but when starting out, try 6 miles as a useful scale.

A ruins hex is a much smaller area, containing a space roughly 680 feet by 680 feet. At this scale, roughly 8 ruins hexes equal 1 mile, measured from side to side. If the PCs are searching a lost city or an underground complex, this scale is more useful for tracking buildings, streets, and civic structures.

If tracking miles across hexes proves too much, try hex tracking or mileage tracking to determine how time and travel speed are tracked.

ADJUSTED TRAVEL SPEED BY MAP ELEMENT

Elements	Maximum Overland Travel Speed
Desert	Fast
Forest	Fast
Hills	Fast
Jungle	Slow
Mountains	Normal
Narrow Passages	Slow
Plains	Fast
Ruins	Normal
Swamps	Slow
Underground	Normal
Volcanic	Normal

WEATHER EFFECTS

Weather Conditions	Effects	Examples
Catastrophic	Travel under these conditions is impossible by non-magical means.	Hurricanes, monsoons, floods.
Extreme	Each hex takes twice as long to traverse, checks to avoid getting lost are made with Disadvantage, and traversing each hex imposes one level of exhaustion.	Blizzards, hail, tornados, mud slides.
Inclement	Each hex takes twice as long to traverse and checks to avoid getting lost have disadvantage.	Thunderstorms, major snowstorm.
Unpleasant	Each hex takes twice as long to traverse.	Rain and wind, light snowfall.
Agreeable	Standard conditions for travel.	Overcast.
Nice	Checks made to forage have advantage.	Sunny.
Ideal	Each hex takes half as long to traverse, and checks to forage have advantage.	The most clement day of the year.



Hex Tracking. This method abstracts travel even further for ease of play. Movement occurs in terms of full hexes traveled each day. With this method, a hexcrawl turn is 1 day of travel. The **Travel Speed (Hex Tracking)** table shows the travel speed by hex for two groups of hex sizes.

Mileage Tracking. This method tracks the number of miles that the PCs travel. This mileage, adjusted by travel pace and terrain, determines how many hexes they cross. With this method, the hex isn't used as the measure of distance. The distance traveled indicates when the PCs cross into a new hex.

Remember, at a normal pace over unimpeded ground, the PCs can travel 24 miles in an 8-hour period. If the terrain is difficult, halve this speed. A hexcrawl turn is considered to be 8 hours, using this method. The **Travel Speed (Mile Tracking)** table shows hourly and daily travel speeds using this method.

Navigation

Hexcrawling can be divided into two major styles of gameplay: traveling with the aid of roads and maps, and traveling without such luxuries. Traveling by road has two main effects: the PCs don't risk getting lost, but they can't attempt to move stealthily, even if they're traveling at a slow pace. Traveling cross-country increases the difficulty of navigation and increases the chances for both discovery and danger.

Each time the PCs spend a turn traversing without a road, they must designate a navigator to roll a WIS (Survival) check to avoid getting lost. On a success, they go where they intend to without complication. The PCs' traveling pace can affect this roll. The navigator also has advantage if the party has a map, but the navigator has disadvantage under poor weather conditions or if the group is traveling at night. The baseline DC of the check for navigation in standard conditions is 5 for grasslands, farmlands, and other plains; 10 for hills, deserts, and open sea; and 15 for forests, mountains, and wetlands.

When the PCs are lost, each time they attempt to move to any adjacent hex, they instead move in a random direction determined by assigning a number (1 to 6) for each side of the hexagon and rolling a d6. Continue to privately track what hex they are in at any given time but keep this information hidden so long as the PCs remain lost. Lost PCs can spend 1d6 hours foregoing travel to gain their bearings and figure out their location. Once that time has passed, the navigator can re-attempt the WIS (Survival) check to avoid becoming lost and continue traveling.

Stamina

While traveling through hexes, PCs must consider their stamina. Even with the best of weather, clear terrain, and well-maintained roads, PCs can spend only 8 hours per day traversing hexes before they risk exhaustion. They can push themselves past their limits to cover additional ground with a forced march (see *Player's Guide*).

Optional Rule: Weather Effects

While exploring a hex, weather can have a positive or negative effect on the PCs' travel and activities. The **Weather Effects** table gives examples of how weather can impact the PCs during a hexcrawl. Keep in mind that many weather events, especially extreme ones, often have other weather events leading up to them, which can be used to foreshadow the upcoming inclement weather. A day of thunderstorms might be preceded by a day of wind and a day of snow might be preceded by a sunny but chilly day.

EXPLORATION

To explore, a PC or the whole party takes time to get the lay of the land or overcome obstacles in the area, such as ravines or thick underbrush. A PC that uses their hex turn to explore the current hex looks beyond the obvious to thoroughly investigate the area. Each PC engaged in exploring must make a DC 15 WIS (Perception) check at the end of the turn. This DC might be higher or lower, depending on terrain, weather conditions, and other factors working for or against the PC.

On a success, a PC gains an overview of the current hex, including the terrain, inhabitants (if any), and other information deemed appropriate. For example, a PC exploring a ruins hex might learn that the inhabitants of the lost city once worshiped a snake god or that a manticore dwells nearby. A PC that succeeds on the check by 5 or more learns a hint about any secret or hidden aspects of the area.

INVESTIGATION

To investigate, a PC or the whole party searches for or examines a specific element, location, structure, or object within the hex. Each PC engaged in investigating must make a DC 15 INT (Investigation) check at the end of the turn. This DC might be higher or lower, depending on terrain, weather conditions, and other factors working for or against the PC.

On a success, a PC learns information about the subject of the investigation, including hidden or secret knowledge. For example, a PC using their turn to investigate a ruined tower might find a hidden entrance or learn of the recent arrival of a heavily laden wagon.

SCOUTING AND TRACKING

To scout or track, a PC or the whole party scouts for danger in the next hex, ventures ahead to learn useful information about a single adjacent hex, or spends time to find the marks left by another creature to follow its trail. Each PC engaged in scouting must make a DC 15 WIS (Survival) check at the end of the turn. This DC might be higher or lower, depending on terrain, weather conditions, and other factors working for or against the PC.

On a success, a scouting PC gets an overview of the adjacent hex, including the type of terrain found there, any obvious landforms or structures, and any obvious dangers or challenges that await. For example, a PC using their turn to scout the hex ahead might learn of a major river, a deep chasm, or the presence of towering megafauna. A PC that succeeds on the check by 5 or more learns an additional bit of information that might be learned if that hex was explored normally.

Alternatively, a PC can use this activity to find evidence of a specific creature and follow its tracks. The PC must make a WIS (Survival) check with a DC equal to 8 plus the CR of the creature being tracked. On a success, the PC can follow the target creature up to one adjacent hex away.

CAMP ACTIVITIES

Camp activities is a catch-all category for any manner of activities the PCs conduct while not traveling or exploring. The most common camp activities are foraging for food and setting up camp. PCs who use their hex turn for camp activities do the necessary tasks of travel, such as setting up a secure camp site, foraging for food, tending to the party's mounts, keeping watch, or



resting. Each PC engaged in camp activities must choose a specific task and then make a DC 10 WIS (Survival) check at the end of the turn. This DC might be higher or lower, depending on terrain, weather conditions, and other factors working for or against the PC.

On a success, a PC accomplishes their task in good order. Resting doesn't require a roll. A success at foraging results in finding a source of fresh water or gathering enough food for 1 day of rations for the entire party. A PC that succeeds on the check to forage by 5 or more gathers enough food for 2 additional days of rations. Some terrain types might not allow for some types of foraging (GM's discretion). For example, a volcanically active area might not provide enough potable water to support the PCs.

RANDOM HEX LOCATION ENCOUNTERS

In addition to the random encounter tables found in **Appendix B** (and also in the *Game Master's Guide*), the tables in this section can provide additional random encounters and adventure hooks for hexes, using the table appropriate to the environment. Even better, use the tables as inspiration to create unique encounter and adventure hook tables. Each table includes suggested terrain and tier of play for that encounter. (See the *Game Master's Guide* for more information about tiers of play.)

WILDERNESS LOCATION ENCOUNTERS

d8	Tier	Name	Description
1	2	Ambushed Bandits	A trail of bodies, clearly bandits from their garb, leads to the center of a dismal, water-logged low spot. There, a **hydra** feasts on the remains of the last bandits.
2	2	Bad Mimic	A wooden chest on the ground is obviously a **mimic** as it keeps muttering: "Nope, not a mimic" or "Yup, just an ordinary chest" in Common. Its offspring is being held by a nearby hag. In return for rescuing its offspring, the mimic offers the secret word to unlock the hag's treasure cache. It gives directions to the hag's nearby lair.
3	1	Direction Stone	A stone column stands in the center of a small clearing, singing bawdy tavern songs. If a PC correctly answers a riddle, it describes all prominent features and any secret information about one adjacent hex of the PC's choice. If the PC answers incorrectly, the stone falls silent for 1d4 days.
4	2	Impact Crater	At the center of a recently made crater is a stone egg engraved with strange, otherworldly glyphs. The egg is broken, as if from the inside, and three **lesser voidlings** lurk in the broken remains of the egg, attacking if disturbed.
5	3	Strange Old Woman	An old human woman gathers sticks into a large pack on her back. She is friendly but a bit cryptic, and she asks if the PCs will take a wrapped package to her sister in return for an ancient glowing ring. She gives directions to the location in entry 8 on this table. If attacked, she magically curses the PCs for being so rude before vanishing. See **Chapter 4** for some sample curses.
6	4	Sunbathing Wyrm	An adult dragon appropriate to the terrain lies on its back on a flat-topped upthrust of stone. If it detects the PCs, it follows them for days, hunting them one by one, acting like it's a game.
7	1	Tree Bard	While camping, a **treant** approaches the PCs and offers to perform its latest ballads for them. If they agree, it is overjoyed, sets up its makeshift drum, and performs. The treant's singing is horrible, and its songs are interminably long. If the PCs suffer the full set of twelve songs, the treant rewards them with two *feather tokens (tree)*.
8	3	Yet Another Strange Old Woman	An old human woman sits on the porch of a dilapidated hut perched atop chicken legs. She asks the PCs to seek out her sister, who has a package for her, giving directions to the location in entry 5 on this table. When the package is delivered, she invites the PCs in for tea. Afterward, she gives them a *ring of free action* and cryptic words of prophecy.

RUINS LOCATION ENCOUNTERS

d8	Tier	Name	Description
1	2	Aiding Evil	A wounded **spirit naga** begs the PCs to aid it in recovering a holy relic stolen by a nearby group of **lamias**. As a reward, it promises to give them a manual of gainful exercise.
2	4	Chess Tournament	Deep in the heart of a still-intact structure, the PCs encounter a **lich** who challenges them to a game of chess on a room-sized board. The PCs each take the place of one of the chess pieces, and they must fight monsters as pieces are moved. As a reward, the lich offers their pick of items from its treasure vault.
3	3	Guarded Armory	The doors leading to an intact armory are still protected by three **shield guardians**. Inside is a number of magic items, including a *nine lives stealer longsword*.
4	2	Lost Explorer	The PCs are hailed by a disheveled human scholar who got lost while exploring these ruins. They offer the PCs a sizable reward to accompany them. But the scholar is also being hunted by a **balara** for disturbing the ancient druid grove in the center of the ruins.
5	1	Old Gate	The only way forward from the current hex is blocked by an old gate with a closed portcullis. The PCs can attempt a group DC 15 STR (Athletics) check to open it.
6	4	Ruined Docks	The crumbling docks in this ward lead out to a more-or-less intact vessel (or airship depending on terrain). Unfortunately, the ship is inhabited by five **selangs**, two **selang void pipers**, and a **voidling** who conduct dark rituals in the hold.
7	3	Rumble in the Rotunda	Sounds of destruction lead the PCs to a large, open area. In the middle of it, two **chimeras** play a violent game of pounce-and-wrestle with two **wyverns**. All of them attack the PCs on sight.
8	2	Still Guarding	The ruins in this area show signs of some long-ago battle. As the PCs investigate, they disturb six **ogre zombies** who still guard the withered body of a dead necromancer.





UNDERGROUND LOCATION ENCOUNTERS

d8	Tier	Name	Description
1	4	A Normal Tunnel?	The way ahead seems perfectly fine, doesn't it? A particularly intelligent **purple worm** lies in the tunnel, mouth open, its throat coated with mud and rock. A DC 18 WIS (Perception) notices the worm before walking into its maw.
2	2	Arachnid Bridge	A yawning chasm cuts across the tunnel ahead. Too far to jump or dimension door, the only obvious means of crossing is a web bridge created and maintained by a group of **driders**. For a toll, they say they'll allow the PCs to cross, but can they be trusted?
3	2	Broker	An enterprising, extremely hungry **xorn** approaches the PCs to offer information about the surrounding tunnels and caverns, as well as the entrance to an undisturbed dungeon in exchange for any gems and rare metals the PCs are carrying. Its information is true, and if treated respectfully, it returns from time to time to offer more information.
4	3	Ferry Service	On one side of a lake or chasm, an overweight **otyugh** gazes mournfully toward the far side. Stolen from the deep gnome community that used it as a garbage disposal, the otyugh wants to cross and reclaim its cushy job. The PCs can aid the creature, but the trip is sure to be dangerous.
5	1	Helpful Sign	The PCs find a patch of colorful fungus. A sign on a post, written in misspelled Common, reads "Red is Heel, Blu is Beg, Yelo is Stong." There are two types of each mushroom in the patch (equivalent to a *potion of healing*, *potion of growth*, and *potion of hill giant strength*), but eating one makes a PC twice as likely to attract random encounters for 24 hours.
6	4	Sleeping Balor	While traversing a section of underground tunnels, the PCs encounter a wounded **deva** who tells the PCs of its defeat at the hands of a **balor**. The fiend currently sleeps in a nearby cavern recovering from its own wounds. This might be the only chance to defeat such a powerful foe, if the PCs can spring the perfect ambush.
7	1	Toll-Passage	At the entrance to a vast underground network, an enterprising **kobold witch** charges a nominal fee for admission. The kobold doesn't resist if the PCs refuse to pay, but waves of **kobolds** ambush the PCs repeatedly while they explore the hex.
8	3	Vampire Hospice	A community of **vampire spawn** maintains a hospital and sanitarium in the ruins of an ancient dwarven hold. Claiming to worship a benevolent healing deity, the vampire spawns offer healing magics and a limited supply of potions for a reasonable price. When a few of their dangerous inmates, including their master, break free from the sanitarium's magical cells, matters grow complicated.

3: DUNGEONS & RUINS

Can't get much more iconic than an ominous dungeon entrance, drenched in shadow. There's an inherent promise there of the unknown, of the mysteries hinted at in local tales—and of peril. But there's also the hint of excitement and comradery, of secrets and treasures and great renown for an adventuring party willing to brave its depths. This chapter provides a broad toolset for building dungeons and ruins, for manipulating their atmosphere and theme, effectively weaving together encounters and other mechanical components with the narrative, and for ensuring consistency throughout an adventure.



Dwarves put the finishing touches on their latest vault.

WHAT LIES WITHIN?

PCs explore dungeons to uncover secrets, defeat monsters, and find cool stuff—untold treasures like ancient artifacts and forgotten knowledge. And usually in the face of great peril. Perhaps it's curiosity or perhaps it's greed that acts as the primary motivator, or perhaps it's the quest for glory or the lack of common sense, but into the subterranean realms of lost worlds and ancient terrors we go.

There are many reasons adventurers are motivated to risk their lives while exploring the dark and dangerous unknown:

- ***Adventure.*** The lure of uncharted territories appeals to those seeking the thrill of the unknown. These PCs delve for the challenge of facing insurmountable odds against deadly traps and deadlier monsters. They thrive on danger.
- ***Exploration.*** Some PCs revel in the excitement of discovery. Driven by uncovering the long lost and the never seen. They obsess over documenting their discoveries of ancient artifacts and unknown flora and fauna—maybe even hoping that something is named after them—and charting new maps, so they can share their exploits with others, sparking their wonder and imagination.
- ***Intrigue and Mystery.*** Dark corridors and concealed passages hide the secrets of those who came before. The temptation to unravel those ancient mysteries and uncover whatever else lies forgotten in history's wake calls to the imaginations of some PCs.
- ***Lore and Knowledge.*** The ruins of ancient and lost civilizations hold the collective knowledge of peoples long fallen from glory but still with much to teach. Hidden within their libraries and locked within their vaults rest powerful runes, forbidden lore, names of celestials and fiends, the psychic memories of god-like elder beings, and who even knows what else.
- ***Power.*** Hand in hand with whatever lies hidden away is vast power and prestige for the PC willing and able to take it. These are the spaces where warriors and sages hone their skills, seeking those experiences that will make them more powerful.
- ***Quests.*** Sometimes a job is just a job. When a PC agrees to a quest that leads into a dungeon, then into the dungeon they go. Perhaps it's to do with a sense





IT'S YOUR GAME

When opening a discussion on design, there's one thought that cannot be overstated—it's your game. It's your dungeon. So when designing for your own game, do what you think is fun and engaging. While not every choice will resonate with your audience, no one can tell you it's wrong. Many considerations go into designing a dungeon, and many factors determine how it will be received, so no perfectly balanced encounter or clever plot twist can guarantee that it hits its mark or that your efforts will feel validated. And that's okay. You built a thing, and you can appreciate that. And now you've learned a few things to make your next one even better.

of duty or obligation, or perhaps it's just to put food on the table. Whatever the reason, they feel as if they have no other choice.

- ***Wealth.*** Piles of gold and gems, chests filled with treasures, ancient relics, and magical artifacts fuel the fire of mortal greed, and for some, a vast wealth and all that comes with it are reason enough.

DUNGEON SIZE

Dungeons are not "one size fits all" elements of an adventure. While there are countless possible directions to go, consider first the needs of the narrative and of the players. Perhaps several smaller dungeons fit the theme and adventure pacing better than one big one. Or perhaps the players are entranced by the idea of a massive, continuous dungeon crawl.

This section presents considerations for the two extreme categories of dungeon size, the single-session dungeon and the megadungeon, with the assumption that all others will fall somewhere in between.

SINGLE SESSION

A single-session dungeon adventure typically consists of about five areas, or rooms. These are designed to engage players with compelling and challenging experiences in just a single gaming session, lasting only a few hours. Introductory games, one-shots, convention events, and organized play frequently use single-session dungeons.

It might also take the form of a flashback sequence to resolve past events and determine their effect on current affairs as part of another adventure or campaign. In this case, the players assume new PCs whose lives and actions are somehow related to their main PCs. Events in the one-shot then enter the game world's historical record and influence events in the ongoing adventure.

When designing a single-session dungeon, focus on efficiency to gain the most impact. Use a logical dungeon layout, a straightforward plot structure, brief descriptions, and NPCs with direct and predictable motivations. Presented here is a breakdown of the elements needed:

- ***Define Theme.*** Choose a thematic focus for the dungeon. Whether it's a haunted crypt, a mysterious laboratory, or an abandoned temple, clearly thematic elements will help set the adventure's tone and establish continuity, as long as it's used consistently throughout.
- ***Establish Objective.*** PCs should know and understand their objective before the game starts. This should be simple and easily managed in just a single session. Snatch and grabs, bounty collections, heists, and other quick missions work best.
- ***Organization.*** Organize notes and maps in a logical order. A clear and straightforward layout allows the PCs to guide themselves through the dungeon smoothly. The narrative should then connect those various dungeon elements and unfold naturally from encounter to encounter.
- ***Pacing.*** When running a one-shot at a convention, game store, or similar situation where time is limited, set up time constraints to manage the pacing. Plan the encounters to balance exploration, social, and combat, using a mix of challenges, including traps and puzzles, and estimate how long each section should run. It's better to cut time from early encounters than to rush to the final encounter.
- ***Pre-Generated Characters.*** One-shots and introductory games often use pre-generated PCs, which allow for seamless incorporation into the narrative and for coordinated character abilities. If experienced players prefer building their own PCs for one-shots, consider creating a few backstory options that tie to the adventure, such as personal motivation, mysterious messages, the request of a mentor, or an urgent call for assistance. Whether pre-generated or not, PCs need a compelling hook that immediately draws them into the adventure.

ANCIENT CRYPT

Presented here is a sample outline for a single-session dungeon.

Area 1: Entrance Hall

A dimly lit hall with ancient carvings.

Objective. Locate the sealed door that leads deeper into the crypt.

Challenges. As PCs explore, maddening whispers lure the party forward to their doom.

Area 2: Guardian's Chamber

The resting place of a mighty undead warrior who also serves as guardian.

Objective. Retrieve a key from the guardian.

Challenges. Battle the vicious undead guardian.

Area 3: Puzzle Chamber

An intricately designed room with a strange puzzle trap.

Objective. Solve the puzzle to safely reveal a secret passage to the hidden tomb.

Challenges. Puzzle solving and potential traps.



Area 4: Hidden Tomb

A tomb where a forgotten hero has been laid to rest.

Objective. The PCs must perform a ritual to respect the fallen hero's spirit.

Challenges. The fallen hero's spirit guides the PCs by granting one of them a powerful vision, and that PC must struggle to keep from going mad from the knowledge.

Area 5: Sealed Vault

A heavily secured vault that contains the artifact the PCs seek.

Objective. The PCs must open the vault and then use skills to navigate the room to secure the artifact.

Challenges. The structure starts to slowly collapse as soon as the vault door is opened, and the PCs must race the clock to flee the dungeon with the artifact before being buried alive.

MEGADUNGEON

Megadungeons are massive, sprawling dungeons of grandiose scope. They are capable of serving as the central focus for an entire campaign, and examples include *Empire of the Ghouls* and *Scarlet Citadel*.

DESIGNING A MEGADUNGEON

The key idea to note when designing megadungeons is that, rather than a dungeon, it's really a world all itself. This massive dungeon is an enclosed and typically isolated microcosm. With it comes a detailed history, local politics, complicated ecologies/biomes, and specialized locations, all of which might exist in a reality entirely independent of the rest of the game world.

Foundational Theme

Just as with the single-session dungeon, a foundational theme provides a unifying framework for constructing the megadungeon. It gives the dungeon an identity by building its history, legends, and lore. This will guide the rest of the design, influencing atmosphere, architecture, terrain, and encounters. The stronger the theme, the easier it will be to establish continuity and maintain consistency. Make sure to keep the theme's scope broad enough to support a handful of adventure concepts. For help determining objectives to guide the PCs through the megadungeon, consult the **Overarching Objectives** table or choose something appropriate.

OVERARCHING OBJECTIVES

d8	Objective
1	Decipher a world-altering secret.
2	Defeat a powerful adversary.
3	Dismantle a world-threatening plot.
4	Petition a deity or restore the faith of a dead god.
5	Release a long-imprisoned entity of significant power.
6	Retrieve or destroy a legendary artifact.
7	Uncover the dungeon's history.
8	Undo an ancient curse or break a prophecy.

Subplots and Plot Webs

A single objective isn't enough to build an entire campaign, so once the foundational theme and overarching objective are determined, it's necessary to group and define the various areas within the megadungeon that will provide for individual adventures. Each set of areas should have a subplot or collection of subplots parallel to the foundational theme and overarching objective. Then as PCs explore, they can be drawn into different subplots with specific plot hooks, so develop a clear structure for the dungeon with interconnected paths, hidden shortcuts, and diverging routes. Allow the players to choose their routes to maintain a sense of purpose and direction.

A plot web helps when outlining the connections between various plots within the megadungeon, better enabling the tracking of the various narratives of factions, rivals, and other NPCs and how they interplay or overlap. As PCs progress, each level or section of the dungeon should provide opportunities to uncover new information, revealing layers of intrigue, conflicts, and evolving storylines. Connecting these seemingly unrelated events and NPCs helps provide a sense of continuity. Reward PCs for their exploration, curiosity, and perseverance by revealing the dungeon's secrets and truths throughout the campaign. Also plot various points for moments of tension, revelation, and discovery, ensuring players remain engaged throughout the campaign.

The complexity and difficulty of challenges should increase gradually, mirroring the PCs' progression and accomplishment. Also include a diverse range of challenges that test different PCs' abilities, from large-scale battles to intricate puzzles, even varied for different playstyles within the gaming group.

NPC ROLES

d6	Role
1	***Ally.*** Offers aid to the PCs through information, supplies, healing, or refuge.
2	***Gatekeeper.*** Possesses the needed information, controls a vital location, has essential draft animals or a vehicle, or knows an alternate route through dangerous territory. PCs making positive interactions with the NPC can create new options for navigating part of the dungeon.
3	***Mercenary.*** Will trade services, such as guidance, scouting, guarding, or fighting, with the PCs for resources.
4	***Mystery.*** Reveals new information of a mysterious nature that warrants exploration/investigation.
5	***Prisoner/Refugee.*** Sides with whomever can offer them freedom or needed resources. While they offer aid, most have little to offer. Their primary objective is to flee for safety as soon as possible.
6	***Revelation.*** Offers cryptic advice, prophesies, or revelations, perhaps as an oracle or mystic.

NPCS

Humanoids from a game world's most common peoples are often under-utilized in dungeons and other hostile environments. However, non-adversarial NPCs have an important role in such places: they punctuate the narrative by introducing a variety of non-combat encounter situations that provide a change of pace and some humanity to the game. Give important NPCs recurring roles and have them appear at different levels to offer guidance, present challenges, or act as pivotal figures in the evolving story. They can bring news of the opposition or of the outside world, they can continue with plans outside of the PCs' direct influence, and as they develop, they can recruit others as allies and found settlements and outposts, which can serve as home bases or supply points for the PCs. To create an NPC role on the fly, consult the **NPC Roles** table or choose something appropriate.

DUNGEON SEEDS

Dungeons can take on whatever form is needed. They are, after all, the stage upon which the PCs discover and respond to the narrative. If a dungeon needs to be the final rest for a long-lost civilization that tragically fell to its own hubris, done. If it needs to be a mesmerizing, underwater labyrinth filled with strange creatures and landscapes untarnished by mortal hands, done. If it needs to be a mysterious, broody mansion outfitted to study the stars and in which secrets are slowly revealed that promise debilitating madness on the back of profound universal truth, done. And from there, the adventure steadily unfolds.

The dungeon seeds provided here are intended to serve both as framework for tailoring adventures to the needs of the campaign and players and as inspiration for countless forays into the unknown.

BIODUNGEONS

A biodungeon presents a habitable environment that has either developed within a living system, which might be a single creature or a colony of creatures, or somehow incorporated biological material into its construction. Perhaps it's the interlocking megastructures created from the growth of coral or fungus—whether by instinct or intelligent design on the part of the creature or by outside intelligence—or perhaps it's built by others within the corpse of a colossal creature—or maybe it's still alive. It is marked by walls and structures built from nonstandard building materials, likely of animal or plant origin, and some or all of it is considered alive, or at least was once.

Special consideration should be given to the living dungeon's ongoing biological (or magical) needs, assuming it still lives, and to what type of symbiotic relationship it holds with those that inhabit it, such as parasitism, commensalism, or mutualism.

CORAL CAVERNS

Theme. Underwater cave system created by coral overgrowth.

Setting. Colossal coral formations create captivating landscapes of intricate, interconnected caverns that support thriving ecosystems. The coral is the foundation for dozens of other strange organisms and structures and provides shelter for various opportunistic amphibious/aquatic tribes. The living, glowing coral

formations create chambers lit in radiant hues. Steady and mysterious reverberations drift through the catacombs' waters.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Depth's Illusion.*** A magical distortion of perception makes distances seem much farther or closer, leading PCs into disorienting mazes and creating challenges in estimating travel times.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Coral Guardians.*** Animated coral formations come to life, defending the sanctum from intruders with sharp tendrils, stinging polyps, or the ability to generate protective barriers.
- ***Infestation.*** Invasive worms, burrowed in the sand surrounding the coral, attack anything that comes within range.
- ***Oracle of Pain.*** Magical energies converge upon a cluster of ancient coral, which the local denizens worship as a strange oracle. The coral's sting induces hallucinogenic visions.



FUNGAL ENCLAVE

Theme. Evolving fungal labyrinth with mysterious intelligence.

Setting. The labyrinthine tunnels are formed completely by the "flesh" of the mycelia and countless interconnected fruiting bodies of a massive fungus. There is a near constant change in the layout as tunnels merge and divert, towering mushrooms bloom overnight into spires and more specialized features, and mycelium strands maintain the space, reclaiming all organic remains and sequestering anything else. A delicate mix of earthy fragrances pervade the space, along with the subtle glow of bioluminescence. Shimmering spore clouds drift on the air, and the surfaces have a soft, rubbery consistency. Though somewhat fragile, any damage is quickly filled in with a jelly-like substance, creating beds primed for fresh growth.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Sporestorm.*** Sudden spore plumes or drifting spore clouds can trigger hallucinations that disorient and confuse the living, making navigation challenging and hastening their demise—and further contributing to the enclave's sustenance.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Ascendance Capsules.*** A chamber contains magical capsules that when consumed allow for communion with the fungal enclave and grant temporary fungal abilities, such as spore release or mycelial transportation, which might be helpful to the PCs.
- ***Mycelial Surge.*** The ubiquitous fungal mycelium, which typically runs out of sight just beneath the surfaces, can rapidly extrude to form attacking limbs or barriers. They might also bring other defenses/offenses to bear, such as poisonous secretions or explosive spore releases.
- ***Symbiotic Grove.*** A hidden chamber reveals a strange symbiotic relationship between the fungal enclave and the other denizens.

HEART OF THE WORLD TREE

Theme. Cultivated communal space within a massive primordial tree.

Setting. Within the colossal trunk of a world tree runs an intricate network of chambers, its walls marked by pulsating roots. The tree is inhabited—and revered—by a colony of thorny humanoid creatures, and in return, the tree protects them as its children. The rhythmic droning of its vascular system in action resonates within the tree. Elaborate patterns weave through the wood that lines the vertical passages and chambers, interspersed with organic flourishes and turnings and the occasional burl. The smell of sap pervades the interior with occasional notes of perfumy nectar. In addition to internal passages, PCs can climb the exterior.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Root Quakes.*** Sudden tremors caused by the tree's movements can disorient and alter the dungeon layout.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Sap Confluence Puzzle.*** A room filled with glowing sap pools requires the party's cooperation to navigate. Success grants access to deeper, hidden chambers.
- ***Thorned Guardians.*** Mobile, sentient thorn constructs patrol certain areas, attacking intruders with razor-sharp projectiles.
- ***Whispering Leaves Oracle.*** A mystical entity resides within a chamber adorned with luminescent leaves. It imparts cryptic prophecies and guidance to those who seek its wisdom.

SENTIENT SANCTUM

Theme. Enigmatic interlinked structures incorporated into the digestive tract of a massive creature.

Setting. Within the guts of a titanic, primordial creature sprawls a strange series of structures—curious geometric shapes fashioned from strange metals and lodged in pockets of flesh. Slime-covered chains extend between structures, providing crude but navigable guidelines. Pulsating veins of magical energy, the distant echoes of the creature's heartbeat, and the bioluminescent glow of symbiotic organisms fill the space—as do seeping putrescent biofluids, which collect in pools, and the grumblings of the creature's digestive tract.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Regurgitant Pools.*** Pockets within the creature hold undigested remnants of previous meals in the form of hazardous pools.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Children of the Sanctum.*** A tribe of mutated humanoids lives within the creature, harvesting and feasting on its flesh while worshipping it as a god.
- ***Guardian Oozes.*** The creature's natural biological defenses manifest as massive swarms of oozes that engulf and devour anything they encounter.
- ***Rogue Ganglion.*** Near the creature's brain, PCs encounter a semi-conscious shard of the creature's mind, separate from the rest. It is dissatisfied with the creature's lot and seeks control of its consciousness.



ELEMENTAL DUNGEONS

An elemental dungeon is somehow fed, and likely created, by the ever-churning primordial engines of one or more of the elemental planes. They are often found on one of the elemental planes or at their rifts and coterminous zones within other planes. In the case of multiple sources, they might exist in a harmonious mixing, such as elemental earth and water feeding a dungeon exemplified by mud, or they might largely retain their independence, maintaining their more singular personalities, as it were.

BLUE LAGOON (EARTH AND WATER)

Theme. Vibrant aquatic haven full of life and rimmed by crystals.

Setting. The crystalline waters of this serene lagoon are surrounded by reflective geodes, and small islands dot its surface, many free-floating. Crystalline growth appears to take on a role similar to coral, creating spectacular geometric reefs and teeming with life forms that seem to take on similar aspects. The waters are calm, and the space is filled with the gentle sound of lapping waves and the iridescent glow of underwater crystals.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Crystalline Terrain.*** The surrounding geodes and the shores of the islands are ragged and can cut deeply into the flesh of those that move recklessly.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Crystal Sphinx's Riddle.*** A sphinx made of enchanted crystal presents a riddle, allowing passage only to those who solve it.
- ***Nymph's Reflection.*** A water nymph seeks companionship, offering guidance and protection in exchange for a promise of return.
- ***Siren's Song.*** Evil aquatic creatures attempt to lure prey into ambushes with their enchanted songs.

CITADEL OF ELEMENTAL CONVERGENCE

Theme. Mystical nexus of shifting elemental energies.

Setting. Within the citadel's confines, the boundaries between the Material Plane and the various elemental planes roil, and their realities blend for periods before rectifying—only to begin the cycle anew elsewhere. Its ever-shifting environment is marked by sporadic elemental traits.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Elemental Anomaly.*** Unstable pockets of reality give rise to elemental anomalies, each requiring a unique approach or solution to navigate the shifting dungeon safely.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Arbiter's Assassins.*** A neutral extraplanar entity, named the Arbiter, maintains the citadel's delicate balance. PCs must prevent a group of unknown assassins from killing it and disrupting the precarious balance holding the dungeon together.
- ***Chaosweaver's Puzzle.*** An enigmatic being manipulates elemental threads to challenge PCs with a puzzle that, when solved, opens gateways to new realms or brings about elemental chaos.
- ***Warring Factions.*** Elemental creatures from various planes cross over, looking to challenge any opponents for control of the citadel.

CRYSTAL CAVERNS (EARTH)

Theme. Plunging subterranean depths of dirt and crystal.

Setting. The extensive caverns, of seemingly natural development, are studded with massive, pulsing crystalline formations that refract the faintest light, amplify the merest sound, and channel stray psychic impressions into magnificent displays. The faint thrum of energy emanates from the crystals, punctuated by dazzling light bursts and the long-reverberating echoes of footsteps and strange chirps.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Rockslides.*** The surrounding stone and crystal are sensitive in spots to loud noise or damage (such as from thunder damage or excessive area-of-effect damage), causing occasional cave-ins or rockslides.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Ancient Memoirs.*** Enchanted crystals resonate with the memories of ancient beings, sharing forgotten tales and providing cryptic clues.
- ***Gemstone Guardian.*** A golem of enchanted crystal challenges PCs to a battle of wits, guarding the most precious crystalline formations.

- ***Rock Centipedes.*** Large centipede-like constructs patrol the caverns, activated by the elemental energies. They can climb any surface.

ENTROPIC NEXUS (VOID)

Theme. An eternal emptiness in which wayward islands of solid matter drift.

Setting. Strange islands float in the dimensionless space, circling inexorably toward the spiraling nothingness at its center: an endless void as far as can be seen being imperceptibly devoured by oblivion. The space is marked by absolute silence, a disorienting lack of gravity, and the sensation of being untethered in the cosmos.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Void Madness.*** PCs begin to hear voices of unknown origin, which offer curious instructions and bits of questionable information.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Echoing Silence.*** A powerful, malefic void entity manifests illusions of lost loved ones, testing PCs' emotional resilience and resolve.
- ***Life Beacon.*** The PCs' life force attracts the attention of violent or insane humanoids, such as derro or satarre, that use the nexus as their hunting grounds.
- ***Reality's Reflection.*** Distorted illusions create shifting landscapes, challenging PCs to discern the true path amid the void's ever-changing illusions.

ETERNAL EMBER SANCTUM (FIRE)

Theme. Massive underground chamber and peripheral caverns marked by flame and molten rock.

Setting. The area is surrounded by perpetual flames. There is a sacred feel to the space as ancient runes appear in midair, sizzling with flame upon the very fabric of reality, then blinking just as suddenly out of existence. The air shimmers with heat, and there is the constant crackling of fire and the acrid smell of smoke.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Heat Chamber.*** Bursts of sulfurous, hot gases erupt and rapidly raise the local temperature to potentially lethal levels.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Deceivers.*** Mischievous fire sprites lead the PCs astray, offering a cryptic riddle to navigate the eternal flames.
- ***Ember Enchantment.*** A dormant magma elemental awakens, offering to enhance the PCs' abilities with controlled exposure to its inner fire.
- ***Magmin.*** Magma elementals emerge from fiery pits, pelting PCs with globs of molten rock.

FIRESTORM CALDERA (AIR AND FIRE)

Theme. Volcanically active region with rifts to elemental planes.

Setting. The active caldera rumbles almost constantly, and random geysers and lava plumes are common. Nearby rifts also fuel intense local storms of fire, intermingling with the thunder, lightning, and cinder. The area is marked by intense heat, and the smells of brimstone and ozone mingle throughout.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Elemental Bleed.*** At various points, random merging elements create fire vortices and bursts of scalding ash.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Dueling Elements.*** Opposing elementals merge in a violent storm of fire and thunder, and PCs must navigate the chaotic battleground, avoiding the destructive forces of both elements.
- ***Elemental Guardians.*** Magma and lightning elementals patrol the area.
- ***Lava Tempest Dancer.*** A volatile fusion of fire and air spirits challenges the PCs to a contest, a dynamic dance that would result in either insights into the caldera's mysteries or a chaotic storm released into the lands beyond the caldera.

INFERNAL FORGE (FIRE)

Theme. An eternally burning forge rests belowground.

Setting. Large, interconnected chambers provide the stage and support areas for a massive forge, fueled by the perpetual pools of magma surrounding it and the channels through which it flows. The incessant heat bathes everything in a fiery glow, and the area is marked by occasional bursts of flames and the constant, dull roar of the blaze.



Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Magma Intrusion.*** Portions of the floors or walls randomly liquify into pools or flows of magma before resolidifying, possibly altering the landscape and certainly posing a temporary hazard.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Elemental Guardians.*** Azers guard the mystical forge, controlling flaming constructs animated by the forge's elemental energies.
- ***Fireforged Warden.*** A sentient entity created by the forging fires challenges the PCs to prove their worth before granting access to the forge's secrets.
- ***Molten Bargain.*** A fire elemental offers forbidden knowledge or enchanted weaponry in exchange for a service that aligns with its fiery nature.



QUICKSAND CATACOMBS (EARTH)

Theme. Abyssal sands cover an ancient city, eerily preserving those lives lost within.

Setting. Perpetually shifting sands periodically uncover a vast network of plunging tunnels and towering stone pillars covered with mystical writing. The once-great city must have been quickly overcome, for the inhabitants were caught and preserved in the midst of their day-to-day lives. There is a dry staleness to the air, along with echoes of unidentifiable voices and the occasional rumble from the depths—and an ever-present grit.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Shifting Sands.*** The sands periodically shift from some unknown mechanism—rising and falling, pushing and pulling, almost like the surface of the sea, though in slow motion. This can create avalanches of sand.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Burrowers.*** Voracious elemental worms burrow through the deeper pockets of sand, waiting to ambush the unwary.
- ***Lost Miner's Echo.*** The ghostly voice of a miner trapped in the catacombs guides intruders, providing insights into hidden dangers and valuable treasures.



- ***Sandstorm Warden.*** An earth elemental emerges from the shifting sands. It confronts a PC, addressing them by an unknown name and accusing them of a crime, and it demands the return of a mystic granite key.

REEF CAVERNS (WATER)

Theme. Deepsea reef on the edge of an abyssal shelf, overlooking an elemental rift.

Setting. The deep reef is especially lush, marked by bioluminescent seaweed and teeming with a greater abundance of life than would be expected. The abyssal trench it sits next to hides a whirlpool rift to the Plane of Water, which feeds the area with unceasing energy and possibility, feeding the great variety and abundance of strangeness. The area is marked by subdued lighting, the distant rushing of underwater currents, and the echoing calls of aquatic creatures.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Petrifying Coral.*** PCs adjacent to the coral formations risk being petrified by getting too close. Victims sink to the reef bed where they provide scaffold for new coral formation.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Eel Bait.*** A giant wolf eel prowls the caverns.
- ***Murmuring Abyss.*** A benevolent water elemental imparts forgotten wisdom about the whispering currents.
- ***Stewards of the Ancients.*** A tribe of xenophobic sea elves patrols the grotto, defending its secrets from all interlopers.

SKY GARDENS (AIR)

Theme. Celestial arboretum and satellite gardens on landmasses floating through the sky.

Setting. The floating islands are clearly well tended, cultivated to the needs of a wide variety of strange and ethereal flora. However, the impression is that there are very few other living creatures present. The brisk, near constant breeze tousles the leaves and vines as the islands drift along on the complex air currents. Soft melodies carry on the wind, along with the scent of myriad blossoms and the calming rustle of leaves.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Chaotic Winds.*** Vortices dance unpredictably through the gardens, making the area difficult to traverse. PCs must figure out how to navigate the winds to avoid being subjected to the whims of the ever-shifting air currents.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Aerial Revelry.*** A family of benevolent air sprites invites the PCs to a celestial feast, sharing tales of the skies and flying lessons.
- ***Skyborne Soothsayer.*** An air elemental sage floats on currents, offering glimpses into the future or cryptic warnings of the arrival of something it calls the maelstrom.
- ***Your Stupid Face.*** A group of mephits decide they don't like the PCs and proceed to make an ongoing nuisance of themselves.

TEMPEST HEIGHTS (AIR)

Theme. A strange structure bobs and drifts within a perpetual storm.

Setting. The hollow sphere floats along within a violent and perpetual storm, slave to the vagaries of the winds. Bolts of lightning sporadically strike, causing its surface to ripple in crackling waves, and as the winds impact the channels at its surface, a range of screeching whistles sound—eerily beautiful accompaniment to its dance, careening between harmony and discordance. The sphere consists of winding passages and chambers that swirl with a roaring wind that smells of rain and crackles with energy.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Gravitational Flux.*** Gravity within the sphere shifts as it moves through the storm. An unexpected flux places the PCs at risk of being jettisoned from the sphere.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Elder's Eye.*** In a vast spherical chamber at the sphere's center floats an orb of swirling blue energy. The orb possesses a collective intelligence and sends out tendrils of energy, which it uses to feed on sentient life.
- ***Lightning Dancers.*** Mischievous storm spirits defend the sphere against interlopers by throwing lightning and using hit-and-run tactics.
- ***Skyward Sirens.*** Air elementals disguised as ethereal beings tempt the PCs with the promise of flight or enlightenment, testing their resolve.

FIENDISH DUNGEONS

A fiendish dungeon is operated by fiends. They might breach gaps between the hells and the Material Plane, or they might exist just about anywhere, whether built by fiends for an express purpose, such as the harvesting of souls, or simply repurposed from conquered or abandoned sites.

ABYSS OF ETERNAL CHAINS

Theme. A devil's prison built to detain powerful entities and rebellious minions and drain their life essence.

Setting. The walls of this cavernous abyss are lined with cells, each housing undulating soul-forged chains that imprison the broken flesh of the damned. A cadre of hellish wardens watch over the prisoners. Agonizing

wails of pain and hopeless cries for mercy barely rise above the clanking cacophony, creating an oppressive weight of despair.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Soul Siphon.*** The remains of some of the more powerful prisoners, now soulless husks, threaten to absorb the essence of those who get too close—reconstituting themselves with the stolen energies of others.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Chain Warden.*** One of the zealous wardens relentlessly pursues intruders.
- ***Enslaved Spirit of Rebellion.*** A rebellious entity seeks an ally to break free, offering forbidden knowledge or assistance in return.
- ***Spectral Chains.*** The mysterious chains take on a life of their own, lashing out at intruders, trying to ensnare and drain them.

ARENA OF THE DAMNED

Theme. Brutal battleground where demons prove their strength and devour the essence of the defeated.

Setting. This subterranean battlefield was carved into an ever-shifting maze of broken bones, demon flesh, and boiling pools of congealing fiendish blood. Piles of carnage from warped creatures of all shapes and sizes and broken armor and weapons litter the ground. The clanging of weapons mixes with the screams of the combatants. Sparks of unholy energy streak across the sky, and the stench of brimstone and bile clot the air.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Essence Pits.*** These hidden shallow depressions are scattered on the battlefield. They magically immobilize victims and slowly drain their essence.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Demon Horde.*** Waves of relentless demons swarm intruders, each more formidable than the last.
- ***Demon Lord's Champion.*** A powerful demon challenges intruders, offering rewards or alliances to those who prove their mettle.
- ***Portal Guardian.*** A creature guards a hidden portal that offers escape or leads to even deadlier arenas.

CITADEL OF INFERNAL MACHINATIONS

Theme. A strategic stronghold designed for plotting political intrigue and manipulating mortal affairs.

Setting. This grand citadel has menacing, ornate, black-iron spires that pierce the sky and oppressive labyrinthine corridors dimly lit by sporadic torches. Hideous, diabolic reliefs adorn the walls, depicting the centuries of its befouled history. The air is thick with the scent of brimstone, and the walls seem to whisper with sinister plots.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Diabolic Traps.*** Cunning traps exploit ambition and treachery, testing the wits and resilience of intruders.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Betrayal Constructs.*** Animated constructs turn on intruders. They are fueled by the deceit and treachery of their surroundings.
- ***Infernal Negotiator.*** A devilish diplomat offers dark bargains or an alliance in exchange for a favor.
- ***Manipulative Imps.*** These small fiends sow discord and confusion, complicating intruders' progress.



CONFESSIONAL

Theme. A citadel used by devils to extract payments from those who have violated infernal contracts or angered the higher hierarchy.

Setting. This expansive prison complex is layered with cells and twisting, overlapping corridors, entwined in an intricate maze-like complex. At its ominous core stands a courthouse, a domain of inquisition ruled by merciless devils. Anguished cries of the accused reverberate through endless rows of cold-iron cells. The drone of endless charges, legal litany, guilty verdicts, and whining pleas for mercy drifts through the darkness. Across the cold, damp walls, the flickering torchlight suggestively backlights horrific shadows of despair.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Soul-Extracting Devices.*** Magical devices in the cells drain the essence of prisoners, using it to empower the prison and its denizens.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Corrupt Inquisitor.*** A devilish inquisitor manipulates trials for personal gain, willing to make deals to maintain its authority.
- ***Damned Bureaucracy.*** Administrative demons ensure the prison's efficient functioning, punishing those who resist.
- ***Wrongfully Accused Soul.*** An innocent soul seeks liberation and offers secrets of the prison in return.

LABYRINTH OF DECEPTION

Theme. A maze designed to confuse and confound intruders, testing their cunning and resolve.

Setting. The treacherous labyrinth is filled with portals, transporting travelers to other areas within its halls. The rooms and passages shift, seemingly randomly, in three dimensions and defy comprehension by looping back upon themselves while stairs and doors seem to exist in impossible relationships and perspectives to one another. The experience is disorienting to the extent of threatening the sanity of those within it.

Atmosphere. An unsettling hum fills the air, constantly changing frequency, and illusions play tricks on the senses.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Illusory Traps.*** Deceptive illusions lead intruders into perilous situations.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Deceptive Guide.*** A mischievous entity offers guidance through the maze, but it has a hidden agenda.
- ***Enforced Rules.*** Fiendish brutes enforce labyrinthine rules, punishing those who attempt to break the maze's structure.
- ***Rune of Eternity.*** In several dead ends, massive runes are carved into the floor. Mortals attempting to decipher them run the risk of going mad.

SANCTUM OF DESPAIR

Theme. A sanctuary where shadowy entities manipulate the emotions and fears of mortals, feeding on their suffering.

Setting. The realm is bathed in perpetual twilight, giving rise to vast armies of shadow. The shadows flicker and shift, seeming to possess minds of their own—and that becomes very clear once a soul becomes separated from any companions. The eerie silence is broken only by unsettling whispers and occasional howls. A sense of paranoia and fear runs rampant.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Nightmare Chambers.*** The rooms induce horrifying nightmares, draining the willpower of those who intrude.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Despair Weaver.*** A shadowy entity manipulates emotions, seeking alliances or causing intruders to turn on each other.
- ***Nightmare Herald.*** Spawned from the darkest of dreams, the creature challenges intruders to confront their deepest fears.
- ***Shadow Creatures.*** Entities ambush intruders from the shadows, feeding on their fears.

SEPULCHRAL ARTERIES

Theme. A forsaken realm of ominous stone prison-tombs.

Setting. A flotilla of titanic boulders drifts through an endless void, linked by translucent tubes formed from an unsettling phosphorescent crimson resin the consistency of flesh. Strange entities lie imprisoned within massive stone tombs—not alive but also not quite dead. Reason seems to have little sway on the oppressive nature of the place. The air is thick and heavy



with a haunting presence, and malevolence seems to emanate from the towering tombs that cast their jumbled shadows across the shimmering pathways.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Sentient Tombs.*** The stone tombs each possess a malevolent consciousness and unleash psychic attacks on those who draw near.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Bloodbinders.*** A strange device sprays a nearby creature with a fast-drying resin that forms a protective shell. It seems beneficial until the victim's memories start to drain away.
- ***Proto-Deity's Ghost.*** An ancient entity confined within the realm seeks liberation and offers cryptic insights. It bargains with mortals to utilize their flesh as a vessel for its escape.
- ***Vampiric Phantoms.*** Spectral entities stalk the resinous passages, haunting intruders and draining their life force.

SOULFORGE CRUCIBLE

Theme. A place where demons craft cursed weapons and armor, infusing them with the suffering of tortured souls.

Setting. Anvils dot the landscape of this terrible forge, constructed from the bones of the damned, cluttered with the tools and debris of smithing and the gore of violence. Vile implements of war are created and plunged into the river of nightmare-tormented souls that runs through the space. The air is thick with brimstone and what must be the indescribable stench of burning souls. The sounds of tortured metal echo through the cavernous chambers.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Cursed Weapons.*** All the weapons scattered within are cursed.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Forge Overseer.*** A fiendish supervisor demands relentless productivity of the smiths and other workers.
- ***Soul-Enslaved Artisan.*** A tormented blacksmith seeks redemption, offering forbidden knowledge in exchange for liberation.
- ***Tormented Blacksmiths.*** Fiends turned malevolent spirits, the smiths attack intruders to protect their infernal craft.

TORTURE DEN

Theme. A place where fiends inflict unimaginable suffering upon captured foes and heretics.

Setting. The subterranean hideaway exudes a fiendish ambiance. Flickering torches cast ominous shadows on cold stone walls, and a malevolent collection of torture instruments, each clearly designed with a flair of artistry, lines the space. Every shadow seems to conceal a secret. The air is heavy with the scent of blood, and the muffled cries of agony intermix with the echoes of sadistic laughter.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Cursed Shadows.*** Malevolent shadows reach out from the walls to drain the life of those they can grab.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Cursed Seeker.*** A tormented soul seeks release, offering information about the crypt.
- ***Fiendish Tormentors.*** Sadistic fiends seek to inflict excruciating pain on those that interfere with their depravity.
- ***Sadistic Inquisitor.*** A fiendish interrogator basks in their craft, fresh bodies lying broken on the ground, while evaluating and negotiating with any intruders.

HOUSES OF THE DEAD

Houses of the dead can be found almost anywhere, from cemeteries within city limits to storied mausoleums on ancestral estates to ancient tombs and necropolises of long-dead peoples. The only requirements are the remains of the dead.

ANCESTRAL MAUSOLEUM

Theme. The resting place of a noble family line, having served many generations.

Setting. Spires and intricate stained-glass windows adorn the elaborately crafted mausoleum atop a low hillock. Patina covers the copper-plated doors, and the granite blocks of the walls are stained with age and thick blotches of a pale-yellow lichen. It's obviously been well cared for, at least in the past, but the family's fading line and fortune leave little for upkeep. Wind chimes tinkle

in the distance, and the air carries the faint taste of rust. The rustling squawk of the ever-present crows might leave some with the ominous feeling of being watched.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Trapped Corridors.*** The walls within shift, and traps ensure graverobbers steer clear.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Cult Rituals.*** A local cult has adopted the mausoleum, using it as ritual space for forbidden ceremonies.
- ***Guardian Spirit.*** A loyal servant in life and now a guardian in death, a spirit guides those who visit with honorable purpose.
- ***Undead Noble.*** A betrayed noble can't stay dead and wanders the halls as a revenant, compelled to seek something it can't identify.

ARCANE MORGUE

Theme. A university's morgue, preserving remains for physical and magical study.

Setting. The sterile, steel-lined chambers possess rows of drawers that hold the surgically dismembered remains of the departed. Octagonal porcelain tiles line the walls and floor, etched with arcane symbols that dimly flicker with a cold-blue light. The tang of chemicals in the air overwhelms and stings the nostrils, and the light's random flickering makes everything appear as if it's constantly moving. From the corner of the eye, dark shapes seem to repeatedly dart past.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Necromancer's Taint.*** Years of dark necromantic experiments have left behind a dangerous residue that threatens to siphon the life from intruders.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Reanimated Corpses.*** The dead, reanimated in various states of decay, are very much at home here.
- ***Trapped Soul.*** An ancient soul, bound to its bare skull, has been kept bound as a font of arcane knowledge.
- ***Twisted Necromancer.*** The necromancer that operates here does not appreciate interference—but does approve of the raw components their corpses leave behind.

BURIAL MOUND

Theme. A natural space of sobering primacy.

Setting. Fog coats the woodland site, slowly drifting through the ancient elms as haunted shadows dance on the mounded soil. It's challenging not to feel the raw power settling on the space, the imposing weight of death and rebirth. The leaves rustle in breezy gusts, and the night is alive with a chorus of crickets punctuated by the hoots of owls. There is a pervasive sense of being watched from the shadows, which stretch in every direction.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Animated Plants.*** The plant life in the area tries to corral intruders away from the mound. When dealing with those intentionally ignoring this gentle suggestion, the plants become more aggressive.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Guardian Trials.*** Spectral stags subject intruders to trials that test their merit, ensuring only those worthy of the site's sanctity gain passage.
- ***Possessed Wolves.*** Roaming the hallowed grounds, wolves possessed of restless spirits defend the sacred grounds against intrusion.
- ***Spirit's Plea.*** An ancient druid's spirit beseeches the assistance of worthy visitors to restore equilibrium by partaking in a long-forgotten ritual, a quest intricately linked to harmonious balance with the natural world.

FAMILY CRYPT

Theme. A modest family's loving final rest.

Setting. Simple sculptures of tarnished bronze, a few silver, and loving tributes fill the niches of the cold, dimly lit crypt. The family members have now all passed, finding their rightful rests, and no more-distant kin can be found locally. The darkness is limned by wavering shadows, and the stagnant air, clotted with a mildewed pungency, seeps deep into the bones with an unnatural frigidness.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Simple Traps.*** Some simple traps guard the remains, more to dissuade graverobbers than protect treasures.



Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Cryptic Puzzle.*** The family's history is intertwined with a cryptic puzzle that guards a surprising ancestral treasure.
- ***Ghostly Plea.*** An outcast ancestor, disavowed by much of the family, appears and requests aid in breaking a generations-old curse.
- ***Malevolent Spirits.*** Ancient spirits are bound to the crypt, harassing intruders from the shadows.

FORLORN GRAVEYARD

Theme. A rural graveyard, old and untended.

Setting. Rows of weathered gravestones stretch for at least a quarter mile in all directions, most tangled in overgrown thickets. A small copse of blackthorn trees marks its center. Brittle bones lie strewn near the broken timbers of long-ransacked caskets by a few open graves that are rapidly filling with dead leaves—the rustling of which in the breeze mingles with the tolls of distant church bells.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Haunted Monuments.*** Restless spirits make a nuisance of themselves by ridiculing or scaring the living or upending pots, but they never fully manifest.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Grave Robbers.*** Startled grave robbers protect their livelihood—at least to a point.
- ***Reanimated Corpses.*** Some disturbed remains find a renewed foothold in the mortal world, reanimating in bold mockery of the living.
- ***Spectral Guide.*** A guardian spirit offers insights into local history, either aiding or hindering intruders.

ROYAL TOMB

Theme. A tomb made for royalty.

Setting. Lining the crumbling stone corridors, mold-spotted tapestries depict forgotten battles, and fading portraits showcase long-gone noble families at their zenith. Alcove displays feature dust-covered marble busts, cracked and chipped by age. The stench of the moldering and the neglected permeates the darkness. With its former glory broken and strewn, the clear sense of violence is unmistakable.



Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Ancient Trap.*** Tampering with the burial artifacts triggers a site-wide trap that magically seals the tomb.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Guardians Constructs.*** Suits of armor continue to carry out their last orders.
- ***Opportunistic Denizen.*** A potent creature, drawn by the quiet solitude offered by the tomb, has taken up residence.
- ***Royal Appeal.*** The spectral remains of a member of the royal family pleas with honorable visitors to avenge a terrible betrayal and upend a conspiracy.

SACRED NECROPOLIS

Theme. A city run by the undying to best put the dead to use.

Setting. Cracked cobblestone streets weave past towering statues of long-forgotten kings and sepulchers adorned with faded frescoes. As one nears the center, the path turns into stairs that climb a plateau as the structures gradually become larger and more elaborate. A distant iron gong rings, which is soon answered by another gong from another point within the city and so on repeatedly. Skeletal soldiers can be spotted marching in formation throughout the city.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Lost Knowledge.*** Runes scattered around the city absorb residual necromantic energy and refocus it to bolster nearby undead.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Lich's Ambition.*** A powerful lich seeks to expand its undead army and arrogantly challenges any intruders to thwart its plans.
- ***Shadow Portal.*** A hidden portal allows otherworldly creatures into the city, posing a threat to the living and undead alike.
- ***Undead Factions.*** Undead factions within the city vie for control, turning the streets into dangerous battlegrounds.

LOST RUINS

Lost ruins are like a unique setting sequestered somewhere out of the way within the game world, where they are potentially free of all design constraints. The discovery of such sites, and the hidden or forgotten peoples who created them, provides the opportunity to introduce new creatures, unique types of magic or technology, and strange lore or alternate histories. The results should be just as weird as they need to be.

BLOODFEN CITADEL

Theme. The crumbling domain of a vampire lord and its minions.

Setting. Within the iron-tinged swamp water that floods its twisted corridors hides the half-sunken remains of a moss-covered fortress: Bloodfen Citadel. Living in its shadow, ghoulish humans with deep-set eyes travel the swamps on makeshift rafts. Blood pacts bind them as livestock to powerful vampire overseers that rule over the region from the fortress. The stifling, stagnant air carries the pungent aroma of swamp gases and decay. Eerie echoes break the silence within its twisted halls, which are slowly being reclaimed by the swamp.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Swamp Gases.*** Swamp-gas emissions are especially prominent in the area. While typically dissipating harmlessly outdoors, it tends to collect within the confines of the catacombs where its highly flammable nature becomes especially problematic.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Bloodthirsty Thralls.*** The vampire lord's emaciated and blood-starved thralls prowl the swamps and citadel. Nearly mindless in their hunger, they immediately swarm and devour any living creatures they encounter.
- ***Dark Conspiracy.*** A neutral arbiter, overseeing the rituals within Bloodfen, faces imminent danger, and the PCs must prevent a group of unknown assailants from disrupting the unholy rites that are the only thing holding the vampiric society together.
- ***Enigma of the Nightshade Throne.*** An enigmatic seer, the Nightshade Oracle, presents the PCs with an enigmatic prophecy rooted in the shadow. Puzzling out the mystery opens a pathway to outer realms, presenting an alternative for the vampires. But is that a good thing?

CRYSTAL SPIRE

Theme. A font of forgotten lore and raw, unbridled arcane energies.

Setting. High atop the glacial rim teeters the ruins of the towering Crystal Spire. In lost eons, an order of mystical alchemists harnessed their magic from the raw arcane energies that course through the spire's crystalline veins, but in their relentless pursuit of knowledge, they unwittingly brought into existence sentient magical anomalies, leading to their downfall. Though much of the magic that once filled the spire has dimmed, the ruins still resonate faintly with its hum. The aftermath of reckless arcane experimentation—and the not so infrequent anomalies it created—expose the spire's inevitable fate.



Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Veins of Magic.*** The veins that pulse through the spire carry raw, unbound magic, but the widescale damage long ago wrought by arcane disaster has made the currents volatile, making the magic unpredictable and equally likely to benefit as to hinder.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Astral Paradox.*** The ancient alchemists kept a ledger of enigmatic codes PCs can use to manipulate the flow of magic within the spire and even to destroy the anomalies. However, the anomalies are somehow linked to the astral prison of a trapped lich, and one wrong move could inadvertently free the creature.
- ***Crystal Worms.*** Composed of shimmering shards of enchanted crystal, these cunning predators meld into the crystalline walls to ambush prey.
- ***Mutant Apes.*** Warped by exposure to the anomalies, the local snow apes now feed on magic, immune to magical effects and savagely hunting and devouring spellcasters.

HAVEN

Theme. A mechanical people revolt to gain their freedom—though the humans present a more apocalyptic viewpoint.

Setting. The crumbling city of Haven tells the story of a people harnessing intricate clockwork mechanisms. Ruled by a cabal of mighty sages, they sought to merge magic and machinery, but the city is collapsing as its creations are rebelling against their creators. The survivors live scattered while the clockwork automatons consolidate their power. The rhythmic ticking and hissing steam of active clockwork behind the city's crumbling walls, and the occasional whir or clang, paints a picture of mechanical precision and innovation. Hints of iron and grease coat the air.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Confounding Rebellion.*** The ubiquitous clockwork, while seemingly well maintained, doesn't work properly. Or rather, it provides random and baffling results, as if possessed of an intelligence that was deliberately trying to subvert its own design.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Clockwork Sentries.*** The more capable and free-moving clockwork constructs have revolted, breaking free from the control of the city sages. They now stalk the ruins, protecting their burgeoning utopia from outside influence.
- ***Cogs of Invention.*** An enigmatic inventor, enjoying seclusion deep within the steamworks, might possess perspective-changing secrets. If rumors are to be believed, the inventor is responsible for the constructs' desire for change, for instilling that spark of rebellion, presenting a diplomatic puzzle for the PCs to solve.
- ***Uprising Aftercare.*** A saboteur for the sages, in the guise of a diplomat tasked with negotiating the peace, is currently meeting with the constructs. Learning of the situation, PCs can intervene, choosing a side or attempting to broker a true peace.



HOLLOW COURT

Theme. Ruins of a large subterranean city, a portion of which is still populated by a shadowy cult.

Setting. Within a vast, lightless cavern lies the remains of an ancient temple-city, dedicated to the goddess of night and the underworld. In centuries past, high priests who called themselves the Hollow Court used dark rituals to harness the shadows, but the rituals attracted the attention of ancient, shadowy entities that drained life from the living and turned the place into a realm of lifeless shadows. The air is thick with the perfume of burning incense, and light sources struggle to push back the perpetual gloom. Ominous whispers are forever in the air due to the perpetual ritual performed in the temple: exhausted performers are replaced from a succession of rested cultists within the ritual so that it might continue undiminished and without pause.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Shadow's Embrace.*** While the shadows are especially dense and resistant to being dismissed by light, that light still manages to keep the shadows at bay, for without it, they would claim all sanity from the living.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Realm of the Shadow Queen.*** Overseeing the ritual, a gaunt and twisted creature known as the Shadow Queen sits upon an obsidian throne, guarded by shadowy, inhuman minions. The queen bears witness to the ritual and never leaves the throne.
- ***Shadowbound Cultists.*** Those that have succumbed to the encroaching shadows now turn on their former cultmates, seeking to extinguish their inner light. They are kept at bay by light sources, just as the shadows are.
- ***Melana Shadowsong.*** A ghostly bard known as Shadowsong ministers to the needs of the ritual's performers and, time allowing, paints their stories—their sorrows and regrets—into song to strike back against the darkness.

MONASTERY OF THE OPEN MIND

Theme. Isolated monks explored the secrets of enlightenment by peering into the unknown cosmos.

Setting. Above the ridgeline of the mountain range that runs along the edge of the world rests a walled monastery of drab gray stone. Its monks probed the limits of psychic mysticism, and by astrally projecting themselves, they crossed into nightmare dimensions, unwittingly attracting the attention of primordial beings bent on devouring their thoughts and dreams. There's a sudden openness to one's thoughts when near the monastery, almost as if someone opened the windows of one's mind to let the sun and breeze in, to blow away the stuffiness and cobwebs. It feels as if one is suddenly connected to everyone nearby, as if simply yelling out that mental window might receive a reply.

Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Astral Rifts.*** The relentless psychic self-experimentation has resulted in several accidental astral rifts on the grounds, and occasionally, nightmares can seep through the material world, which are best avoided.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Astral Quandary.*** Astral entities are at war with one another, and their conflict bleeds onto the Material Plane. The monks' former experiments become both bane and boon in the resulting struggles.
- ***Dream Siphoning.*** Eldritch creatures, drawn by the psychic energies concentrated in the monastery, manipulate the thoughts and dreams of those within. PCs must contend with a blurring reality, weaponized to drive them to madness, as they try to survive.
- ***Eldritch Resonance.*** A collection of bizarre ancient artifacts, which the monks safeguarded, contain the captured shadows of primordial beings from beyond the veil of reality. Manipulating the artifacts brings shadows to life and might prove a convenient weapon against the monastery's foes, but the price those hungry shadows demand might be higher than anyone anticipated.

TWILIGHT SANDS

Theme. Eternally shadowed sands that cover ancient secrets.

Setting. Scattered ruins lie buried across a vast desert that lies veiled in perpetual twilight. The empire's nomadic survivors now stalk the ruins, and the legends surrounding them claim they are centuries old, bound by an ancient curse to manifest as wandering shadows. The shifting sands mirror their eternal nomadic existence. Eternally mired in a gloomy twilight, the shadows cling to those within, including to its denizens, masking intentions and numbers within the ethereal landscape.



Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Illusory Landscape.*** The sands give birth to frequent mirages that would hold their own against the best illusions. In addition, distances and perception in general seem to become distorted. Just taking a step can be fraught with unforeseen consequences.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Nightmare Guardians.*** Beyond the sand's illusions, the nomads also command shadow magic and summon nightmarish creatures to guard their wandering caravans.
- ***Twilight Sorcerer.*** A sorcerer lives in a tower that moves about each night when no one is watching. The nomads claim the enigmatic figure and tower are remnants of the city buried beneath the sand and that through them lies the key to accessing those ruins.
- ***Veiled Diplomacy.*** A schism erupts within the nomads that will have very little impact beyond their borders, but if this can't be healed, the growing discord will doom their survival as a people.

SYSTEM OF BELIEF

d100	System of Belief
1–3	***Ancestor Worship.*** Ancestors are revered and guidance is sought from the spirit world. Rituals, traditions, and cultural practices are centered around ancestral connections.
4–6	***Arcane Utopia.*** Utopia can be achieved through the use of arcane magic. Advanced studies of specialized magic are integrated into society, such as divination, necromancy, or transmutation.
7–9	***Archivism.*** Knowledge is of utmost importance and is preserved in timeless libraries.
10–12	***Bio-Alchemical Manipulation.*** Powerful alchemists manipulate living systems for the betterment of society.
13–15	***Chivalry.*** A code of honor guides society, based in valor, loyalty, and the pursuit of justice.
16–18	***Dialectics.*** The pursuit of knowledge through questioning and dialogue is the way of life, valuing education, critical thinking, and the examined life.
19–21	***Druidism.*** A deep connection with nature and reverence for the natural world is engendered. Druidic magic intertwines with environmental stewardship and balance.
22–24	***Dystopian Totalitarianism.*** An oppressive regime—perhaps of sorcerers, druids, or priests—control the military and the dissemination of information. Surveillance, censorship, and loss of personal freedoms become central themes.
25–27	***Egalitarianism.*** Resources and opportunities are equally distributed, and hierarchies and disparity-based deprivation are avoided.
28–30	***Epicureanism.*** Life is about the pursuit of pleasure, simplicity, and avoidance of pain. Society focuses on cultivating happiness through intellectual pleasures and friendship.
31–33	***Etherealism.*** The supreme goal of life is to transcend one's physical trappings and become a being of pure aether or magical energy.
34–36	***Ethical Collectivism.*** A society should explore ways to ethically preserve the knowledge and intellect of its elders, including by prolonging sentience within material objects, such as brain vats or crystalline shards, or by rituals that allow for them to live on within the bodies and brains of their descendants.
37–39	***Golem Binding.*** Animated constructs are used for labor and protection. Philosophies often arise around the ethical treatment of golems and their status as sentient beings.
40–42	***Hedonism.*** Life should be devoted to maximizing pleasure and sensory experiences, to communal living centered around indulgence and transient sensualism.
43–45	***Hermetic Alchemy.*** Spiritual enlightenment can be achieved through the consumption of alchemical compounds. Exploration of the mystical properties of elements and the transmutation of psychic awakening is a part of everyday life.
46–48	***Individualism.*** Independence, self-reliance, and the pursuit of personal goals and desires are emphasized.

VEILED OASIS

Theme. A desert oasis marked by strange disturbances, where one's senses can't be trusted, and sanity becomes luxury.

Setting. At the heart of a desert oasis, ethereal artisans weaves reality-bending enchantments. The Veiled Oasis is their sanctuary, where they maintain their extraordinary tapestries that can manipulate the fabric of spacetime. However, their ambitious experiments with dimensional threads have drawn the attention of extraplanar entities, resulting in bizarre and terrifying anomalies that distort reality within the region. The air—or is it the fabric of reality itself? —feels taut, like a drum, and as actions are taken, varying degrees of vibration can be felt through one's body. And sometimes this feels right, resonating with something deep inside, and sometimes this feels wholly incongruous.

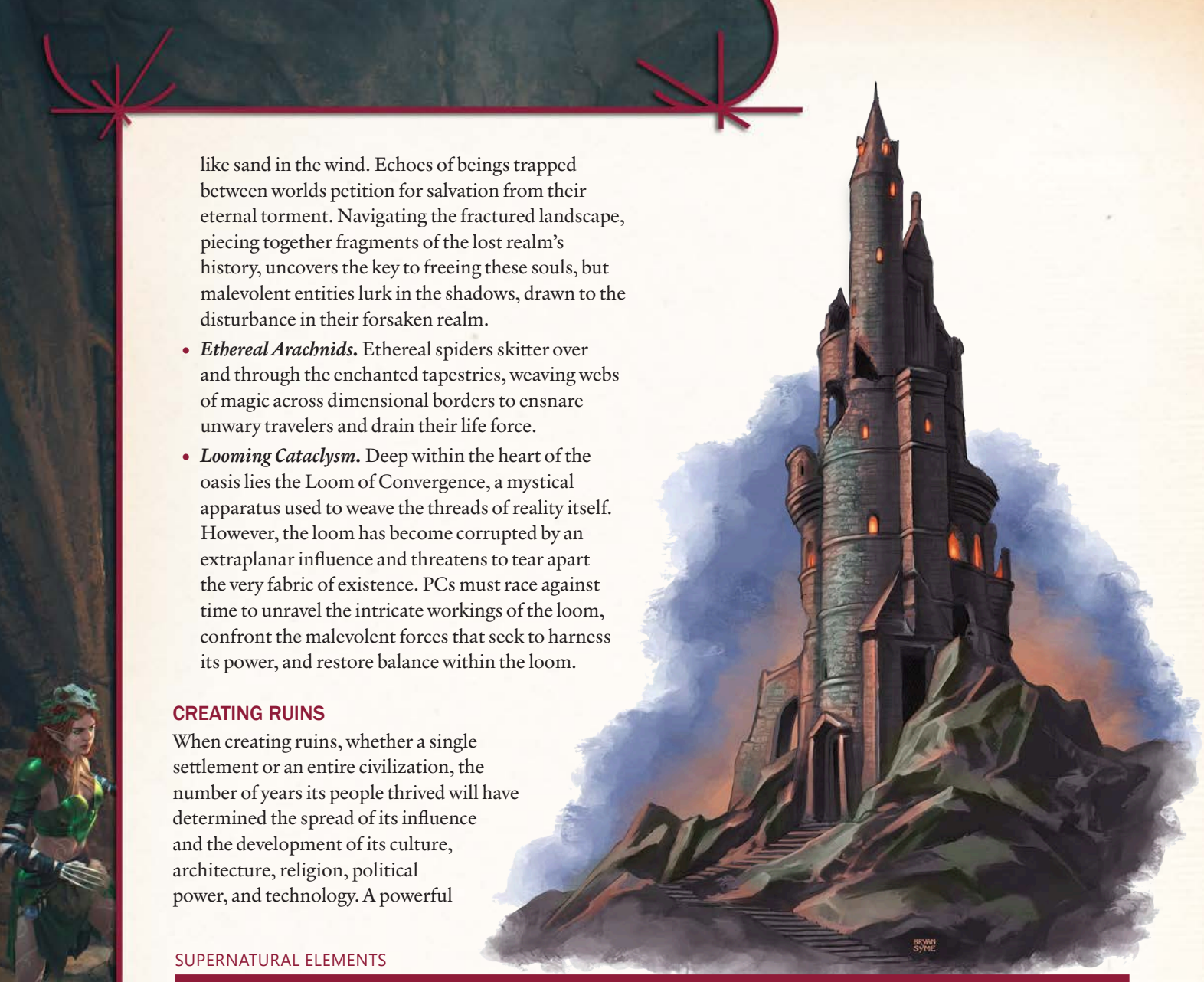
Environment. The following threat represents one of the possible ongoing environmental conditions in this dungeon:

- ***Anomalous Warp.*** The ambitious experiments of the Etherweavers have given rise to temporary distortions within the oasis, where spacetime is in constant flux.

Encounters. The following encounters represent specific interactions PCs might have in this dungeon:

- ***Echoes of Lost Realms.*** A PC feels a certain resonance with a particular tapestry, and touching it, the party is transported to a dimension on the brink of oblivion, where time is erratic and reality shifts

d100	System of Belief
49–51	***Lucid Dreamwalking.*** Dreams are used to find spiritual insight and guidance. Lifestyles evolve around dreamscape exploration and interpretation.
52–54	***Mercantilism.*** Persuasive rhetoric and the art of negotiation are highly valued. Wealth and influence are gained through business acumen.
55–57	***Monastic Mysticism.*** Isolation allows one to focus on spiritual and magical practices, on the preservation of ancient knowledge and esoteric traditions.
58–60	***Parasitic Communities.*** The usage of parasites is integrated into communal benefit via ritual bonding for increased health, resource management, and societal harmony.
61–63	***Philosophy.*** Philosophers guide society with their wisdom and virtue, embodying justice, fairness, intellectual pursuits, wisdom, and the common good.
64–66	***Primordial Structuralists.*** Society should be based on a belief in the inherent harmony and systemic order of the universe, promoting spiritual and philosophical teachings based on alchemical, astrological, or mathematical principles.
67–69	***Prophecy Seekers.*** The society is focused on fulfilling a certain prophecy, rejecting all that would seemingly steer them away from it, though possibly accounting for differing interpretations.
70–72	***Stoicism.*** Emphasis is placed on self-discipline, rationality, and an acceptance of fate, and virtue and inner strength are greatly valued.
73–75	***Storytelling.*** Story and music shape reality. Magical and philosophical teachings are conveyed through epic ballads and tales.
76–78	***Survivalism.*** Society adapts to the world, even when ravaged by environmental or magical disasters. Lifestyles should focus on survival, scavenging, and adaptability.
79–81	***Transhumanism.*** Radical human enhancement is embraced through mystic ritual and brutal experimental chirurgery, perhaps including the societal integration of lycanthropy, arcane grafts, or flesh warping.
82–84	***Virtue.*** Society is best governed by principles of virtue and of the golden mean, balancing governance on reason, moderation, and ethical conduct.
85–99	***Roll Two Times.*** Incorporate the two belief systems into one or maintain both as coexisting or competing systems within the society.
100	***Roll Three Times.*** Incorporate the three belief systems into one or maintain all as coexisting or competing systems within the society.



like sand in the wind. Echoes of beings trapped between worlds petition for salvation from their eternal torment. Navigating the fractured landscape, piecing together fragments of the lost realm's history, uncovers the key to freeing these souls, but malevolent entities lurk in the shadows, drawn to the disturbance in their forsaken realm.

- ***Ethereal Arachnids.*** Ethereal spiders skitter over and through the enchanted tapestries, weaving webs of magic across dimensional borders to ensnare unwary travelers and drain their life force.
- ***Looming Cataclysm.*** Deep within the heart of the oasis lies the Loom of Convergence, a mystical apparatus used to weave the threads of reality itself. However, the loom has become corrupted by an extraplanar influence and threatens to tear apart the very fabric of existence. PCs must race against time to unravel the intricate workings of the loom, confront the malevolent forces that seek to harness its power, and restore balance within the loom.

CREATING RUINS

When creating ruins, whether a single settlement or an entire civilization, the number of years its people thrived will have determined the spread of its influence and the development of its culture, architecture, religion, political power, and technology. A powerful

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

d12	Element
1	Ancient oak trees served as wise councilors and magistrates.
2	Celebrations to mark various alignments, conjunctions, and other celestial events culminated in communal transformative rituals.
3	Communal magic displays of light and shadow were used to build kinship.
4	Devices to study the heavens, and the art celebrating it, incorporated stones imbued with star magic.
5	Farming techniques incorporated clockwork magic to better control growing times, pest reduction, and yield.
6	From their glass sanctuaries, dreamweavers manipulated the dreams of others in a consensual rite to commune with the divine.
7	History was recorded on living parchment with enchanted ink, and individuals maintained personal accounts as mystical tattoos.
8	Instantaneous long-range communication was possible between sentient libraries.
9	Magical tapestries were elevated as an artform to tell stories but also utilized as protective barriers and energy conduits.
10	Massive alchemical balloons transported goods and people with the aid of dedicated skybridges.
11	One's societal standing was directly proportional to one's mastery of a particular branch of magic.
12	The governing council covertly forged pacts with fiends.

empire, for instance, might have an influence carried far beyond its borders and produce relics that surface in locations halfway across the globe. PCs might find such evidence long before they even know there's something to be found, leading to a chain of similar discoveries.

Culture, Philosophy, and Religion. Whether by design or happenstance, particular populations are often most associated with customs and beliefs common to their majority or somehow held in high regard. This might arise from tradition or divine intervention, from social engineering or prophecy, from a democratic vote or monarchical fiat. To determine the focus of the dominant beliefs of a particular culture, consult the **System of Belief** table or choose something appropriate.

Supernatural Elements. Make discovering a lost people more fantastic by weaving supernatural elements into their history, whether by arcane forces or cosmic phenomena, by divine influence or consequences of

DOWNFALL

d12	Downfall
1	***Betrayal and Internal Strife.*** Internal conflicts, betrayals, and power struggles among the rulers or factions lead to chaos, collapsing infrastructures, and ruin.
2	***Celestial Alignment.*** The alignment of stars, planets, moons, or other celestial objects triggered a cascade of destructive consequences, unleashing cosmic energies that proved detrimental to the people's magical foundations. Hints of impending doom might have lain in prophesy or been foretold by a rare planetary conjunction, changes in star patterns, a falling asteroid, or an eclipse.
3	***Curse.*** A powerful curse doomed the people to ruin. Possible causes for the curse might have included the pursuit of forbidden knowledge, the offense of a vengeful deity, or the consequence of past transgressions or pacts with supernatural forces. The effects of a curse might have resulted in the gradual decline of morality, a series of plagues, or supernatural calamities that eroded the inhabitants' lives over time. A curse might have affected the bloodline of rulers or influential figures and manifested over generations, slowly sowing discord and strife.
4	***Dimensional Breach.*** The inhabitants opened a rift between planes, either intentionally or inadvertently, and allowed entities to seep into the world. In an escalation of events, the extraplanar entities invaded, ushering in nightmarish visions that tormented the inhabitants and drove them to madness.
5	***Dying Magic.*** The magic vital to the people began to wane or fade. Essential enchantments and protective spells crumbled, leaving them vulnerable to external threats or internal strife. Gradually, the loss of their lifeblood rendered survival unsustainable.
6	***Environmental Collapse.*** The overexploitation of resources caused severe environmental degradation. This might have included alchemical pollution, the depletion of essential natural or arcane materials, or the awakening of ancient guardians set to protect the natural order.
7	***Fading Gods.*** The inhabitants sustained themselves through the worship of powerful deities. Over time, the withdrawal or abandonment of these gods, or the derangement of the worship, resulted in a loss of divine protection and favor, exposing the people to insurmountable external threats.
8	***Forgotten Pacts.*** The inhabitants entered pacts or alliances with supernatural entities in exchange for power or protection. Forgotten or broken over time, those forces ultimately turned against the people.
9	***Magical Catastrophe.*** A singular cataclysm, triggered by the misuse of powerful magic, laid waste to the people almost instantaneously. There are perhaps identifying signs of this, such as the inhabitants being turned to stone as they went about their daily activities.
10	***Prophecy.*** A prophesied event foretold the demise of the people. While the inhabitants were aware of the inevitable downfall—those who believed it anyway—they were powerless to prevent it. Perhaps there existed a series of prophecies, and each iteration marked the end of an era.
11	***Unraveling of Reality.*** In their studies, arcane mathematicians somehow upset the fabric of reality, and the people became lost in spacetime, perhaps displaced into the future/past or finding themselves on an inhospitable plane of existence.
12	***War with Otherworldly Forces.*** A war was waged against otherworldly entities, perhaps fiends, elementals, or even gods, and the people lost.

FATE OF DESCENDANTS

d8	Fate
1	***Ascension.*** They developed a new technology or potent magical/psychic abilities and actively hide their advances from the world, whether out of fear or hubris.
2	***Assimilation.*** They spread out, assimilating into other cultures and slowly losing their connection to their fallen people.
3	***Coexistence.*** They coexist with the denizens of a nearby region—or perhaps they are far from home.
4	***Domination.*** They claimed dominion over another people or entire region.
5	***Migration.*** They became nomads, either forever on the move or actively searching for a place to resettle.
6	***Peace.*** They resettled and lived a simple life, creating a peaceful and idyllic utopia and renouncing their former excesses.
7	***Rebuilding.*** They are actively rebuilding upon the ruins of their crumbled people.
8	***Survival.*** They have fractured, resorting to raiding and scavenging on the fringes of other peoples.

TRANSFORMATIVE ADAPTATIONS

d8	Adaptation
1	***Chrono-Madness.*** They experience the flow of time differently, aging either more slowly or more rapidly—or perhaps aging in reverse. This also might allow them certain prophetic abilities.
2	***Dermal Camouflage.*** Adaptive skin pigmentation allows them to blend seamlessly with their surroundings.
3	***Echolocation.*** They possess the heightened ability to navigate by sound. This might also allow them to manipulate others' senses, causing disorientation or fear.
4	***Geomantic Sight.*** They can perceive the magic of the land, the ley lines and energy flows, and might even have some control over that magic.
5	***Mindreading.*** They read the thoughts of others and forcibly extract memories, some even altering memories. This might have fostered a xenophobic desire to assimilate or eliminate perceived threats.
6	***Mineral Integration.*** Years of exposure to certain substances have enhanced their strength or provided some magical abilities. Unfortunately, the absorbed minerals also have toxic side effects, perhaps making them conduits for a strange elemental intelligence or else disturbingly altering their psyches or physical forms.
7	***Psychic Control.*** They can invade the minds of others, using their powers to manipulate and control.
8	***Uncanny Luminescence.*** Bioluminescent patterns on their skin help them navigate the subterranean darkness. Changing patterns or colors might also reflect different emotions and be used to communicate.

meddling with the unknown. To add a supernatural flair, consult the **Supernatural Elements** table or choose something appropriate.

Downfall. Define what caused the population's downfall. It's often a culmination of many things, so feel free to incorporate a mix of themes, such as decadence, war, punishment, famine, disease, or magical apocalypse. Often, such destruction results from the transgressions of the dominant inhabitants. Hubris and ambition, unbridled pursuit of power, and attempts to control forces beyond their understanding tend to spawn unintended consequences, such as unleashing uncontrollable magic or awakening ancient, dormant entities that subsequently wreak havoc. To determine the turning-point event that the population's downfall can be linked to, consult the **Downfall** table or choose something appropriate.

Descendants. Included among the many mysteries buried amid the rubble is the answer to what happened to the inhabitants. Plague, cataclysm, or war might quickly lay waste to a people, but even just a handful often survive. Survivors might have been forced to endure harsh living conditions in dangerous, inhospitable locales and continue to exist in isolated communities, surviving, adapting, and evolving. To determine what became of the descendants, consult the **Fate of Descendants** table or choose something appropriate.

Adaptations. Whether from arcane waste, planar bleeding, biological alterations, toxins, symbionts, or centuries of isolation, the surviving descendants might have significant physical changes. To determine what these changes are, consult the **Transformative Adaptations** table or choose something appropriate.

SITES OF POWER

The powers of the multiverse hold sway over the mortal realms in many ways. This section details dungeons and ruins—whether in subterranean or wilderness environments—infused with holy/unholy power. Regardless of the type of environment, all such sites have certain common characteristics.

Holy sites are abundant with radiant energy, generally enhancing positive characteristics and healing magics. While within such an area, the following effects apply:

- Attacks that deal radiant damage deal an extra die of damage.
- Creatures taking a short rest can add double their CON modifier to each hit die spent to regain hit points.
- If you roll a 1 on a die for a healing spell, you can reroll the die and must use the new roll.
- On finishing a long rest, you gain the effect of a normal rest after only 4 hours and regain all spent hit dice.
- You have advantage on all WIS (Insight) checks and disadvantage on all CHA (Deception) checks.

Unholy sites lash out at travelers. Aside from dangerous creatures, these zones generally enhance negative characteristics and inhibit healing. While within such an area, the following effects apply:

- Attacks that deal fire or poison damage deal an extra die of damage.
- Creatures taking a short rest don't add their CON modifier to hit dice spent to regain hit points.
- If you roll the highest result on a die for a healing spell, you must reroll the die and must use the new roll.
- On finishing a long rest, you regain hit points as normal, but you can't be restored to more than half your hit point maximum.





- You have advantage on all CHA (Deception) checks and disadvantage on all WIS (Insight) checks.

Additional effects related to a site's source of influence might also be present (GM's discretion).

The reasons for a site's manifested power might be by chance or by intention. Random sites tend to cover large swaths of terrain, widening like ripples on a pond from a rift between planes, gradually altering the area with its influence. Intentional sites tend to be artificial structures, from small shrines creating a dimensional focus to outposts of advance guards, created by celestials or fiends or their mortal agents to further their immortal plans.

Creatures and Other Dangers. The influence of the heavens or hells attracts creatures of a similar bent and enables those from related planes to slip into the mortal world.

For sites with a celestial influence, this includes various angels and **acolytes**, **awakened shrubs/trees**, **couatls**, **pegasi**, **priests**, and **unicorns**, among others. All Beasts in such a site are calm and curious and less likely to react with fear or violence unless provoked, and they possess the Celestial Resilience trait (see *Monster Vault*).

For sites with an abyssal/infernal influence, this includes various demons and devils, chols, hags, and **cultists**, **infernal champions**, **lamia**, **nightmares**, **rakshasa**, **succubi**, and **worgs**, among others. All Beasts in such a site are aggressive and territorial, and they possess either the Demonic Resilience or Devilish Resilience trait (see *Monster Vault*).

SUBTERRANEAN SITES

Underground adventures typically focus on the unknown, on adventurers plunging headlong into unfamiliar territory—always on guard, not knowing what's around the next corner.

SOURCES OF POWER

The type of power focused on here is that related to holy and unholy planes of existence. These sites are influenced by the heavens and the hells, but this is just one example of such focused extraplanar influence. Other possibilities include sites with elemental influence or stranger powers still, such as from the Astral Plane or from even more bizarre, mind-bending planes.

Environment. Though almost any environment can host these sites and the degree of their extraplanar influence can vary, they do share some common features.

Exalted sites are marked with an atmosphere of rejuvenation and life. The stone passages are dotted with a radiant bioluminescent fungus, giving the impression of stars and providing dim to bright light. The air and water are fresh and uncontaminated. There are no natural hazards, and animals are nonviolent unless provoked. PCs entering these locations no longer feel the oppressive weight so commonly experienced during underground exploration.

Sinister sites can be zones of utter darkness or areas marked by a low crimson glow, emanating from the stone surfaces. The air carries the stench of brimstone, and the deeper one travels into the site, the warmer it grows. Lava streams, geysers, and other volcanic hazards are common as are other hazards like cave-ins. Subterranean monsters seem driven to uncontrollable rages and fits of violence.

Exploring. Those seeking passage through an exalted or sinister subterranean space face different challenges than those traversing uninfluenced stretches:

- ***Corpse Breath.*** Resembling a low-hanging yellow-white mist or fog, corpse breath is a mass of floating spores produced by tiny fungi that grow underground in sinister sites. When a spell is cast within 10 feet of the fungus, the fungus discharges its spore cloud, forming a 2-foot-thick cloud that fills a 15-foot area for 1 minute. Creatures beginning their turn within the cloud, or who enter it for the first time, must make a DC 10 CON save. On a failed save, the creature moves at half speed and begins to suffocate. If a creature fails the saving throw by 5 or more, it also falls unconscious. These effects remain as long as the creature is within the area of the cloud.
- ***Repercussion Crystals.*** These dark crystals resemble obsidian and grow in warm exalted sites, forming either spines (10 feet tall, 5 feet wide) or sheets (20-foot square, covering floor or wall). If a ranged weapon or spell attack misses a target within 5 feet of a repercussion crystal, the attack is reflected back at the attacker, who becomes the new target.

Notable Sites. Any type of subterranean space can be the target of this extraplanar influence:

- ***Ambulant Garden of Delights.*** Always found where several passages intersect in a large, exalted cavern, the Ambulant Garden of Delights magically moves through the underground, seemingly at random. At the very top of the cavern ceiling burns a huge orb



of light, simulating natural sunlight. Below it, near the center of the garden, a small grove of oak trees hosts a multilevel wooden structure suspended amid the branches and trunks. Arrayed around the trees are meandering pathways between raised garden beds where insects and birds dart. The air carries the scent of flowers and new grass along with the titter of birdsong. The garden is managed by a community of couatls who offer respite and a selection of magical and alchemical remedies to travelers. The remains of those who fail to respect the community make excellent fertilizer.

- ***Fiendish Construction Site.*** A massive, lizard-like form of iron and steel slowly takes shape in a vast sinister cavern deep underground. Devils and mortal servitors scurry along scaffolding, operate wooden cranes, craft parts at metal forges, and smelt ore in blazing furnaces. Portals set into the walls disgorge wagons full of supplies, new workers, and a seemingly endless stream of fiends and cultists. Arrayed around the construct, the make-shift town that houses the workers emits a cacophony of screams, shouts, and bestial roars in a hundred languages. Among the structures, the wall of the foreman's office displays a map of familiar surface kingdoms and the route of destruction the construct will follow. Resembling the famed tarrasque, the gargantuan construct seems too large to exit the cavern by normal means, but as the project nears completion, the devils prepare to create a huge portal.

Story Seeds. Adventures in such sites often focus on planar threats and moral dilemmas:

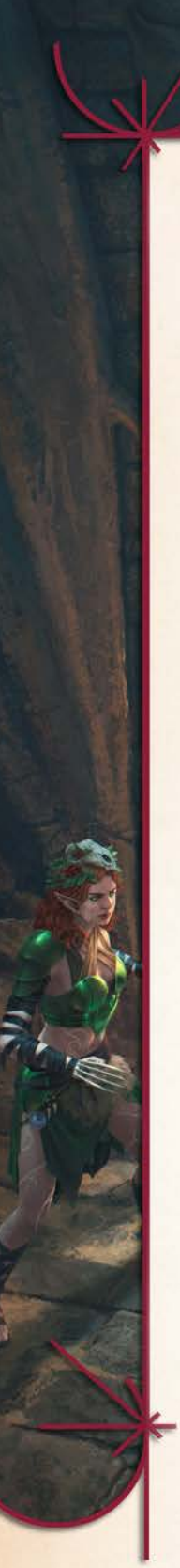
- ***Divine Hunt.*** A powerful planetar angel hires the PCs to trek underground to find and safely capture a fleeing deva. This rogue angel is in possession of a powerful artifact greatly desired by a cabal of demons. Why an angel would do such a thing is not known by the party's employer, but the rewards for the job are extreme. Once underground, the PCs must overcome monsters and hazards while attempting to track down the rogue angel. Once they do though, they realize there is no artifact and no demonic cabal. The deva fled to be with the demon she loves. Will the party complete their task or protect the couple from the planetar, who arrives to punish the lovers?
- ***Great Imp Incursion.*** Though imps are generally considered merely a nuisance, too much of anything can be a really big problem. A multitude of imps swarm from the underground, first overwhelming a dwarven settlement and then spreading out to nearby communities. Under royal contract, or hired by a consortium of guilds, the PCs must get through the seemingly unending swarms of imps, descend into the underground, and cut off the source of the imps before they decimate the surface.

WILDERNESS SITES

For as long as humanoids have walked the world, the power of the divine has managed to find access and seep into the wild spaces of the mortal world—whether under a glacial overhang or in a dense forest, at a bend in the river or an out-of-the-way spot of the grasslands.

Environment. Though almost any environment can host these sites and the degree of their extraplanar influence can vary, they do share some common features.

Hallowed sites feel full of life and light. Everything is perfect. The exceptionally healthy plant life bears a slight silver or golden tinge, and each is an exemplar of its genus. Water is crystal clear and free of any contaminants. Animals are more docile, and every living thing is perfectly contented, having all they need in



this idyllic space. Even at night, a pearlescent radiance pervades the area, providing dim light.

Profane sites present an opposite scene. Here the plant life is dangerous, growing razor-sharp thorns, spraying poison or acid, or grasping at the unwary with animated vines. Areas of clinging darkness alternate with veins of sanguine bioluminescence, creeping through the landscape as if a spreading infection. Corrupted by the influence, animals act against their nature, becoming more aggressive and violent. Day or night, awake or asleep, the feeling of unseen watchers is constant.

Exploring. Those seeking passage through a hallowed or profane wild space face different challenges than those traversing uninfluenced lands:

- ***Bonerot Root.*** This white and brown speckled fungus grows in profane sites, slowly feeding on the moldering remains of those finding their demise here. It extends thread-thin, translucent roots, tracing itself upon all surfaces within 100 feet. Imbued with necrotic energy, these roots inhibit all natural and magical healing within 5 feet. Those within 10 feet of bonerot root must succeed on a DC 12 WIS (Perception) check to notice them.
- ***Thief-Catcher Tree.*** Found in hallowed sites, this perennial broadleaf tree has pale golden bark with twisting vertical striations. It can grow up to 150 feet tall and possesses wide branches spreading up to a 40-foot radius. It produces fruit all year round, regardless of weather conditions. When moving beneath its canopy, a creature must make a DC 12 DEX save or be struck by a falling fruit. On a failed save, the fruit hits the target, causing a loud chiming sound, and the target is restrained as the fruit bursts, enveloping them in sticky resin. A creature restrained by the fruit can use its action to make a DC 12 STR check to break free.

Notable Sites. Any type of wilderness can be the target of this extraplanar influence:

- ***Celestial Watchtower.*** The graceful lines of this shining crystal tower and its beautiful ornamentation speak to its celestial origin. Within a half mile of its 20-foot-high double doors, the faint hymns of an angelic chorus whisper in one's mind. Inside, the whole of the vast space is open, and angels fly about, adjusting strange floating arrays of crystals and mirrors. Images flicker across these devices, seemingly random and all from within 50 miles of the structure. This cathedral is an outpost of the Choir of Eyes, an order of angels who keep watch on locations of prophetic importance.
- ***Devil's Trading Post and Waystation.*** This modest wooden building and attached roadhouse can be found in various environments, usually appearing near a road, path, animal trail, or sometimes in a small clearing. From all appearances, the post appears to be a general goods shop and inn that caters to travelers, explorers, and those who make their living in the wild. The establishment, its proprietor, his wife, and two adult children go by various names, all customary to the local region, and offer food, lodging, supplies, and a catered assortment of unique magical items. The post remains for a period of usually no more than a couple weeks before vanishing and appearing elsewhere. More than one trading post exists but never more than one within a thousand miles of the next. The staff of each are devils, all using the same array of magical disguises. Within the 100 yards of the structure, all divination magic is suppressed and WIS (Insight) checks have disadvantage.

Story Seeds. Adventures in such sites often focus on planar threats and moral dilemmas:

- ***Broken Wing Escort.*** During their travel, the PCs stumble across a wounded angel under attack from low-CR fiends. Should they opt for rescue, they discover the angel's wing has been broken and cursed by a powerful devil to be unhealable. The angel needs to get to a nearby mountain shrine (a hallowed site) to deliver a warning of an upcoming assault on its home plane by a fiendish army. On the way, the PCs must defend their charge against increasingly more powerful devils while overcoming the treacherous terrain. Can the party keep the angel alive and get to the shrine in time to avert a war in the heavens?
- ***Damned If You Do or Don't.*** While investigating a dark forest, the PCs are approached by a minor demon who begs them for aid. Though this is a profane site, the demons long ago agreed to protect a small human community in exchange for the soul of a holy woman. Recently, a child has been abducted from the village by a group of zealous paladins who believe she is possessed. The demons hope the heroes will negotiate with the paladins or, if that fails, retrieve the child by force. When confronted, the paladins are convinced of their own path and accuse the PCs of consorting with demons. With increasingly desperate demons on one side and fanatical paladins on the other, can the party save the child and learn the secret hidden within her?

CREATING QUESTS

A quest is a narrative device that tasks a PC or the entire party with the completion of a specific goal, which is accomplished by undertaking challenges that lead to a climactic event. Their actions along the way determine whether or not they succeed.

Quests create a structure for players to interact with the campaign and the broader game world by focusing on the PCs' journey within the greater narrative. The quest allows for the unfolding of bite-size portions of the plot, providing a clear context and opportunity for the PCs to directly participate in the storytelling. The resulting outcomes and consequences will then directly shape what is to come.

DEFINING QUESTS

A quest is a narrative structure that guides PCs on a transformative journey of adventure and self-discovery and might fall into one of a few types:

- ***Hero's Journey.*** PCs plunge into the unknown. The trials and challenges they face lead to self-discovery and transformation.
- ***Mythological Quest.*** The PCs undertake an epic journey to accomplish heroic feats, obtain divine favor, or overcome supernatural adversaries.
- ***Quest for Knowledge.*** The PCs pursue a spiritual quest for specific knowledge or for enlightenment, perhaps transcending the Material Plane in the search for forbidden knowledge or unlocking the secrets of the cosmos.
- ***Symbolism.*** Each challenge is an allegory for a human condition, exploring themes such as conflict, morality, aspiration, and redemption.

Use the quest to drive PC development. This often takes the form of incorporating a PC's backstory by thrusting them into conflict and forcing them to confront their fears, weaknesses, and limitations. Resolving such backstory conflict allows a PC to draw upon inner strength, resilience, and courage, developing their ongoing story and strengthening their connection to the campaign and game world. Moral quandaries trigger internal conflicts, such as doubt, insecurity, or repressed trauma, and their moral compass is defined by their difficult decisions. The consequences of their actions offer opportunities for PCs to reflect and adapt and to directly impact the greater narrative.

A quest is also often a useful bridge between parts of the game world—or between plot points—providing a transitional tool for storytelling and motivation for PCs. It signals some of the options on the table for adventuring, which can be especially important for players less experienced with the game.

COMPLICATIONS

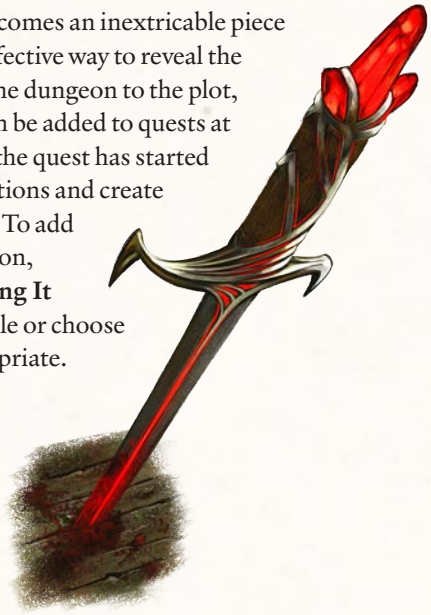
A dungeon is often more than just another bit of window dressing, more than just the backdrop for the story. It can very well be a vital component of the narrative itself. Whether due to the lore of the item the PCs seek or the backstory of their most formidable foe, it comes out that it's all somehow tied to that dungeon, so understanding one means understanding the other.

MAKING IT COMPLICATED

d6	Complication
1	***Anomaly.*** Time loops, alternate realities, or spatial anomalies disorient the PCs and complicate their efforts to navigate the dungeon. But it also opens their eyes to past events or to unknown avenues to explore.
2	***Betrayal.*** A close ally betrays the PCs, either out of greed, desperation, or coercion. This jeopardizes the quest's success and puts the party in peril.
3	***Competition.*** Rival adventuring parties compete for the same goal and interfere with the current quest, sabotaging the PCs' efforts, stealing valuable resources, or spreading false information to mislead them.
4	***Curse.*** The retrieval of a cursed artifact brings calamity upon its possessor. Malevolent entities drawn to its dark power throw the party into discord.
5	***Destruction.*** The dungeon begins to collapse or self-destruct due to magical instability, seismic activity, or external interference, forcing the PCs to race against time to complete their quest and escape before they are buried alive.
6	***Guardian.*** Powerful and unexpected guardians left behind by the dungeon's creators awaken to defend their domain, clearly presenting a challenge for the PCs that is more than they can handle. Moving forward will require research and careful consideration.

Or perhaps the puzzle at the dungeon's heart can save the region from what afflicts it, resolve a long-standing blood feud, or challenge the hereditary lineage of despotic royals.

The dungeon becomes an inextricable piece of the story, an effective way to reveal the plot. To help tie the dungeon to the plot, complications can be added to quests at some point after the quest has started to upend expectations and create new possibilities. To add such a complication, consult the **Making It Complicated** table or choose something appropriate.



MORAL DILEMMAS

As the PCs embark on quests, face challenges, and navigate the complexities of the game world, they should be provided with opportunities for self-discovery and character development. Through these, they will grapple with their own identities, values, and motivations—possibly undergoing profound transformations. This is especially effective when tied to a PC's backstory. For example, a rogue who grew up in poverty might struggle with feelings of inadequacy and self-worth, and a wizard exiled from their homeland might grapple with questions of belonging and identity.

To help create such opportunities to force PCs to confront their beliefs, biases, and fears, consult the **Another Fine Mess** table or choose something appropriate. Each situation presents a dilemma—or a difficult moral decision that carries profound consequences—and PCs must choose whether to resolve the encounter by paying a significant cost for upholding their moral principles or by succumbing to expediency and personal gain.

ANOTHER FINE MESS

d12	Dilemma	Cost
1	***Betrayal.*** Members of the dungeoneering guild accuse a mentor or close ally of betrayal, providing only circumstantial evidence, and the PCs must decide whether to trust and defend their friend or to condemn them.	Trusting the accused might lead to further betrayal or endanger the party and guild, while condemning them could ruin a life and fracture the guild, eroding the trust among its members.
2	***Corrupt Authority.*** The PCs discover an authority figure is abusing their power and must decide whether to expose them.	Exposing the corruption could foment civil unrest and destabilize the region, while ignoring it could perpetuate injustice and erode the party's integrity.
3	***False Accusation.*** The PCs encounter a group of villagers who accuse an innocent person of a crime. They must decide whether to intervene or to stay out of it.	If they intervene, they might face backlash from the villagers or legal consequences, and if they do not, they might have to live with the guilt at letting injustice prevail.
4	***Forbidden Magic.*** The PCs learn of forbidden knowledge or artifacts that would grant great power but at a steep price. They must decide whether to pursue it or not.	Pursuing the forbidden knowledge might corrupt the party's souls or attract the attention of malevolent forces, while destroying it could mean giving up a significant advantage.
5	***Mercy Killing.*** The PCs encounter a terminally ill individual begging for a quick death to end their suffering. They must decide whether to grant the request.	Granting the request might weigh heavily on the PCs' consciences and attract legal repercussions, while refusing could prolong the individual's suffering, haunting the PCs with guilt.
6	***Moral Compromise.*** The PCs must choose between allying themselves with a morally dubious faction or abandoning the alliance to maintain their principles.	Aligning with the faction might tarnish the party's reputation and compromise its values while rejecting them could leave the party isolated and vulnerable.

EPIC QUESTS

An epic quest describes a long and arduous journey, during which PCs undergo many trials and hardships. It serves a greater purpose than the mere needs and desires of individuals, and often, the PCs must weigh their ethics and morality against the dictates of the quest.

A quest might last for only a few game sessions or it could span an entire campaign, but either way, the PCs will be transformed, spiritually reforged, by their journey. Various elements common to epic quests are discussed here:

- ***Character Development.*** The process of roleplaying includes the negotiation of emotional and physical conflict and of moral dilemmas, often under pressure and with the life of the PC or other characters on the line, which can spark profound personal transformation. PCs go on to forge deep bonds with their party and with recurring NPCs.
- ***Grand Scale.*** Epic quests involve expansive journeys that take PCs across continents, through ancient ruins and towering peaks, and into the depths of untamed wilderness. Each stop features minor objectives and clues directing the PCs toward their next destination.
- ***High Stakes.*** Epic quests feature a final objective with extremely high stakes and dire consequences for failure. The PCs' actions should decide the fate of friends and kinsfolk, of a kingdom, or perhaps even of the world.
- ***Lore and Mythology.*** In order to have epic consequences, epic quests should drench the PCs in the lore and mythology of the game world, relying on immersive storytelling and powerful motivations.
- ***Perilous Challenges.*** At every opportunity, perilous challenges and obstacles should test the PCs' mettle. Such trials might feature confrontations with legendary monsters, reoccurring villains, complex puzzles, and moral dilemmas that force PCs to make difficult choices.

d12	Dilemma	Cost
7	***Redemption.*** The PCs encounter a former enemy who seeks redemption and assistance. They must decide whether to help them (whether or not they can also forgive) or reject them based on their past actions.	Helping the former enemy might risk betrayal or manipulation, while rejecting them could deny them a chance at redemption and perpetuate a cycle of violence.
8	***Refugees.*** The PCs encounter a group of refugees fleeing from a war-torn region. They must decide whether to offer aid, even if it means risking their safety and resources.	Assisting might strain the party's resources and attract unwanted attention from hostile forces, while ignoring the refugees might haunt the party with guilt and remorse.
9	***Sacrifice.*** The PCs must choose between saving a group of innocent civilians or pursuing their primary objective, knowing that they cannot do both.	Saving the civilians might cause their mission to fail or place their lives in danger, while prioritizing their objective might lead to the deaths of innocents.
10	***Trial of Faith.*** Evidence challenges long-held religious beliefs. Individual PCs must decide whether to cling to their faith despite doubt or abandon it for the truth.	Clinging to their faith might lead to willful ignorance or close-mindedness, while abandoning it could leave them feeling lost and adrift without a guiding principle.
11	***Ultimate Sacrifice.*** The PCs face a final, terrible challenge: that of sacrificing themselves to ensure the safety of others or prioritizing their own survival while doing what little they can for others.	Sacrificing themselves might mean losing everything they've fought for, while trying to ensure their own survival could mean challenging their principles and leaving some to perish.
12	***Unjust Law.*** The PCs must choose between obeying an unjust law that oppresses a marginalized group or defying it to uphold justice and equality.	Obeying the unjust law might perpetuate oppression and suffering, while defying it could lead to punishment or retaliation from those in power.

- ***Wonder.*** Epic quests create a playful sense of wonder and discovery. In order to create grandeur, PCs also need a sense of the mundane. Introduce simple elements that allow them time to pause and appreciate or contemplate the marvels and the worth of the world they are questing to save.

LEGENDARY CREATURES

A legendary creature quest leads PCs on a journey to a fantastic location to confront some rare or unique creature. Individual adventures might involve exploration and the study and possible eradication of the creature. Presented here are various elements common to legendary creature quests:

- ***Ancient Guardians.*** Legendary creatures guard the dungeon and defend its secrets. PCs must defeat these formidable guardians in combat, proving their worthiness to uncover the hidden mysteries.
- ***Capture/Containment.*** A powerful and dangerous creature occupies a nearby dungeon and threatens settlements and travelers. A council of merchants hires the PCs to capture the creature alive, so they must employ specialized traps, tranquilizers, or magical wards to subdue the creature with minimal harm.
- ***Eradication.*** A formidable monster commands a horde of malevolent creatures and seizes control of nearby ruins. This poses a grave threat to the surrounding region, and a curious patron hires the PCs to eradicate the horde, restoring the region to normal.
- ***Monster Bounty.*** A guild or patron places a significant bounty on a legendary creature, drawing skilled hunters and mercenaries from far and wide. The PCs and rival factions compete for the bounty as they navigate the treacherous depths of the dungeon in pursuit of their quarry.
- ***Research Expedition.*** The PCs accept a commission to embark on a research expedition into a dungeon rumored to be the lair of a rare creature, such as a dragon or an elusive elemental guardian. The patron requires documentation on the creature's natural habitat and behavior and valuable specimens for scientific analysis.
- ***Spiritual Encounter.*** The creature within the dungeon is not a physical entity but a spirit or a manifestation of magic. The quest draws the PCs into a spiritual journey as they seek to commune with or confront the legendary creature in order to unlock its secrets.
- ***Taming the Beast.*** Instead of seeking to eliminate the creature, a patron tasks the PCs with taming or befriending it, perhaps harnessing its power to the benefit of the patron or the community. Encounters emphasize skills over combat in order to determine the creature's motivations and behavior.



PROPHECIES

A prophecy quest centers on unfolding events foretold by ancient prognostications or modern oracles. During early adventures, the PCs should find several cryptic clues that all refer to a series of events prophesied to culminate in a cataclysmic shift in reality. As they decipher the clues, they learn more about the precise nature of the prophecy and any mystical connections to other events. Clues can appear almost anywhere, such as from overheard whispers, ciphers in modern art/literature, ancient texts, oracles, dreams, or mystical visions. The same prophecy might exist in several locations or be described in different languages by unrelated cultures. The prophecy foretells events that, when pieced together, culminate in a significant event that reshapes the fate of a particular individual, an entire city, or even the world.

A prophecy predicts an outcome that is either auspicious or ominous.

Creating a Prophecy. When setting up a prophecy quest, start by defining the prophecy's culminating event—its finale—and then use that to identify and create the situational challenges that lead up to it. This "backward design" allows for more thematic encounters and helps simulate fate's heavy-handed influence in the unfolding events.

Encounters leading to the finale should provide elements the PCs can use to affect the odds of everything unfolding according to the prophecy. For instance, PCs seeking to prevent an ominous prophecy would face encounters that decrease the likelihood of the prophecy from unfolding while PCs seeking to ensure an auspicious prophecy face encounters that increase the likelihood of the prophecy unfolding.

AUSPICIOUS PROPHECIES

d6	Prophecy
1	***Ascension of Heroes.*** "The key of justice shall be met by the sword of honor. Five ordinary souls shall rise to greatness as the echo of triumph sings through the ages."
2	***Era of Renewal.*** "When the ever-fire cleanses the old ways, the twelfth mother shall give birth to new beginnings. A world reborn shall balance upon the precipice."
3	***Harmony of Nature.*** "The horns shall summon the wraith of the wild. Rivers will run clear, and all living creatures shall find solace in nature's embrace."
4	***Rebirth of Magic.*** "When the slumber breaks and the eye of the ancients emerges, magic shall once again flourish in the land."
5	***Resurgence of Knowledge.*** "As dawn strikes mysteries of the past, the ancient secrets shall unlock the enlightenment and usher in an era of unparalleled wisdom."
6	***Rise of the Guardians.*** "When the frigid waters spring from the goblet, a golden age shall emerge to unite heroes from every corner of the realm."

OMINOUS PROPHECIES

d6	Prophecy
1	***Awakening of the Titan.*** "When the stars strike new fire, and their sparks set the sky ablaze, the titan shall break its slumber and reap vengeance upon the world."
2	***Betrayal of Kings.*** "When the crown falls and blood stains the throne, betrayal shall reign supreme. Brother will turn against brother, kingdoms will crumble, and the world will plunge into chaos."
3	***Eternal Winter.*** "When the last sun shatters and the snow falls crimson, the icy grasp of everwinter will claim the world, heralding an endless night."
4	***Final Eclipse.*** "The devourer swallows the sun, and the world will tremble with the birth of the harbinger. The tearless eyes of children shall weep as night collapses into oblivion."
5	***Forbidden Gate.*** "A fool shall break the lock upon the forgotten gate. Two lovers will usher in an age of despair and suffering."
6	***Veil of Dreams.*** "When the bride drops her veil, dreams will burn. When the darkness crests upon the world's edge, their ashes shall rise as nightmares and feast upon the threads of reality."

PCs must use skills to interpret the prophecy's significance, such as by deciphering a cryptic language, unraveling symbolic imagery, and seeking guidance from knowledgeable scholars or mystics who can shed light on its meaning. Once the prophecy is deciphered, the second part of the quest unfolds. Depending on the details, the PCs either work to thwart or to fulfill a prophecy. To determine the impact of the prophecy, consult the **Auspicious Prophecies** and **Ominous Prophecies** tables or choose something appropriate.

RESCUES

A rescue quest is an adventure or mission in which the primary objective is to liberate someone that has been captured or imprisoned against their will. This quest typically involves a heroic effort to locate and free the captive from their captors, who might be holding them for ransom, as a hostage, or for other nefarious purposes. The quest often requires the PCs to navigate dangerous terrain, overcome obstacles, and confront adversaries to reach their target and facilitate their

RESCUE MISSIONS

d12	Mission
1	***Abducted Royalty.*** A shadowy cabal kidnaps a beloved monarch and replaces them with a puppet ruler to further their ambitions. The PCs must brave treacherous wilderness and infiltrate the cabal's fortress, facing off against elite guards and uncovering a web of corruption and betrayal to rescue the monarch and restore their rightful rule.
2	***Beastmaster's Menagerie.*** A cruel beastmaster captures a menagerie of exotic creatures, including a rare and intelligent beast connected to the PCs. The party must infiltrate the beastmaster's infamous subterranean arena, defeat their savage minions, and liberate the captive creatures before being forced to fight to the death.
3	***Captive Oracle.*** A tyrannical ruler captures a sacred oracle, blessed with the gift of prophecy, in order to exploit their visions. The PCs must journey to the ruler's palace, outwit the guards, and free the captive oracle before the tyrant manipulates the prophecies to cause untold destruction.
4	***Distressed Adventurer.*** A trusted ally disappears while investigating a dangerous conspiracy. They are believed to have been captured and tortured for information, and the party must follow a trail of clues, navigate through the cursed necropolis, and find their comrade before it's too late.
5	***Elderly Mentor.*** The PCs' wise mentor is taken hostage by a ruthless crime lord seeking leverage over the party. The PCs must navigate a maze of city sewers, facing off against the crime lord's enforcers and uncovering a web of betrayal and deceit to rescue their mentor before it is too late.
6	***Errant Explorers.*** A group of explorers venture into a dungeon searching for fame and fortune, but they become trapped by hungry denizens. The PCs must undertake a rescue mission to save them.
7	***Gruesome Grimoire.*** An ambitious apprentice mage pilfers their master's spellbook and attempts to sell its secrets to a nefarious rival mage. The PCs must infiltrate the rival's sanctum, outwit the arcane defenses, and recover the grimoire.
8	***Haunted Prison.*** A haunted prison holds the spirits of those tortured and wrongfully imprisoned, including an innocent soul that awaits rescue from eternal torment. The PCs must brave the prison's spectral guardians and uncover the truth behind its dark history in order to free the innocent spirits and put their tortured souls to rest.
9	***Lost Expedition.*** An archaeological expedition exploring ancient ruins has gone missing and is believed to have been captured by the guardians of the ruins. The PCs must follow in their footsteps, braving traps, puzzles, and monsters to uncover the fate of the expedition members and rescue any survivors.
10	***Magical Creature in Chains.*** Poachers capture a mystical creature, seeking to exploit its magical properties for profit. The adventurers must track down the poachers, overcome their defenses, and free the creature.
11	***Sorceress's Apprentice.*** A demonic cult kidnaps the talented young apprentice of a powerful sorceress as a vessel for their fiendish patron. The PCs must navigate the forbidden forest and shadowy ruins to thwart the cult's plans and rescue the apprentice before darkness consumes them.
12	***Underworld Abduction.*** A loved one has been abducted by agents of the underworld and taken to the realm of the dead to be sacrificed in a dark ritual to empower a malevolent entity. The PCs must journey into the depths of the underworld, facing off against the tormented souls of the damned and overcoming trials of darkness to rescue the captives before it's too late.

escape to safety. To determine the details of the rescue quest, consult the **Rescue Missions** table or choose something appropriate.

REVELATIONS

Revelation quests revolve around uncovering secret lore or solving ancient mysteries, and dungeons and ruins often serve as backdrops for such quests. The revelation might involve the uncovering of lost magics, the truth about ancient bloodlines, the unknown tragedy that befell a sunken city, the recovery of an epic ballad's lost verse, or the lost password to open a treasured music box. Presented here are various elements common to revelation quests:

- ***Chamber of Reflection.*** Deep within the dungeon lies a chamber where ancient sages once communed with the spirits of nature. The PCs must attune themselves to the chamber's natural energies, meditating on its mysteries to unlock visions of the past, present, and future, revealing the secrets hidden within the dungeon's ancient stones.
- ***Forgotten Library.*** A dungeon houses the remnants of a once-grand library filled with long-lost knowledge. The PCs must explore the ruins, piecing together fragments of lore and unlocking the secrets of ancient civilizations, dead languages, and arcane rituals.
- ***Guardian of Memory.*** A powerful guardian tasked with protecting the memories of an ancient civilization resides within the dungeon. The PCs must overcome the guardian's challenges to access the vault of memories, where they will uncover the secrets of the civilization's rise and fall and the events that led to its demise.
- ***Labyrinth of Temporal Echoes.*** Echoes of past events reverberate through the dungeon's labyrinthine corridors. The PCs must attune themselves to these echoes, piecing together the fragmented memories of ancient inhabitants to unravel the secrets that unlock a time gate.
- ***Lost Ritual Chamber.*** Legends speak of a hidden ritual chamber within a dungeon where a long-forgotten cult performed ancient rites.
- ***Ruins of the Elders.*** The PCs must delve into the ruins of an ancient city built by an enigmatic cabal, deciphering the architecture, artwork, and inscriptions to uncover the secrets of the society, their technology, and the cataclysmic event that brought about their downfall.
- ***Spectral Archive.*** Spectral guardians protect an otherworldly archive that contains the memories and experiences of countless souls. The PCs must navigate the spectral realm, braving spiritual trials and confrontations, to access the archive and unlock its secrets.
- ***Tomb of the Ancients.*** A sunken ziggurat holds the tomb of a long-dead civilization's revered god-king. As PCs decipher hieroglyphics to reconstruct the details of the ruler's life, they uncover clues to an ancient murder mystery that led to the god-king's downfall.

TREASURE HUNTS

The primary objective of a treasure hunt quest is to retrieve a specific, important treasure. This could be anything, such as a mystical item imbued with powerful magic or a historical relic of great cultural importance. To complete the quest, the PCs must journey to and explore a lost or forgotten site, seeking the hiding spot of their target. Or perhaps the PCs must race to recover the recently discovered treasure before it falls into the hands of a rival faction.



The treasure's retrieval is a matter of utmost urgency. Create encounters that encourage the PCs to be careful and resourceful. To add pressure or motivation to the quest, ensure that failure to recover the treasure has direct consequences, such as empowering dark forces or destabilizing a region. For just the right treasure, consult the **Lost or Stolen** table or choose something appropriate.

LOST OR STOLEN

d12	Item
1	***Alchemist's Elixir.*** A rogue alchemist has stolen a potent elixir—supposedly capable of granting eternal life.
2	***Artifact of the Gods.*** An artifact of divine origin, gifted to mortals by the gods, has been lost for centuries in the depths of a forgotten temple.
3	***Crown Jewels.*** The crown jewels of a wealthy merchant prince, stolen during a brazen heist, are now scattered across the land.
4	***Emissary's Seal.*** The royal seal of an esteemed emissary, lost during a diplomatic mission gone awry, holds the key to averting war between rival kingdoms.
5	***Heart of the World.*** A mystical gemstone, known as the *Heart of the World*, is said to be able to sway the balance of nature itself. It was recently stolen by a cabal of dark druids.
6	***Key to Hell's Gates.*** A demon worshipping cult has stolen a mystical key capable of unlocking the gates of hell.
7	***Last Dragon Egg.*** The last remaining dragon egg, believed to hold the key to restoring dragonkind to the world, has been stolen by poachers.
8	***Lost Map.*** A rival band of adventurers has stolen a map that leads to a fabled treasure trove hidden deep within uncharted territory.
9	***Sacred Icon.*** Zealots have stolen a sacred icon of a long-forgotten religion, which is believed to hold the key to enlightenment.
10	***Sealed Reliquary.*** Cultists have unearthed a sealed reliquary that contains the essence of a fallen god.
11	***Stolen Crown.*** Thieves have stolen the kingdom's royal crown, which legitimizes the ruler's reign and is also imbued with ancient magic.
12	***Tome of Forbidden Knowledge.*** A grimoire containing dark and forbidden secrets has resurfaced, threatening to unleash untold chaos.

VILLAINS

A villain quest pits the PCs against a powerful adversary, such as a demi-lich, dragon, archmage, eldritch horror, fiend, or god. PCs typically begin such quests facing insurmountable odds, and as they gain experience, they increasingly face challenges that introduce them to the villain's minions and influence and to the evidence of the escalating threat. As the PCs advance, so does the villain and their plot, assuming increasingly greater influence over the game world.

Creating an Epic Villain. Motivation catapults a villain toward excess and obsession, transforming them into something epic, and this is often driven by underlying personality characteristics. To determine the villain's motivations and flaws, consult the **Epic Villain Motivations** and **Epic Villain Flaws** tables or choose something appropriate.





EPIC VILLAIN MOTIVATIONS

d6	Motivation
1	***Chaos Agent.*** The villain embodies mayhem. Their plots sow chaos and destruction, and they revel in the wake of ruin. The villain focuses all their efforts on ushering in an apocalyptic event.
2	***Immortality.*** The villain seeks immortality or transcendence, driven by a desire to escape their limitations and achieve godlike status. The villain focuses all their efforts on attaining power and knowledge to that end.
3	***Obsession.*** There is some person or creature, some item, some event, that the villain is obsessed with, and anything that gets in their way of that goal is nothing more than an obstacle or threat. The villain focuses all their efforts on finding/possessing/achieving the target of their obsession.
4	***Omnipotence.*** The villain seeks ultimate power or control over the world, driven by a thirst for dominance and supremacy. The villain focuses all their efforts on expanding their holdings and influence.
5	***Revenge.*** The villain nurtures a deep-seated pain and a resentment toward those who have wrong them. The villain focuses all their efforts on an elaborate plan to exact their vengeance.
6	***Twisted Justice.*** The villain suffers from the delusional belief that their vile actions serve a greater good. They see themselves as the appointed holy arbiter. The villain focuses all their efforts on enforcing its twisted sense of justice.

EPIC VILLAIN FLAWS

d4	Flaw
1	***Envy/Jealousy.*** The villain covets the wealth, power, or status of its adversaries, driving them to tear down anyone perceived as having what they want.
2	***Existential Crisis.*** The nihilistic villain grapples with their purpose and the meaning of their existence, and they desperately search for that meaning, often succumbing to violent rage or self-destructive despair.
3	***Fanaticism.*** The villain is a fanatic, willing to sacrifice anything and anyone to support their belief system. They fervently cling to their values, even in death.
4	***Fear/Insecurity.*** The villain harbors intense feelings of fear and inadequacy. They take aggressive measures to protect themselves from perceived threats and go to extreme lengths to display worthiness to followers and adversaries alike.

QUEST GIVERS

A quest giver is an NPC whose purpose is to assign quests. They are catalysts that help keep the narrative moving, providing motivation, direction, and goals, and that support the PCs by offering guidance, hints, or rewards to incentivize the completion of quests. Whether the wise mentor, desperate villager, enigmatic stranger, or influential leader, whether appearing once or having a recurring role, quest givers are vital to a healthy campaign.

DUNGEONEERING GUILDS

A dungeoneering guild is an organization of likeminded souls dedicated to the exploration and mapping of dungeons, ruins, natural caves, and similar locales, often dangerous and mysterious. Guild members, known as dungeoneers, are skilled adventurers who specialize in delving into the depths to uncover lost knowledge and treasures while also dealing with the various hazards and creatures that inhabit those places.

In addition to providing quests, the guild can provide access to resources, such as maps, equipment, training, and research. Additionally, the guild might serve as the broker for dungeon exploration contracts, connecting adventurers with clients that seek to hire them for specific expeditions. For some sample dungeoneering guilds and their objectives, consult the **Sample Dungeoneering Guilds** and **Guild Objectives** tables or choose something appropriate.

Joining a Guild. Many guilds are prestigious institutions, allowing membership only to those who can prove themselves worthy, whose skills can bolster the guild's reputation. So most reputable guilds require

prospective members to undergo an assessment or trial to evaluate their abilities and suitability for membership. The precise process might vary, depending on the specific guild and setting, but likely, it will relate to the guild's focus, such as demonstrating proficiency in combat, magic, crafting, or other relevant skills. Assessment might also include an interview or evaluation by guild leaders or senior members.

There are many benefits to be gained by membership:

- ***Advancement and Recognition.*** Members can advance their skills, reputation, and standing within the adventuring community. The guild recognizes members who demonstrate exceptional proficiency, bravery, and leadership with awards, titles, or promotions within the guild hierarchy.
- ***Mission Brokerage.*** They often act as intermediaries between adventurers and clients that seek assistance with dungeon-related tasks. Guild members can accept missions, quests, or contracts commissioned by individuals, organizations, or governments, ranging from exploration and mapping to artifact retrieval and monster hunting.
- ***Preservation of Knowledge and Artifacts.*** They are crucial in preserving and cataloging knowledge, artifacts, and historical treasures discovered during dungeon expeditions. Guild members might be required to document their findings, conduct archaeological surveys, and ensure valuable artifacts are safeguarded and protected from exploitation or destruction.
- ***Resource Sharing and Collaboration.*** They facilitate collaboration and resource-sharing among members, allowing adventurers to pool their knowledge, expertise, and resources to tackle the most challenging expeditions. Members can exchange information about dungeons, share maps and intel, and collaborate on missions to maximize their chances of success.



SAMPLE DUNGEONEERING GUILDS

d8	Guild
1	***Adventurer's Consortium.*** A mercenary guild renowned for its versatility and adaptability, they accept contracts for various tasks, including dungeon exploration, monster hunting, and artifact retrieval. With branches in major cities across the land, the consortium's members are skilled in various disciplines, making them capable candidates for just about any adventure.
2	***Brotherhood of the Underdark.*** Operating from their hidden stronghold deep underground, they specialize in delving into the deepest, most inaccessible caverns and labyrinths. With their extensive knowledge of all things subterranean, they seek to unearth ancient secrets while fending off the shadows.
3	***Darkwater Fellowship.*** A guild shrouded in mystery, they are rumored to specialize in exploring the ocean depths and sunken ruins. With their mastery of underwater survival and navigation, their members regularly brave the open sea in search of the unknown.
4	***League of Planar Explorers.*** A select group of adventurers versed in the mysteries of the multiverse, they specialize in exploring the boundless planes of existence in search of otherworldly treasures. With their mastery of planar and interdimensional travel, their members are regularly drawn beyond the realms of reason and into the unfathomable, casually braving the odd cosmic horror.
5	***Order of the Delvers.*** A renowned guild of dungeoneers, they are dedicated to exploring and mapping the most ancient of ruins, caverns, and dungeons. The guild operates from a secret location beneath a large metropolis and runs a vast network of skilled adventurers and scholars, which collaborate on expeditions to uncover the lost and forgotten.
6	***Ruin Seekers.*** They operate on the fringes of society, rugged adventurers and treasure hunters that scour war-torn landscapes, haunted ruins, and desolate wastelands in search of hidden riches. Despite their reputation as opportunists and mercenaries, their members are skilled at navigating dangerous terrain and recovering valuable artifacts.
7	***Society of Arcane Explorers.*** Founded by esteemed wizards and scholars, they investigate magical anomalies, enchanted ruins, and other mystical phenomena. With their knowledge of the arcane arts, members delve into ancient libraries, mystical tombs, and arcane sanctums in pursuit of magical artifacts and esoteric knowledge.
8	***Wayfarer's Guild.*** A diverse guild of adventurers from all walks of life, they dedicate themselves to exploring untamed wilderness and uncharted territories beyond civilization. They have chapters across the realm.

- ***Training and Education.*** One of the primary purposes of the guild is to provide training, education, and skill-development opportunities for aspiring adventurers. They typically offer members—sometimes for an additional fee or other consideration—downtime opportunities to learn skills, combat techniques, survival strategies, basic and advanced navigation, trap detection, and team building.

GUILD OBJECTIVES

d20	Objective
1	Address Environmental Hazards
2	Attack Threats
3	Colonize New Lands
4	Discover a Lost City
5	Discover New Spell Components
6	Find Fabled Artifacts
7	Find Forbidden Spells
8	Find Lost Lore
9	Find Prized Materials
10	Find Shrines of Forgotten Gods
11	Forge a Treaty
12	Map/Survey Uncharted Lands
13	Prove Existence of Creature/Item/Place
14	Recover Lost Resources
15	Recover Territories
16	Recruit Allies
17	Scout Trade Routes
18	Spy on Neighbors
19	Vanquish Powerful Monster
20	Wander



PATRONS

A patron is an influential NPC that can serve as the PCs' benefactor or sponsor and provide support, guidance, resources, and quests in exchange for their service and loyalty. The specific role of a patron can vary widely, depending on the game setting and campaign, but they typically fulfill one or more of the listed roles:

- ***Ally/Protector.*** They might serve as allies or protectors of the PCs, offering aid in times of need, such as sanctuary, healing, or even reinforcements during dangerous missions and intervening in political or social conflicts on the PCs' behalf.
- ***Faction Leader.*** They might lead or represent a powerful faction, guild, or secret society. Such a patron might recruit the PCs to join their cause, advance their agenda, and expand their interests through diplomacy, espionage, or warfare.
- ***Mentor.*** Some patrons act as mentors to the PCs, offering guidance, training, or advice to help them develop their abilities, knowledge, and skills.
- ***Plot Catalyst.*** Their deeds, agendas, or conflicts can provide fodder for the plot, driving the campaign's narrative, perhaps creating rivalries, dramatic twists, and revelations for the PCs.
- ***Quest Giver.*** They frequently send PCs on specific quests, which might involve retrieving items, defeating monsters, or solving mysteries, all in service to the patron's interests.
- ***Source of Resources.*** They often provide the PCs with access to resources, equipment, or facilities, even providing transportation, such as ships, mounts, or magical portals.



POWERFUL PATRONS

d20	Patron
1	***Ancient Dragon.*** An ancient dragon, slumbering in a hidden lair beneath the mountains, offers boons of wealth, knowledge, and power to those who dare awaken it from its ageless slumber, setting them on a quest to retrieve the lost artifacts needed to break the seals of its ancient prison.
2	***Arcane Archivist.*** A reclusive wizard, residing in a tower of ancient tomes and mystical artifacts, offers apprenticeships and access to a vast library of arcane knowledge in exchange for assistance in retrieving rare spellbooks, magical artifacts, and reagents.
3	***Celestial Patron.*** A divine being of light and righteousness, seeking champions to carry out its will in the mortal realm, bestows blessings and divine gifts while presenting quests to vanquish evil, aid the downtrodden, and spread the light of righteousness throughout the land.
4	***Crime Lord.*** A ruthless crime boss who controls the criminal underworld of a bustling city offers lucrative opportunities to engage in smuggling, theft, espionage, or assassination in exchange for wealth, favors, and protection.
5	***Cursed Noble.*** A once-mighty lord cursed by foul magic wants help breaking the curse and reclaiming their lost honor and fortune, offering quests to retrieve rare ingredients for a cure, uncover the origins of the curse, and confront the entity behind it all.
6	***Dread Pirate Captain.*** A seasoned pirate captain who commands a notorious crew of swashbucklers and cutthroats seeks to expand their crew for the plundering of treasure-laden ships and exploration of uncharted islands for the fame, fortune, and glory to be found on the high seas.
7	***Elder Druid.*** A wise and venerable druid who serves as a guardian of the natural world presents quests to protect endangered forests, cleanse corrupted lands, and thwart the schemes of those who would seek to exploit or despoil nature for personal gain.
8	***Eldritch Entity.*** A mysterious and otherworldly being from beyond the veil of reality offers forbidden magics and secrets from the stars while presenting quests to uncover ancient rituals, perform dark rites, and retrieve arcane artifacts.
9	***Elemental Archmage.*** A master of elemental magic who harnesses the power of fire, water, air, and earth seeks aid in restoring balance to the elements, presenting quests to quell elemental disturbances, recover lost artifacts, and confront elemental beings.
10	***Exiled Prince/Princess.*** A royal heir cast out by usurpers or enemies requires assistance gathering support and uncovering allies, reclaiming their birthright, and restoring order to their homeland.

For some sample patrons and their objectives, consult the **Powerful Patrons** table or choose something appropriate.

VICTIMIZED COMMUNITIES

A victimized community is any population that has suffered adversity, oppression, or hardship due to others, and this can provide the seed of countless quests, storylines, or PC motivations, highlighting themes of injustice, struggle, and resilience. Examples include directly protecting the community from foes, delivering them aid, or assisting them in efforts to rebuild. Interacting with the community can present moral dilemmas that challenge the PCs' values and beliefs, possibly necessitating careful consideration on how far they're willing to help, such as whether they should confront the perpetrators or not.

Exploitative or hostile forces that seek to harm communities can come in many different forms, such as marauding bandits, roaming monsters, rival factions, duplicitous tyrants, invading armies, or unscrupulous con artists. The struggles might also, at least in part, be longstanding and deeply rooted, perhaps involving the realities of living in harsh environments, facing discrimination or prejudice, or being stuck in the cycle of generational exploitation and poverty. Such beset, impoverished, or marginalized communities often lack the access to essential resources, infrastructure, or opportunities to alleviate their situation.

d20	Patron
11	***Fallen Paladin.*** A noble knight who has fallen from grace and seeks redemption through acts of heroism and selflessness needs capable companions to accompany them on quests to right past wrongs, vanquish evil, and uphold the principles of justice and righteousness.
12	***Fey Courtier.*** A mischievous sprite who serves as a messenger of a faerie court presents whimsical quests and challenges to gain the favor of the faerie queen, offering rewards of magical blessings, enchanted artifacts, and passage through the faerie realms.
13	***Hermetic Sage.*** A wise hermit studying the mysteries of the cosmos and unraveling arcane secrets presents quests to recover ancient tomes, decipher cryptic prophecies, and uncover the hidden truths of the multiverse in return for wisdom and insight.
14	***Mad Artificer.*** This brilliant, eccentric inventor, who creates wondrous contraptions and mechanical marvels in a workshop of wonders, requires assistance in testing inventions, retrieving rare components, and protecting the workshop from rival inventors and thieves.
15	***Mercenary Captain.*** A seasoned warrior who leads a band of mercenaries that specialize in protection, escort missions, and military campaigning offers employment and promises coin, glory, and camaraderie, assigning missions ranging from escorting caravans to storming enemy fortresses.
16	***Mystic Oracle.*** An enigmatic seer who dwells in a hidden sanctuary deep within the wilderness offers cryptic visions, prophecies, and quests that are promised to shape the fate of empires.
17	***Noble Lord.*** A wealthy and established noble with strange or even embarrassing tastes, such as craving restricted foods or dealing with an addiction or magical affliction, requires assistance maintaining their lifestyle and offers quests that promise access to the political stage and influence within it.
18	***Relic Collector.*** An eccentric collector obsessed with the acquisition of antiquities offers generous rewards and access to their vast collection while presenting quests to retrieve lost relics, ancient artifacts, and mystical treasures from forgotten tombs, ruins, and temples.
19	***Shadowy Spymaster.*** A master of espionage who pulls at the strings of intrigue and power within the realm requires assistance in their clandestine operations, offering sabotage, espionage, and assassination quests to further a clandestine agenda.
20	***Undead Mastermind.*** A powerful vampire who rules over a dark and decadent undead court offers immortality and power to those who serve them faithfully, presenting quests to gather blood, expand their circle of influence, and eliminate rivals in an eternal struggle for dominance.



WHITE KNIGHTS

There is a significant difference between saving someone and helping someone. Saving a community involves an urgent and life-threatening situation. A community requires saving if it is besieged by violent monsters, is burning down, or is actively facing a similar calamity that will kill everyone. If this isn't the case, if the threat isn't immediate, then the community doesn't require saving—but rather the help of an ally.

PCs attempting to save a community that only needs help, especially without listening to the input and needs of community members, have crossed an ethical threshold: "white knighting" is when heroes take it upon themselves to perform acts of heroism without consulting the needs, considerations, and abilities of those they see to help.

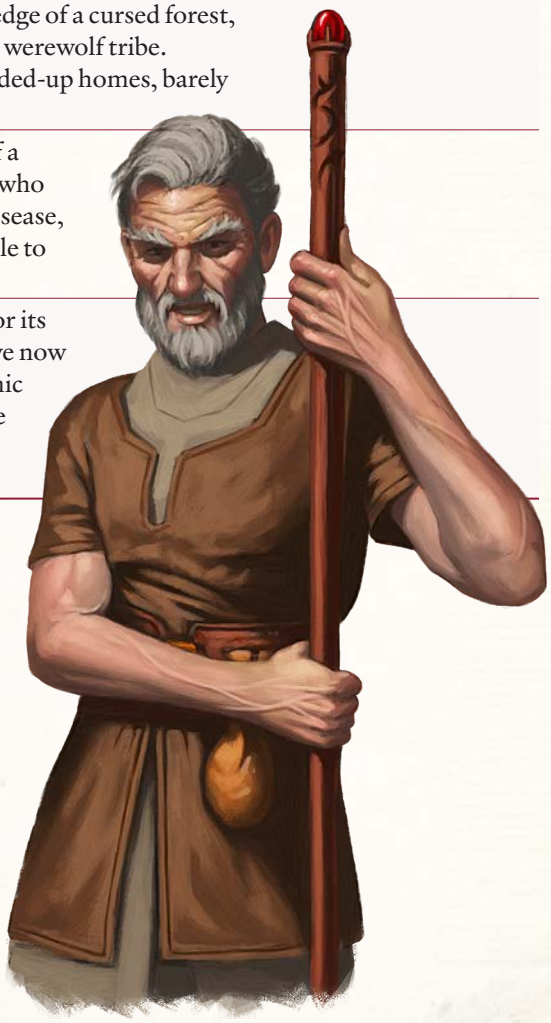
When presenting a victimized community in the narrative, consider the following options:

- The PCs are members of the community and help to establish the goals that involve the community.
- The PCs are allies, assisting at the request of community members.
- The PCs are mercenaries, hired by the community or outside patrons and neither allies nor saviors.

SAMPLE COMMUNITIES

d8	Community
1	***Besieged Fortress.*** A stalwart fortress built to withstand the onslaught of invading armies, Ironhold finds itself besieged by a relentless horde of goblin raiders who seek to plunder its riches and enslave its inhabitants. The siege stretches the defenders to their limits—their supplies dwindling and their morale faltering as they desperately await reinforcements.
2	***Blighted Village.*** In the looming shadow of Gray Mountain, a sinister curse plagues the small village of Shadowbrook, blighting the land and twisting its inhabitants into monstrosities. The villagers live in fear of the malevolent spirits that haunt the woods surrounding their village, even while unseen forces wither their crops and slaughter their livestock.
3	***Cursed Manor.*** The grand estate of Ravenwood Manor, within the dark heart of a foreboding forest, has been cursed by the restless spirits of those put to rest there. The halls echo with the anguished cries of the dead, and ghastly visions drive those who dare enter to the brink of madness. The few brave souls who remain trapped within its walls seek a way to lift the curse and put the spirits to rest.
4	***Indentured.*** High in the mountains, Ironcrest was once a haven for dwarven miners who toiled tirelessly in the depths of the earth to extract precious metals and gemstones. Recently, however, the settlement has fallen under the control of a ruthless dragon who demands tribute in the form of slave labor. The dwarves now toil in chains, their spirits broken and their hopes of freedom fading, as they dig ever deeper at the dragon's command.
5	***Plundered Temple.*** The Temple of Serenity provided sanctuary for weary travelers in need of guidance or solace from the goddess of peace. However, after marauding cultists stole its sacred relics and defiled its hallowed halls, the acolytes' faith has been shattered, and they do what they can to rebuild.
6	***Ravaged Hamlet.*** A prosperous farming community at the edge of a cursed forest, Grimwald is being regularly savaged in attacks by a roaming werewolf tribe. The villagers live in constant fear as they cower in their boarded-up homes, barely able to defend themselves as their fields go untended.
7	***Refugee Camp.*** A makeshift camp located on the outskirts of a war-torn kingdom, Hope's End shelters dozens of refugees who were displaced by the war. Those in the camp face hunger, disease, and the constant threat of marauding bandits as they struggle to rebuild their lives amidst the chaos.
8	***Sunken Village.*** Once a thriving coastal settlement known for its bustling harbor and prosperous fishing industry, Starry Cove now lies submerged beneath the waves, the victim of a catastrophic tsunami unleashed by a vengeful sea witch. The survivors are scattered farther inland or on nearby islands, eking out a meager existence while they attempt to rebuild.





Despite all this, victimized communities might still draw on their deep resilience, solidarity, and determination to overcome challenges. They might band together to resist oppression, defend their homes, or seek justice for past wrongs, rallying behind charismatic leaders, brave heroes, or visionary revolutionaries who inspire hope and courage.

For some sample victimized communities, consult the **Sample Communities** table or choose something appropriate.

MAPPING DUNGEONS

Mapping is a vital component of the game, providing a visual approximation of the events taking place. It estimates distances, whether between locations or combatants, and helps to establish the passage of time during travel or combat. It becomes an interface for how the players (and the GM) interact with the game, making one decision after another. Together with miniatures or other markers, maps can make for thrilling encounters. Indeed, tactically focused campaigns or sessions often benefit greatly from the ability to directly manipulate miniatures upon maps. Still, maps are no less important for story-driven games, making excellent props and visual aids to help players better envision the game world.

POINTS OF ACTION

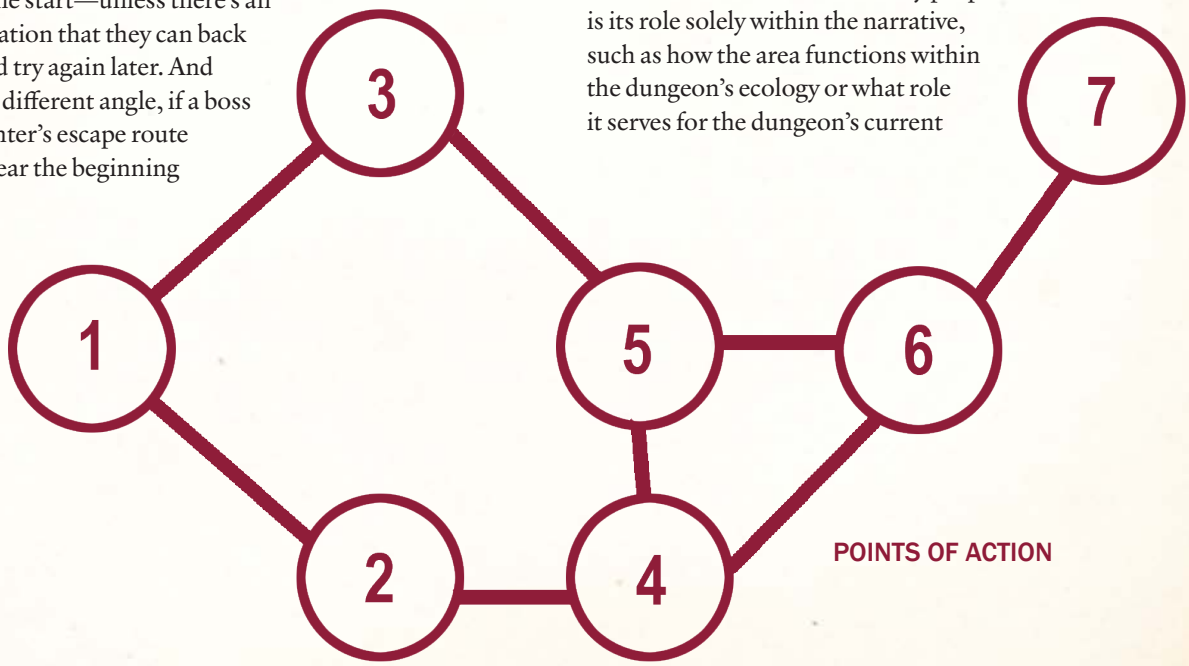
A point of action is a specific location where the PCs' arrival has been predetermined to change the narrative, so when the PCs arrive at a point of action, something happens. All non-random, planned encounters are considered points of action, including social encounters, rest areas, traps, hazards, and combat. All the map does is connect different points of action.

For dungeon maps, those points should connect in a way that makes sense while still offering the PCs options. Keep in mind, though, that certain limitations might be necessary to direct the flow of action and better support the narrative. For instance, the map should not intentionally allow the PCs direct access to climactic encounters or the final encounter right from the start—unless there's an expectation that they can back out and try again later. And from a different angle, if a boss encounter's escape route runs near the beginning of the dungeon, the potential of the PCs finding it and inadvertently bypassing the rest of the dungeon is there.

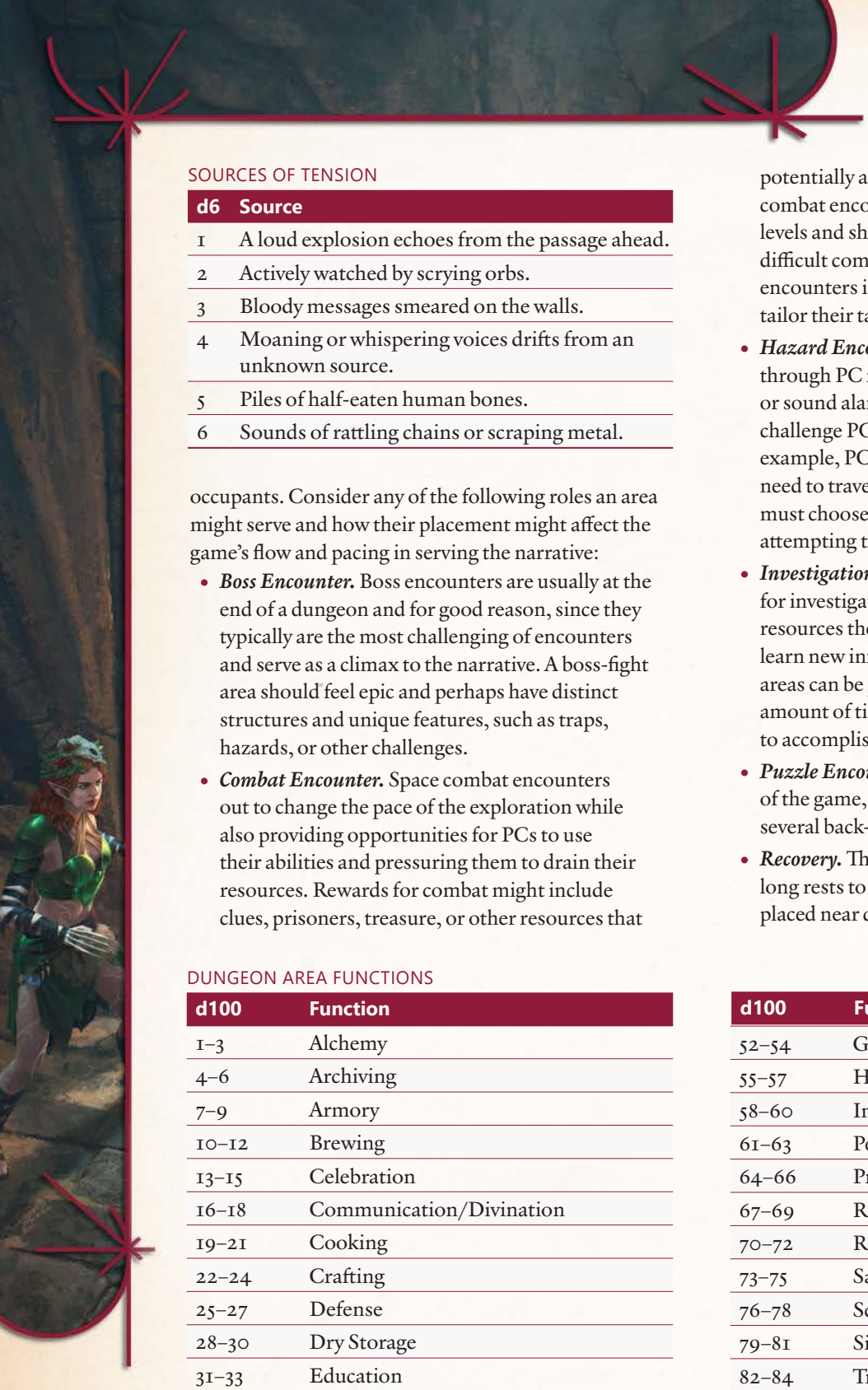
For an example of how points of action might connect, see the **Points of Action, Step 1** figure, which maps out the flow of a series of points of action. The numbered circles represent individual points of action, in this case areas within a dungeon, and the connecting lines represent the passages connecting them. Those areas aren't defined in terms of size or description, and distances between them are only vaguely implied, but this simplified map does clearly show the progression of the dungeon delve and allows for player choice during exploration. Listed is a key for use with the figure:

- ***Area 1: Entrance Hall.*** Introduction room. Sets the tone. Brief combat encounter with guardians.
- ***Area 2: Orrery.*** Puzzle encounter with a time constraint. Provides clues about **Area 6**.
- ***Area 3: Laboratory.*** Combat encounter with creatures possessing secrets about **Area 6**.
- ***Area 4: Common Area.*** Combat encounter with minions, which eventually flee to warn boss monster in adjacent chamber.
- ***Area 5: Dry Storage.*** Trap encounter weakens PCs, burning health resources, but also provides key to **Area 7**.
- ***Area 6: Living Quarters.*** Challenging combat encounter with boss monster.
- ***Area 7: Library.*** Secret treasure room with a hidden exit. Possible plot hooks for future exploration.

The purpose of an area is always twofold. Its primary purpose is to provide a space for the PCs to interact with the narrative. Its secondary purpose is its role solely within the narrative, such as how the area functions within the dungeon's ecology or what role it serves for the dungeon's current



POINTS OF ACTION



SOURCES OF TENSION

d6	Source
1	A loud explosion echoes from the passage ahead.
2	Actively watched by scrying orbs.
3	Bloody messages smeared on the walls.
4	Moaning or whispering voices drifts from an unknown source.
5	Piles of half-eaten human bones.
6	Sounds of rattling chains or scraping metal.

occupants. Consider any of the following roles an area might serve and how their placement might affect the game's flow and pacing in serving the narrative:

- ***Boss Encounter.*** Boss encounters are usually at the end of a dungeon and for good reason, since they typically are the most challenging of encounters and serve as a climax to the narrative. A boss-fight area should feel epic and perhaps have distinct structures and unique features, such as traps, hazards, or other challenges.
- ***Combat Encounter.*** Space combat encounters out to change the pace of the exploration while also providing opportunities for PCs to use their abilities and pressuring them to drain their resources. Rewards for combat might include clues, prisoners, treasure, or other resources that potentially aid in exploring the dungeon. Different combat encounters should present varying challenge levels and should include easy, average, and difficult combats. Consider adding difficult combat encounters in areas where PCs are better able to tailor their tactics.
- ***Hazard Encounter.*** Use hazard encounters to burn through PC resources, slow their progression, or sound alarms. Place hazards where they best challenge PCs to examine their overall strategy. For example, PCs seeking a more direct route might need to traverse a hazardous structure, so they must choose between taking a longer, safer route or attempting the faster but more precarious path.
- ***Investigation/Research.*** Areas with opportunities for investigation or research contain information or resources the PCs need to complete their objectives, learn new information, or clarify the unknown. Such areas can be placed anywhere but consider first the amount of time that would be required for the PCs to accomplish what's needed.
- ***Puzzle Encounter.*** Puzzle encounters slow the pace of the game, so they can provide some respite after several back-to-back combat encounters.
- ***Recovery.*** These areas allow PCs to take short or long rests to recover health and spells and should be placed near difficult encounters. A dungeon delve is

DUNGEON AREA FUNCTIONS

d100	Function
1–3	Alchemy
4–6	Archiving
7–9	Armory
10–12	Brewing
13–15	Celebration
16–18	Communication/Divination
19–21	Cooking
22–24	Crafting
25–27	Defense
28–30	Dry Storage
31–33	Education
34–36	Feasting
37–39	Food Preparation
40–42	Food Storage
43–45	Gardening
46–48	Gathering
49–51	Government
52–54	Guarding
55–57	Hatchery/Nursery
58–60	Imprisoning
61–63	Personal Quarters
64–66	Protection
67–69	Research
70–72	Rituals
73–75	Sacrifice
76–78	Scrying
79–81	Signaling
82–84	Training/Weapon Storage
85–87	Treasury
88–90	Trials
91–93	Waste
94–96	Weapon Making
97–99	Worship
100	Roll Twice (Combine Results)

made easier by adding places to rest or more difficult by removing them.

- ***Social Encounter.*** A social encounter occurs when the PCs engage with NPCs without fighting. Though any discourse holds the potential to turn violent, the intent is to present the option to have a non-violent exchange. This can be encouraged by offering greater rewards than from the equivalent fight, such as an exchange of goods or information or the gaining of allies.
- ***Tension.*** Areas that build tension evoke fear and anticipation primarily from narrative elements. They sometimes also provide plot hooks or treasures, but their primary purpose is either to allow PCs to consider their actions before proceeding or to stage clues about upcoming encounters. For some sample narrative elements of tension, consult the **Sources of Tension** table or choose something appropriate.

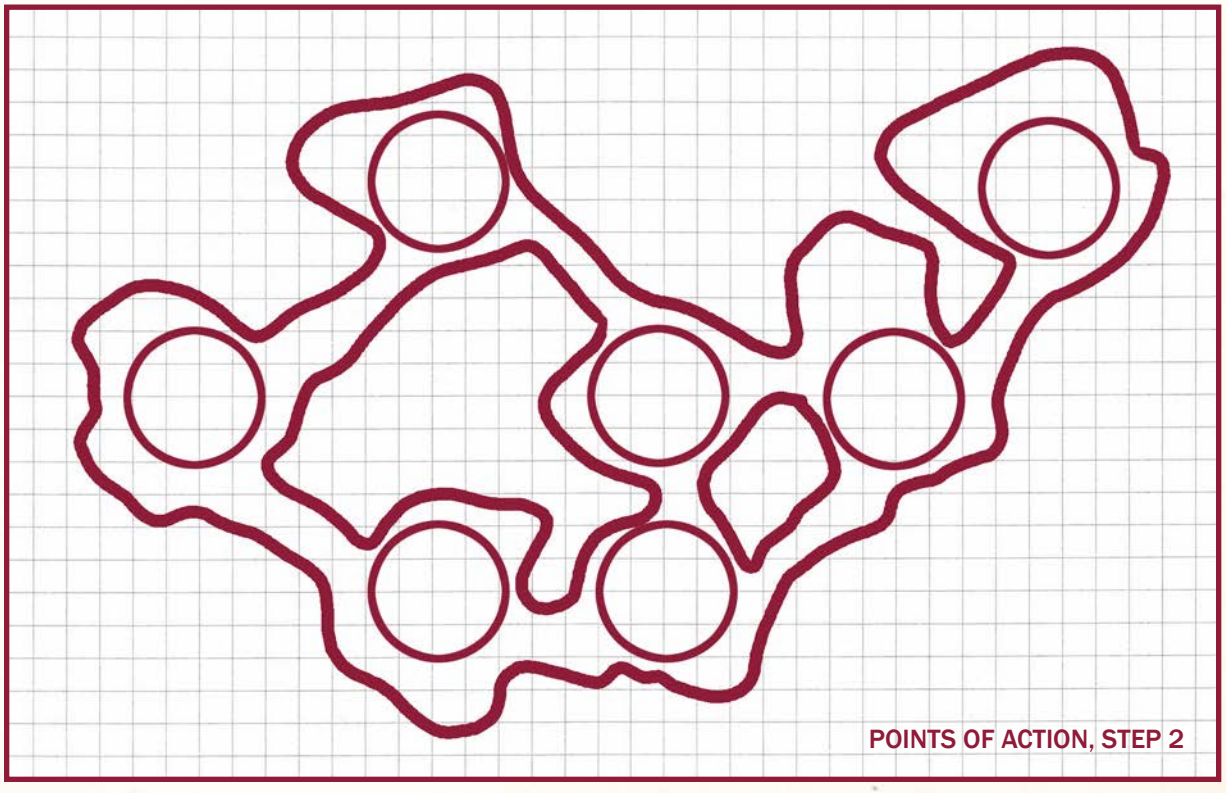
When determining an area's function, consider its context by asking some questions. Is it a natural formation or was it built by intelligent creatures? If the latter, who created it, and what purpose did it serve? Does it serve the same purpose now? How old is it? How many others have made use of the area? For a random assortment of dungeon areas, consult the **Dungeon Area Functions** table or choose something appropriate.

MORE DETAILED MAPS

The distance between areas on a map can significantly affect the PCs' actions. The closer any given two linked areas are, the less time PCs have to recover between encounters, specifically combat encounters that burn health and spells.

Considering our evolving dungeon map (see the **Points of Action, Step 1** figure), a scale would be especially helpful, and to that end, overlaying the map with a grid makes it much easier to measure distances. Alternatively, arbitrary or even non-standard measurements can be set simply by labeling the lines connecting the points of action. For example, the distance between **Areas 1** and **2** might be labeled as 300 feet and the distance between **Areas 6** and **7** labeled as a quarter mile, despite both lines being approximately the same length on the map. Arbitrary measurements can be used on almost any map, even published ones. For example, a staircase taking up 15 feet on a graph map might be deemed to be a switchback staircase that descends 50 feet into the earth before it reaches the next level, or the lava-tube corridors depicted on a battlement might be deemed longer than actually shown.

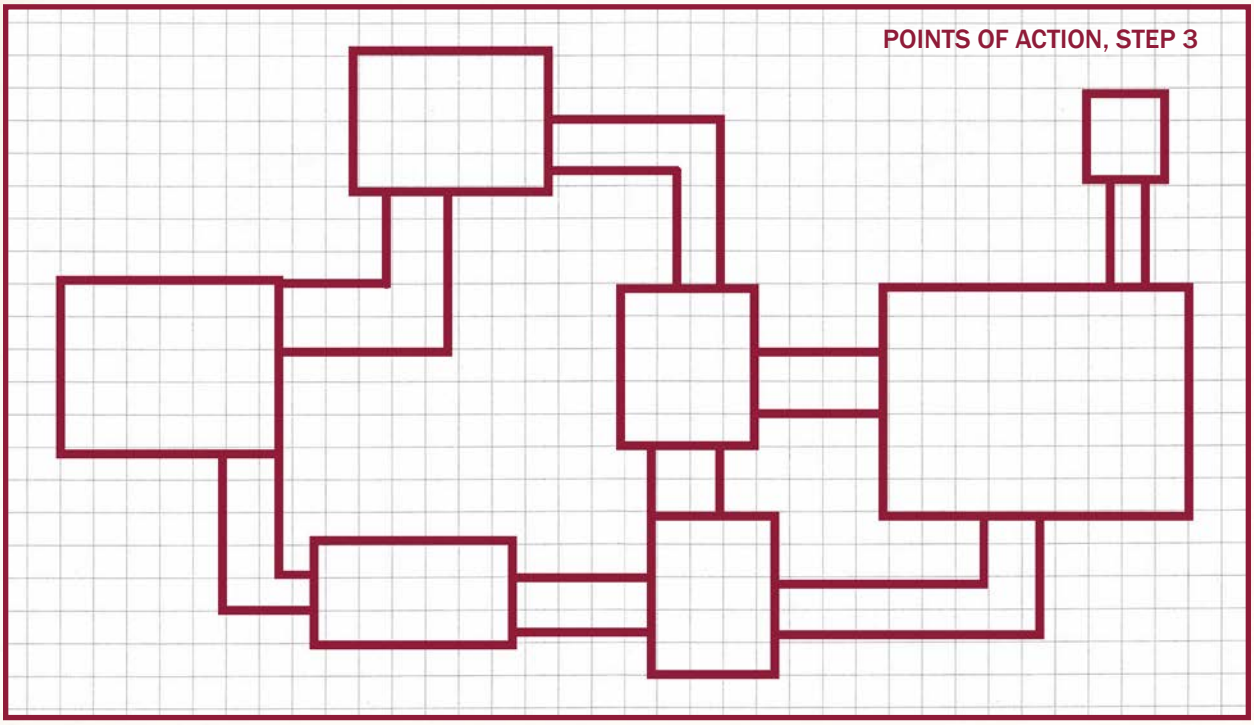
Most maps are drafted on either a square or hex grid to allow for specific and detailed measurements, which can be especially helpful when tracking PC and NPC



POINTS OF ACTION, STEP 2

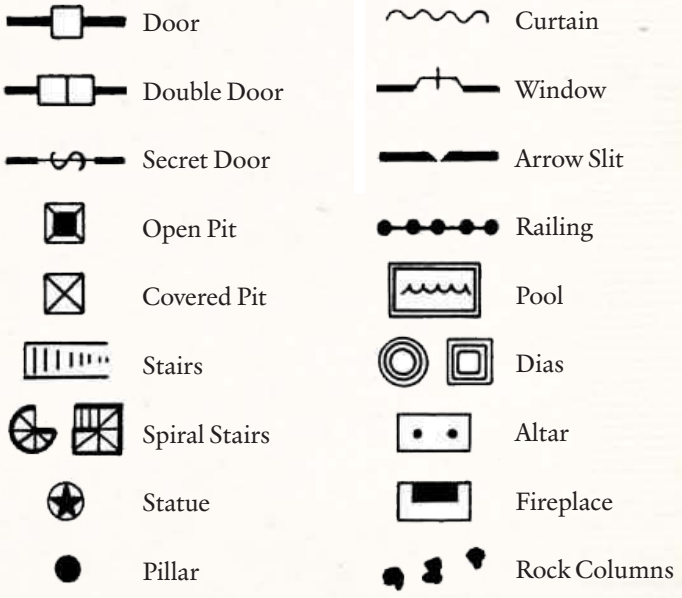
positions in battle and when tracking time during overland travel. A standard battle map uses 1-inch squares to represent the 5-foot-square area occupied by a Medium creature, and dungeon overview maps typically use 1 square to represent either a 5- or 10-foot-square area. The easiest way to get started making a map is to start with a flowchart map (see the **Points of Action, Step 1** figure) and then superimpose that on a grid and sketch in the areas and connecting passages (see the **Points of Action, Step 2** figure).

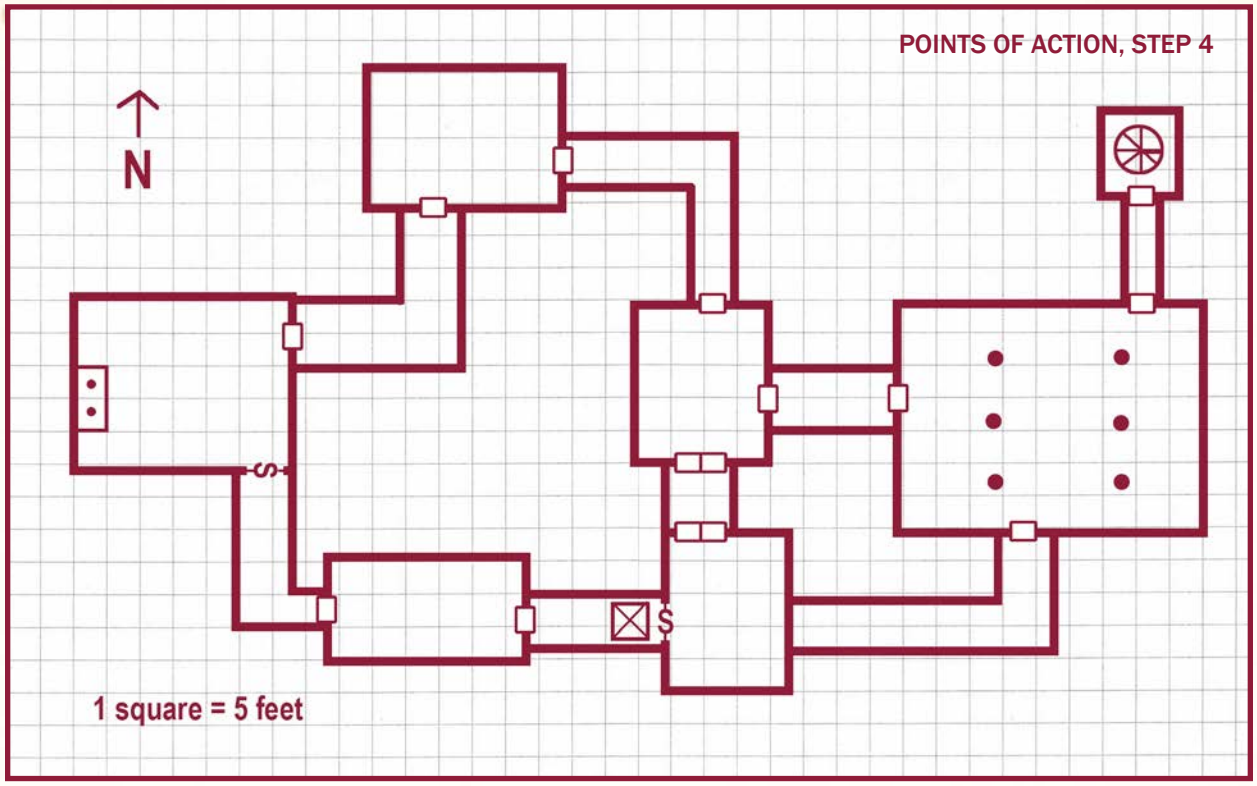
With that done, the most appropriate scale for this map is probably 1 square per 10-foot-square area. The added lines showcase a natural cave structure with areas and passages of various sizes. However, going further and tracing that same map on the graph using a straight edge creates a more deliberate dungeon design, which might instead use a scale of 1 square per 5-foot-square area (see the **Points of Action, Step 3** figure).



Keys and Symbols. With a nearly final map in hand, it is important to consider the composition of each area. The first version of the map (see the **Points of Action, Step 1** figure) shows the simplest way to key a map: the rooms are numbered, and room descriptions for each are placed in a key next to the map. However, using keyed map symbols can make it even easier to see the contents of a room at a glance. A basic key identifies common structures, such as doors (and secret doors), stairs, windows, and other portals or items such as benches, tables, chairs, altars, curtains, and statues (see the **Points of Action, Step 4** figure).

For a random assortment of useful features that might be placed in an area and keyed on a map, consult the **Common Dungeon Features** table or choose something appropriate.





COMMON DUNGEON FEATURES

d12	Doors and Passages
1	Bridge
2	Cave Entrance
3	Door, Entrance
4	Door, Exit
5	Hole
6	Ramp
7	Secret Door
8	Spiral Staircase
9	Stairs (Down)
10	Stairs (Up)
11	Trapdoor
12	Window

d12	Fixtures and Furniture
1	Bed
2	Bookcase
3	Brazier/Lantern
4	Candelabra
5	Chair/Couch
6	Desk
7	Mirror
8	Shelves
9	Table, Dining
10	Throne
11	Torch Sconce
12	Wardrobe

d6	General Features
1	Altar
2	Chasm
3	Columns
4	Fountain
5	Magic Portal
6	Statue

d6	Structures (for Multiple Levels)
1	Balcony
2	Pillar
3	Pool
4	Ruins
5	Sarcophagus
6	Well

d8	Containers and Objects
1	Chest
2	Font
3	Offering Bowl
4	Potion Vial
5	Scroll Case
6	Strongbox
7	Treasure Chest
8	Vault

d6	Imprisonment and Torture Features
1	Cages/Cells
2	Catherine Wheel
3	Coffin
4	Hanging Chains
5	Iron Maiden
6	Pillory/Stocks

d10	Structural Features
1	Alcove/Niche
2	Boulder/Rubble
3	Grate
4	Hidden Compartment
5	Hole
6	Pillar
7	Scaffolding
8	Skylight/Vent
9	Walls, Crumbling
10	Walls, Moss-Covered

d12	Hazards and Traps
1	Acid Pool
2	Collapsing Ceiling
3	Crevasse
4	Falling Boulder Trap
5	Glyph Trap
6	Incendiaries
7	Poison Dart Trap
8	Pressure Plate
9	Spiked Pit
10	Swinging Blade Trap
11	Toxic Gas Cloud
12	Tripwire

d8	Traces and Signs
1	Abandoned Campsite
2	Animal Tracks
3	Bloodstains
4	Bone Pile
5	Drag Marks
6	Footprints
7	Mysterious Symbol (Unidentified)
8	Skull

d6	Environmental Features
1	Cistern/Lake
2	Crystals
3	Lava/Magma
4	Quicksand
5	Strange Fungus/Plant
6	Waterfall

d10	Magical and Mystical Features
1	Arcane Sigil
2	Cursed Object
3	Elemental Symbol
4	Lost Artifact
5	Magic Circle
6	Magic Item
7	Phylactery
8	Portal
9	Runes
10	Strange Device



HEX MAPS

As described in **Chapter 2**, a hex map uses a hexagonal grid to represent the terrain. While typically associated with mapping large territories, such as wilderness or sprawling ruins, hex maps can also depict smaller areas, using the same scales as square maps. Hex grids are particularly useful for mapping caves and caverns where various rooms and passages do not fall neatly onto the square grid pattern—as the hexagonal shape more naturally lends itself to less rigidly aligned and more highly interconnected maps. It can simplify mapmaking for some, allowing for a more intuitive design than on square grids, whether they're being prepared ahead of time or drawn on the fly.

Hex maps also offer a more natural representation of movement than square maps because the arrangement of hexes more closely accommodates diagonal movement. The tactical depth provided by a hexagonal grid also allows PCs to more effectively visualize positioning and cover, encouraging more dynamic combat encounters.

ISOMETRIC MAPS

An isometric map is a three-dimensional (3D) depiction of a space (such as a cave system, dungeon, or ruins) in two dimensions, creating the illusion of depth and providing a more detailed and "true-to-life" depiction of the space. While this kind of mapping requires more precision and effort to design, it has distinct benefits over standard two-dimensional mapping.

A 3D visualization of a dungeon layout, for instance, provides a more realistic depiction than that of a traditional bird's-eye-view map. The map more easily allows for the identification of elevation changes, architectural details, and spatial relationships between rooms and corridors. The 3D perspective also makes it easier for players to understand the relationship between the PCs and their environment, making it easier to navigate—especially in complicated 3D environments—to plan tactical actions, and to avoid getting lost or disoriented. PCs will always make poor decisions and still be able to get lost—that's part of the appeal of dungeon delving—but it's not fun when the game drags to a halt because of an inadequate description for a complicated space.

Isometric maps also make it easier to run games, effectively displaying key elements, such as landmarks, traps, secret passages, and hidden treasures, and easier to describe important details to players clearly and efficiently. They also look really cool and, if needed, can be shown to the players as visual aids.

RESKINNING MAPS

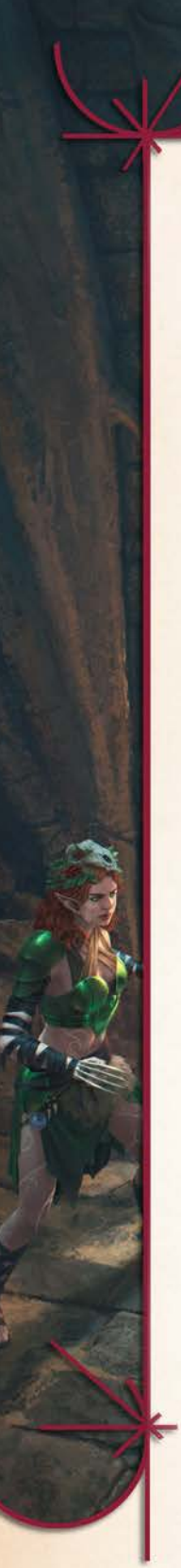
Another technique is the repurposing of existing maps: modifying the appearance, theme, or details to fit a new context. This process is also known as reskinning and can save time during game prep. It typically requires minimal effort, relying only on where points of action are in the new scenario. This practice reduces the need to create brand-new maps and other assets and can help develop consistency within the game world. Using familiar layouts and structures, players begin to recognize recurring elements and motifs, developing a sense of continuity across different locations. Each map might only need a few new unique details and elements each time to enhance the gaming experience.

Another form of reskinning involves a "cut-and-paste" map design in which premade sections or components of the map are combined to form a larger map. This method involves selecting individual rooms, corridors, and other features from existing maps and arranging them in a new configuration to create a unique layout. Cut-and-paste mapping requires minimal technical skill or artistic ability since it can use pre-existing components without the need for complex software or artistic talent, and even while using premade sections, maps can still be customized to fit specific needs. Published map components are readily available in various formats, including printed tiles and digital or online resources.

MAPPING ON THE FLY

PCs sometimes break away from the main adventure and head into locations that haven't been prepared yet. This unexpected change of direction then requires extending the existing map—or creating a new one—spontaneously in order to be able to continue with the game. So locations and points of action are added to the map in real time based on the PCs' actions. On-the-fly mapping allows for unparalleled flexibility to respond to unexpected player decisions, and the map evolves organically and unpredictably, ramping up the excitement and tension and encouraging creative problem-solving.

Though potentially exhausting, this type of mapping encourages spontaneity and creativity in both the players and the GM, and it allows for experimentation with new challenges and story elements. The tone and pacing can be adapted as needed, as can the challenge level, introducing or modifying the adventure to maintain the players' engagement.



MAPMAKING RESOURCES

Fortunately, there are a ton of resources for maps, whether purchasing published maps online or making your own. Most major virtual tabletop services include map-drafting tools or have them available as plug-ins. And of course, pencil and paper also work just fine.

Creating the layout in real time like this also blurs the lines between the storytelling and the players' experience, enabling truly immersive moments. At a minimum, players can now passively participate in the design of the dungeon, making decisions that are then responded to by the GM. But it's not a stretch for the players to have a more active role in shaping the environment, taking on some of the GM's workload. This might look like enabling the players to decide on some of the elements in an area, for instance, such as declaring that a room is flooding, putting both the PCs and their foes at a similar disadvantage, or else providing offsetting boons or setbacks to each side.

GMs who prefer improvising their sessions become very good at on-the-fly mapping. It is more efficient than preparing detailed maps in advance, and those who prefer this style claim it allows them to focus more on running the game and engaging with the players.

DESIGNING ROOMS

For the purposes of this section, it's first important to define the term *room*: any area within a dungeon, accessible by other areas, where encounters might take place. Each such room should have a purpose, and while one might typically think of the room as a staging ground for encountering a band of angry kobolds, for instance, an empty room should equally have a purpose. Empty rooms might create suspense or tension, provide an area to rest, or offer a position of strategic advantage. Now create a point of action (see **Mapping**) when designating the room.

Then, outfit the room with a theme.

ROOM THEMES

When drafting a dungeon layout, make an effort to clarify the purpose of each room and how it affects the adventure's flow and pacing. This might be specific to the narrative, such as guard rooms, sleeping chambers, or crypts, but it might also just refer to the challenges and rewards it offers the PCs. A room might have more than one theme, but even then, one of them is typically dominant. Preparing a variety of themed rooms creates a more dynamic and memorable dungeon.

MONSTER LAIR

A monster lair serves as the home to a creature and possibly others of its kind, such as a mate or young, and maybe even additional creatures of some other type, perhaps living communally or parasitically. PCs entering such an area should immediately sense a change in the atmosphere—perhaps a musky aroma or stagnant air—thematic elements that make the PCs feel like the outsiders they are. A classic example is an abundance of spiderwebs, a tell-tale sign of a looming battle with one or more aggressive, poisonous foes. Typically, lair encounters place the PCs at odds with a monstrous adversary, which is then resolved with combat.

Establish an immersive theme for the area the PCs can interact with, allowing them to speculate on the nature of whatever lives here. Weave tell-tale signs of habitation and create opportunities for the PCs to use their abilities while inspecting and interpreting the area: perhaps some strewn tools, broken weapons, gnawed bones, a cold or smoldering campfire, shards of pottery, or a moldy backpack that contains a traveler's journal or map. Add a more personal element (to the creature), such as an egg sac, hive, nest, or webbing, as appropriate. Don't, however, explain the lair; simply describe, indirectly implying that this might be a creature's territory.

Presented here are some additional considerations when designing lairs:

- ***Dung.*** Dung, guano, scat—a creature's excrement often litters nearby passages and unoccupied sections surrounding its lair. Some creatures, however, won't make a distinction and will just poop wherever they're standing, like birds. Alternatively, a creature might use its dung (or urine or musk) to mark or even decorate its territory. Consider allowing the PCs to use their skills to identify what sort of creature might live here, what it might eat, or if it has notable characteristics, based on the dung.

- ***Food and Water.*** A tell-tale indicator of possible life is the proximity of food and water, which are essential for many lifeforms. Imply the presence of a nearby lair by placing storage receptacles or other evidence of use near bodies of water, perhaps tracks that lead to and from the water or an artifact of its use, such as buckets or pottery to collect water, fishnets, or a makeshift dam. Elsewhere, perhaps there are small rodent traps or obviously cultivated fungi gardens.
- ***Observers.*** The lair's primary inhabitant might not live alone. Consider placing small verminous familiars or skittish minions, covertly studying PCs until they are spotted and flee. Or perhaps the creature's young or various opportunistic creatures that survive off the creature, either while going unnoticed or while providing a service, like keeping the lair free of pests.
- ***Tracks.*** Tracks provide information about the type, number, and size of creatures that inhabit an area. PCs skilled in tracking might glean even more information, such as patterns that reveal hunting practices, favored ambush sites, or the creature's activities. While footprints are one common track type, consider using different identifiers, such as a trail of blood from carried-away prey, scat, chalk marks, slime trails, molts, scratches from claws or from dragged items, or soot marks from torches on a ceiling.
- ***Warning Signs.*** Carvings, pictographs, or icons inscribed in the lair and its surroundings might serve to warn trespassers or to project dominance. Consider providing the PCs with cryptic clues by placing half-eroded warning inscriptions on walls from previous adventurers or, perhaps, ominous runes or foul images painted in ocher and blood—perhaps even three-dimensional pieces, such as crude scarecrows, piked heads, flayed skins, or bone sculptures.





NARRATIVE TRIGGER

A narrative trigger reveals something about the narrative, such as the building of the dungeon, its former inhabitants, or some hidden purpose. The decor or other physical clues or remains might also reveal new mysteries or further existing ones. A narrative trigger often relies on successfully recovering and interpreting clues within the area, but even if most of the clues lie elsewhere, this is the last bit, revealing the narrative twist.

An investigation and subsequent interpretation of the trigger might cause the PCs to change their approach to a specific encounter or rethink challenges in the dungeon. For example, in an evil temple, they might find out angels built the dungeon to imprison members of their own order who had fallen from the path of righteousness or, preparing to face a terrifying guardian, the PCs might learn that killing the guardian will unleash a worse fate, such as triggering the massive collapse of the central structure.

PUZZLE ROOM

A puzzle room challenges the PCs' intellect. These should be designed for players who like such challenges, not necessarily just the PCs. Make an effort to provide a logical reason for the puzzle's existence, or it might fall flat. Puzzles are especially effective when the players have the time to fully consider it, making their success feel well earned. What lies beyond the puzzle could be almost anything, such as a secret vault of treasure or unimaginable secrets locked away for everyone's safety. A puzzle might also involve serious risk with failure to solve it correctly resulting in injury or death.

LESS IS MORE

Only provide the players with enough information to give a general idea of their surroundings—and only that which would be obvious to the senses upon entering. Too much information becomes confusing, can easily derail from the objective at hand, and detracts from the players' agency. It's far more satisfying when players feel supported in asking for more details as they need them. For example, describing a room as a workshop allows a player to ask if there's a hammer in the room. Proactively listing all the tools available would be less engaging and ultimately less useful or interesting.

However, when the clock is ticking in an adventure, consider challenging the PCs with a puzzle that threatens to hinder their ability to complete their goals. Perhaps success reveals the safe path across the area floor, through a magical effect, or into the sealed room.

QUANDARY

An area's trappings or its very nature might present innate ethical or moral dilemmas or existential crises for the PCs. This is commonly used to foreshadow important events or revelations in the narrative, to build tension, and to add depth to the roleplaying experience.

Presented here are some additional considerations when designing quandaries:

- ***Art.*** Thought-provoking paintings or sculptures depict contentious scenes or reprehensible ideas. These artworks might stimulate introspection and discussion about how personal beliefs align or clash with the views presented.
- ***Contrasting Beliefs.*** Excerpts from the sacred texts of a religion followed by one or more of the PCs cover the walls. Several important passages contradict one another, raising questions about authenticity and interpretation and about the diversity of religious beliefs, potentially challenging their faith.
- ***Cultural Relativism.*** The PCs uncover detailed accounts of the cultural practices of those who once lived in the ruins they're exploring. Upon initial interpretation, the practice appears morally questionable, but they encounter descendants who retain many of these practices and values and must confront their own reactions to these customs.
- ***Dark Past.*** An area bears inscriptions, pictographs, or carvings that reveal a society was built upon the systemic inequality and discrimination of various populations within the society.
- ***Environmental Crisis.*** Features of the area, such as an active fault, toxic chemical compounds, or mutating magic, threaten one or more of the region's natural resources. The PCs must consider how their actions might impact the region's environmental stability and sustainability.
- ***Influence.*** The PCs are thrown into a situation where they must decide how to treat a given population and if they can or should influence a particular situation that arises, such as whether to defend the creatures' autonomy against an oppressor or to recognize a creature's previously unsuspected sentience.

- ***Religiosity.*** Religious icons or symbols from two or more faiths adorn the chamber, all coexisting in a visually striking but potentially conflicting arrangement. Statues, paintings, and artifacts from different religions share the same space, perhaps suggesting a religious pluralism or even that the opposing deities are merely dual manifestations of a single deity.
- ***Resources.*** The PCs find several half-starved prisoners, weak and sickly and begging for freedom, and must help keep them alive while trying to liberate them.
- ***Weapon.*** The PCs must consider the ramifications of recovering a powerful weapon for an elderly patron whose many heirs hold opposing views. All have an equal opportunity to inherit the weapon, prompting potential debate over autonomy, accountability, and unintended consequences.

SAFE PLACE

A safe place provides the PCs with an area where they can rest and recover from injuries. Perhaps it is also easy to defend, provides for multiple escape routes, protects against scrying, or is secured behind sturdy doors. Determine as needed how long PCs might be able to avoid danger based on the relative protection provided by the room. The PCs can also hide extra gear, supplies, treasure, or artifacts in such a safe space.

The area might also serve a secondary purpose, depending on the narrative and the PCs' needs. Such a space might provide a location to meet in private, to carefully review maps or a magic tome, to shake unwanted pursuers, or to perform covert activities.

SUPPLY CACHE

A supply cache lets the PCs restock essential supplies, such as food and water, equipment, tools, and ammunition and weapons—even useful knowledge—increasing their chance of both success and survival. Generally, only provide enough supplies to reward scavengers with a slight advantage on one or two future challenges in the same dungeon. Thematically, the recovered supplies should fit the context of the location and might take the form of armories, cellars, forges, kitchens, laboratories, libraries, pantries, and workrooms.

Place supply caches near areas where the PCs might need something specific, which they might not otherwise have, or perhaps with materials to help them compensate for challenges they are unprepared or unready to face, such as a couple barrels of black powder. Take care when placing items essential to the narrative in such caches, for the PCs might overlook them as unnecessary, but if the items stand out enough, perhaps they'll remember them later and return, such as the odd breathing devices, which they saw earlier, when they encounter gas-filled chambers later.

ROOM FEATURES

Features are what make dungeon rooms interesting and challenging, rather than just vacant spaces where monsters sometimes lair, waiting to be slain, or where treasure just passively accumulates, just waiting to be hauled away. Features add complexity, mystery, and danger to dungeon exploration, and they should be used liberally but with some thought to the final intent of a room. While features might include just about anything—whether mundane or magical, from furniture to deific power nodes—the categories discussed here share one important element: they provide an obstacle to exploration. Such obstacles can be broken down into four main categories: curses, diseases, hazards, and traps. See **Chapter 4** for more information on the mechanical particulars of each, including many examples. For now, consider them generally for the purposes of designing dungeon rooms.

CURSES

Curses have several unique elements that make them different and, in some cases, trickier than other dungeon room features, so when designing a curse for a dungeon room, give it some extra consideration. Planning exactly how it works ahead of time can make it more exciting and potentially stave off gaffes later.

Triggers. Curses require some kind of specific behavior on the part of the cursed before they activate. This could be simple and straightforward, such as standing in a certain spot, or it could be more subtle and complex, such as being determined by heredity. Not every PC who enters a cursed locale necessarily becomes afflicted. Curse triggers can be quite varied with regard to type and specificity:

- Breaking the seal of a chamber or vessel.
- Failing to offer a sacrifice or prayer.
- Performing an action the curse creators considered blasphemous.
- Reading aloud from a forbidden text.
- Removing an item from a specific location.
- Slaying a sacred guardian.
- Spilling the mysterious contents of a vessel.
- Viewing a relic forbidden to mortal sight.



Secrecy. When the curse triggers, decide whether to disclose to the players that the PCs have been cursed. A curse might be readily apparent, or it might make its effects known through ongoing play. Sometimes though, it's more effective for players to remain unaware they have triggered a curse. This keeps them from metagaming, on behalf of their PCs, to mitigate its effects and instead allows them to discover the nature of the curse and deal with it as gameplay progresses. For example, a PC that adopts a cursed familiar might suffer the effects of bad luck whenever the familiar is in their presence, and only after several ill-fated incidents do they realize the cause of the bad luck.

Also decide ahead of time whether saves will be rolled in secret or by the players. It's more immersive for the lycanthrope-bitten PC to learn only during the next full moon whether they have contracted the curse. Of course, this "secrecy" is not a style of play suitable for every group, so consider the players involved beforehand when deciding.

Targets. Identify whom the curse targets. It might affect the entire party, individuals within a certain range, or only the individual that triggered it. A discovered item might curse a single PC possessing it, for instance, but a cursed tomb might target anyone that touches any of its sacred relics.

Timing. Curses differ from other obstacles in that they don't always make themselves known immediately and completely. Some curses have conditional or situational triggers that occur before the PCs enter the cursed space while others might not occur until much later—well after the chamber is explored and left behind. Consider how much time passes before the curse takes effect. Some are instantaneous, and others might not manifest until weeks, years, or generations later.

Foreshadowing. More so than other obstacles, a curse's effectiveness in a dungeon greatly benefits from foreshadowing. While a curse can be sprung on PCs like a trap, it's often more evocative to include ominous warnings well before they reach the cursed location. PCs might then attempt to interpret these warnings, trying to figure out what might trigger this ominous curse. As such, foreshadowing then provides greater player agency over subsequent actions, making the results feel more organic and well earned. Presented here are some examples:

- A successful ability check used to recall information about the dungeon reveals something remembered about the curse.
- An inscription within the dungeon warns against actions that trigger the curse.
- The party encounters the mortal remains of others destroyed by the curse.
- The party experiences feelings of dread or notice changes in light or temperature just before taking an action that triggers the curse.
- While preparing to explore the dungeon, locals warn the PCs of the curse.
- While researching the dungeon, the party finds a scroll or tome that warns of the curse.

DISEASES

Diseases are not typically a main feature of dungeon rooms. More often, they are the result of interaction with other features or creatures, living or otherwise. PCs can contract diseases from monster bites or proximity to diseased lairs or filth. Curses, as discussed previously, might inflict a horrific wasting disease upon its targets. There is already plenty of information elsewhere for that kind of contagion (see *Player's Guide*, *Game Master's Guide*, and *Monster Vault*). For the purposes of this element of dungeon design, consider other ways to convey diseases, and why one might want to.

For example, bizarre diseases might come about as a result of arcane waste, toxic substances, or exposure to alternate planes of reality. A chamber might be the site of a mad wizard's laboratory where residual magics left over from long-ago experimentation can infect explorers. A large hall might actually straddle two planes at once, both the material and some fungal lower plane, as deadly spores bleed through a nearby rift. Even something seemingly as straightforward as groundwater, seeping through a barrow where some otherworldly thing lies trapped, could be the source of a virulent disease that has infected a humanoid tribe not normally associated with such contagions.

The point here is to consider how to employ diseases in ways other than the usual means. Catch the players off guard by figuring out interesting variations and making liberal use of the other kinds of features, such as hazards and traps, to disseminate them. See **Chapter 4** for specific examples of diseases that can be used in this way.

HAZARDS

Hazards create a different kind of obstacle in a dungeon, one that does not actively work against the PCs but that also frequently cannot be neutralized. They are often less dangerous on their own and only become a serious threat when interspersed with other features and encounters. Unlike some other types of obstacles in a dungeon, hazards are also primarily "neutral," meaning

they typically occur without any sentient intervention. They can be just as big a threat to the dungeon denizens as to the exploring (or invading) PCs. That does not mean dungeon inhabitants won't take advantage of such features when possible. If the goblins know a section of rock wall is unstable, for instance, they will try their best to lure enemies into the danger zone to benefit from letting the hazard do their fighting for them. But by and large, a hazard isn't there intentionally to thwart the PCs' efforts. Unintentionally, however, hazards can truly complicate encounters.

Foreshadowing. Like curses, hazards can and often should be notable before PCs wind up caught in them. If a section of floor is unstable, chunks are likely missing. If a region can be flooded, telltale evidence, such as puddles and high-water marks, should be visible. Such foreshadowing allows the players to choose whether to venture deeper in a potentially dangerous direction or find another route.

If they do decide to press on, the foreshadowing builds tension, hinting at the risks. A group of explorers who have taken note of clues concerning flooding passageways and insist on continuing deeper into the affected region are keenly aware they might not be able to retreat in time to avoid the next rush of water.

Complication, Not Contention. Hazards are best suited when accompanying encounters, making that encounter trickier and more memorable. They just aren't that challenging on their own. For example, getting across a chasm isn't really dangerous on its own. Maybe there's a rope bridge, or maybe the PCs come up with a clever use for *immovable rods*. But trying to cross that chasm while being attacked by giant wasps, on the other hand, is a hair-raising experience. Now the risk of falling—or burning a spell slot to avoid it—is very real.

On their own, hazards are generally most effective to use up resources. That rope bridge (without the wasps) only required time and rope, and maybe a *fly* spell. But



HAZARDOUS ALTERATIONS AND ILLUSIONS

d4	Hazard
1	***Environmental Changes.*** Actual physical alterations to the environment are more active ways to control those environments, though this often requires greater power to achieve: dreamlike realities, changes in gravity, distortions in time, and manipulation of the local weather and other natural/unnatural phenomena can profoundly baffle the PCs, either making them vulnerable to other dangers or even outright eliminating the PCs on their own.
2	***Isolation.*** Often chaining multiple alteration/illusion hazards over time (and possibly combined with traps or other types of hazards), the sole goal is to separate the PCs, attempting to peel off one or more from their colleagues with each new hazard.
3	***Misdirection.*** Illusions spring up to lead the PCs astray, either away from or toward something: creatures at a distance, the echoing sounds of footsteps, false signs, and even illusory traps.
4	***Shifting Structures.*** Moving floors/walls, invisible platforms, recursive pathways, rooms that change shape, and false doors/stairs/walls confound the expectations and divert attention away from other matters, often safeguarding something important or else containing the PCs.

that's a spell slot they can't use. And they don't have a never-ending supply of rope, so unless they undo the bridge, they're out that 50-foot length. Then there's the oil or torches and possible ongoing spell durations to account for.

Once the PCs hit high enough levels though, many hazards become inconsequential, easily overcome with their newfound abilities (and likely no longer needing rope). With a little creativity, however, hazards can still force PCs to sit up and take notice. Consider the following complications for the same chasm, whether or not a rope bridge is used:

- A rift in space can be seen within the chasm. This might be able to pull PCs into another plane, or creatures might come out of it, but whether any of that actually happens, the PCs will speculate on it.
- Buffeting winds threaten to slam flying creatures into the cliffs or other rock formations or to blow them far off course.
- Creatures on the other side of the chasm stand ready to attack with ranged weapons or spells.
- Creatures that would otherwise leave the PCs alone don't like the PCs' choices. For example, if one or more PCs start to fly, perhaps territorial flying creatures take it as a challenge.
- Other hazards might make certain choices less favorable, such as toxic gases rising to pool near the ceiling, again affecting those who would otherwise fly across the chasm.

Alterations and Illusions

Actively altered landscapes and illusions, whether natural tricks of the light/perspective or magical in nature, mask the potential danger of other hazards by disorienting one's senses or obscuring reality. Alternatively, they might create a false sense of danger, discouraging exploration in a particular direction. Once PCs discover they have been tricked once by

CHALLENGING SURFACES

d6	Hazard
1	***Boneyard.*** The cavern floor lies buried beneath a mountain of skeletal remains, making for an unstable surface and sharp edges.
2	***Hidden Pitfalls.*** Concealed pit traps, hidden chasms, or sinkholes lie along the path.
3	***Jagged Rocks.*** Stone rubble or outcroppings crowd the area, creating difficult terrain for walking/climbing that hampers movement and might result in falling injuries.
4	***Slippery Surfaces.*** Wet or icy floors/walls, or moss-covered or slimy rocks might cause slipping and falling.
5	***Tangling Roots.*** Underground chambers or overgrown ruins might have masses of roots (or even mycelia or vines) that crisscross the floor and walls, impeding movement and risking becoming entangled.
6	***Thick Webbing.*** Thick strands of cobweb enshroud the chambers/passage, hindering movement, obscuring visibility, and entangling creatures attempting to move through the space.

COLLAPSING STRUCTURES

d4	Hazard
1	***Cave-In.*** Entire sections of passage walls or ceilings might collapse unexpectedly, cutting off access and potentially burying the surrounding area beneath tons of rubble.
2	***Falling Debris.*** Debris might fall from great heights, whether loose rocks or moldering chandeliers, passively targeting random areas in their descent.
3	***Floor Giving Way.*** Damage or decay might weaken surfaces enough that the weight of a PC or area damage during an encounter cause the floor to give way, threatening to plunge all within a certain area to the unknown below.
4	***Seismic Activity.*** Sudden seismic activity might create a prolonged hazard as various collapses occur in succession. This might create an ongoing challenge with a time limit or while the PCs remain within a certain area.

illusory elements, they might then become suspicious of their surroundings and spend additional time and resources trying to avoid the same mistakes. For possible alteration/illusion hazards, consult the **Hazardous Alterations and Illusions** table or choose something appropriate.

Challenging Surfaces

Any surface that hinders a PC's movement, actions, or mobility can be considered difficult terrain. The hazard might be obvious or might require an ability check to recognize. Often, care can be taken to avoid consequences, such as moving more slowly or making saves. The consequences might mean anything from tripping or falling prone to taking physical damage or suffering more esoteric effects, depending on the hazard. PCs might become stuck or trapped and unable to move, making them vulnerable to attack. They might need an ally's help or to expend resources to escape. For possible challenging surfaces, consult the **Challenging Surfaces** table or choose something appropriate.

Collapsing Structures

Collapsing structures present significant dangers when exploring underground or near damaged or decaying buildings. PCs might suffer bludgeoning damage from falling debris or even become buried beneath rubble. Debris might seal passages, forcing PCs to find alternate routes or spend hours clearing the way, or it might block airflow, leading to a depletion of the oxygen within the confined space. The initial collapse might trigger additional and more substantial collapses. Saves might be required to mitigate some or all the damage or to resist other effects. For possible collapsing structure hazards, consult the **Collapsing Structures** table or choose something appropriate.

Fungi and Plants

Fungi and subterranean flora can create numerous hazards that hinder movement or cause physical or psychological damage. These might be relatively normal, non-magical specimens or else bizarre,



HAZARDOUS FUNGI AND PLANTS

d8	Hazard
1	***Flesh-Eating Vines.*** The vines ensnare and slowly digest anything they encounter, commonly creating dangerous zones at choke points.
2	***Fungal Mycelia.*** A dense network of fungal threads covers the ground, forming a spongy, difficult-to-traverse mat and possibly triggering unseen effects.
3	***Giant Mushrooms.*** Giant mushrooms obstruct pathways with their thick, fibrous stalks and spongy caps, perhaps providing an alternative route passage atop the cap (for those with some skill).
4	***Phosphorescent Moss.*** The softly glowing moss is slippery, especially on already uneven surfaces.
5	***Pollen/Spore Cloud.*** Clouds of pollen/spores hinder visibility and possibly bring additional effects, such as taking damage or being poisoned.
6	***Root-Webbed Corridor.*** Interconnecting root systems have long ago pierced dungeon walls, hindering movement in passages.
7	***Toxic Algae.*** Pools of stagnant water might host toxic algae harmful to those moving through it.
8	***Toxic Bushes.*** Thorny bushes deliver a potent toxin upon contact, making them dangerous to navigate.

otherworldly species with magical effects. Running afoul of such obstructions might simply inflict cuts and bruises, or it might result in being poisoned or alerting other creatures. For possible fungal or plant-based hazards, consult the **Hazardous Fungi and Plants** table or choose something appropriate.

Gases and Liquids

Gases and liquids can create a wide range of potential hazards. Immersion in sufficient quantities might make breathing difficult or impossible, threatening suffocation, and might alter how one moves or perceives, such as requiring swimming and reducing visibility. Contact itself might be detrimental, perhaps causing direct acid or poison damage or triggering hallucinations. Moving quantities of gas/liquid might create flooding issues or driving winds, threatening PCs with being swept away or dashed against rocks. For possible gas/liquid hazards, consult the **Hazardous Gases and Liquids** table or choose something appropriate.



HAZARDOUS GASES AND LIQUIDS

d6	Hazard
1	***Caustic Agent.*** Caustic liquid, vapor, or gas pools in the area, corroding metal equipment or inflicting severe chemical burns to unprotected flesh.
2	***Flash Flood.*** A sudden deluge from a breached/overflowing aquifer, melting ice, or heavy rainfall might flood passages and chambers, trapping the unwary in rapidly rising waters. Sediment churn might also diminish visibility. Whirlpools, undertows, and rapids are possible additional concerns.
3	***High Wind.*** High winds prevent or limit flight and ranged weapons, perhaps even making walking challenging, making already precarious areas like narrow bridges and vertical descents all the more harrowing. Debris, gases/vapors, or even necrotic or other energies mixed in the air add the risk of direct damage or other effects.
4	***Lava/Magma Flow.*** A stream of molten rock creates an impasse while emitting intense heat. Breached walls or built-up pressure might also create sudden lava/magma plumes in the area.
5	***Noxious Fumes.*** An area of noxious gas brings the risk of asphyxiation, poisoning, and stranger effects, such as hallucinations, to those who can't hold their breath.
6	***Smoke.*** Acrid black smoke billows through the area, reducing visibility and making breathing all but impossible. The rising heat also means that an active fire is closing in.

Labyrinths and Mazes

Complex layouts with branching options—that is, labyrinths and mazes—confuse and disorient PCs, becoming hazardous when the lost run out of resources or run afoul of creatures or other hazards within. Especially when coupled with a powerful singular guardian, possibly roaming free, the PCs become challenged to find safe harbors for rest and become wary of every passing moment. However, getting lost in a labyrinth/maze can exhaust player patience and drag out precious game time, so the idea is often much more entertaining than the reality.

One option is to replicate the consequences of being lost without spending several hours of game time having the players incessantly mapping their surroundings. Have PCs instead make ability checks to determine how much time they spend in the labyrinth/maze, then apply other consequential effects. Consider not even mapping it, and instead implement the consequences, such as encounters or other hazards, assigning them to certain milestones or crossroads with escalating DCs, allowing the PCs to bypass those they succeed.

For example, for a very simple maze, set a monster lair encounter at DC 15, a trap at DC 20, and a hazard at DC 25. Then have one PC make an appropriate ability check, such as WIS (Survival), or instead call for a group check. Successful checks mean that encounter is skipped—intimating that they made the correct choices while navigating the maze—though the description of close calls, of animal spoor, or of warnings and clues scratched on walls help enhance the sense of their barely avoiding dangers as they wander through the maze.

TRAPS

In the big three of dungeon design, next to monsters and treasure, traps feature very heavily. No discussion of classic dungeon-crawling is complete without a nod to the clever and well-hidden traps that guard the moldering tunnels and secreted riches within. See **Chapter 4** for more information on specific traps, but for now, consider briefly how they might be incorporated and how to use them to the best effect.

Not All Traps Are Created Equal

Traps are not typically made by the same entity/group or of the same quality materials, so it would be a mistake to consider all traps as equivalent. The simplest traps, perhaps makeshift and built by the lowliest of the dungeon's inhabitants, are often far different from the complex mechanisms designed into the original construction by the architects. Either can still be terribly effective, but the nature of the traps reflects these differences. Crude traps typically use basic and random detritus as building materials, delivering a very different experience from the most subtle and punishing clockwork deathtraps hidden within the dungeon's walls. When planning traps for a dungeon, consider who built each and what they had on hand for construction.

A Trap's Purpose

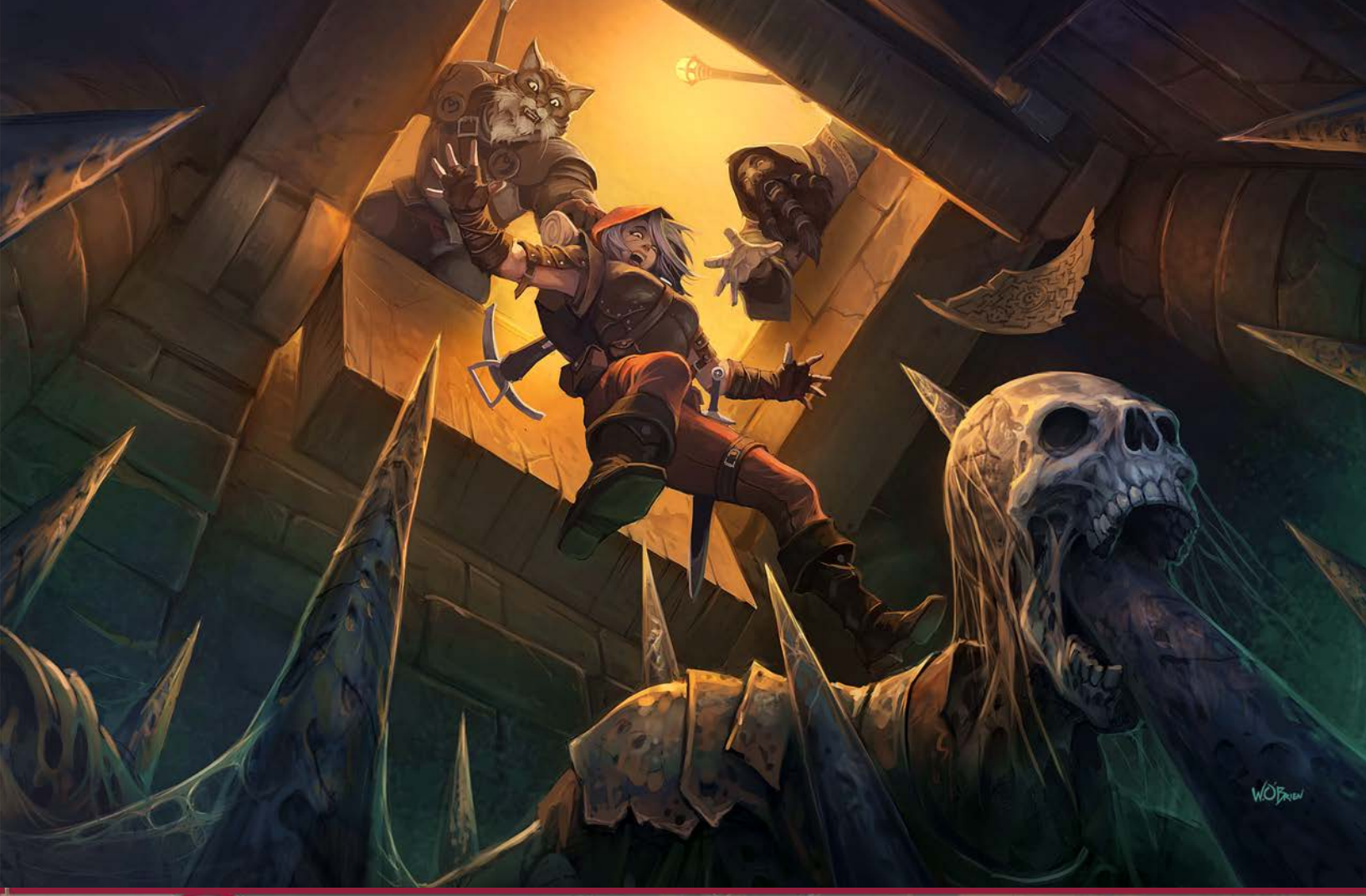
Traps serve a variety of functions. From guarding valuables to scaring off would-be enemies, every trap is installed with some goal in mind. Rarely is the intention, "Something simply needed to go in that space."

A trap builder might be interested in protection and might not even care if the trap is obvious. Consider modern spy movies, where the laser grids guarding the treasures are quite apparent (once some smoke is sprayed or special goggles used), but the thief still needs to be skilled enough to avoid those lasers—taking a trap effectively from impossible to just quite challenging. So to most adventurers, that trap would still be more than enough to discourage them from even trying. In the same way, a humanoid tribe concerned about its stronger neighbors might build traps that are obvious, not hidden at all, but difficult to bypass or disarm. A chamber full of propped up deadfalls crisscrossed with taut tripwires in plain view, or perhaps a pair of nearly twinned swinging pendulums that require perfect timing to slip through, will discourage all but the most determined invaders. For that matter, even if the trap is fake or an illusion that only looks like it will inflict massive injury, it can still be incredibly effective.

Other trap types might serve to funnel intruders into more dangerous parts of a dungeon. Shifting walls, pit traps with slides into rooms with locked exits and hungry monsters, or even false passages that keep the safer path concealed all serve to misdirect the PCs from their goals. In some instances, this methodology is a safeguard. In others, it is viciousness for the sake of viciousness. Either is fine but consider that reasoning before plunking it down in the middle of a corridor.







4: MALIGN MAGIC & MECHANISMS

The party scout was sure the way had been clear, but teamwork saves the day.

While monsters are the usual and primary threat one expects when delving into dungeons and ruins, a run of recurring battles can become tedious, so some additional options can make such places more interesting and challenging. Curses, diseases, hazards, and traps can help break the monotony and provide challenges where talents other than skill at arms can overcome such obstacles. This chapter provides all these elements, laying out the mechanics of each and providing plenty of examples to use in the game.

USING CURSES, DISEASES, HAZARDS, AND TRAPS

Curses, diseases, hazards, and traps feature prominently in fantasy fiction, which can provide inspiration for such encounters within the game. One vivid moment that comes to mind is the opening scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: there are pressure plates on the floor, poison darts that shoot from holes in the walls, jutting spears with the skeletal remnants of a previous delver who failed to bypass them, and a yawning pit blocking the hero from their goal.

And then, actually taking the golden idol triggers the iconic scene where the main character must run from the giant boulder that rumbles through the corridor, back the way they came—requiring skill, strength, and wit to escape alive with the treasure. These are the sort of events that can make dungeons and ruins truly dangerous.

ELEMENTS OF CURSES, DISEASES, HAZARDS, AND TRAPS

Every curse, disease, hazard, and trap description begins with basic information about its nature and then includes the following information: trigger, effects, and resolution.

TRIGGER

This describes the action that must happen to activate this danger's effects. For example, a trap trigger might describe the size and placement of the pressure plate that activates its mechanisms. A curse might include the DC of the save a creature must make to avoid its effects. The trigger also includes any ways to detect the danger before it triggers, such as a WIS (Perception) check.

Unlike most hazards and traps, curses are not readily noticeable using normal Perception. Foreshadowing or telegraphing a curse's potential is a better way to clue players into what's coming. A well-delivered curse is preceded by warning that it might be in play, which allows players the agency to actively try to avoid it if they so choose. For example, an archway might be inscribed with an ancient warning of the doom that awaits all who trespass within the sanctuary beyond. The PCs can choose to risk the danger rather than blunder into the area and become cursed unknowingly.

EFFECTS

This describes what happens after the trigger condition is met. It includes ability checks, saves, and other details required to help determine what happens to targets. For example, a hazard's effects might detail ongoing penalties for a creature as part of the effects. A trap's effects might detail the damage creatures take when they are within range of the triggered trap's area of effect.

Effect Severity

When inserting a curse, disease, hazard, or trap, consult the **Effects Save DCs and Attack Bonuses** and **Damage Severity by PC Level** tables to alter the degree of danger it poses: setback, dangerous, or deadly. The attack bonus of an effect, the save DC to resist its effects, and the damage it deals can vary depending on its severity. An effect intended to be a setback is unlikely to kill or seriously harm PCs of the indicated levels. A dangerous effect is likely to seriously injure (and potentially kill) PCs of the indicated levels. And a deadly effect is likely to kill PCs of the indicated levels.

EFFECTS SAVE DCS AND ATTACK BONUSES

Effect Danger	Save DC	Attack Bonus
Setback	10–11	+3 to +5
Dangerous	12–15	+6 to +8
Deadly	16–20	+9 to +12

RESOLUTION

This describes how to escape, stop, or mitigate any ongoing effects. For example, this section contains how to end a curse's effects, and a trap's resolution might include the DC of the check to disarm it. If the danger has limited reuse, this is also explained here.

CURSES

As old as storytelling itself, curses are magical maledictions laid on people, objects, or places, often as a form of revenge or retribution. Curses put princesses into eternal slumber, turn princes into beasts, cause a land to suffer and die as its king does, consign pirates to undeath for stealing gold, and generally make life difficult for the afflicted until the curse is removed.

Curses might require specific deeds to remove them. In the game, removal of a curse might be as easy as a spell, but it might also be the impetus for a new quest with the end goal of lifting the horrid magic that grips the hero. Curses are as much flavor as they are game mechanics, when used properly.



DAMAGE SEVERITY BY PC LEVEL

PC Level	Setback	Dangerous	Deadly
Tier 1 (1–4)	5 (1d10)	11 (2d10)	22 (4d10)
Tier 2 (5–10)	11 (2d10)	22 (4d10)	55 (10d10)
Tier 3 (11–16)	22 (4d10)	55 (10d10)	99 (18d10)
Tier 4 (17–20)	55 (10d10)	99 (18d10)	132 (24d10)

A common way PCs encounter curses is through attunement to a cursed magic item. In dungeons and ruins, a curse might be laid as protection over a treasure or tomb. A curse might be the lasting remnant of whatever calamity brought the place to ruin in the first place or an additional ward against those who seek to plunder a dungeon.

Unlike traps, curses don't usually have immediately devastating effects. They are similar to diseases, inflicting debilitating effects, often worsening over time. If a curse is fatal, death often comes only after the victim has had time to suffer. The upside to this is that it gives the victim the opportunity to overcome the curse, either by curative magics or by meeting certain requirements that help to negate their transgression and in turn lift the curse. This also gives a GM time to let problems and conditions develop rather than ending within a few rounds.



TYPES OF CURSES

The most common type of curse is one attached to a magic item, afflicting a creature when it attunes to the item. Creatures can also use curses as spells (*bestow curse* is a prime example) or as actions or parts of actions. Lycanthropes are a prime example of creatures that can deliver curses as part of an attack. A creature might use an action or reaction to deliver a curse. A powerful creature might be able to pronounce curses upon those who offend it or deliver a curse upon the creature that kills it, using its dying breath. Other curses manifest in a manner similar to traps, triggering when a particular condition is met, such as a creature crossing a threshold or entering a particular area, or interacting with a particular object or creature.

SAMPLE CURSES

Here are several ready-to-use curses.

Some have notes for variations on how they can be triggered and on their resulting effects, so they can be tailored to a campaign more easily. **Note that in the sample curses provided here, the trigger, effects, and resolution are tailored to the flavor of the curse. If the curse is desired to come from a particular magic item or NPC, feel free to simply change those details, and the curse can be more or less powerful by adjusting the save DCs.**

Bad Luck

Curse

Constant ill luck means misfortune and mishap for the cursed.

Trigger: A creature intrudes on a cursed area. A powerful creature curses a target. A creature destroys a magic mirror. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 INT save or become cursed.

Effects: The cursed creature has disadvantage on all ability checks, attack rolls, and saves. At the GM's discretion, other forms of bad luck can also manifest. For example, a plan to infiltrate a house while the owner is away might go wrong because the owner unexpectedly returns. An item the victim has been saving up for is purchased by another buyer just minutes before they arrive at the shop. A needed component for a new spell is suddenly nowhere to be found, due to a shortage brought about by unforeseen events.

Resolution: Various resolutions can end a bad luck curse. The victim must convince the creature who pronounced the curse to revoke it. A successful DC 15 INT (History) check discovers a ritual that can remove the curse: in addition to a certain invocation, which

must be researched or found, the cursed creature must wear a necklace of seven jade discs, worth no less than 100 gp, and ride a white elephant (or walk with a white rat carried with them) to a field of shamrocks or white heather to recite the ritual, then release the animal and bury the jade discs in the field. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Bloodletting

Curse

The cursed creature's wounds bleed profusely and take longer to heal.

Trigger: When a powerful creature dies by the blade, its curse consigns its killer to the same fate.

Effects: When the victim takes piercing or slashing damage, the wound continues to bleed. At the start of its turn, the creature takes an additional 1 HP from blood loss (increasing to 2 HP if the attack was a critical hit). This damage increases by 1 HP for every additional successful attack that deals piercing or slashing damage (or 2 additional HP for every critical hit). The bleeding continues until the creature or an ally makes a successful DC 10 WIS (Medicine) check to bandage the wounds or the creature receives magical healing. This stops the bleeding, but not the curse.

Resolution: A successful DC 14 INT (History or Nature) check reveals a possible cure. A magical flower, said to grow in valley meadows in a remote mountain range, can be brewed into a tea with a few drops of troll's blood. This elixir can break the curse.

Curse of Cowardice

Curse

Fear is the constant companion of the victim of this curse.

Trigger: A victim steals the weapon of a mighty warrior from their tomb. Alternately, when the victim runs from a fight, abandoning a creature they were sworn to protect, the creature curses them for their cowardice. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 CHA save or become cursed.

Effects: The victim gains the frightened condition any time a hostile creature is within its sight or when faced with a situation in which they think they might come to harm. The victim must make a DC 14 WIS save, at disadvantage if they have recently taken damage from a hostile creature or nearby circumstances. On a failure, the victim must immediately use whatever movement or other means available to get as far from the hostile creature or dangerous situation as possible. The frightened condition remains until the creature has removed itself from dangerous conditions, or it is unable to detect hostile creatures at the start of its turn. On a successful save, the creature is frightened until the end of its next turn.

A victim can't willingly attempt a CHA (Intimidate) check. If magically coerced into doing so, it makes such checks with disadvantage.

Resolution: The cursed creature must return the weapon that was stolen or contact the creature sworn to protect with sincere contrition. In addition, the victim must give an item worth at least 50 gp as payment for their transgression. Alternately, if the creature can use a stolen weapon to single-handedly defeat a creature with a CR of at least 1 less than the creature's level (or hit dice), the curse is broken.

Curse of Slothfulness

Curse (Area)

This curse robs creatures of their will to do anything but laze about, causing them to slowly waste away.

Trigger: A creature stops to rest in the area upon which the curse is laid. The presence of prior victims of the curse, whether fresh remains or long-dead bones, is a warning about the curse's presence. There are no signs of violence; the bodies lie in repose with no



clear reason for their deaths. A successful DC 12 WIS (Medicine) check on a fresh body reveals evidence of death by dehydration.

Effects: Once a creature has rested for at least 1 hour in the cursed locale, they lose all motivation to leave. To remove itself from the cursed location, a victim must succeed on a DC 11 CHA save. If the save fails, the creature contentedly remains and can't leave voluntarily. The victim can't attempt the save again for another hour. The DC of this save increases by 1 for each hour spent in the cursed locale, to a maximum of DC 18 after 8 hours of rest. If attacked, victims defend themselves, but immediately cease all activity outside that allowed during resting once the threat has passed. A cursed creature lounges around in this area, even after running out of food and water, wasting away rather than taking the effort to leave.

Resolution: A successful CHA save ends the curse, but the victim can make saves only in the cursed area. The curse on an individual creature ends when it voluntarily leaves the cursed area. A creature forcibly removed from the area is still cursed and seeks to return to the area at its first opportunity. The curse is removed from the area by a cursed creature initiating violence within the area, causing at least 6 HP of damage to another creature in the area, or taking the damage themselves. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Curse of the Goliath

Curse

This curse causes a creature to grow to immense size. What might initially seem advantageous quickly becomes debilitating and painful.

Trigger: The dying curse of a hag proclaims all will see what a big hero her killer is. A magic item bears an inscription warning that the owner might be too great a being for the world to contain. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or become cursed.

Effects: A creature under the effects of this curse constantly grows larger in size. While this seems advantageous at first, it quickly becomes apparent that the new size does not provide equivalent strength. As the creature grows, its muscles become unable to bear the weight of its mass. The increase in size is noticeable after the victim's first long rest after it becomes cursed. After three long rests, the creature's size increases by one size category (Medium to Large, for example). This provides the enlarge benefits of the *enlarge/reduce* spell. However, another three long rests increases the creature by an additional size category. As its size continues to increase, the victim's growth outpaces its muscles' ability to bear its mass. At the second stage of growth, the only benefit gained is natural reach for melee attacks (if at least Huge in size). However, the victim's speed also drops by 10 feet, and its carrying capacity is halved for a creature of its size category and STR. Once the creature reaches Gargantuan size, its speed is reduced an additional 10 feet, it loses advantage on STR checks and saves, and has disadvantage on ability checks, attack rolls, and saves that use STR, DEX, or CON. Unlike the *enlarge/reduce* spell, the victim's weapons, equipment, and clothing might not grow with it, at GM's discretion.

Resolution: The cursed creature must seek out another hag and provide a service to her in exchange for breaking the curse. Or the cursed creature could seek out the temple of a good god who promotes the virtue of humility. A month's service performing menial services for the good of poor folk is enough to provide a perspective on humility and gain the god's good graces, ending the curse. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Curse of the Unseen

Curse

This curse makes others ignore and overlook the victim.

Trigger: A powerful creature curses the target for its overweening pride. The target must succeed on a DC 15 CHA save or be afflicted.

Effects: Other creatures that have minor interactions with the curse victim (brief meetings, serving a drink at the tavern, etc.) often completely forget the interaction or have difficulty recalling specific details, such as the creature's name or general appearance. At first, this curse might seem advantageous. The creature has advantage on DEX (Stealth) checks while cursed. However, people quickly lose interest in the victim, and it makes little impression on others. All CHA checks made to influence others have disadvantage.

Resolution: The cursed must find a way to genuinely impress the creature that cursed it. Another method to ending the curse would be for the cursed creature to genuinely consider its pride to be a fault, and to work for the betterment of others without gaining fame or praise for their actions (this can be a quest of the GM's making; consider the curse lifted so long as no one, or someone other than the cursed creature, is considered responsible for the heroic act). Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.



Diminishment

Curse

The afflicted creature shrinks in size, slowly but inexorably.

Trigger: A magical creature curses a creature that bullies or intimidates it. A magic item stolen from a Tiny fey creature bears the curse. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or become cursed.

Effects: The creature under the effects of this curse begins to reduce in size. The reduction is noticeable after the first long rest after the creature is initially cursed. After three long rests, the creature is reduced by one size category (Large to Medium, or Medium to Small, for example). This gives the creature the reduce effects of the *enlarge/reduce* spell. Each three additional long rests reduce the creature another size category, until it reaches Tiny size. Each time its size category is reduced, the die type rolled for the reduction in its weapon damage increases (from 1d4 to 1d6, then to 1d8, and so on). Unlike the *enlarge/reduce* spell, the victim's weapons, equipment, and clothing might not shrink with it, at GM's discretion.

Resolution: The cursed creature must make amends to the creature it offended. A stolen item must be returned to its owner or paid for in trade for an item or service the owner considers of equal or greater value. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Inconstant Form

Curse

The afflicted creature is cursed to constantly metamorphose randomly from one form to another.

Trigger: Holy and/or magic items are stolen from the temple of a trickster god. A creature insults a fey noble. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or become cursed.

Effects: The afflicted creature randomly polymorphs into another form. While the cursed creature takes on the physical appearance of a creature of that type, it gains none of the ability bonuses or traits common to a creature of that type. This happens immediately after each long rest while cursed, but the change can also be triggered by physical trauma or stressful situations. When the creature takes damage equal to at least 10 percent of its hit points or is in a considerably stressful or emotional situation (GM's purview) or gains the frightened condition, roll percentile dice, with a 25 percent chance that the cursed creature shifts form. To determine what form the creature takes, roll 1d8 and consult the **Cursed Form** table.

CURSED FORM

d8	New Form
1	Bugbear
2	Gnoll
3	Goblin
4	Hobgoblin
5	Kobold
6	Lizardfolk
7	Minotaur
8	Orc

Resolution: A successful DC 15 INT (History or Religion) check reveals that the curse can be lifted by committing a clever prank or robbery on behalf of the offended trickster god and making a suitable offering (such as the story in writing or the ill-gotten gains from the theft) on the altar in the deity's temple. A less savory way to lift the curse is to pass it to another victim. According to the lore, the curse can be passed to a complete stranger with only a touch and the words, "I give you this gift in the name of," and naming the trickster god who pronounced the curse.

If cursed by a fey noble, then finding a way to appease the fey, or doing a service for an equally powerful fey noble, might be enough to have the curse removed. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Mind of the Minion

Curse

The cursed creature becomes servile, quick to follow the suggestions and commands of others.

Trigger: Insulted by the victim's stubborn or haughty demeanor, a powerful creature—fey, fiend, or hag—curses it.

Effects: Any CHA checks made to influence the creature's behavior have advantage. The creature has disadvantage on saves against enchantment spells and effects that influence or control it. If the victim considers another creature a trusted friend, authority figure, or someone of importance, then anything that creature says that can be interpreted as a suggestion or a command acts as the spell *suggestion* or *command*, using the creature's CHA as the ability modifier to determine the save DC. The victim also has disadvantage on such saves.

Resolution: A successful DC 15 INT (History) check provides a method for removing the curse: the afflicted creature must strike a killing blow on a powerful foe, such as a lion (or a specific monster determined by the GM), and then cut out and eat its heart. A particularly striking act of attrition towards the being that pronounced the curse might sway them to lift it. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Salt the Earth

Curse (Area)

This curse withers an area, killing crops, allowing nothing to grow, and denying any bounty.

Trigger: A powerful being pronounces a curse on a region.

Effects: The cursed area becomes barren. Any edible plants, including fodder for animals, withers and dies over a period of time chosen by the being who pronounced the curse. Water drunk from any source in the area tastes bitter; the drinker must make a DC 12 CON save or be poisoned for the next hour. Any food brought into the area begins to rot within an hour of being in the area. Not even divine magic can circumvent this curse; if a creature casts *create food and water* or *create or destroy water* in the area, the results are rotten and inedible, and the water befouled like anything found in the area.

Resolution: To lift the curse, the being that cast the curse must be destroyed, appeased, or made to revoke it. A major quest likely must be undertaken to gain the being's favor.

Stolen Shadow

Curse

This curse steals a creature's shadow, turning it into an undead creature that shares a horrible psychic link with the accursed.

Trigger: A deal gone bad with a powerful fey, fiend, or hag causes a creature to lose its shadow. A dark necromancer curses a creature and steals its shadow. The victim must succeed on a DC 13 CHA save or become cursed.

Effects: The creature casts no shadow. This alone causes no real harm, though suspicious folk might take it as a sign that the creature is a vampire or some other monster. The creature's shadow is now a shadow of the undead variety, serving the being that cursed it. In addition, the accursed and their former shadow are psychically connected. When the creature sleeps, its dreams are haunted by the shadow's hunts, as it stalks and kills prey to satiate its hunger. During a long rest, there is a 50 percent chance that the cursed creature has nightmares, dealing 4 (1d8) psychic damage upon waking. Every time it has these nightmares, the creature must make a DC 13 CHA save. On a failure, the psychic damage can't be healed, the victim's hit point maximum is reduced by the same amount, and it receives one level of exhaustion.

Resolution: A successful DC 12 (Arcana) check provides a possible cure for the curse. If the accursed finds and kills its shadow with a silver weapon, the curse will be lifted. This isn't likely to endear the creature to the one that cursed it, but it is the most direct way to deal with the curse. Another way is to enter another bargain with the being, hoping for better results this time, and ask for the shadow's return as the price for future services. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.



Sympathetic Pain

Curse

Any pain caused to others by the afflicted creature, it also feels keenly.

Trigger: A powerful being seeks to teach a bloodthirsty warrior a lesson. The dying curse of a powerful creature is that its killer knows the pain of its victims. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 WIS save or become cursed.

Effects: Whenever the curse victim causes damage to another creature with a melee or ranged attack, it takes half the damage inflicted by the attack.

Resolution: A method to end the curse can be found with a successful DC 15 INT (History) check. An opponent who fells the cursed creature by dropping it to 0 HP, but grants it mercy, breaks the curse. Another version states that, should the victim beg for mercy but be struck down anyway, the curse is transferred to the creature striking the blow. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Twisted Visage

Curse

The cursed creature's body warps and deforms, leaving it a twisted version of its former self.

Trigger: An adventurer who strikes a killing blow on a wicked monster is afflicted by its death curse. A creature commits a great transgression against a god of physical beauty. The victim must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or become cursed.

Effects: The creature's body twists into crooked parody of itself. All its movement speeds are reduced by half, and its STR, DEX, and CHA scores are reduced by 2. Individuals viewing the creature's twisted form might be moved to pity or fear (or perhaps mockery and bullying if more evil in inclination).

Resolution: A successful DC 15 INT (History or Religion) check reveals that the curse can be lifted by journeying to a lost temple devoted to a god of healing, defeating the evil monster set there as a guardian by one of the god's foes, and then bathing in the pool of healing waters at the heart of the temple. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Withering Body

Curse

The cursed creature's body can't naturally heal and becomes resistant to magical healing.

Trigger: The curse is placed on any who loot the tomb of a long-dead priest. A lich who exists in constant envy of those who still have a robust natural life pronounces the curse on a most offensive specimen of livelihood.

Effects: A creature afflicted by this curse does not regain lost hit points when resting. When injured, the victim's current hit point total becomes its new maximum hit points. A creature that casts a spell that heals hit points, such as *cure wounds*, or that uses an item or effect to restore hit points, must succeed at a



DC 12 WIS check. If the check fails, the cursed creature gains temporary hit points rather than healing. If the check fails by 5 or more, the spell fails, and the spell slot or item charge is expended. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the cursed creature is healed half the total hit points rolled for the effect (and has its maximum hit points raised by the same amount) and gains the rest as temporary hit points.

Resolution: A successful DC 17 INT (Arcana, History, or Religion) check reveals that the curse can be lifted by performing a ritual over the mummified remains of the dead priest whose tomb was violated, requiring 1,000 gp worth of rare oils and incense. In the case of the lich, the cursed creature must destroy the lich, recover its phylactery, and perform a ritual with it to divest itself of the curse before the lich can reconstitute a new body. Alternatively, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

Withering Spirit

Curse

The cursed creature's mind and spirit become increasingly vulnerable to attack.

Trigger: A powerful fey or fiend curses a creature that outsmarts them. The curse is cast on those that violate the sanctuary of a (presumed) dead wizard.

Effects: The victim's mind becomes fragile, and it gains vulnerability to psychic damage. Worse, the accursed creature's mental faculties fade over time. At the end of a week, the creature's INT, WIS, and CHA scores are each lowered by 1 point. The creature continues to lose another point in each ability score for every week that passes, until at least one ability reaches a score of 1. Then, the creature enters a vegetative state, unable to do anything or comprehend the world around it.

Resolution: A successful DC 17 INT (Arcana or History) check uncovers a means to end the curse. The brain of an aboleth must be boiled down into an elixir with other rare ingredients worth 1,000 gp and then drunk. Alternately, the victim can attempt to bargain with the creature that cursed it, providing a service in exchange for the return of its mental faculties. Finally, the curse can be lifted with a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

DISEASES

Exploration of remote areas, and particularly subterranean ones, brings with it the risk of exposure to unclean environments and infectious agents, whether they be mundane or magical. Diseases are often associated with organisms, possibly linked to a creature encounter or to a hazard, which might include anything from tainted sewer water to infected saliva to strange spores. They are often secondary effects, such as being inflicted after certain damage is taken. Most can be treated with traditional or magical healing, but some require more potent cures that might involve rare ingredients or applications of strange magic.

SAMPLE DISEASES

Here are several ready-to-use diseases.

Ancestor's Visage

Disease

This disease infects those who spend time exploring or tending to the dead in catacombs and become exposed to decaying funeral shrouds and ossuary dust. It causes hallucinations and false memories.

Trigger: When a creature inhales the dust associated with desiccated corpses, it must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or become infected.

Effects: When a creature becomes infected, it has disadvantage on WIS saving throws, and any time a WIS save is failed, in addition to any other effects the failed save allows, the creature experiences false visions and memories as if affected by a *major image* spell, except that interacting with the imagery does not reveal it to be false. The effects last for 1 minute.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by inhaling the vapors of a collection of herbs and flowers soaked in pungent aromatic oils for 1 hour. A creature that has proficiency with herbalist tools can create the concoction with 10 minutes of work.

Crimson Hunger

Disease

This disease causes bloodthirsty cravings to the point of psychological irrationality. It is transmitted through contact with the daytime resting place of vampires.

Trigger: When a creature comes into contact with the coffin, crypt, or soil of a vampire's lair, it must succeed on a DC 17 CON save or become infected.

Effects: This disease takes 1d4 days to manifest, after which the infected creature is poisoned and has

disadvantage on WIS saves until the disease is cured. The poisoned condition can be suppressed for 1 day if the infected creature consumes any amount of Humanoid blood.

Resolution: An infected creature repeats the CON save every day at dusk. On a success, the creature is cured.

Cryptic Phage

Disease

This disease infects those who are exposed to the bites of certain dust mites that nest in magical paper items such as scrolls and tomes. It manifests as an inability to enjoy restful sleep, the victim instead plagued by vivid and unsettling nightmares.

Trigger: When a creature comes into contact with old, dusty scrolls, spellbooks, or other magical paper items infected by magical dust mites, it must succeed on a DC 13 CON save or become infected.

Effects: An infected creature suffers vivid nightmares, cannot regain Hit Dice, and only regains half its hit points after a long rest.

Resolution: An infected creature repeats the CON save after each long rest. After three successes (not consecutive), the creature is cured.

Crystal Growths

Disease

This disease is an infection of the blood stream, caused by consuming subterranean water sources rich in mineral content, and manifests as painful crystalline eruptions through the skin.

Trigger: When a creature drinks water from a pool or spring found in caverns with high concentrations of mineral formations, it must succeed on a DC 12 CON save or become infected.

Effects: When a creature becomes infected, large sores form on the skin which begin extruding crystal growths. At the end of each long rest after the symptoms appear, the growths grow larger, and the creature's hit point maximum decreases by a d4, its speed is reduced by 5 feet, and it has disadvantage on DEX saves. When the creature's speed is reduced to 0, it is paralyzed. When the creature's hit point maximum is reduced to 0, it dies.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by inhaling the vapors of a collection of herbs and flowers soaked in pungent aromatic oils for 1 hour. A creature that has proficiency with herbalist tools can create the concoction with 10 minutes of work.

Echoing Silence

Disease

This disease manifests as a loss of hearing coupled with an unceasing dull roar or reverberation in the ears. It is caused by exposure to the dust of stone or crystalline creatures that suffer sound-based damage.

Trigger: When a creature breathes the dust caused by thunder damage to a mineral-based creature such as a stone golem or earth elemental, it must make a DC 13 CON save or become infected.

Effects: The disease manifests in 1d6 days. The creature becomes deafened and can only hear a low roaring sound until cured.

Resolution: The disease can be cured by the creation of ear drops made from the blood of a harpy and the spores of a shrieker. The infected creature must be treated by the drops four times in 24 hours, after which it is cured. A creature that has proficiency with alchemist tools can create the ear drops with 1 hour of work.

Eldritch Veil Syndrome

Disease

This disease most often affects those who spend time in proximity to places where two or more planes overlap. The most common symptom is the body becoming slightly insubstantial and vulnerable to magical planar energies.

Trigger: When a creature comes within 30 feet of a planar portal or a location where the barrier between two planes is weak, it must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or become infected.

Effects: An infected creature repeats the CON save each hour. On a failure, it becomes ethereal, while on a success, it returns to its current plane.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by the *restoration spell* or similar magic.

Forgotten Sunburn

Disease

This disease is transmitted through exposure to searing holy light and can cause severe burns on the skin days or even weeks afterward.

Trigger: When a creature takes radiant damage, it must succeed on a DC 11 CON save or become infected.

Effects: The disease manifests 1d4 days after infection, at which time the creature begins suffering 2d6 radiant damage every 1d4 hours and has disadvantage on saves made in bright light.

Resolution: The disease can be cured by application of a poultice made from the blood of a darkmantle that has had darkness cast upon it. The infected creature can repeat the CON save after 24 hours of treatment and every 24 hours thereafter. A success means the creature is cured. A creature that has proficiency with alchemist tools can create the poultice with 1 hour of work.

Glyphic Blight

Disease

This disease can take years to manifest and is caused by prolonged exposure to the effects of abjuration magic, particularly for those who work to disarm such magic warding chests, doors, and other sealed containers or areas.

Trigger: When a creature is exposed to the effects of a *glyph of warding* spell or similar abjuration magic that has been triggered, it must make a DC 14 CON save or contract this disease.

Effects: An infected creature develops oddly mottled skin that turns painful to the touch. The creature has disadvantage on any CHA-based checks and suffers 2d8 force damage at the conclusion of each long rest.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by the *restoration* spell or similar magic.

Infernal Resonance

Disease

This disease most often infects those who are exposed to the filth and unholy life forces of fiends from the lower planes. It causes the physical body of the victim to begin manifesting fiendish traits, including changes to the skin, the eyes, and body odor.

Trigger: When a creature suffers damage from a Fiend's claw or bite attacks, it must succeed on a DC 16 CON save or become infected.

Effects: An infected creature manifests a fiendish appearance, has disadvantage on CHA-based checks, and is poisoned until cured.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.

Labyrinthine Fever

Disease

This disease derives its names from the propensity of its victims to become easily confused or lost, but it is caught through prolonged exposure to enchantment magic.

Trigger: When a creature fails a WIS save against the effects of an enchantment spell, such as *charm person* or *geas*, it must succeed on a DC 14 CON save or contract this disease.

Effects: A creature that contracts this disease becomes incapacitated within 1d4 hours of being infected and can only communicate in halting speech until the disease is cured.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by the *restoration* spell or similar magic.

Shadow Rot

Disease

This disease infects creatures that are exposed to the smoke of candles and burning oils rendered from the tallow from corporeal undead. It causes the flesh of the infected to begin rotting away.

Trigger: When a creature spends 1 minute within 10 feet of a flame fueled by the body parts of Undead, it must succeed on a DC 12 CON save or become infected.

Effects: An infected creature takes 2d6 necrotic damage at the conclusion of each long rest. This reduction in hit points also reduces the infected creature's hit point maximum. If the creature's hit point maximum reaches 0, the creature dies.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by inhalation of steam vapors created by mixing the tears of an angel with holy water. After 10 minutes of treatment, the infected creature can repeat the CON save with advantage. The save can be repeated every 10 additional minutes until the save succeeds.





Subterranean Miasma

Disease

Creatures that spend long periods of time exposed to the sour, fetid air of some underground regions where rot and decay are common sometimes grow sick from the infectious vapors that settle there.

Trigger: When a creature spends 10 minutes in any subterranean area where stale air has accumulated, such as within a sealed crypt, a passage blocked by water at its low points, or where noxious vapors have settled, it must succeed on a DC 11 CON save or become infected.

Effects: The disease takes 1d4 hours to manifest, after which the creature develops a severe cough. The creature has disadvantage on CON, DEX, and STR checks and saves and gains 1 level of exhaustion after each long rest until cured.

Resolution: An infected creature can be cured by breathing the vapors of a djinni whirlwind, after which the creature loses 1 level of exhaustion after each long rest until no levels remain. At that time, ability checks and saves no longer have disadvantage.

Time's Embrace

Disease

This disease is caused by exposure to magical effects that alter the passage of time, such as through certain spells or portal effects. Creatures that become infected suffer premature aging of the body and mind.

Trigger: When a creature is subject to the effects of transmutation magic such as the *sequester* or *time stop* spells, it must succeed on a DC 18 CON save or contract this disease.

Effects: The disease manifests immediately and the infected creature begins to age and wither preternaturally quickly. After the conclusion of a long rest, the creature loses 1 point from each of its six ability modifiers and gains 1 level of exhaustion. If any of its ability modifiers reaches –5, the infected creature dies.

Resolution: Only a *wish* spell or similarly powerful magic can reverse the aging process and restore ability modifiers.

HAZARDS

Unlike traps and many curses, hazards are often happenstance. While some hazards might be purposefully placed, many are a natural result of the environment. Harmful fungus, geothermal activity, and old, crumbling infrastructure are common hazards found in such locales. Hazards run a range of types and levels of danger. Some are merely nuisances or obstacles to be overcome while others are harmful and potentially deadly to those taken unaware by their presence. Some hazards become more dangerous when paired with another kind of threat. For example, a field of unstable debris might merely pose a delay when a party must traverse it, but if a monster were to attack while in the middle of such a debris field, it can significantly hamper the PCs' ability to combat or flee, worsening their survival odds. This is especially true when the opponents are immune or less affected by the hazard than the PCs are, giving them a significant advantage in battle.

TYPES OF HAZARDS

Hazards can be divided into three general categories: inconvenient, harmful, and potentially deadly. The types of hazards within these categories can vary wildly, as can their size and area of effect. Some hazards might occupy only a section of a corridor, a portion of a room, or even a single door. Others might occupy an entire dungeon level (flooding, for example) or extend throughout an entire building. Some hazards are more dangerous in combination with other elements of dungeons and ruins, such as traps built to take advantage of a hazard's presence (like flame traps in an area with flammable gas) or monsters that can ignore a hazard and take advantage of its effects (like aquatic creatures in a flooded environment).

SAMPLE HAZARDS

Here are several ready-to-use hazards.

Anemic Magic Zone

Hazard

The magical fields that normally permeate the world are thin and tattered here. Spellcasters struggle to make magic happen.

Trigger: When a creature enters an anemic magic zone, it suffers the effects of the hazard. Creatures that can cast spells can feel the drop in magic levels as soon as they attempt to cast a spell.

Effects: Creatures have advantage on saves against magical effects while in this area. Spellcasters have difficulty gathering enough magic to cast and maintain spells while in the area. When casting a spell, a creature must make an ability check using its spellcasting ability to succeed. The DC is 10 + the level of the spell being cast. In addition, casters have disadvantage on concentration checks made to maintain concentration on a spell.

Resolution: Leaving the area of the hazard ends its effect on a caster. A *wish* spell cast from outside the area can restore magic to the area and eliminate the anemic magic zone.

Binding Roots

Hazard

Rough, blackened, twisting roots burst from the floor, walls, or ceiling, grasping at creatures in its area and holding them fast.

Trigger: When a creature enters an area of binding roots, it suffers the effects of the hazard. A successful DC 13 INT (Nature) or WIS (Survival) check allows a creature to recognize the hazard presented by the roots.

Effects: The area containing the binding roots is difficult terrain. A creature that enters or starts its turn unrestrained by the roots in the area must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save or be restrained. A creature that starts its turn restrained by the binding roots takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage as the roots twist and tighten their hold. On its turn, a restrained creature must make a DC 13 STR check. On a success, the creature is no longer restrained.

Resolution: An affected creature must avoid or leave the area. A *freedom of movement* spell or similar magic can counteract the effects of the binding roots. Casting *blight* on the area kills the roots and removes the hazard. The roots can also be destroyed by dealing damage to them. A total of 10 HP clears a 5-foot square, though attacking at melee range triggers the hazard even for creatures standing outside the area. The roots are resistant to piercing and bludgeoning damage and immune to psychic damage.

Flammable Gas Pocket

Hazard

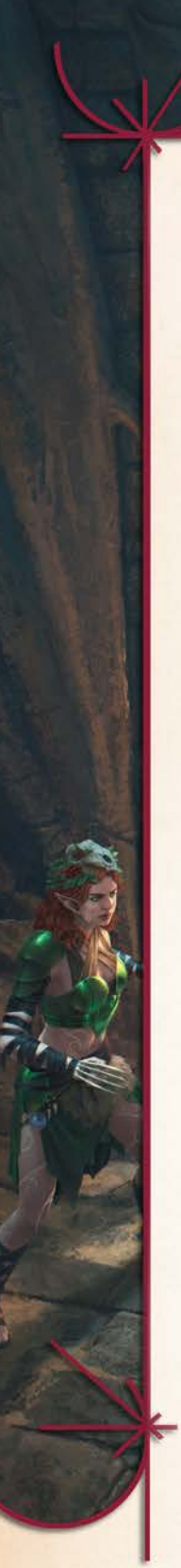
Flammable gas has filled an area underground or within a building, igniting if exposed to flame.

Trigger: When mundane or magical fire, such as a torch, lantern, or *fire bolt* spell comes in contact with the gas, the entire hazard area erupts in flames. A successful DC 14 WIS (Perception) check reveals a hissing sound or odor signaling the gas's presence.

Effects: Until ignited, this area affects creatures as the poisoned air hazard. All creatures in the area of ignition must make a DC 14 DEX save, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.

Resolution: The gas can be ignited from outside the area, burning up the flammable gas. The hazard is then removed. If the flammable gas seeps in from somewhere else, it refills the area over time (10 minutes, 1 hour, or whatever time period the GM chooses). A *gust of wind* spell can disperse the flammable gas, negating the hazard temporarily in an area or providing a safe route through, for as long as the spell lasts, plus 1 additional round.





Flash Flood

Hazard

A sudden surge of water flows through an area, battering and shoving creatures and objects in it. Debris might also be within the rush of water.

Trigger: When a creature enters the flow of water or is caught by the surge, it suffers the effects of the hazard. A successful DC 12 WIS (Survival) check allows a creature to note signs of high-water marks or other indicators of flooding, as well as rising water levels indicating an imminent flash flood.

Effects: A creature with forewarning has 1d4 rounds to remove itself from the area before the flash flood arrives. Any creature in the area when the water does arrive must succeed at a DC 14 STR save or be swept 60 feet in the direction the water is flowing. If the water also carries debris or runs over rough terrain, a creature in the area takes 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage. A creature must make a new DC 14 STR save at the beginning of its turn on consecutive rounds to avoid being carried further by the water. A creature fully inundated by the water or carried to an enclosed area might also have to contend with effects from the flooding hazard.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area to avoid continuing effects. Spells such as *freedom of movement* and *water breathing* or a creature with a swimming speed can alleviate some of the disadvantages of operating in a flash flood. Casting *create or destroy water* can eliminate some of the flow, though the rush of additional water refills the space in a subsequent round. Unless the source of water is continual, a natural flash flood subsides in 2d6 minutes.

Flooding

Hazard

Areas partially or fully flooded pose difficulties and dangers for land-dwelling, air-breathing creatures. Enclosed areas that are prone to sudden flooding can be especially dangerous for creatures passing through them.

Trigger: When a creature enters the flooded area, or if it is in the area when flooding occurs, it suffers the effects of the hazard.

Effects: Depending on the level of flooding, the area is difficult terrain for a partial flood or requires a creature to swim in a fully flooded area. If completely flooded, a creature must hold its breath unless it can breathe water. In fully flooded areas, the rules for underwater combat come into play (see **Underwater Combat** in **Chapter 6** of the *Player's Guide*).

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. Spells such as *freedom of movement* and *water breathing*, or a creature with a swimming speed can alleviate some of the disadvantages of operating in a flash flood. Casting *create or destroy water* can eliminate water from a flooded area, though it might need to be cast at a higher level or cast multiple times depending on the volume of water. Once the water is destroyed, the area might reflood if water flows in from elsewhere.

Geothermic Vents

Hazard

Scalding steam vents from apertures in the surrounding rock, obscuring the area and causing terrible wounds to those who get too close.

Trigger: When a creature enters or starts its turn in the area, it suffers the effects of the hazard. Mist and heat indicate the presence of geothermic vents. A successful DC 10 INT (Nature) check reveals the presence of a vent.

Effects: Everything within the area is considered lightly obscured. When a creature enters or starts its turn in the area, it must succeed on a DC 12 DEX save, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failure, or half that damage on a success. If a creature fails its save by 5 or more, it is blinded.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. Magic that provides fire resistance can reduce the effects of the vents. Blindness gained from this hazard lasts until the creature heals the damage taken from the steam or receives a *lesser restoration* spell.

Geyser

Hazard

A geyser is a burst of boiling hot water and steam, vented from an underground hot spring due to built-up pressure. A natural geothermal phenomenon, it can also be induced by the forces of the elemental planes intruding upon it.

Trigger: If a creature is in the area of the geyser when the eruption takes place, it suffers the effects of the hazard. Pooled hot water, steam escaping from the vent, and mineral build-up around the area are distinct clues to the geyser's presence; no ability check is needed.

Effects: A creature of Medium-size or smaller standing in, or flying above, the area where a geyser is located is hurled into the air, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage from scalding water. If the creature was not flying, it also takes falling damage, landing prone adjacent to the geyser. The falling damage is based on the height of the

geyser. A typical geyser might reach a height of 100 feet, dealing 35 (10d6) falling damage.

In addition, a hemisphere around the geyser (with a radius equal to the height of the geyser) is drenched in a cascade of superheated water. All creatures in this area take 7 (2d6) fire damage. A successful DC 13 DEX save reduces this damage by half.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. *Protection from energy* can reduce the damage from the heat. Once the geyser has been identified, a successful DC 11 INT (Nature) check is enough to inform a creature making the check that such releases happen at regular intervals, and observation over time can determine the time between eruptions.



Inexorable Darkness

Hazard

Stygian magic overlies an area, extinguishing sources of illumination or reducing their effectiveness.

Trigger: If a light source enters or is lit in the darkened area, the effects of the hazard apply to it.

Effects: Mundane light sources, such as torches and lanterns, are immediately extinguished and can't be lit within the area. Magical light sources are reduced in effect, shedding only dim light when a source would shed bright light, and no light when it would shed dim light. For example, a *light* spell would shed only dim light in a 20-foot radius, while a *faerie fire* spell would cease working in the area. Magical light sources return to their full effects once they are removed from the inexorable darkness. Nonmagical sources must be relit.

Resolution: When a light source leaves the area, the effect ends. A *dispel magic* spell ends the inexorable darkness effect with a successful DC 16 spellcasting ability check.

Magical Mire

Hazard

The floor in this area transmutes into a morass of mud.

Trigger: If a creature enters the area, it suffers the effects of the hazard. A *detect magic* spell or a similar effect reveals an aura of conjuration magic in the area.

Effects: The floor in the area of effect turns into thick mud, and creatures in the area sink into it, to a depth of 2 feet. The entire area of the trap is difficult terrain.

All creatures roll initiative. The hazard acts on initiative 1, losing ties, and only on round 10. A creature that ends its turn in the area must succeed at a DC 11 STR save or be restrained. On its turn, a restrained creature can reroll the save if it is at the edge of the

area or has some means of pulling itself free (a rope tossed to it and held by an ally, for example), ending the restrained condition on a success. At the end of round 10, the floor returns to normal. All creatures still in the area of effect are restrained and held fast in the now-solid floor. This condition lasts until they are removed from the floor.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. The hazard's effects end after 1 minute. A *dispel magic* cast on the area removes the hazard with a successful DC 15 spellcasting ability check.

Creatures trapped in the floor after the effect has ended can be freed with varying levels of difficulty, depending on the type of floor. A dirt floor requires 10 minutes of digging to free a creature. A stone floor requires breaking enough of the floor around the creature to sufficiently free it (AC 17, 10 HP).

Monster Attractor

Hazard

Whether placed or accidental, something (a loose chain rattling against a wall, a magical bell tolling, running water rattling on a piece of discarded sheet metal, or some similar object) makes noise, loudly and unusually enough that it attracts curious monsters or hungry predators.

Trigger: Different monster attractor hazards have different triggers. Generally, when a creature enters the area of the hazard or interacts with an attractor, the effects of the hazard begin. Physical sounds might be due to local conditions—an air current, seismic tremors, ancient machinery in the walls, or similar effects. A magical alarm could be triggered by creatures entering its area of effect or when someone moves within proximity of the source of the sound.

Effects: A loud, unusual sound rings out. If the source of the sound is hidden, a creature can locate it with a successful DC 10 WIS (Perception) check. Until the source is dealt with, double the chances of wandering monsters entering the area. If not using a wandering monster table, have a creature that inhabits or frequents the area come to investigate the noise while the PCs are there, unless they stop the source of the sound within 30 seconds.

Resolution: Leaving the area reduces the wandering monster chance to normal. A *silence* spell ends the effect for the duration of the spell. A permanent end to the hazard involves removing the source of the noise.

Necrotic Dust

Hazard

Years, decades, or centuries of necromantic rituals and the presence of undead have left this area tainted with dust from the remains of hundreds of undead bodies. The area is heavy with residual necrotic energy, impeding healing.

Trigger: When a creature enters and lingers in the area, it suffers the effects of the hazard.

Effects: A creature can't regain hit points by resting in the area. When casting healing spells in the area, roll twice for the number of hit points healed and use the lower roll. Undead in the area have advantage on saves against the Channel Divinity class feature.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. A *hallow* spell cast in the area destroys the necrotic dust, but none of the normal benefits of the spell occur unless cast a second time.

Poisoned Air

Hazard

The air here is tainted with poisonous gases or polluted with spores or other hazardous materials.

Trigger: When a creature enters an area of bad air, it suffers the effects of the hazard. The presence of bad air can be detected several ways. Tainted or polluted air might have an odor. The air might be visibly contaminated. In either case, it is noticeable with a successful DC 10 WIS (Perception) check. Alternately, a creature might notice tiny creatures dead in the area that have succumbed to the bad air's effects.

Effects: For every minute a creature spends breathing poisoned air, it must make a DC 13 CON save. On a failure, it takes 5 (2d4) poison damage and is poisoned. On a success, it takes half the damage and isn't poisoned. To represent more toxic environments, reduce the time of exposure necessary for the save, increase the DC of the save, increase the damage, or use a combination of the three.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. Depending on the size of the area, a creature might make it through by holding its breath. A *gust of wind* spell can disperse poison or pollution, or replenish oxygen in a depleted area, negating the hazard temporarily in an area or providing a safe route through, for as long as the spell lasts, plus 1 additional round.

Shifting Debris

Hazard

The floor or ground in this area is covered in shifting, uneven piles of debris such as rocks and dirt from a collapse, the remains of decayed furniture, piles of bones or other objects, or similar materials.

Trigger: When a creature attempts to move across shifting debris using its walking speed, the hazard's effects activate.

Effects: The area containing the debris is difficult terrain. If a creature uses its full speed to move within the area, it must succeed on a DC 11 DEX save or fall prone. If a creature fails this save by 5 or more, it also takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. (It can be slashing or piercing damage instead, depending on the composition of the debris.)

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area or use a form of movement other than walking. Physically or magically removing the debris can also remove the hazard.

Tainted Water

Hazard

What seems to be a viable water source is tainted, causing sickness or death if drunk or otherwise interacted with.

Trigger: When a creature drinks from, enters, or begins its turn within the tainted water, it suffers the effects of the hazard. A successful DC 13 INT (Nature) or WIS (Survival) check reveals a lack of animal life near or in the water source, making its potability suspect. A successful DC 13 WIS (Perception or Survival) check can be made while sampling a small amount of the water to discern the toxins.

Effects: The creature must make a DC 13 CON save. On a failed save, the creature takes 3 (1d6) poison damage and is poisoned for 1 hour. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage and isn't poisoned.

Resolution: A creature poisoned by tainted water can be treated with a DC 13 WIS (Medicine) check. Success removes the poisoned condition.

Unquiet Spirits

Hazard

Due to curses, tragic deaths, or lingering necromantic magic, the spirits of the dead sometimes linger to plague the living. While less dangerous than actual undead, unquiet spirits can unnerve and disturb the living. The presence of unquiet spirits isn't immediately obvious until they are triggered into manifesting.

Trigger: When a living creature enters the domain of the unquiet spirits, it suffers the effects of the hazard. However, living creatures tend to shun such areas. A successful DC 11 INT (Nature) or WIS (Survival) check reveals an unusual lack of living creatures typical to such an area, even rodents and insects.





Effects: The unquiet spirits can manifest visually, or audibly, or both. Audible spirits yammer, howl, or whisper, attempting vainly to communicate with the living. Visual manifestations appear as dark, ragged shadows, glowing eyes in the dark, and faces that peer from the corners, leering and mouthing silent screams. The constant distraction wears on the mind. All WIS (Perception) checks using hearing or sight (or both, as appropriate) have disadvantage, as are any INT, WIS, or CHA checks made after at least 1 minute of exposure. Resting isn't possible in the area. At the end of each minute spent in the area, a creature must succeed on a DC 12 WIS save or become frightened for 1 round. When frightened in this manner, a creature must use any means of movement to get as far from the area as possible.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. A cleric who uses their Channel Divinity feature to Turn Undead can banish the unquiet spirits and end the hazard. A *silence* spell can block the effects of an audible manifestation. A creature that can't see (due to blindness or darkness) is unaffected by a visual manifestation. A *protection from good and evil* spell negates the effects on the protected creature.

Unstable Architecture

Hazard

The floor, walls, or ceiling in this area are crumbling and unstable. Cracks, fallen debris, and obvious wear are visible. Careless activity in this area could cause a collapse.

Trigger: If the unstable architecture is struck by a bludgeoning attack that exceeds its hardness, takes any thunder damage, or is affected by magic or conditions that could destabilize it (such as an earth tremor or an *earthquake* spell) it collapses in its area. A creature can recognize signs of instability with a successful DC 12 INT (Investigation) or WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: The area where the collapse occurs is difficult terrain and a shifting debris hazard until the debris is cleared. Creatures and unattended objects in the area of effect take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and a creature is knocked prone if they fail a DC 12 DEX save. If a creature fails the save by 5 or more, it is also restrained by being buried in rubble. The restrained creature or any adjacent creature can attempt a DC 11 STR check to free it. The restrained creature has disadvantage on this check.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. Certain magic might provide temporary reinforcement to an area of unstable architecture, such as *wall of stone*, preventing collapse until after the spell ends.

Vampire Ivy

Hazard

Often growing over forgotten ruins, this plant's tendrils secrete a numbing oil, allowing it to sink tendrils into a passing creature's skin unnoticed, to feed on its blood.

Trigger: When a living creature enters an area containing vampire ivy, it suffers the effects of the hazard. Vampire ivy can be discerned from a harmless plant by the pale green color of its heart-shaped leaves. A successful DC 13 INT (Nature) or WIS (Survival) allows a creature to identify the plant. A successful DC 13 WIS (Perception) check also reveals the bones of small animals in the dirt, hidden beneath the ivy's canopy.

Effects: When a creature first enters an area containing vampire ivy, and each round it starts its turn there, the creature loses 1 HP due to blood loss, and its maximum hit point total is reduced by the same amount. The maximum hit point reduction can be removed by casting *lesser restoration* on the creature, or by taking a long rest.

Resolution: An affected creature must leave the area. The plant can be killed by dealing enough damage. A total of 5 damage clears a 5-foot square of ivy. The plants are resistant to bludgeoning and piercing damage, and immune to psychic damage.

TRAPS

Traps are a common danger in dungeons and ruins. Unlike hazards, traps are intentionally placed, typically meant to protect creatures or objects, especially treasure, in these environs. Traps usually deal damage and are meant to injure or kill unsuspecting intruders. PCs might fall into deep pits (some filled with acid or sharpened spikes at the bottom), be crushed by falling ceilings, or be burned, electrified, or frozen by hidden glyphs.

Traps can also be used as alarms or to subdue, hinder, imprison, or force intruders out of an area. That doesn't mean nonlethal traps aren't dangerous. Alarms summon guardians or encourage hungry monsters to come see what all the noise is about. A trap that imprisons targets holds them until someone comes along or until they just die of thirst. A trap might just distract someone long enough for a second trap to finish the job.

Some traps can be triggered by a failed attempt to disarm them. In such cases, the resolution section of the trap's description will describe these effects. If a trap does not indicate that a disarm failure triggers it, then the trap remains set after the failure.

As PCs gain levels, use the effect severity guidelines (see **Effect Severity** earlier in this chapter) to scale up trap effects and keep them meaningful.

TYPES OF TRAPS

A trap can be either mechanical or magical, and either can also be complex, which is discussed in the trap's description.

MECHANICAL TRAPS

Mechanical traps include things that depend on a mechanism to operate, such as collapsing ceilings, poison darts, or scything blades.

MAGIC TRAPS

Magic traps consist of magical devices that activate spells or spell-like effects. Spells such as *glyph of warding* and *symbol* function as magic traps.

COMPLEX TRAPS

Complex traps continue to execute on rounds after activation instead of triggering once and being done. For example, a trap that slowly floods a room is a complex trap. On the trap's turn, the water level rises. After several rounds, the room is completely flooded.

Resolve a complex trap's effects in initiative order along with the PCs' actions. A complex trap's description states when it acts. On each of its turns, the trap takes an action, usually making successive attacks or maintaining an effect that changes over time. Until triggered, a complex trap can be detected and disabled like a standard trap.



DESIGNING TRAPS

Using a mix of different trap types is key to keeping the PCs on their toes. The moment the players start expecting every suspiciously empty hallway to be trapped or every statue to animate, it's time to shake things up. If the perfect trap isn't here or in the *Game Master's Guide*, consult the tables in this section to create new traps.

TRAP TYPE

d4	Type
1	Mechanical
2	Mechanical Complex
3	Magic
4	Magic Complex

TRAP SEVERITY

d6	Severity
1–2	Setback
3–4	Dangerous
5–6	Deadly

TRAP PLACEMENT

d6	Placement
1	On a specific portion of an area, such as a segment of floor or part of a wall.
2	On a structure or terrain feature, such as an altar/fountain/garden.
3	On an entrance/exit, such as a gateway/staircase/trapdoor.
4	On a painting/statue/tapestry.
5	On the lock of a chest/door/diary.
6	The entirety of an area, such as a cavern/chamber/hallway.

TRAP TRIGGER

d8	Trigger
1	Cast Spell
2	Enter Area
3	Fail Check
4	Pressure Plate
5	Time Limit
6	Touch
7	Trip Wire
8	Wrong Answer

TRAP EFFECT

d12	Effect
1	Activates Hazard
2	Casts Spell
3	Creates Barrier
4	Deals Damage
5	Delivers Poison
6	Destroys Item
7	Inflicts Condition
8	Inflicts Curse
9	Inflicts Disease
10	Summons Creatures
11	Triggers Alarm (see also threat levels in **Chapter 6**)
12	Triggers Different Trap

TRAP DETECTION

d6	Resolution
1	Decipher/Find Warning
2	Detect Magically
3	Passive Investigation
4	Passive Perception
5	Successful INT (Investigation) Check
6	Successful WIS (Perception) Check

TRAP DEACTIVATION

d8	Deactivation
1	Bypass with Code/Key
2	Command Word
3	Defeat Monster
4	Disable with Thieves' Tools
5	Disable without Thieves' Tools
6	Dispel Magic
7	Solve Puzzle
8	Toggle Lever/Switch

SAMPLE TRAPS

Here are several ready-to-use traps.

Acid Spray

Trap (Mechanical)

This uses hidden pumps to vent a powerful, organic-eating acid into the area when activated by a pressure plate.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature moves through the trap's space, depressing the pressure plate and activating the sprayers. A creature can notice the trap with a successful DC 13 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: Creatures and unattended objects made of organic materials (such as cloth or wood) in the trap's area must make a DC 15 DEX save, taking 22 (4d10) acid damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success. A creature or object that is damaged by the trap is soaked in acid for the next minute. An object or creature that failed its save against the trap takes 7 (2d6) acid damage at the start of each consecutive turn, until it or another creature takes an action to douse the creature with water or another liquid to wash away the acid. If a creature succeeded on its save, it takes 3 (1d6) acid damage on its next turn only, suffering no other damage thereafter.

Resolution: This trap can contain any number of charges. A creature can disarm the trap with a successful DC 15 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check. A different skill or tool can be used to make the check with disadvantage.

Crumbling Step

Trap (Mechanical)

A false step crumbles under the weight of a creature stepping on it, pitching the creature off-balance and possibly causing it to fall.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature puts more than 10 pounds on a step, which crumbles underneath the weight. A creature can notice a distinct difference in coloration or texture to the trapped step with a successful DC 12 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: A creature moving up the steps must succeed on a DC 12 DEX save or fall prone, taking 1 bludgeoning damage. A creature moving down the steps must succeed on a DC 14 DEX save or fall the remaining distance to the bottom of the steps, taking 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet traveled, and falling prone at the bottom of the steps.



Resolution: The step is broken after triggering, permanently ending the trap. A creature can easily step over the trap or disarm it by purposely breaking it with no special tools or ability check.

Crushing Walls

Trap (Mechanical)

Massive hidden engines push two walls of the room into the center, crushing anything inside.

Trigger: The trap activates if a creature enters the room and remains inside for 1 round, or if all doors to the room are closed while a creature is inside the room. A successful DC 20 INT (Investigation) check reveals the switch to deactivate the walls, which might provide a clue about the trap before it activates (if the GM decides to include one).



Effects: When triggered, any doors that are still open swing shut and lock, and all creatures present roll initiative. The walls act on 1, after all other turns have been taken. On their turn, the walls close in, reducing the space between them by 5 feet. Once the distance between the walls is less than the space through which a creature can squeeze, the creature is restrained and takes 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage at the end of the walls' turn. Once the distance between the walls is 0, the walls begin to withdraw to their original position, and creatures in the room no longer take damage.

Resolution: A door to the room can't be unlocked from inside without using magic, such as the *knock* spell. The door can be attacked and destroyed to allow for escape. Any object used to brace the walls that isn't destroyed by the trap's damage for 2 rounds triggers a safety mechanism to activate, causing the walls to retract, the door(s) to unlock, and the trap to reset. Magical solutions that create objects capable of stopping the walls' movement, such as *wall of stone*, can stop and reset the trap.

In addition, a hidden switch can be included inside the room that deactivates the trap. This switch will be located on the (non-moving) walls or floor in the center of the room where the walls will meet. The switch is well-hidden, requiring a successful DC 20 INT (Investigation) check to discover.

Deceiving Orb

Trap (Magical)

This glowing crystal orb stands affixed to an ornate, wrought-iron pedestal, emitting a soothing radiance. This orb lures the unwary in by providing beneficial magic, only to harm the next creature that uses it.

Trigger: A creature touches the orb. A creature using the *detect magic* spell can examine the orb's magical aura. A successful DC 15 INT (Arcana) check uncovers the orb's harmful inclinations. A successful DC 18 INT (Arcana) check also indicates its healing properties. A successful DC 20 INT (Arcana) check also reveals the 1-hour reset time.

Effects: The first creature to touch the orb is healed, gaining 12 (2d10 + 1) hit points. The next creature to touch the orb, even if it is the same creature, takes 22 (4d10) necrotic energy damage with no save. After 1 hour, the orb's magic resets, once again healing the next creature to touch it.

Resolution: The trap can be circumvented by not touching it. The crystal has an AC 13 and 15 HP. Hitting it with weapons does not count as touching it.

Fall and Crush

Trap (Complex Mechanical)

This trap has two working parts: long staves that project from the walls, arcing along the floor to sweep creatures off their feet, followed by a massive stone sphere that drops from a hidden trapdoor in the ceiling, and rolls down the hallway to crush the fallen.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature depresses one of the pressure plates. A creature can notice the initial portion of the trap with a successful DC 15 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: When triggered, flexible wooden poles sweep out in an arc from either wall of the corridor, in the direction of the trigger. All creatures standing in a 10-foot square are surprised if the trap isn't detected. The poles attack all creatures in the area, with a +6 bonus. On a hit, the target takes 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 15 STR save or fall prone.

After the poles have attacked, they retract back into the walls, triggering the second part of the trap. All creatures present roll initiative. The sphere descends on initiative count 1. On its turn, the sphere moves 60 feet in a straight line. The sphere can move through creatures' spaces, and creatures can move through its space, treating it as difficult terrain. Whenever the sphere enters a creature's space, or a creature enters its space while the sphere is rolling, that creature must succeed on a DC 15 DEX save or take 55 (10d10) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone.

The layout of the corridor is ultimately up to the GM but should have enough of an incline to allow the sphere to roll for some distance, possibly with a pit at one end for it to roll into when it reaches the end of its run. The sphere can't roll around corners, but corridors designed with curving turns can allow the sphere to roll into nearby passages as needed.

Resolution: A creature can disarm the trap (either by disabling the pressure plate or the poles) with a successful DC 15 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check; a different skill or tool can be used to make the check with disadvantage. The pressure plate can also be activated from outside the area of effect, springing that part of the trap harmlessly, but still activates the second part and starts the sphere rolling down the corridor, causing the latter section of the Effects section to play out as normal.

Fleshwarp Portal

Trap (Magical)

A magical doorway or archway pulses with energy that causes physical changes to creatures passing through it.

Trigger: A creature moves through the portal, causing the magic to activate. A creature can notice the rippling magic of the trap with a DC 18 INT (Arcana) check or with a *detect magic* spell.

Effects: An affected creature must succeed on a DC 18 CON save or develop a permanent deformity (see **Fleshwarp Deformities** table). Studying the trap for 1 minute reveals a pattern to the magic that allows a creature to time its movement through the portal during a quiescent moment with a successful DC 11 DEX (Acrobatics) check.

Resolution: The trap can be avoided if it is noticed prior to entry. Its magic can be suppressed for 1 minute with a *dispel magic* spell. Fleshwarp deformities can be corrected with a *greater restoration* spell or similarly powerful magic.

FLESHWARP DEFORMITIES

d6	Deformity
1	**Amorphous Appendage.** One of the PC's appendages (arm, leg, or tentacle) becomes slightly amorphous, allowing them to squeeze through tight spaces easily. However, this appendage occasionally appears formless, causing mild discomfort.
2	**Chameleon Skin.** The PC's skin assumes a chameleon-like quality and changes color with the surroundings. The PC becomes proficient in stealth; however, their skin occasionally changes colors involuntarily.
3	**Heat Sensitivity.** The PC becomes sensitive to temperature changes, providing advantage on saves against extreme cold but imposing disadvantage against extreme heat.
4	**Iridescent Hair.** The PC's hair turns iridescent, reflecting a spectrum of colors.
5	**Luminous Eyes.** The PC's eyes emit a dim glow, providing darkvision up to 30 feet. However, this constant illumination makes stealth difficult, imposing disadvantage on DEX (Stealth) checks in low-light conditions.
6	**Resonant Voice.** The PC's voice repeats with a slight echo. The echo projects over distances or noises, but it becomes challenging to speak quietly. The PC has disadvantage on ability checks when attempting to whisper.

Freezing Mist

Trap (Magical)

A magical rune, when triggered, fills the area with a freezing fog, dealing cold damage and icing all surfaces in the area.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature moves within 5 feet of the rune. The trigger rune can be spotted with a DC 12 WIS (Perception) check. (The DC can be raised if the rune is camouflaged among other carvings, or otherwise more difficult to detect.) *Detect magic* or a similar spell reveals an aura of conjuration magic in the area.

Effects: A roiling, white mist fills a 30-foot cube, spreading around corners and heavily obscuring the area. All creatures that enter the mist, or start their turn in it, take 11 (2d10) cold damage. All surfaces become coated in a layer of ice, becoming difficult terrain. If a creature moves within the area, it must make a DC 13 DEX save. On a failed save, it falls prone. A creature that remains in the mist without moving at least 1 round finds its limbs frozen to the floor, requiring a successful DC 10 STR save in order to free itself and move. This DC increases by 1 for each round the creature remains immobile within the mist, to a maximum of DC 13.

Resolution: The trap can be avoided by staying 10 feet or more from the rune. The trap's effects end after 1 minute. It can be disarmed by marring or destroying the rune (AC 18, 5 HP, vulnerability to thunder damage, and immune to poison and psychic damage).

Hall of a Thousand Spears

Trap (Complex Mechanical with a Magical Trigger)

Entering this corridor activates a complex engine of machinery, causing stabbing spears to thrust from the walls, ceiling, and floor in rapid, seemingly random order.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature moves into the hallway. All creatures present roll initiative. The trap acts on initiative 20. The pattern of holes from which the spears emerge can be discerned with a successful DC 15 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: The entire area is considered difficult terrain. Creatures that enter or start their turn in the trap's area must make a DC 15 DEX save, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success. On the trap's turn, spears attack all creatures in the area with a +8 bonus. On a hit, a target takes 11 (2d10) piercing damage.

Resolution: The spears can be destroyed, though there are many, and it takes time. A creature within or adjacent to the area can attack the spears in a 10-foot section (AC 15, 40 HP). For every 10 damage of damage dealt, the attack roll of the spears in that area is reduced by 2. Spells and magical effects can also inflict damage, possibly in multiple 10-foot squares, depending on area of effect. The spears are immune to poison and psychic damage, and always make their saves against spells and effects that allow a DEX save.

A creature with thieves' tools can use an action when in or adjacent to a 10-foot area of the trap. A successful DC 15 (Thieves' Tools) check hampers the mechanisms projecting the spears, reducing the attack bonus of the spears in that area by 2. A creature can make this check multiple times reducing the attack bonus by 2 with each success.

As an action, a creature that can see the blades can make a DC 15 INT (Investigation) check to examine the spears. On a success, the creature notices a pattern to the spears' movements, and the spears' attacks against the creature have disadvantage, as long as the creature isn't incapacitated or restrained.

Finally, a successful DC 15 INT (Investigation) check in the area at the far end of the trap reveals a hidden mechanism that can deactivate the trap.

Hungry Hall

Trap (Complex Mechanical)

This trap is laid into the floor of a long, narrow hallway (ideally at least 90 feet long and only 5 feet wide), with the entrance positioned at one end and a false door positioned at the far end.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature steps on a pressure plate in the floor halfway down the hallway or a creature attempts to touch or open the false door. A creature within 10 feet of either the pressure plate or the false door can attempt a DC 15 INT (Investigation) check to notice the trap.

Effects: When the trap is triggered, the floor begins to move and the wall with the false door rises into the ceiling—revealing a dark alcove filled with writhing tentacles.

All creatures in the hallway must roll initiative. On initiative count 20, the floor moves any creatures or objects on it 30 feet closer to the tentacle-filled alcove. When this movement occurs, creatures standing on the floor must succeed on a DC 17 DEX save or fall prone.

A creature that starts its turn in the alcove's area must succeed on a DC 17 DEX save or take (10) 3d6 bludgeoning damage and be restrained by the tentacles. A creature takes an additional (10) 3d6 bludgeoning damage at the beginning of each turn it remains restrained. A creature restrained by the tentacles can use its action to make a DC 15 STR (Athletics) or DEX (Acrobatics) check (its choice), ending the restrained condition on a success.

Resolution: Wedging a spike, dagger, or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating. The floor stops moving and the tentacles disappear once they've dealt an accumulated total of 100 damage, or if a creature in initiative order passes through one of the hall's true exits.

Magnetic Repulsion Orb

Trap (Complex Magic)

This trap is an enchanted orb that pulses with arcane power. With each pulse, magnetic objects are pushed away from the sphere. The orb is typically placed on a pedestal or ledge over a chasm where those pushed from it might fall to their doom.

Trigger: When a creature moves to a space within 15 feet of the orb without speaking the command phrase, it activates the trap, causing the orb to begin pulsing. A creature can notice the trap with a successful DC 15 WIS (Perception) check. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as the *detect magic* spell, reveals an aura of transmutation magic around the orb.

Effects: Each creature within 30 feet of the orb and wearing metal armor must succeed on a DC 15 STR save or be pushed up to 15 feet away from the orb and knocked prone. Any creature holding a metal weapon, shield, or other metal object, such as a lantern, must succeed on the STR save or let go of the object, which is then pushed up to 15 feet away. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties) of each round, the orb pulses again, and each creature within 30 feet of the orb must make the same save.

Resolution: The orb stops pulsing if no creature is within 30 feet of it on initiative count 20, ending the effects of this trap until triggered again. A creature within 5 feet of the orb can disarm it by succeeding on a DC 15 INT (Arcana) check. Alternatively, a successful *dispel magic* spell (DC 13) cast on the orb destroys the trap.

Punisher of the Greedy

Trap (Mechanical)

A large and valuable-looking gem sits in a fitting within the room, as a decoration on a throne, an eye of an idol, or similar setting. The gem acts as a cap on a reservoir of highly poisonous gas. Removing the gem from its fixture releases a cloud of poisonous gas into the area.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature removes the gem from its fitting. A creature making a successful DC 13 WIS (Perception) check notices a wax seal between the fitting and the gemstone. If part of the wax is scraped away, allow a DC 13 WIS (Perception) check to notice the odor of the gas, and a DC 15 INT (Investigation) or WIS (Medicine) check to identify the poison.

Effects: When the gem is removed, the gas quickly fills the area. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the area takes 11 (2d10) poison damage and must make a DC 15 CON save. On a failure, the target is poisoned for 1 minute. Each round, at the beginning of its turn, a creature poisoned in this way takes 5 (1d10) poison damage. A poisoned creature can make a new save at the end of each of its turns, ending the poisoned condition on a success.

A GM can replace this toxin with any poison. Perhaps the trap's designer wanted to capture thieves rather than



kill them, so instead, the poison knocks the affected creatures unconscious rather than inflicting damage.

Resolution: With a successful DC 17 (Thieves' Tools) check, a creature can remove the gem and stopper the vent before enough gas is released to have an effect; a different skill or tool can be used to make the check with disadvantage. If the disarm check fails, the trap triggers as normal.

Rising Pedestal

Trap (Mechanical)

This trap is concealed within what seems a fairly easy obstacle: a chasm, pit, or other similar area that must be traversed, with several stone pedestals that can be hopped, one to another, to reach the other side. What appears to be a harmless steppingstone (or multiple steppingstones) turns into a deadly piston, driving the creature standing on it into the ceiling.

Trigger: The trap activates when more than 10 pounds are placed on the trapped stone. A creature making a successful DC 12 WIS (Perception) check can notice a distinct difference between the trapped pedestal and the others (dried blood, cracks and damage to the top of the pedestal, or perhaps broken pieces of metal or other materials embedded in its surface).

Effects: Any object or creature on the pedestal when the trap is triggered takes 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and falls from the pedestal unless it succeeds at a DC 15 DEX save.

Resolution: A creature can disarm the trap's mechanism with a successful DC 15 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check, but it must do so at the base of the pedestal. This requires descending into the area below, which might be an altogether different sort of danger. A creature can also attempt to avoid contact with the pedestal entirely, jumping over it to the next one in line, by making a DC 10 STR (Athletics) check. On a failed check, the creature falls into the pit below.

Screaming Banshee

Trap (Magical)

A statue of dark, smoky crystal is carved in the image of a woman, fists clenched against her chest, head back and mouth open as if screaming. The enchanted statue vibrates with a high, ringing noise that damages creatures in the nearby area.

Trigger: When a creature moves within 20 feet of the statue, the trap activates. A creature can notice arcane symbols etched into the base of the statue with a successful DC 16 WIS (Perception) check. A *detect magic* or similar spell reveals an aura of evocation magic on the statue.

Effects: When a creature comes within range, the statue vibrates with a high ringing noise, building to an ear-bleeding frequency. All creatures in the area must make a DC 16 CON save, taking 55 (10d10) thunder damage and becoming deafened for 1 minute on a failed save. On a successful save, a creature takes half damage and isn't deafened. A creature deafened in this manner can reroll the save on subsequent rounds, ending the deafening effect on a success. The trap resets after 1 minute.

Resolution: A *dispel magic* cast on the statue removes the trap with a successful DC 17 spellcasting ability check. The statue has an AC 13 and 18 HP, is immune to poison and psychic damage, and vulnerable to bludgeoning damage. However, if the statue is reduced to 0 HP, it explodes in a shriek of sound and flying shards. All creatures within 30 feet take 11 (2d10) piercing and 11 (2d10) thunder damage. A successful DC 15 DEX save reduces the damage to half.

DISCOVERING COMMAND WORDS

Creating opportunities for the PCs to discover the command word for a trap, magic item, or similar item before it's actually encountered is a great way to reward exploration! Finding a scrap of paper with a single word written on it in the pockets of a defeated guard or discovering an arcane phrase scratched onto the wall of a prison cell is a great way to make a location feel full of secrets to be uncovered.

Searing Heat

Trap (Magical)

A magical rune, when triggered, fills the area with broiling heat, dealing fire damage.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature moves within 5 feet of the rune. The trigger rune can be spotted with a DC 12 WIS (Perception) check. (The DC can be raised if the rune is camouflaged among other carvings or otherwise more difficult to detect.) *Detect magic* or a similar spell reveals an aura of conjuration magic in the area.

Effects: A roiling wave of superheated air fills a 30-foot cube, spreading around corners. All creatures that enter the heat, or start their turn in it, take 11 (2d10) fire damage.

Resolution: The trap can be avoided by staying 10 feet or more from the rune. The trap's effects end after 1 minute. It can be disarmed by marring or destroying the rune (AC 18, 5 HP, vulnerability to thunder damage, and immune to poison and psychic damage).

Searing Light

Trap (Magical)

A small magical glass bulb inset in a small hole in a wall or statue emits a burst of searing light.

Trigger: When more than 20 pounds are placed on the trap's pressure plate, the trap activates. A creature can notice the trap, typically from faint shadow silhouettes on the floor or wall opposite the trap's hole, with a successful DC 15 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: A brilliant burst of light emits from the wall or statue in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 15 DEX save. On a failure, a creature takes 11 (2d10) radiant damage and is blinded for 1 minute. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't blinded.

Resolution: The trap can be disarmed with a successful DC 15 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating. A creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns to end the blindness on itself.

Shock Lock

Trap (Magic)

This trap is an enchantment that can be placed on any lock. Most commonly, it is placed on locks that secure doors and chests. When a shock lock enchantment is applied to a lock, the enchanter must choose a command word that can be spoken aloud to suppress its effects.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature doesn't say a preset command word before picking or using a key to unlock the lock. A creature can attempt a DC 15 INT (Investigation) check to notice the trap. A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as *detect magic*, reveals an aura of evocation magic around the locked door or chest.

Effects: All creatures within 10 feet of the unlocked lock must make a DC 15 DEX save. Creatures wearing metal armor make this save with disadvantage. A creature takes 22 (4d10) lightning damage on a failure, or half as much damage on a success.



Resolution: If the lock's command word is spoken aloud within 30 feet of it, the trap's effects are suppressed for 10 minutes (allowing it to be opened safely). A *dispel magic* spell (DC 16) cast on the lock also suppresses the trap's effects for 10 minutes. After firing, the trap becomes dormant for 10 minutes before becoming active again.

Spinning Tunnel

Trap (Mechanical)

A long, cylindrical tunnel with doors on both ends spins when its mechanism is triggered.

Trigger: The trap activates when a creature moves through the space at the midpoint of the hallway, tripping the pressure plate. A creature can notice the pressure plate with a successful DC 12 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: When a creature triggers the pressure plate at the midway point of the hallway, the doors at either end close and lock. All creatures must roll initiative. A creature in the hallway must use 15 feet of its movement on its turn to counteract the rotation of the hallway and remain standing, otherwise it tumbles, taking 5 (1d10) bludgeoning damage and being knocked prone. If the pressure plate is triggered a second time, or the door at the far end of the hall is opened, the rotation increases to double speed, requiring creatures in the hallway to use 30 feet of movement to counter the rotation and avoid falling.

Resolution: A creature can disarm the trap with a successful DC 13 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check; a different skill or tool can be used to make the check with disadvantage. The locks on the doors at either end of the hallway can be unlocked with a successful DC 12 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check, but this check is made at disadvantage while the hallway is spinning, unless the creature making the check can hover or levitate. Certain types of special movement, such as flying or the *spider climb* spell, can bypass the trap, allowing a creature to stick to avoid the tumbling effect of the trap.

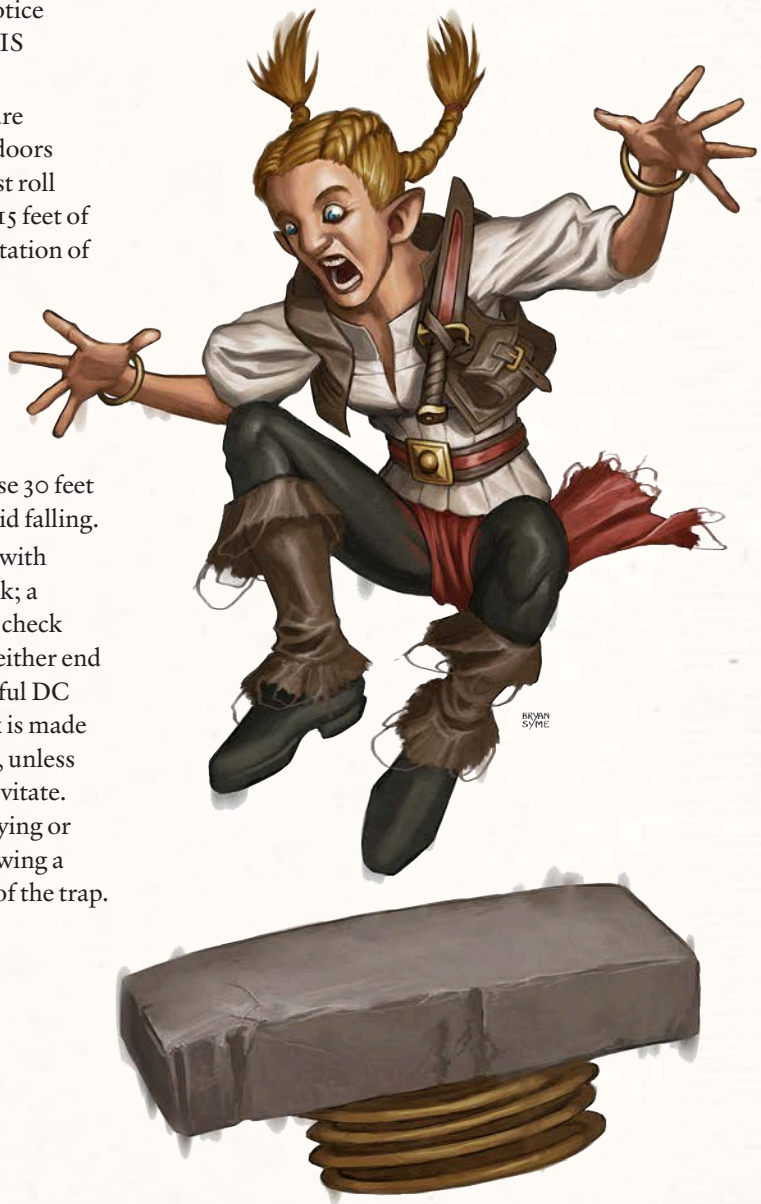
Spring Floor

Trap (Mechanical)

A creature stepping on this section of trapped floor is flung away as the floor pops up at an angle with a great amount of force.

Trigger: When a creature enters the trap's space, it activates. A creature can notice the trap with a successful DC 15 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: The creature is thrown 15 feet, landing prone and taking 11 (2d10) points of bludgeoning damage. The spring floor can be combined with a hazard or another trap. For example, the creature could bypass a pit, only to have the spring floor toss it into the pit, taking the



pit's falling damage instead of the normal trap damage. Or the spring floor could toss the creature back into a hazard that had been avoided. It could also fling a creature over a balcony or off a wall, in which case the normal trap damage would be replaced with falling damage (as it would if the creature were tossed into a pit). The target of the trap can attempt to leap off the square as it triggers, requiring a DC 16 DEX save. On a success, the creature moves to an adjacent space and isn't affected by the trap.

Resolution: A creature can avoid the trap by not stepping on it. A creature can disarm the trap with a successful DC 15 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check; a different skill or tool can be used to make the check with disadvantage.

Tilting Floor

Trap (Mechanical)

A smooth, polished, but otherwise normal-looking stone floor in a hall, at least 60 feet long, is secretly balanced on a fulcrum at its center. When weight is applied unevenly to one side, it tilts drastically, sending everyone on the floor sliding into a pit, encounter, hazard, or another trap.

Trigger: The trap activates when one or more creatures are at the tipping point, three quarters of the way across the hall, halfway between the fulcrum at the middle of the hall and the hall's end.

Effects: Once there is more weight beyond the tipping point than on the other side, the floor tilts, taking 3 rounds to fully descend, minus 1 round for every Medium-sized creature (or one Large or two Small creatures) beyond the tipping point. All creatures must roll initiative. The trap goes on initiative 1, after everyone else.

At the start of a creature's turn, it must succeed at a DC 11 DEX save or slide 10 feet toward the low end of the floor. If this puts the creature past the midpoint and increases the number of creatures on the lower half of the floor, decrease the descent time and increase the DC of the DEX save by 1.

Once the tilt begins, movement toward the upper end of the floor is considered difficult terrain. If the tilt increases a second time, all creatures immediately slide to the bottom, regardless of initiative order.

Resolution: Moving weight to the opposite side of the fulcrum tilts the floor back toward level, decreasing the DC, and either increasing the descent time or halting it entirely.

Once the mechanism of the trap has been observed, the easiest way to ensure it isn't set off is to keep more weight on the near side. Various magical effects can also disable or bypass the trap, such as using *stone shape* to meld one or both ends of the floor to the surrounding stone or using *dimension door* to teleport across. Creatures with a flying speed can avoid the floor entirely.

Trapping Claw

Trap (Mechanical)

Attempting to open a door causes metal talons to unfold and grab on to a creature, holding it fast.

Trigger: When a creature attempts to open the door, the trap activates. A creature can notice the trap with a successful DC 13 WIS (Perception) check.

Effects: When a creature attempts to open the trapped door, the claw extends and contracts. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save or take 5 (1d10) piercing damage and gain the grappled condition.

Resolution: A creature can disarm the trap with a successful DC 13 DEX (Thieves' Tools) check; a different skill or tool can be used to make the check with disadvantage. If a creature is grappled by the claw, it can be removed with the same DC as disarming it. An allied creature can attempt to remove the claw with a successful DC 13 STR (Athletics) check. The trapped creature can make a DC 15 STR (Athletics) or DEX (Acrobatics) check to escape but takes an additional 5 (1d10) piercing damage on a fail.

Vampiric Door

Trap (Magical)

This ornate door emits a soothing radiance and is decorated with carvings and symbols suggesting wealth lies beyond it. The door lures the unwary into opening it through enchanting magic, only to harm any creature that touches it.

Trigger: A creature within 5 feet of the door succeeds on a DC 16 WIS save or is convinced to open the door. A creature using the *detect magic* spell can examine the door's magical aura. A successful DC 16 INT (Arcana) check uncovers the door's harmful inclinations.

Effects: A creature touching the door takes 22 (4d10) necrotic damage with no save.

Resolution: The trap can be circumvented by not touching it. The door has an AC 18 and 25 HP. Hitting it with weapons does not count as touching it.



5: PUZZLES & SKILL CHALLENGES

They had several clues, but the party was struggling with the ancient puzzle they found.

A dungeon delve should be about more than just combat. This chapter provides overviews and examples of two unique types of challenges ripe for placement in explorable locations: puzzles and skill challenges. Both are deviations from standard combat, exploration, and social encounters, making them excellent tools to mix it up and captivate any adventurer, whether seasoned or just starting out.

PUZZLES

Puzzles provide the opportunity to overcome an obstacle by wit rather than guile or force, serving as great options for non-combat challenges in a wide variety of scenarios. If the PCs fail to solve a puzzle correctly, it can preface a combat encounter or become the trigger to set off a trap or lead to some other consequence.

Like any other encounter, puzzles benefit from the players collaborating to find the solution. Not all players enjoy puzzles during roleplaying sessions though, for they can blur the line between PC knowledge and player knowledge, which breaks some players' suspension of disbelief. So use puzzles sparingly unless a gaming group especially enjoys them. If puzzles merely cause frustration at the table, it's best to avoid them.

Puzzles are often best when presented in a physical or illustrative form. They greatly benefit from being set up before the game session.

Consider including a puzzle in an adventure for the following reasons:

- As the method to unlock a secret passage.
- To encourage teamwork or party cohesion.
- To hide a secret within easy reach.

USING PUZZLES

Puzzles are a fantastic challenge to add to the mix of a typical game routine, especially in dungeons. Each includes key information to ensure the best experience when running it.

TYPE

Puzzles are categorized as logic, cryptic, riddle, pattern guessing, or mechanical. Trying a variety of types can highlight the kind of puzzles the players most enjoy.

Logic

Logic puzzles require solvers to deduce relationships between numbers, facts, objects, or similar elements based on a selection of clues or well-defined rules. Puzzles of this type often use grids. Examples include Sudoku, nonograms, and zebra puzzles.

Cryptic

Cryptic puzzles usually pose a coded word or phrase that must be decrypted based on a series of clues.

Riddle

Riddles are intentionally baffling or misleading questions that require interpretation to be solved. These puzzles often use poetic language to hint at a one-word answer.

Pattern Guessing

Pattern-guessing puzzles can be a bit challenging to define but serve as a good catch-all category for challenges that involve recognizing patterns in existing information to correctly identify or infer missing information. Often, these patterns take the form of logical sequences or groupings of numbers that mathematically relate to one another.

Mechanical

Mechanical puzzles involve manipulating distinct pieces to construct or deconstruct a larger whole. Examples include jigsaw puzzles, puzzle boxes, and tangrams.

DESCRIPTION

Each sample puzzle includes information in italics to read or paraphrase when the PCs first encounter the puzzle in-game. These descriptions help players gain a clear understanding of the components as they work to find a solution.





SETUP

This section describes what preparation the GM needs to do before introducing the puzzle.

SOLUTION

This section breaks down the steps required to solve the puzzle. This is the most important section to read and understand before introducing the puzzle.

CONSEQUENCES

This section contains information about any damage or other penalties that might occur if the PCs input an incorrect solution or otherwise make a mistake while trying to solve the puzzle.

VARIATIONS

This section provides suggestions on how to alter the puzzle to better suit the needs of the players and the campaign. It might also include possible steps to increase or decrease the difficulty of the puzzle.

HINTS

Each puzzle includes three increasingly revelatory hints to give players if they get stuck. As part of introducing any puzzle, let players know they can get hints at any time, and while these can be delivered out of game, it's more fun to communicate them within the narrative. For example, the PCs could get a tip from a friendly NPC, a key insight from a successful skill check, or find the answers carved on the wall. Be generous with hints to keep the players from getting frustrated.

USING HINTS

Be generous with hints. You might notice the hints included in the sample puzzles don't have associated ability checks or DCs. This is intentional so that solutions don't get walled off behind poor rolls on ability checks. The PCs should be able to get hints from you whenever they need them, without needing to succeed on a check.

If you or the players want to put hints behind ability checks, do so with extreme care. Try the following DCs for each provided hint type:

SUGGESTED HINT DCS

Hint Type	Suggested DC
Small Hint	10
Medium Hint	12
Big Hint	15

SAMPLE PUZZLES

This section contains sample puzzles to use as written or as inspiration when creating new puzzles.

CRYPTIC COUPLETS

Puzzle (Cryptic)

You see a mysterious rhyme accompanied by five couplets. Five dials inscribed with the letters of the alphabet are set into the stone—the dials can be turned to select one letter each. Perhaps each couplet can be deciphered to reveal the five letters of the final password and open the lock?

This puzzle has elements of riddle-solving and elements of word-jumble puzzles. Players must interpret rhyming couplets to find the words each line describes, identify the letter that differs between the words described in each line of the couplet, and finally unscramble the revealed letters to find the final five-letter password.

Setup

When the players are ready to begin, read the following text and then offer them **Cryptic Couplets Puzzle Handout 1 of 2** and **Cryptic Couplets Puzzle Handout 2 of 2** (see the back of this book for both), so they can review the text themselves:

To move forward, decipher the couplets below.
The first line reveals one word—the next, a second to know.
By adding a letter to the first word—a second can be made.
Unscramble the letters to learn the password conveyed.

See the back of this book for the player-facing handouts for this puzzle: **Cryptic Couplets Puzzle Handout 1 of 2** and **Cryptic Couplets Puzzle Handout 2 of 2**.

Solution

Solving this puzzle involves two steps.

The first step requires players to identify the correct word that goes with each line of each couplet. The first line in a couplet hints at a word. The second line hints at a word that adds one letter to the first word, making a different word. The letter that is different between the first line and the second line words is the end goal for deciphering each couplet.

Once players know all five letters (one for each couplet), they can advance to step two. They must unscramble the five letters to get the final password—*KNOCK*.

The following lines show the correct words to decipher from each line of the text, and the correct letter to be gleaned from each couplet.

Her writer's tool, she smartly plied (**pen**)
Then hung the sign inviting guests inside (**open**)
Making the revealed letter *O*.
Don't eat the mushrooms or you'll turn green and sick (**ill**)
And an ugly end follows quite quick (**kill**)
Making the revealed letter *K*.
A furious lord slapped his man with a shoe (**hit**)
To which the servant replied, "What? Give me a clue!" (**hint**)
Making the revealed letter *N*.
After days without food, the man was skin and bones (**thin**)
His mind raced with thoughts of buttery scones (**think**)
Making the revealed letter *K*.
The traveler posed a query (**ask**)
"Does that barrel hold wine for the weary?" (**cask**)
Making the revealed letter *C*.

Consequences

Due to the nature of this puzzle, players are unlikely to input an incorrect solution unless they are truly lost. Reserve any penalties for inputting the incorrect five-letter password at the very end of the puzzle, rather than missed steps along the way.

If an incorrect word is inputted, all creatures within 30 feet of the locked object (door or chest, for instance) must make a DEX save, taking 22 (4d10) force damage on a failure or half as much on a success.

Variations

New couplets can be written to create a different password as the end result. As long as the second line of each couplet points to a word that is one letter different from the word hinted at by the first line, this puzzle works.

To increase the time players interact with this puzzle, hide each couplet in different rooms of a dungeon. This makes the PCs collect each piece of the puzzle before they can input the solution into a final door that leads to the dungeon boss or similarly dramatic reveal.

To make this puzzle easier, show the correct words or the letter revealed by one couplet. Having one example already filled in makes the solution easier to grasp.

Hints

The most difficult part of this puzzle is figuring out the trick to get one letter from each couplet. If the players are lost, consider revealing the words and the letter difference for one couplet. Once the players see an example, finding the remaining answers should become easier.

Here are example hints to help players solve the puzzle:

- **Small Hint.** Each line of a couplet should reveal a word. Comparing the words from both lines of the same couplet is key to finding a component of the final password.
- **Medium Hint.** Two words correctly describe a couplet (one for each line), but each couplet is supposed to reveal only one letter of the final solution. How do the words in each couplet differ from one another?
- **Big Hint.** If you identify the word hinted at by each line of a couplet, you have two words that are the same, except for one letter. That letter is one of the letters that must be unscrambled for the final password.

JEWEL GRID

Puzzle (Logic)

Atop a stone podium is an engraving of a five-by-five grid with twenty-five indentations. Several colorful gems have already been slotted into place, but the rest of the spaces are empty. A number of other colorful stones are scattered around, waiting to be placed.

This puzzle is a simplified version of a sudoku puzzle. The PCs must insert the loose stones into the correct indentations so that each row and column contain only one stone of each color. Puzzles of this style are straightforward and fast paced, which makes them a fun, tactile option for players who are hesitant to engage with more complex puzzles.

Setup

Display a five-by-five grid and the colored stones (see **Jewel Grid Puzzle Handout** in the back of this book). Cut out the "stones," so players can physically place them on the grid. Some stones are preset into grid, so mark the positions of those stones permanently. Use game pieces, coins, or similar small objects instead of cut paper if there are enough to represent each group.

If using a virtual tabletop, make this puzzle with a grid and colorful circles to use as tokens.

The example here uses colors to distinguish the different stones, but symbols or shapes can be used instead.

When the players are ready to begin, place the preset stones on the grid and hand them the pile of unplaced stones. Make it clear to players that the preset stones can't be lifted out of the indentations or moved.

See the back of this book for the player-facing handout for this puzzle: **Jewel Grid Puzzle Handout**.

Solution

To solve the puzzle, the players must place all the stones in such a way that every color is used only once in a row or column. Once all the stones are correctly placed, the puzzle is solved. Solving the puzzle might cause a hidden door to open, or the gridded surface might slide open to reveal a treasure or key. See the **Jewel Grid Puzzle Solution** figure.

JEWEL GRID PUZZLE SOLUTION

GREEN	YELLOW	RED	WHITE	BLUE
YELLOW	RED	GREEN	BLUE	WHITE
BLUE	GREEN	WHITE	RED	YELLOW
RED	WHITE	BLUE	YELLOW	GREEN
WHITE	BLUE	YELLOW	GREEN	RED

Consequences

Once all the stones are placed, confirm that each column and each row contain one (and only one) stone of each color. If there are any duplications, all creatures within 30 feet of the grid must make a DC 15 DEX save as the placed stones fire off the grid. On a failure, a PC takes 10 (3d6) force damage. A creature takes half as much damage on a success.

Clear all the stones from the board, except for the ones that were preset. The players must start from scratch to solve the puzzle.

Variations

To make the puzzle easier, start with more preset stones already inserted into the grid.

To increase the difficulty, try any of the following:

- When first explaining the puzzle to players, add this rule: once a stone is placed into the grid, it can't be removed. Think of this like the chess rule, and once a player's hand is off the piece, the move is set, and it can't be taken back.
- Increase the size of the grid and therefore the number of pieces. Perhaps find a sudoku puzzle with a nine-by-nine grid and assign a stone color to each number (so nine colors will be needed instead of five).

Hints

Here are example hints to help players solve the puzzle:

- **Small Hint.** The loose stones must be placed on the board in the correct position.
- **Medium Hint.** Pay attention to stone placement. Think about what might be missing from the rows and columns.
- **Big Hint.** Each row and column must contain only one stone of each color.

MIRROR, MIRROR

Puzzle (Mechanical)

You see an empty mirror frame. Several geometric shards of glass lie in a pile at the base of the frame. Perhaps you can place the pieces back in the frame to reassemble the shattered object?

This puzzle is a tangram, a type of puzzle commonly given to children in school. Solving a tangram requires finding a way to fit a standard set of seven pieces into a larger outlined shape.

Setup

This puzzle works best when the pieces are printed and cut out, so players can physically manipulate them. If playing virtually, a similar experience can be generated by creating tangram pieces in a virtual platform and allowing players to manipulate the shapes. Tangram pieces and fillable shapes are common online. A quick search brings up hundreds of free resources to make them available in whatever format required.

When ready to begin, give the players the separated tangram pieces and the outline of the shape that represents the mirror frame.

See the back of this book for the player-facing handouts for this puzzle: **Mirror, Mirror Puzzle Handout 1 of 2** and **Mirror, Mirror Puzzle Handout 2 of 2**.

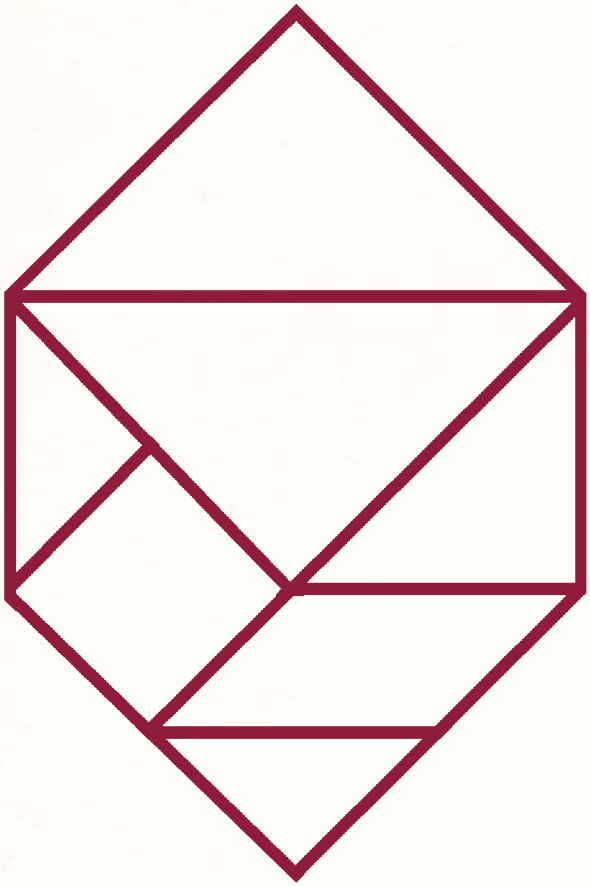
Solution

An image of the correct tangram piece placement is shown in the **Mirror, Mirror Puzzle Solution** figure. Note that slightly different placement of pieces is possible. As long as all the pieces are used to fill in all the space, the puzzle can be considered solved.

Consequences

There are no consequences for assembling the mirror shards incorrectly. However, if the PCs try to assemble them with magic, trickery, or anything other than approaching the mirror as a puzzle, the mirror or any treasure it hides might be disintegrated (GM's discretion).

MIRROR, MIRROR PUZZLE SOLUTION



Variations

Tangrams are a popular form of puzzle, and while keeping the same standard-sized pieces, other shape's outlines can be used for this.

If making puzzles for a large number of players, multiple tangram puzzles might require simultaneous solving. For example, if using the mirror conceit described in the example, separated PCs might have to assemble both sides of a shattered magic mirror before they can step through to rejoin the others.

Hints

Here are example hints to help the players solve the puzzle:

- **Small Hint.** You need to find a way to reassemble the mirror.
- **Medium Hint.** The broken mirror pieces have shattered into specifically sized shapes, almost like puzzle pieces.
- **Big Hint.** Use the broken glass shards to correctly fill in the frame design. There's a way to make all the pieces fit precisely within the frame.

ROYAL LINE

Puzzle (Pattern Guessing)

Panels of royal relief carvings extend along the left and right walls of the hallway, hanging opposite one another. A sealed door at the end of the hallway is inscribed with cryptic lines of text. Could these carvings hold the secret to moving forward?

This puzzle requires the players to employ spatial reasoning and identify the correct path by interpreting the details depicted in the carved stone images. This puzzle is fairly straightforward after players figure out the initial trick. It's a confidence builder for puzzle-hesitant players.

Setup

To set up this puzzle, print or display the images of the left and right walls (see **Royal Line Puzzle Handout 2 of 3** and **Royal Line Puzzle Handout 3 of 3** in the back of this book). If printing, use two pieces of paper (not a single double-sided sheet), so both images can be seen at the same time. If playing in-person, help the players in visualizing the puzzle by hanging the panels across from each other, as they would be if they were on opposite walls of a hallway. Try securing one "wall" to the front of the GM screen with a paperclip and clip the other "wall" to a book or folder sturdy enough to stand on its own when cracked open.

When the players are ready to begin, read the following lines of text found on the sealed door at the end of the hall and then offer them **Royal Line Puzzle Handout 1 of 3** (in the back of this book), so they can review the text themselves:

Look to the rising sun

And follow the royal line

Trace the face of the last heir

To appease the spirits here

See the back of this book for the player-facing handouts for this puzzle: **Royal Line Puzzle Handout 1 of 3**, **Royal Line Puzzle Handout 2 of 3 (Left Wall)**, and **Royal Line Puzzle Handout 3 of 3 (Right Wall)**.

Solution

To solve the puzzle, the players must first identify the correct starting point using the hints given in the text. The correct starting point is the portrait with the small carving of the sun—the portrait on the bottom left corner of the left wall. See the **Royal Line Puzzle Solution** figure.

Once players identify the starting portrait, they must follow the gaze of the person depicted in each portrait to find the next correct portrait in the series. For example, the starting portrait with the sun depicts a figure looking to the right—so the portrait to the immediate right is the next correct portrait. The figure in that second portrait is looking diagonally up and to the right, so that portrait is the next correct portrait in the sequence.

When the players encounter a portrait looking straight out, no longer in profile, that indicates they must turn around and look to the portrait opposite the current tile position on the other wall to continue. Deciphering this action is the most challenging part of this puzzle. Once the players figure this out, the solution is in hand.

Note: Hanging the wall handouts directly across from each other (see suggestions in the **Setup** section of this puzzle) is the best way to help the players visualize what to do at this point.

After following the portraits' gazes to the end, the players should reach the final portrait in the top left corner of the right wall. The portrait's gaze in that position leads outside the puzzle, indicating that it is the final portrait in the line. Players must physically touch this portrait and the puzzle is solved.

Consequences

If the players select the wrong tile as the final solution, they've insulted the spirits of those depicted, and an Undead creature is immediately summoned, attacking the PCs. Depending on the average level of the PCs and the amount of time desired for the encounter, choose between a **mummy** (CR 3), a **wraith** (CR 5), a **death knight** (CR 8), a **mummy lord** (CR 15), or any similar creature from the *Monster Vault*.

Variations

To increase the difficulty of this puzzle, add a challenge to the final solution, such as requiring the players to discover and speak the name of the individual in the final portrait in addition to touching their picture. That name could then be hidden somewhere in the dungeon, could require a skill check to recall, or could be provided here but needed as the solution to a different puzzle.

Hints

Here are example hints to help players solve the puzzle:

- **Small Hint.** Several words in the text give you the keys to the steps of this puzzle. Note the **start**, the **line**, and the **last** heir.
- **Medium Hint.** Visualize how these walls would look if you were standing in a physical hallway. That perspective might help you follow the line of portraits.
- **Big Hint.** Start with the portrait marked with a sun, then follow the gaze of each portrait until you end at a portrait that doesn't lead anywhere—that final portrait is the "last heir" mentioned in the text.

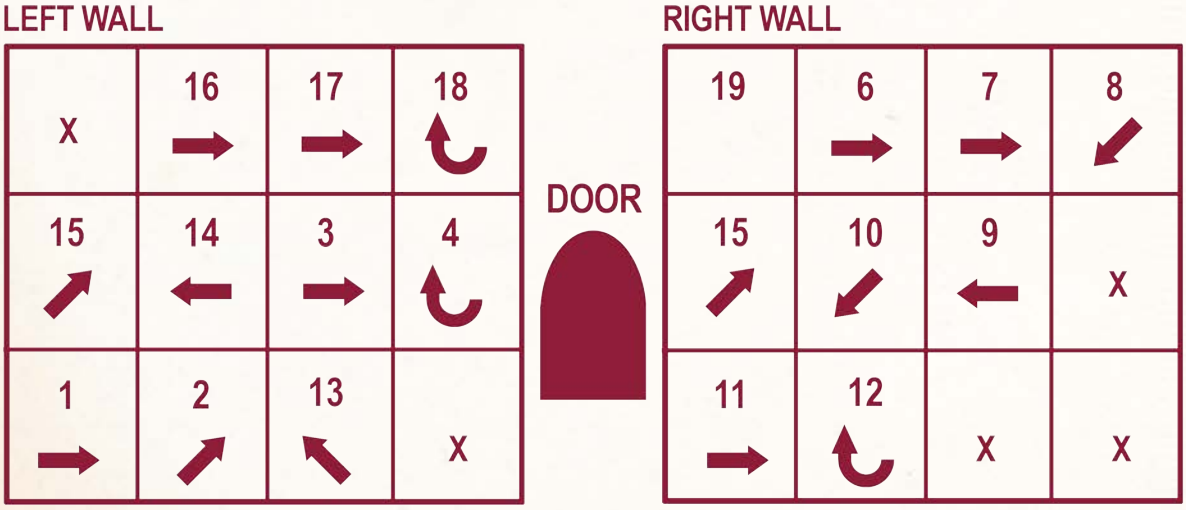
STONE SUBJECTS

Puzzle (Logic)

Seven empty alcoves line the walls—and the same number of stone statues are lined up before you. Beside the pieces rests a stone tablet inscribed with verse. The riddle seems to refer to the people depicted by the statues. Perhaps it also contains hidden instructions for how the figures should be arranged in the alcoves?

To solve this puzzle, the players must identify the carved stone pieces and then use the clues in the riddle to place them into the alcoves in the correct order.

ROYAL LINE PUZZLE SOLUTION



Setup

Before starting, make sure the players have the riddle's text and the image of all the pieces (see **Stone Subjects Puzzle Handout 1 of 2** and **Stone Subjects Puzzle Handout 2 of 2** in the back of this book). Tell the players that the statues' bases are curved in the back, so they only fit properly in the alcoves when they face outward from the wall.

When the players are ready to begin, read the following lines and give them time to review **Stone Subjects Puzzle Handout 1 of 2**:

The castle defends the kingdom's end
Wary of a dragon beside its monstrous friend
The lady waits by walls of stone
While her husband is far from home
The knight forsakes the king's might
Preferring to sit to his lady's right
The fiend's proximity would make the king fear
If not for the angel whispering in his other ear

See the back of this book for the player-facing handouts for this puzzle: **Stone Subjects Puzzle Handout 1 of 2** and **Stone Subjects Puzzle Handout of 2**.

Solution

From left to right, the correct placement of the figures in the alcoves is: angel, king, devil, dragon, knight, queen, and castle. Note that the riddle has the knight to "his lady's right." This refers to the statue's right, not the PCs' right, which might be any direction, based on how the character stands. See the **Stone Subjects Puzzle Solution** figure.

Consequences

When a statue is placed in an incorrect alcove, that PC takes 9 (2d8) fire damage as the statue glows red hot. To avoid this penalty, encourage players to figure out the correct order for all the statues before they attempt to place any statues in the alcoves.

Variations

To increase the time players interact with this puzzle, hide each statue in different rooms of a dungeon. Doing so means the PCs must collect each statue before they can input the solution that leads to the dungeon boss or similarly dramatic moment.

To make this puzzle easier, have one or more of the statues already placed in their correct alcoves but then make it clear that the placed statue can't be moved.

STONE SUBJECTS PUZZLE SOLUTION



Hints

If the players are struggling with this puzzle, feel free to make a solution easier by revealing the correct position of one statue. The riddle becomes easier with even one confirmed statue placement.

Here are example hints to help the players solve the puzzle:

- **Small Hint.** There is only one correct alcove for each figure. Read every line of the riddle and consider every clue in the text before attempting to place any of the statues.
- **Medium Hint.** Give the players one of the following clues that correctly interprets the instructions in each line of the riddle: 1) The first line tells you the castle statue needs to be placed in either the first alcove (the alcove on the far left) or the last alcove (the alcove on the far right); 2) The second line tells you the dragon statue and the devil statue must be placed in alcoves next to one another; 3) The third line tells you the queen statue and the castle statue must be placed in alcoves next to one another; 4) The fourth line tells you the king statue can't be placed in an alcove next to the queen; 5) The fifth line tells you the knight's statue can't be placed in an alcove next to the king; 6) The sixth line tells you the knight's statue must be placed in an alcove to the queen's right; 7) The seventh line tells you the fiend's statue must be placed next to the king; 8) The eighth line tells you the angel statue must be placed next to the king.
- **Big Hint.** Reveal a second clue from the list given for the Medium Hint.





SKILL CHALLENGES

A skill challenge is a unique type of encounter that requires the PCs to succeed on a variety of ability checks to overcome an obstacle or reach a goal. To win a skill challenge, the PCs must accrue a number of successes before they rack up too many failures. Set the number of required successes versus the number of failures PCs can have before the encounter ends based on the difficulty of the skill challenge.

For additional guidance on creating skill challenges from scratch, see the *Game Master's Guide*.

USING SKILL CHALLENGES

Skill challenges work wonderfully as the main component of exploration or social encounters and can even add complexity to combat encounters. Each includes key information to ensure the best experience when running them.

DESCRIPTION

Each entry begins with a flavorful description to set the scene, which also includes basic information about the goal and obstacles of each challenge.

SETUP

The setup section describes any narrative circumstances that must be met before the skill challenge can take place.

COMPLEXITY

Use the **Skill Challenge Complexity** table to choose the challenge's degree of complexity. This determines how many successful checks are needed to win the challenge and how many failed checks the PCs can accumulate before they lose the challenge.

Choose complexity based on the narrative scope of the challenge and its intended duration in-game. A simple skill challenge requires fewer successes, so it takes less game time to complete than a very complex challenge. Similarly, a less complex skill challenge means each PC is likely to only contribute one or two ability checks, so the scenario doesn't require lots of different ways for PCs to contribute.

SKILL CHALLENGE COMPLEXITY

Difficulty	Successes	Failures
Simple	4	2
Average	6	3
Moderate	8	4
Complex	10	5
Very Complex	12	6

DIFFICULTY

With the complexity determined, use the **Skill Challenge Difficulty** table to choose how difficult it is to earn successes during the challenge and to set the DC for all ability checks the PCs must make. As always, adjust the DCs as needed, and it is not required to keep the DCs at intervals of 5 (as they are listed on the table).

Consider skill challenge complexity and the context of the challenge within the story when determining DCs. For example, when running a skill challenge during a combat encounter, it's best to choose a lower difficulty since the PCs are being challenged in other ways. When running a very complex skill challenge, choose a lower difficulty to keep player morale high through the longer and more creatively demanding challenge. Similarly, when running a simple skill challenge, perhaps set a higher difficulty to give the short-lived challenge some punch. When unsure what difficulty to set, choose medium difficulty (DC 15) as the default.

SKILL CHALLENGE DIFFICULTY

Difficulty	Chance of Success	Suggested DC
Easy	High Chance of Success	10 or Lower
Medium	Moderate Chance of Success	15
Hard	Low Chance of Success	20
Very Hard	Almost No Chance of Success	25 or Higher

CORE PROFICIENCES

With the skill challenge mechanically defined, create a list of at least four skill, tool, or vehicle proficiencies that are likely to contribute to overcoming its obstacles and share the list with the players. The more proficiencies added, the easier it is for PCs to excel. Try to create a mix of proficiencies that appeal to the various types of PCs in the party to give each a chance to participate.

It can also help to jot down some notes about how the PCs could use these core proficiencies. As always, keep in mind that the PCs are likely to come up with creative and unexpected uses. If they have an idea to use a proficiency that isn't on the list, try to go with them on it.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

The success and failure sections respectively describe what happens when the PCs succeed or fail the challenge. Tailor the specifics of these suggestions to the campaign, making use of treasures and NPCs to increase the rewards granted by success and the risks associated with possible failure. Note that failing a skill challenge is almost never the end for PCs. Instead, failure results in PCs coming out the other side with a heavier cost than success would have required.



SAMPLE SKILL CHALLENGES

This section contains sample skill challenges to use as written or as inspiration when creating new skill challenges. To help ensure their utility, these requirements intentionally lack details that would otherwise force them to use a specific setting or NPCs, but original challenges can be more specific.



BURIED ALIVE

Crashes and creaks thunder from above as the floor shakes violently. Choking dust fills the air as debris rains down, completely blocking the exit.



This skill challenge has the PCs escape from a collapse, cave-in, or similar falling-ceiling disaster that leaves them trapped without a clear exit. In addition to surviving the triggering event (like an earthquake that caused the collapse), this challenge encompasses the process of traveling through a hostile environment (like a cave system or catacombs) to find an exit.

Setup. Before beginning this skill challenge, the PCs must have entered a sizeable location in which they can be trapped, such as a cave system, subterranean ruins, or underground bunker. The skill challenge kicks off when a triggering event, like an earthquake, an explosion, or the attack of a humongous creature, destroys the entrance.

Complexity. Complex (requires 10 successes before 5 failures).

Difficulty. Easy (DC 10).

Core Proficiencies. Acrobatics, Athletics, Construction Tools, and Survival:

- *Acrobatics.* Squeeze through tight places, shimmy up ropes, and dodge falling debris.
- *Athletics.* Move heavy obstructions, lift companions to safety, and smash through crumbling barriers.
- *Construction Tools.* Reinforce damaged ceilings, find the weak point in a damaged structure, and drill airholes.
- *Survival.* Plot a safe course, avoid hostile wildlife, and secure necessities like clean air or potable water.

Success. The party finds an exit and reaches the surface without incurring serious harm or loss. If the PCs do exceptionally well, consider an additional reward. Perhaps they find the exit through a hidden treasure room filled with long-forgotten stores of gold. Alternatively, their actions could earn the friendship of NPCs or wild creatures who are also trapped by the triggering event.

Failure. The party finds a different exit to the surface but incurs a heavy cost. Perhaps their escape takes a long time, allowing the villain who caused the initial collapse to escape or cause great harm to other creatures or vulnerable structures on the surface. Perhaps magic items, equipment, or vehicles are lost or damaged beyond repair during the collapse. An NPC ally could perish from grievous wounds because they couldn't be treated in time. Any of these would be a fitting penalty for failure.

COURTLY AFFAIR

Dozens of well-dressed individuals spin gracefully on the dance floor as the sounds of music, conversation, and laughter fill the air. Hidden by masks of civility, curious eyes are already measuring you, carefully noting your appearance and behavior.

This skill challenge has the PCs attend a high society event packed with nobility, politicians, or other influential NPCs. Currying favor, learning information, or discretely uncovering information are excellent motivations for this challenge, paired with the goal of blending in and avoiding unwanted attention, of course.

Setup. To engage in this skill challenge, PCs must attend a fancy party, gala, performance, or similarly festive event attended by a large number of upper-class NPCs.

Complexity. Average (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Difficulty. Medium (DC 15).

Core Proficiencies. History, Insight, Performance, Persuasion, and Stealth:

- *History.* Recall key facts about nobles, identify important people, leverage rivalries or relationships, and implement complex traditions or etiquette.
- *Insight.* See through lies, spot suspicious NPCs, assess the mood of a room, and get a sense of how a conversation is going.
- *Performance.* Dance immaculately, create distractions, and charm guests with stories or songs.
- *Persuasion.* Convince people that you belong, sway individuals to your cause, and tease secrets out of reluctant targets.
- *Stealth.* Slip away unnoticed, discreetly pass hidden messages, and open the way to off-limits areas.

Success. Depending on the needs of the narrative, successfully completing this skill challenge could earn the PCs any of the following rewards:

- Convince an NPC to donate resources, assistance, or become a patron of the party.
- Gain one or more contacts (as per the carousing downtime activity in the *Player's Guide*).
- Uncover secrets or learn critical information about a villain or their plans.

Failure. Failing this challenge garners the PC unwanted or negative attention from one or more groups in attendance at the party. Perhaps the PCs commit enough social errors to lose upper-class contacts or negatively shift the attitude of a powerful (and potentially dangerous) NPC.

GREAT ESCAPE

Raucous laughter and the flickering orange of bonfire flames come through the narrow gap of the holding tent. The bandits are distracted by their victorious celebration. If you want to escape with your lives, it's time to make your move.

This skill challenge has the PCs escape from a well-guarded location, such as a monster lair, prison, castle, or enemy encampment. With minor adjustments, this challenge could also be used to represent an attempt to sneak inside a high-security area. Emphasize that a quiet escape is preferable to the odds of fighting their way past guards or foes beyond the party's skill level.

Setup. Before beginning this skill challenge, the PCs must be imprisoned in an appropriately guarded location.

Complexity. Moderate (requires 8 successes before 4 failures).

Difficulty. Medium (DC 15).

Core Proficiencies. Athletics, Perception, Performance, Stealth, and Thieves' Tools:

- *Athletics.* Climb over walls, knock out minions, smash manacles, and similar activities that require brute force.
- *Perception.* Listen for guards, track patrol patterns, watch for traps or other security measures, and keep a lookout.
- *Performance.* Create convincing distractions or otherwise redirect focus from other party members.
- *Stealth.* Move past guards quietly and hide in shadowy corners.
- *Thieves' Tools.* Pick locks and disarm security devices.

Success. The party escapes without attracting notice and doesn't leave a followable trail.

Failure. The party escapes at a cost. Perhaps they have to fight a squadron of guards or a powerful mini boss. Perhaps they have to leave a valuable treasure or item behind. Perhaps they accidentally leave behind clues to their identities or their destination, guaranteeing that their jailors attempt to hunt them down later.





MURDER MYSTERY

Shocked stares and quiet sobs accompany the horrible sight before you. Plenty of details are amiss here, but the biggest one is obvious—the victim's body lies in the center of it all.

This skill challenge has the PCs attempt to solve a mysterious murder. To raise the stakes, the murder could take place in isolated circumstances, such as aboard a ship at sea or while sealed in an ancient castle until morning, where PCs and NPCs are at risk of harm if the murderer isn't apprehended. Alternatively, the PCs might be forced to solve the murder because it was staged to frame them as the guilty party.

Setup. The PCs must stumble upon a shocking, mysterious murder. They must also be asked to solve the crime or feel it is in their best interest to identify the killer. To accomplish this, consider having the victim either be an NPC tied to the PCs or else stage the crime as part of a situation where the party can't help but get involved.

Complexity. Average (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Difficulty. Medium (DC 15).

Core Proficiencies. Insight, Intimidation, Investigation, Medicine, and Survival:

- *Insight.* Glean information from suspects, determine who is lying, and detect signs of guilt or relevant emotional responses.
- *Intimidation.* Interrogate difficult witnesses or suspects, demand access or resources, and bait the attentions of the killer.
- *Investigation.* Notice key details at the crime scene, discover hidden information in the victim's personal effects, and construct a full picture from disparate clues.
- *Medicine.* Determine a cause of death, treat injured witnesses or bystanders, and detect evidence of poison.
- *Survival.* Tail suspects, follow footprints, and set traps to catch the killer.

Success. The party successfully identifies and apprehends the murderer. Thorough success could merit an additional reward, such as uncovering relevant plot information that involves the victim, killer, or circumstances around the crime.

Failure. The party identifies the killer after it's too late to apprehend them, perhaps claiming another victim before the PCs stop them. Alternatively, the killer could escape, returning at a later time to threaten the PCs again.

REST IN PEACE

Haunting moans echo through the catacombs, bouncing weirdly off the black stone walls. You've caught the spirit's attention. Perhaps it's best to finish the ritual quickly—before it decides you're a threat.

This skill challenge has the PCs attempt a ritual to permanently lay a spirit to rest.

Setup. This challenge works best with an established narrative set up. Learning the history of the spirit and why its doom haunts the mortal plane and interacting with an NPC that knew the spirit in life helps increase the PCs' sympathy and desire to put a tortured creature to rest. Perhaps the spirit is a distant ancestor of someone from a royal bloodline who has hired the PCs to help. Perhaps a once-benevolent local ghost has grown violent due to construction or other changes in the community. Perhaps the spirit is a murdered religious figure who can't move on until proper last rites are performed.

Complexity. Average (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Difficulty. Medium (DC 15).

Core Proficiencies. Insight, Performance, Religion, and Sleight of Hand:

- *Insight.* Assess the mood and needs of the restless spirit, as well as any other NPC bystanders involved in the ritual.
- *Performance.* Accurately recite incantations or perform other actions involved in the ritual.
- *Religion.* Recall or interpret information about last rites important to the spirit or people who share the spirit's heritage.
- *Sleight of Hand.* Interact with items required for the ritual: lighting candles or incense, tracing complex sigils, reassembling skeletal remains, tying knots, and similar actions. This skill is also important to ensure these items aren't disrupted if environmental conditions become more difficult as the spirit grows agitated.

Success. The spirit is laid to rest and no longer poses a threat to others.

Failure. The spirit becomes enraged, becoming an Undead creature of an appropriately challenging CR. It attacks the party immediately or reappears at a later time to attack the PCs when they least expect it. Any of the following *Monster Vault* creatures would be appropriate for the spirit's dangerous new form: **specter**, **will-o'-wisp**, **ghost**, **wight**, or **death knight**.



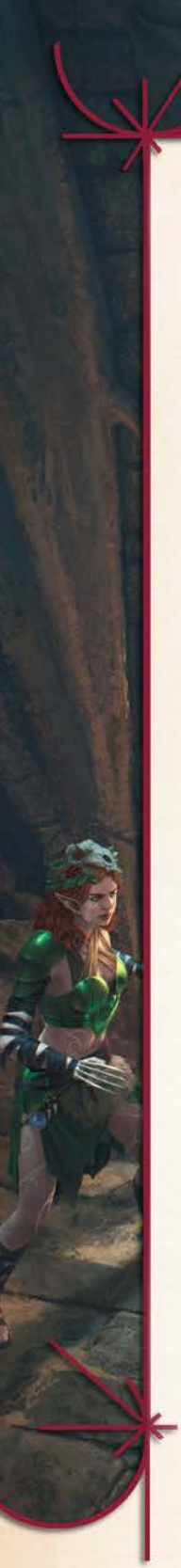
6: COMBAT IN THE DEPTHS

Combat is a staple of adventure and a key component of any delve into the unknown. This chapter provides guidance on populating locations with an ideal assortment of creatures, gives advice for effectively using those creatures, and breaks down systems useful for making monsters feel like a living part of any dangerous ecosystem.

The party had very little time left to reach the top, and the fiends weren't making their lives easier.

PICKING THE PERFECT MONSTERS

Populating dungeons, ruins, or underworld spaces with appropriate monsters helps set or reinforce the tone, and this might just be the first decision made when creating such a location. While maintaining a sense of realism isn't vital for these spaces, it helps the players immerse themselves in the game when they're not trying to resolve something that feels out of place. After establishing a location's ecology and determining the monsters based on the environment and appropriate challenge ratings, building a random encounter table adds to the location's sense of vibrancy and habitancy.



MONSTERS BY ECOLOGY

In wilderness adventures, geographical regions help define the monsters living in those areas. For instance, mountains support creatures that can climb difficult surfaces or tunnel through rock and that, in some cases, require the ability to breathe with limited oxygen. Monsters able to persist both on land and in the water, at least for short periods, thrive in coastal areas, and waterborne creatures can adapt to attack prey on the water's surface while landbound creatures can learn how to attack sea creatures near the surface.

A dungeon ecology works similarly. Most such creatures can see in the omnipresent darkness within the depths, have other ways of sensing their environment without sight, or use tools and magic to circumvent their sight limitations. Underground areas can feature terrain analogous to mountains, seas, and even forests and plains, albeit with elements typical surface dwellers might find unusual. Generally, it makes sense for monsters that lair in these locations to live comfortably in their homes.

Before discussing aspects to worry about in a dungeon ecology though (if a coherent ecology is even a concern), it helps to define an ecology, especially with respect to monsters.

What Is Ecology?

A monster's ecology is how it interacts with others of its kind, other monsters in the area, and its environment. A dungeon's ecology is how all the creatures in the dungeon interact with each other and with the environment of the dungeon. When choosing monsters in a dungeon, consider how the monsters exist within it, how they interact with each other, and what kind of reactions they might have to the intrusion of outsiders or similar effects that disrupt their (perhaps tenuous) harmony. Keep in mind that a dungeon is an environment, and monsters are often living creatures, which means there might be competition for the dungeon's limited resources like food and water. These available resources also help to determine what kind of monsters are best able to reside in the dungeon and if their residency is temporary or long-term.

When to Worry about Ecology

Oftentimes, concerns about ecologies can be handwaved through the expediency of magic. However, players typically enjoy some verisimilitude in their games, and nonsensical decisions take them out of the game as their suspension of disbelief breaks. Obviously unexpected creatures—such as treants thriving underground—would require some justification for their presence, such as a globe of light that provides the equivalent to sunlight. Similarly, the players might spend precious gaming time questioning how an orc in a sealed off 10-foot-square room could have survived until the PCs found it.

If the dungeon has an overriding motif, the monsters should reflect it. For example, a dungeon set in an active volcano would have very few cold-based creatures, unless they happen to be resistant or immune to fire. However, a dungeon boss might subvert expectations and catch PCs off guard by using summoning spells or other magic to add something the PCs might not have prepared for.

Similarly, the overall layout of the surroundings drives the types of creatures populating a dungeon. Resident monsters generally should move through their lairs with little difficulty. If the dungeon features a lot of water, for example, most of the inhabitants should have a swimming speed or the ability to breathe in water. As another example, monsters in a lair prominently traversed through vertical accesses should be able to climb, fly, or use teleportation magic to move through the dungeon. The same holds true for space requirements. Small or amorphous creatures maneuver through tight spaces with no difficulty, while larger and more solid trespassers find movement difficult or impossible. Large monsters, such as manticores and dragons, require expansive areas they can easily traverse. The level and type of accessibility in a dungeon level provides clues to clever PCs about the types of opponents they might face.

The environment also determines the availability of sustenance for dungeon dwellers. Most living creatures require food and potable water to survive, and an individual's physiology determines the food it needs. Herbivores should have access to plenty of plant material (usually in the form of fungi in areas untouched by the sun), carnivores want ready access to meat lest they turn on one another, and omnivores need at least a little of both. If not readily available, the creatures then need to trade with others or use magic to create food and water. Unliving creatures might have stranger requirements, such as vampires needing blood or ghouls needing humanoid flesh, and many such undead aren't simply immune to the effects of running out of their unusual food sources.

In addition, monster ecologies determine impermanent dungeon features. Species that have darkvision or can otherwise find their way around in darkness have no need for light sources, forcing surface-dwelling explorers to bring their own. Intelligent

monsters might possess magic to counter the PCs' attempts at gaining visibility.

A monster's general attitude allows them to ally with other monsters, to make them belligerent to every other being, or some mix of both, sometimes depending on how hungry they are. While most opposing forces have difficulty agreeing to work together, an external force (such as a more powerful boss intimidating them into a temporary alliance) or a common enemy might compel them to ignore their mutual enmity for a short period. Of course, clever PCs who recognize such a clash in personalities can always exploit the situation, turning the creatures against each other and rewarding themselves with easier combats. Likewise, intelligent monsters might seize the opportunity presented by the PCs' intrusion to eliminate their enemies before turning on their weakened cats' paws.

MONSTERS BY THEME

Narrowing the selection further than a shared ecology, monsters can group together by theme. A powerful lich might have claimed a dungeon, stocking each level with different types of undead while living creatures hardly make an appearance except as meals for the ghouls and vampires patrolling the passageways. A dragon might welcome only creatures of draconic stock in its complex, meaning the PCs will encounter kobolds, dragonettes, drakes, and true dragons, along with a set of "pet" species the dragon finds amusing. And an apocalyptic cult devoted to a demon lord of oozes might fill its complex with oozes, slimes, molds, and other amorphous horrors, along with demonic minions that support the demon lord and the humanoid cultists.

Though the PCs might not suss out the theme after exploring only a level or two, they should eventually figure it out, providing a sense of accomplishment as they decide to focus their abilities, spells, and magic items toward defeating those types of creatures. So when stocking a dungeon with monsters based on a theme, stick to that theme, even if the PCs gain an advantage for it. If the PCs do have such an advantage against the chosen theme, don't be afraid to ramp up the challenge, for their advantage allows them to handle a bit more. Try to avoid the temptation to break with the theme merely to thwart the PCs and, if such a break seems necessary, have an explainable background reason that the PCs can uncover, such as the owner of the dungeon summoning new creatures without the theme's weakness to hunt down the PCs. This helps prevent hurt feelings and helps avoid PCs feeling like they were cheated out of their advantage.

MINIONS

Even the most solitary bosses need underlings to perform menial tasks and run interference against pesky adventurers. Intelligent bosses hire or coerce minions and lieutenants to do their bidding, but less intelligent monsters might attract followers who see these bosses as a way to gain protection and wealth or even as some symbol or herald of a greater being.

Minions move throughout most areas of a dungeon level or region of a ruin, possibly apart from the boss's lair where they run the risk of being eaten or otherwise perishing. Minions run the gamut of loyalty regarding their masters, from fanatically devoted, where they will die to protect their bosses and their bosses' secrets, to mercenarily motivated, where simply making a





better offer will loosen tongues and avoid unnecessary fights. Minions who face regular abuse from their bosses might welcome an offer of liberation from their suffering, or they might view the capture or death of intruders as a path to rewards from their bosses.

Lieutenants fall into the minion category as well, but they usually have more autonomy and a coterie of their own minions. These creatures report directly to dungeon bosses, and since they have similar motivations to their superiors, they gain substantially more trust. Lieutenants also receive a share of any spoils they or their bosses obtain from defeating their foes. These direct subordinates have a similar range of devotion to their bosses as do minions, but they may also have the power to affect regime change should they wish it. Regardless, lieutenants resist intimidation attempts better than ordinary minions. If they are inclined to wrest control from their bosses and see value in allying with the PCs, they entertain the PCs' proposals and make the necessary promises to achieve at least a temporary alliance.

For guidance on how to balance encounters with minions, see **Chapter 4** of *Game Master's Guide*.

RANDOM MONSTERS

During explorations, the PCs will stumble across creatures they wouldn't otherwise face in planned encounters. Ensure random encounters support the area's theme and provide clues about the eventual boss to prevent players from thinking of these encounters as superfluous. At the same time, random encounters keep the PCs alert, aware that they can't spend a lot of time resting since some dungeon inhabitant might turn up to cause trouble for them.

Building Random Encounter Tables

While building a dungeon and its set encounters, consider creating a few random encounter tables, which associate the value of a die roll with a creature wandering through the dungeon or an event that impacts the PCs as they explore the dungeon. Several considerations apply when creating these tables:

- ***Consider a Brief Encounter with the Boss Monster.*** Few ways more effectively hint at the final boss battle than a quick glimpse of the boss or a fleeting encounter with it. This random encounter shouldn't be the final battle though, so the boss should have some way to escape back to its lair. Interaction should be limited to the boss issuing taunts or threats. Should the PCs engage in combat with the boss, use the staging method described in the **Boss Monsters** section elsewhere in this chapter to showcase the boss's first stage before it gets away. A brief combat allows each side to learn about their opponents' abilities and plan accordingly.
- ***Determine the Relative Frequency of Each Encounter.*** When thinking about the table's encounters, decide which ones will occur more frequently and less frequently. Individual monsters, such as lieutenants or a fleeting encounter with the boss, should be less likely to appear. If using a single die for the random encounter table, increase the chance of more common encounters by increasing the range of die results to get that encounter, and decrease the likelihood of rarer encounters by allowing them to occur with one and only one result. Using percentile dice to generate encounters provides flexibility with respect to chances of incidence. Alternatively, add the results of two dice and take advantage of the bell curve to stage the encounters, having more frequent encounters populating the middle results and less frequent encounters at the extreme lows and highs.
- ***Don't Outclass the Boss Monster.*** Sometimes things don't work out as expected, and the boss fight becomes trivial thanks to some lucky or unlucky rolls. However, a random encounter shouldn't outshine the area's most anticipated combat. Keeping the challenge levels of random encounters lower than the boss fight's challenge won't guarantee this outcome thanks to chance, but it should lessen the possibility of the players remembering a random battle in a random corridor more than a carefully crafted final fight. In addition, a lethal challenge contradicts the usual purposes for random encounters (reducing resources, keeping the PCs moving), and many players become annoyed when their PCs die in a supposed side-note encounter. Again, bad luck can change the outcome of any challenge, but the PCs should have a reasonable chance of overcoming a random fight or hazard.
- ***Include Encounters Other than Monsters.*** Options for non-combat encounters add another tool to keep players guessing when rolling on a random encounter table. These include random treasure missed by the area's occupants that might grant the PCs an advantage in a later combat, NPCs representing escaped captives or surviving adventurers, puzzles or weird situations that provide the PCs additional awareness of the dungeon's inhabitants, or a hazard or trap that can foreshadow a similar instance in the boss fight. Of course, those NPCs might have valuable information about the rest of the dungeon, and those encounters might still introduce some tension as the PCs ultimately

determine NPCs' fates. When adding an NPC encounter to the encounter table, add a note to the entry indicating the NPC's goal with respect to the PCs (betrayal, genuine assistance, escape at the first sign of trouble, or similar) or decide the NPC's attitude after rolling. If not mixing encounter types in the same table, consider creating one table solely for monsters and a separate table for traps, hazards, and other events. This has the benefit of separating "wandering" monsters, which can appear any time, from random events, which only make sense in certain portions of the dungeon.

- ***Match the Area's Scope.*** Random encounters shouldn't become repetitive, and building a table that coincides with the area's breadth keeps things fresh while reducing unnecessary work the players might never see. The expected time the PCs spend in the area and the empty, non-planned locations in the area help determine the table's size. If the area's challenges are difficult, forcing the PCs to spend extra time resting, consider adding a couple of extra entries to the tables.
- ***Provide Varying Challenge Levels.*** Random combats and obstacles should range in difficulty. Tougher encounters should sell the players on the idea that they should hasten their exploration and give them urgency to find the boss. Meanwhile, more trivial encounters improve PC (and player) morale, especially after dealing with a serious combat or trap. Easier encounters might not be the more common ones in the area, and moving them to rarer slots reduces the possibility of a run of trivial, and eventually boring, events.

Using Random Encounter Tables

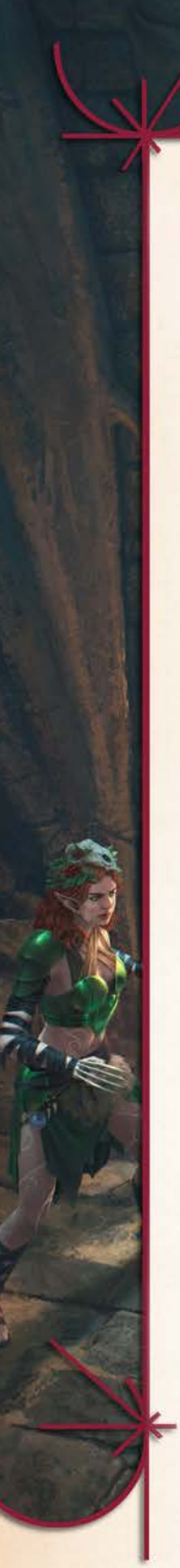
When using a random encounter table, keep a few things in mind:

- ***Monster Doesn't Necessarily Mean Combat.*** Most often, the monsters make up the bulk of random tables, and typically, those encounters result in combat to whittle down the PCs' resources. In cases where the monsters are wandering pests that don't stick to a specific location, the PCs have little recourse other than fighting. However, monsters might provide hints about the dungeon's dangers or secrets if the PCs decide to parlay with them. Most of these monsters are minions running errands, but they could include visitors from other areas or levels, which provide different perspectives on the area and might grant glimpses into future encounters as the PCs travel farther into the dungeon.
- ***Skip Random Encounters when the PCs Are Low on Resources.*** Though random encounters fulfill the role of separating the PCs from their resources, try not to cause them to serve as a punishment for PCs who drain their resources. It makes sense that a monster could stumble upon the PCs in the middle of their long rest, but consider using these interruptions sparingly or when the PCs are already nearly recuperated.

BOSS MONSTERS

Each distinct level or area of a dungeon complex or ruin should feature a marquee matchup between the PCs and the creature(s) controlling the level or area. Such bosses might be the most powerful creature in the area, but they might also serve as minions or lieutenants for an ever more powerful boss deeper within the dungeon or in a better protected area.





Unless the boss is deeply paranoid and refuses to work with other creatures, it should have minions in its lair that can soften the brunt of the PCs' attack. Environmental hazards fill in the gaps for missing subordinates or add yet another dimension to a freewheeling melee against multiple opponents. The boss should have some way to slow down resourceful PCs on their way to it, giving it the chance to act at least once instead of meeting a quick and ignoble demise.

As the culmination of events in the area, a boss fight should be one of the most remarkable events for the PCs. The monster's tactics might be broken out into multiple distinct phases, which reflect the monster's approach to combat and the threat presented by the PCs. Depending on the monster, it might start combat cautiously, reserving its more powerful attacks as the situation grows more desperate, or it might overconfidently unleash its most devastating abilities before going on the defensive. This requires some additional work by breaking out the monster's stats to correspond with each stage of combat and adding thematic bonus actions and reactions that might not already exist in the monster's stat block. However, this yields more dynamic encounters as the final monster responds to combat in definable ways rather than making up tactics on the fly or defaulting to the monster and the PCs trading blows until one side or the other falls over. This also reserves some surprises for the PCs who expect the monster to fight a certain way and suddenly the monster changes its tactics.

In addition, consider enhancing a boss monster by adding lair actions. Theoretically, a boss has been it its lair for a long period, and even unintelligent monsters will have discovered ways to take advantage of their lair's features. Lair actions should reflect the monster's combat preferences and its environment. These actions might also incorporate hazards or minions, which the PCs might otherwise try to ignore, and force them to deal with these lesser threats before they can get to the boss.

Ultimately, if the monster can escape death, take advantage of its abilities that allow it to survive. However, in a larger complex, consider options for the PCs to run into the boss monster again, perhaps as a minion itself to an even more powerful boss that won't let the former boss monster escape a second time. Players enjoy closure, especially after a pitched battle against a worthy opponent, and bringing back their foe keeps them from feeling cheated out of a victory—unless the players are more than happy to never see the monster again.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLICATIONS

Dungeons present many unusual features that directly impact combat. Though more common in dungeons, these features still do exist in plenty of aboveground locations as well, though the complications they create work best sparingly. Otherwise, the players become annoyed at their PCs facing constant limitations relative to their foes. If the area's motif drives a persistence of one or more of these obstacles, consider offering the PCs options to offset the difficulties or to use them to their benefit, at least for a short time.

COMBAT IN DESTRUCTIBLE AREAS

Rough-hewn dungeon passageways and buildings devastated by magic or war don't provide the most secure platforms for combat. A mistimed swing of a weapon can cause the ground or a wall to crumble, creating mayhem for nearby creatures.

In unstable areas where the stonework has weakened or where wooden supports threaten to give out, an accidental blow in the right spot can create an impromptu trap. A mighty blow with a missed warhammer attack can create that final destructive crack in a shaky foundation that collapses the floor. An errant arrow shot can strike the ceiling, opening enough of a hole for water or other liquid to rush into the chamber. Destructive spells also have a chance to inflict unexpected collateral damage.

Unlike in locations that have hazards or deliberately set traps, the occupying creature might not know about the threat posed by an easily collapsible part of its lair. When designing a destructible feature, assign at least a 5-by-5-foot-square area that can be destroyed, decide on its hit points (use the examples for objects provided in the *Player's Guide* as a guideline), and choose its damage threshold, which should be low considering its fragile nature. When a creature misses on its attack roll by 5 or more and that attack can reach the damaged area, the attack inflicts damage to the area. If the section is reduced to 0 hit points, it falls apart and triggers an effect similar to a trap appropriately adjusted for the PCs (see **Chapter 7** in *Game Master's Guide* for guidance on appropriate damage and saves for traps and for sample traps and hazards).

If a PC scans a room for weak points, allow them to attempt a WIS (Perception) check to notice the structural instability. The PC might then alert friends to the danger or attempt to trigger the trap on the monster. If the occupying monster is aware of the

instability, use the guidance in **Combat Near Hazards or Traps**, and the monster might deliberately attack the weak point to trigger the effect. Otherwise, occupying monsters are just as unaware as PCs.

When adding destructible areas to a dungeon's rooms, decide whether damage-dealing spells have the same effect on a missed spell attack roll as missed weapon attacks and if weakened areas are affected by spells that affect areas. Some spells that affect areas specifically state how they interact with the surrounding environment, like the *fireball* spell, but many spells don't give such specifics. Decide on a case-by-case basis if a spell would affect the instability's weak point and trigger the trap.

COMBAT IN SMALL SPACES

Less ubiquitous than darkness but just as frustrating, narrow tunnels and other small passageways dot dungeons and underground locations, granting a major combat advantage to oozes and smaller creatures accustomed to fighting in cramped confines.

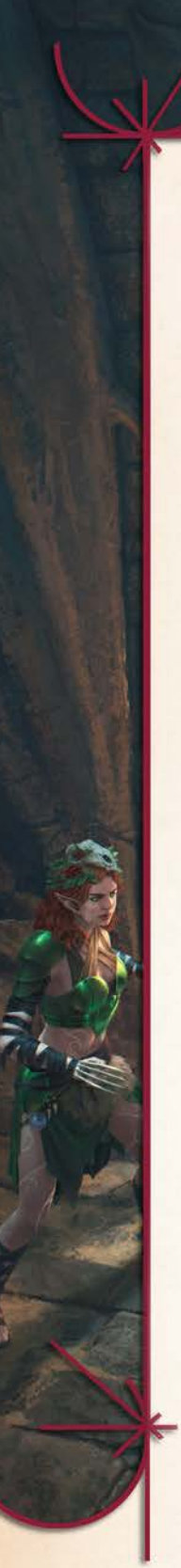
Many amorphous creatures, like oozes, are unintelligent combatants and instinctively retreat to small spaces when injured or preparing an ambush. However, intelligent monsters lure their foes as far as possible into tight spots until their opponents become stuck or must spend considerable time to return to more favorable spaces. Creatures with access to special items or magic might use grease to slick passageways or spells to shrink or enlarge opponents, trapping the opponents in confined spaces and making them easier prey.

Unlike with darkness, even well-prepared PCs might not be equipped to handle combat in confined quarters without some previous knowledge. If the PCs are expected to explore an area with confined passages or rooms, give them a chance to research the area ahead of time. With research, they can learn about the restrictive travel and might prepare *enlarge/reduce*, *move earth*, or *passwall* spells or purchase potions and magic items that similarly aid their travel in confined spaces, such as *oil of etherealness* or *potion of diminution*. If the PCs must spend an extraordinary amount of time in small spaces and had little time to prepare, consider allowing PCs that have proficiency with a melee weapon with the Light property to attack without the disadvantage that normally comes from fighting while squeezing.

COMBAT IN THE DARK

As places untouched by the sun, dungeons and other underground locales are inherently dark. Many creatures populating dungeons have the innate ability to see in the dark, so they enjoy a combat edge over intruders unable to do so without tools or magical assistance. Some monsters native to such areas might even have little difficulty maneuvering in areas of magical darkness, thanks to unique senses like keensense or truesight, which PCs typically lack. Intelligent monsters might even use obstacles in their lairs to confound foes who can't see them. Keep in mind that PCs that can't see foes are treated as if they have the blinded condition, and they have disadvantage on attack rolls against the creatures they can't see. A successful attack often reveals a creature's location to the other PCs (but doesn't negate the blinded condition)—at least





until the creature moves again. In this way, coordinated PCs can take down foes with some effort, even in the darkest conditions.

If using maps to represent combat locations, and the PCs have not had a chance to discover the layout of an area, consider using a blank grid. This does add some work to mentally correlate the PCs' locations to the area's dimensions, but it simulates the uncertainty of probing the surroundings to locate walls and other creatures. In such a scenario, a player indicates where the PC will move in the darkness. If the PC moves more than half their speed and hits a large obstacle along their intended path, such as a wall, door, or bookshelf, the PC stops their movement and takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage (or other damage as appropriate to the obstacle) from blundering into a solid object. For smaller objects, such as tables and chairs, the PC must succeed on a DC 10 DEX save or fall prone instead, tripping over the object as they move. This blank map method can also be employed in other scenarios where the PCs are unable to see each other or their surroundings, such as a steam-filled bathhouse or fog-shrouded cemetery.

Optional Rule: Prolonged Blindness

If a sighted PC spends 8 continuous hours in total darkness or otherwise unable to see, the PC can choose one other sense besides sight to become temporarily heightened. While blinded, the PC has advantage on WIS (Perception) checks that rely on that other sense. However, this prolonged blindness makes the PC's eyes sensitive to light, imposing disadvantage on their attack rolls and WIS (Perception) checks that rely on sight while the PC is in bright light. The PC's eyes remain sensitive to light until their eyes have been exposed to bright light for at least 1 hour. At that point, the PC loses the sensitivity to light and the benefits of prolonged darkness.

COMBAT NEAR HAZARDS OR TRAPS

Hazards and traps are the best non-monster options to repel invaders. With space at a premium in dungeons and similar locations, they might also share location with monsters. Intelligent monsters can employ these features to harm foes while unintelligent monsters know through experience to avoid succumbing to the features.

When in combat in a room with a hazard or trap it is familiar with, a creature typically works to entice its foe to trigger a trap through seemingly random movement or to maneuver its opponent into a position where it can use the Shove action to force the foe into a hazard. As a final desperate act—or not if the creature knows it will escape the trap unscathed—the creature can deliberately trigger a trap or hazard and catch some of its opponents in the effect. A resident of the dungeon that knows about the hazard or trap has advantage on any saves associated with triggering it.

A creature might also enjoy a persistent ambient hazard inimical to intruders. A vent spewing toxic fumes that permeate an area presents no challenge for a creature immune to poison. A lake of acid or river of lava might deter PCs from attacking creatures that take no damage from such a feature. If a clever monster sees its foes balk at hazards that pose it little or no harm, it can devise tactics to exploit the hazards. For example, the creature could use its action to splash some of the acid or lava in a cone (typically 15 or 30 feet) at nearby opponents, subjecting them to the hazard's effects even at a distance. Some intelligent monsters might combine traps and hazards, where the trap does little more than force its target into a hazard. In this case, a monster unafraid of harm might include itself as a target in order to ensnare its foes.

For monsters that have lair actions and reside in hazardous or trapped areas, consider replacing one of its lair actions with the ability to manipulate the hazard or trigger the trap. This could be explained as a trip wire or floor panel the monster interacts with to trigger the effect, or it could represent the creature's ability to concentrate toxic fumes or call forth a plume of acid or lava.

COMBAT ON ROUGH SURFACES

Dungeon dwellers typically use existing passageways that cut through stone and rarely undertake massive construction projects to craft smooth surfaces in their dungeons. This can make travel and combat difficult even for creatures lairing in these areas.

While not as dangerous as traps and hazards, rough surfaces can turn the tide of combat by slowing a creature's movement or tripping up the creature. Most rough surfaces become difficult terrain as those traversing them must carefully navigate minor obstacles and impediments to movement. Sometimes these surfaces present a subtle hazard by knocking the unwary prone from a misplaced footfall or a slippery surface. Inhabitants are often aware of any such hazards and have advantage on any necessary saves to avoid them.

Though the base assumption covers floors, rough surfaces can apply to walls and ceilings. PCs rarely encounter such surfaces unless they make use of magic, such as the *spider climb* spell, or have a natural ability to climb. However, an incautious creature is just as prone to tripping and "falling" along the surface of a wall or a ceiling. Feel free to introduce trip hazards to these unexpected surfaces—with the caveat that regular inhabitants have advantage on their saves to avoid falling prone. A creature that falls while climbing risks taking falling damage.

COMBAT WITH A TIMER

Beyond physical complications, time itself can add an element of tension to combat in a dungeon. A countdown to something detrimental or devastating provides a sense of urgency. The creatures the PCs fight could be running interference for a group of cultists conducting a ritual to summon a powerful demon deep in the bowels of the dungeon. The area where the final fight takes place might be moments away from falling apart and dumping everything in the area—including the person the PCs were sent to save—into a lake of lava. The boss could attempt to escape with a captive or a magical MacGuffin that will set the PCs back or wreak considerable harm to the region. Whatever the situation, the PCs must finish exploring the dungeon or defeat the dungeon's boss in a set amount of time to avoid the consequences.

When using a countdown, try to indicate the amount of time the PCs have before it ends, especially if the PCs take care to ascertain the circumstances. If players don't explicitly uncover the time remaining, use vague terms ("she's about a minute away from completing the ritual" or "another five-foot line of the room tumbles away, and you're sure the rest of the room will soon follow"). In addition, consider using degrees of failure if the PCs just barely miss the window of time. For example, if the PCs were only a round away from stopping the cultists, who barely managed to complete their summoning ritual, the PCs might have to face the summoned creature at partial—but increasing—strength as it emerges from a summoning portal. The PCs might find some desperate handholds (requiring a check or a save to grab) to buy a little extra time before the room completely falls away. Or the escape route might remain open for a few extra rounds, allowing the PCs to follow the villain absconding with the captive or item.

USING THREAT LEVELS

Dungeons are typically challenging for players, and players typically enjoy having their PCs escape or overcome the peril that such dungeons present. However, dungeons and even single levels within a dungeon have a range of difficulty. Party composition, magic items, and player tactics might also diminish a threat while the lack of certain items might increase a threat. Have a reasonable idea of the comparative threat level for the PCs and communicate those threats, especially for difficult dungeons. Note that as the PCs make their way through a dungeon, the dungeon's composition changes with each emptied treasure chest and slain monster, and the threat level will change in response.

HOW DUNGEON THREAT LEVELS WORK

A dungeon threat level is a derived value, typically the combined total CR of encounters, monsters, traps, and hazards within the dungeon. Each dungeon floor might have its own separate threat value, differing from the dungeon's overall value. By giving PCs varying degrees of difficulty as they progress through a dungeon, the dungeon feels unpredictable and more believable. Of course, as the PCs explore the dungeon and either succeed at clearing it out or retreat from a tough fight to an already cleared floor, the threat level could change as other monster factions fill the cleared floor or existing monsters bolster their defenses against the PCs' return.

Generally, the threat level for each portion of the dungeon should keep pace with the PCs as they increase in level. If the dungeon complex is substantial, the PCs will gain multiple levels, and the threat level for each floor should adjust to accommodate the PCs' new capabilities as they move to each floor.

The *Monster Vault* provides guidelines for the challenge of individual encounters, and the *Game Master's Guide* provides guidelines for determining the encounter budget of more complex encounters that feature monsters, traps, and other environmental effects. Both sets of guidance help in determining the threat level of each encounter and in giving a general feel for the overall threat level of the dungeon or of each dungeon floor. Though a threat level is the total of the encounters in that dungeon or floor, be careful not to have multiple extremely difficult encounters offset by a handful of easy encounters to "even out" the threat level. If multiple encounters are expected to push the PCs to the limit, the overall threat level should be increased to reflect this situation.



A dungeon floor's threat level should typically be no more than twice the PCs' encounter benchmark, provided that the floor has multiple rooms of encounters and that no single encounter should exceed the PCs' benchmark—unless it's known that this particular group of PCs can handle the challenge. For example, a group of four 5th-level PCs have an average benchmark of 10, per the guidance in *Monster Vault*. This means no single encounter should have a combined total CR higher than 10, and each floor of the dungeon should have a combined total CR no higher than 20. The more floors the dungeon has, the lower this combined total per floor should be, unless the PCs are going to gain levels between floors or be allowed to take short or long rests.

COMMUNICATING THREAT LEVELS

Players expect a certain amount of challenge for their PCs, so they won't be surprised when exploring dungeon areas with typical threat levels. If using encounters with a severe or extreme threat level, ensure players understand that they can run away from a fight with less dire consequences than trying to tough it out. While this usually comes up in a session 0 or other pre-campaign discussion, players benefit from a reminder before encountering a potentially lethal set of encounters.

If the PCs wisely run away, they shouldn't be punished for their decision. The monster might just look at the PCs' momentary intrusion as another everyday occurrence of adventurers believing they can defeat anything in front of them and then think nothing else of it. Meanwhile, the PCs have experienced some of the creature's capabilities and can better prepare for their next encounter with the creature—or just realize they need to gain experience before they can tackle the tough opponent.

Of course, if the PCs start running away from everything, don't hesitate to have level-appropriate monsters give chase, unless the monsters have story reasons to remain in their encounter locations. By showing which monsters will chase fleeing PCs and which monsters ignore them, the difficulty of each encounter is reinforced.

A warning about the threat level doesn't always require direct communication to the players. Use NPCs to convey the information, such as an NPC that talks about how one of the mightiest fighters in the land barely escaped with their life after entering the dungeon in question. The PCs can follow up by tracking down that fighter and determining that the fighter is more powerful than the PCs, or they might learn more about the monster faced and be armed with better knowledge on defeating it. "The reptilian beastie breathed bone-chilling frost and kept slamming poor Pierre with its tail unexpectedly," should indicate to the PCs that the NPC faced a white dragon with legendary actions. This should provide ample warning within the context of the game and set up the PCs for success despite the upcoming tough encounter.

TRACKING THREAT LEVELS

A well-realized dungeon won't remain static, especially when the PCs get involved. Events behind the scenes, such as inter-floor warfare or the culmination of schemes, might shake up the dungeon's composition. For instance, an NPC adventuring party, either rivals to the PCs or unknowns, might have fully or partially cleared a dungeon floor. Or the PCs' intel might become outdated, so they end up encountering threats for which they hadn't planned. In a large and ever-changing complex, it becomes important to track each area's threat level, especially when increasing or decreasing the threat in response to the PCs' progress.

As the PCs clear dungeon floors, the threat level becomes minimal as they have dispatched most or all opposition. However, dungeons abhor a vacuum, and a myriad of restocking options present themselves:

- A more powerful enemy seizes the opportunity to make a foothold in the dungeon with the eventual goal of ousting the dungeon's overall boss.
- An equally powerful monster or set of monsters waiting for an opportunity finds their opening when the PCs scour the dungeon floor.
- Refugees from other dungeon floors, fleeing powerful monsters below or even the PCs themselves, claim the unoccupied floor.
- The dungeon level's current boss might have escaped but returns later with a new entourage of lackeys, which have a different threat level than the previous group.
- The dungeon's final boss might direct more powerful creatures to occupy the level in retaliation for the PCs' invasion.

Likewise, a dungeon's threat level might change after the PCs start their excursion into the dungeon but then retreat from it for an extended period. The boss might realize it must increase security, or it might capriciously slay underlings for allowing the PCs to invade or escape.

Keeping a spreadsheet of the dungeon's major areas or floors, and the expected PC levels when they reach those areas, helps track the dungeon's threat levels. For the spreadsheet-averse, merely noting the threat level (easy, typical, severe, extreme) next to the room or floor's title helps track threat levels. As circumstances change or if the PCs gain experience quickly or slowly, periodically reassess threat levels. This might simply mean noting the new relative threat level, or it might precipitate changes to keep the threat level current. Not changing the dungeon works well by rewarding PCs who become more competent more quickly and serves as a warning for PCs who haven't developed as rapidly.

For areas where the threat level should change, note the new threat level even if the threat's specifics are unknown. Presumably, the PCs will take time exploring other areas, providing the extra time needed to generate the details.

If using the dungeon character sheet found at the end of this book, make sure to note each dungeon floor's threat level in the appropriate section of the sheet.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Sometimes players incidentally increase the threats to their PCs through their decisions. The PCs might split up based on a seemingly sound justification. They might also blindly crash into an unknown room while fleeing another encounter, causing them to face multiple encounters simultaneously. Likewise, since the dungeon's inhabitants aren't static until the PCs encounter them, some creatures might hear a nearby combat and feel compelled to investigate.

Keeping the floor's overall threat level in mind better enables decisions on how to handle these situations. If the area has an easier threat level, feel free to allow the PCs to string together multiple encounters. For tougher threat levels, allow the PCs to realize their mistake and narrowly avoid their predicament. In cases where the idea of a plausibly active dungeon floor conflicts with the threat level by adding more creatures to an encounter, consider having the extra creatures arrive when the PCs have nearly completed the triggering encounter or having the PCs run into the responders upon leaving the encounter area, spreading the number of foes throughout the rounds of the encounter rather than having all nearby enemies appear at once.



APPENDIX A: DUNGEON DENIZENS

This section contains statistics for various creatures commonly found in and around dungeons, ruins, and other mysterious locales ripe for delving. The stat blocks are presented alphabetically.

BRITTLER

Dry, white powder flakes off this squat quadruped, revealing pink flesh. A long dorsal tentacle whips the air above the creature, sporting a sharp stinger.

Lost Exoskeletons. Brittlers started out their existence with exoskeletons surrounding their soft flesh and protecting them from predation by more powerful underworld creatures. When a rival exoskeletal species encroached on their territories, brittlers quickly developed an enzyme they could use to dissolve their foes' bones. Though they succeeded in driving the rival species to extinction, their victory came at a bitter cost as their descendants lost the ability to grow exoskeletons.

Bone Dissolvers. Brittlers retain the poison they use to dissolve bones but have transferred it to a stinger-tipped tendril. This permits them to inject the poison into their victims to leech nutrients from internal skeletons. Though the carnivorous creatures don't require dissolved bones for sustenance, they rapidly regenerate themselves by feasting on the material, regain their exoskeletons for a brief period, and experience a momentary euphoria. This has developed into an addiction for brittlers, which target skeletal prey over others. Their poison quickly loses its potency when exposed to air or decay, preventing them from saving their victims' bones for later or digesting the bones of skeletal undead.

Developing Society. Brittlers' exoskeletons allowed them to thrive individually, requiring little social contact between the creatures. As they evolved, they became more intelligent, realized they succeeded when they cooperated, and developed a complex, pheromone- and gesture-based language. They gather in colonies of up to 20 brittlers, among which arises a leader. Strikingly, this leader grows an exoskeleton as a show of status that also enables it to participate from the frontlines of combat. The leader is typically aware it has no defense against a unified force of brittlers, giving it incentive to ensure successful hunts that benefit most of its colony.



BRITTLER COMMANDERS

Brittler leaders use the same statistics as a standard brittler, except a leader has an armor class of 15.

Brittler — CR 1

Small Aberration

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 34
Speed 30 ft.
Perception 12 **Stealth** 13
Resistant Aberrant Resilience
Immune poison | poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Languages Brittler

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+1	+3	+3	−2	+2	−2

Aberrant Resilience. The brittler is resistant to the charmed, frightened, paralyzed, and stunned conditions, and it has advantage on saves against spells or effects that would alter its form.

Bone Ingestion. When the brittler makes a Bite attack against a creature poisoned by its crumblebone toxin, it scores a critical hit on a 19 or 20. If the attack hits, the brittler regains HP equal to half the damage dealt, and it gains a +2 bonus to its AC until the start of its next turn.

Crumblebone. The brittler produces a toxin in its stinger that slowly dissolves bone. When a creature succumbs to this toxin, it is poisoned and vulnerable to bludgeoning damage. At the end of each of its turns, the poisoned creature can make a DC 13 CON save, ending the effect of crumblebone on itself on a success.

Limited Amorphousness. The brittler can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. If it benefited from its Bone Ingestion trait this turn, it loses this trait until the start of its next turn.

Actions

Multiattack. The brittler makes two Bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 CON save or succumb to the brittler's crumblebone toxin (see the Crumblebone trait).

Bonus Actions

Tail Whip. The brittler whips its tail in an arc around it. Up to two creatures of its choice within 10 feet of it must succeed on a DC 13 STR save or fall prone.

Deep Dryad

A panoply of fungi of various shapes, sizes, and colors sprout from the skin and clothing of this bald, pale woman.

Underground Fey. Deep dryads preserve nature in underground locations with a specific focus on fungi, the staple plants of underground ecosystems. They spend their lives underground where they tend mushroom forests and protect animals dwelling in the bowels of the earth. Like forest dryads, deep dryads bind themselves to ancient mushrooms and must find new mushrooms when their bonded mushrooms perish.

Mushroom and Earthen Allies. Thanks to their close bonds with mushrooms, deep dryads cooperate readily with mycolids and other intelligent fungi. They are also attuned to natural stone, and welcome deep gnomes, earth elementals, and even xorns as friends, provided these creatures pose no threat to their beloved mushrooms.

Welcome Respite. Aware of the underground's many dangers, deep dryads often offer aid to aboveground travelers who become lost or overcome by the area's hostile creatures and environment. The dryads lead such wayward souls to the surface or call upon trusted friends to escort the travelers. Though some dryads are altruistic in this offer, just as many are keen to get the travelers out of their sacred groves, where the travelers are intruders upon the natural order of the underground.

Deep Dryad — CR 5

Small Fey

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)
Hit Points 108
Speed 30 ft.
Perception 13 **Stealth** 17
Resistant Fey Resilience
Immune poison | poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Languages Terran, Undercommon

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+0	+7	+2	+0	+3	+4

Fey Resilience. The deep dryad is resistant to the charmed and unconscious conditions.

Magic Resistance. The deep dryad has advantage on saves against spells and other magical effects.

Mushroom Stride. Once on its turn, the deep dryad can use 10 feet of its movement to step magically into one living mushroom within its reach and emerge from

a second living mushroom within 60 feet of the first mushroom, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second mushroom. Both mushrooms must be Small or larger.

One with the Faerie Ring. While in its mushroom grove, the deep dryad can't be surprised, and its Perception is 18.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the deep dryad has disadvantage on attack rolls, and its Perception is 8 when perceiving by sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The deep dryad makes two Puffbomb attacks.

Puffbomb. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) poison damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or be poisoned until the end of its next turn.



BONUS ACTIONS

Animate Mushrooms. The deep dryad gives temporary life to up to three Medium or smaller mushrooms. The mushrooms use the statistics of **shriekers** or **violet fungi** (the dryad's choice). The mushrooms act on the dryad's initiative count, acting as allies of the dryad and obeying its spoken commands. The mushrooms remain for 1 hour, until the dryad dies, or until the dryad dismisses them as a bonus action. The dryad can have no more than three such creatures under its control at one time.

Phosphorescent Spores. The deep dryad sends phosphorescent spores toward up to two creatures it can see within 30 feet of it. Each target must succeed on a DC 15 DEX save or be covered in glowing spores for 1 minute. A creature covered in spores sheds dim light in a 10-foot radius, attack rolls against the creature have advantage if the attacker can see the creature, and the creature can't benefit from being invisible. A creature can use an action to brush off the spores, ending the effect for the spore-covered creature.

DUNGEONCLEANER

A tall, gangly stony humanoid hums to itself as it uses a variety of cleaning implements. It stops at a stubborn stain and complains exasperatedly, "This will not do!"

Cleaning Constructs. Dungeoncleaners are specialized constructs favored by dungeon owners who desire a spotless dungeon, especially after the owners' minions messily dispatch trespassers. The constructs are relatively unintelligent but have enough autonomy to thoroughly clean their homes without instruction. Dungeoncleaner creators enjoy programming the constructs with phrases denoting their frustration with messes, but despotic dungeon owners can commission dungeoncleaners with decidedly more aggressive speech.

Dungeoncleaner **CR 8**

Large Construct

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 126
Speed 40 ft.
Perception 16 **Stealth** 12
Resistant acid
Immune Construct Resilience
Senses darkvision 90 ft.
Languages understands the languages of its creator but can speak only limited phrases

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8	+2	+4	−3	+3	−2

Construct Nature. The dungeoncleaner doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Construct Resilience. The dungeoncleaner is immune to poison and psychic damage, and it is immune to exhaustion and the charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, and poisoned conditions.

Immutable Form. The dungeoncleaner is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The dungeoncleaner has advantage on saves against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dungeoncleaner makes two Broom attacks and one Pincer attack. It can replace its Pincer attack with Spray Nozzle.

Broom. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 STR save or be knocked prone.

Pincer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the dungeoncleaner can't make Pincer attacks against other targets.

Spray Nozzle. The dungeoncleaner sprays an alchemical solution in a 15-foot cone, choosing one of the following options:

- **Aggressive Cleanser.** Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 CON save, taking 10 (3d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature in the area suffering from an existing disease or poison that allows for a repeated save to end the effect can immediately make that save with advantage, resolving the disease or poison's subsequent effects as normal.
- **Power Wash.** Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 STR save. On a failure, a creature target takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage and is pushed up to 10 feet away from the dungeoncleaner. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't pushed.

BONUS ACTIONS

Adjust Spray Nozzle. The dungeoncleaner changes the configuration of its Spray Nozzle to affect a line that is 30 feet long and 5 feet wide or changes it back to a 15-foot cone.

Frenzy of Fastidiousness. The dungeoncleaner scans the area for dirt, muck, ash, or other marring or messy substance. It hones in on a point of messiness it can see within 30 feet of it, such as an adventurer's muddy boots or a scorch mark from an errant fire spell. The dungeoncleaner has advantage on the next attack it makes against one creature within 10 feet of that point, and each creature within 10 feet of that point has disadvantage on the next save it makes against the dungeoncleaner's Spray Nozzle.



REACTIONS

Parry. The dungeoncleaner adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the dungeoncleaner must see the attacker.

Enameline

Teeth and fangs cover this rotund creature with stubby arms and legs. It clicks its teeth together unnervingly.

Tooth Obsessed. Enamlines, or tooth goblins, terrorized communities worldwide long ago, stealing teeth from every creature they could, but they eventually fled underground in the face of a determined effort to eradicate them. They can hide much more easily underground, where they continue their depredations on ever larger creatures to satisfy their desire for teeth.

Antisocial. Enamelines never work together and rarely ally with non-enamelines. Their obsession with festooning themselves with teeth makes them paranoid about others taking the teeth for themselves. Toothed creatures working with enamlines must remain alert, as the tooth goblins succumb to their fixations and try to wrest their ostensible allies' teeth loose during periods of unconsciousness. Enamelines spawn by budding and reluctantly part with a few precious teeth out of instinctive obligation to protect the putty-like young they produce.

Enameline CR 3

Small Monstrosity

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 78
Speed 30 ft., burrow 10 ft., climb 20 ft.
Perception 11 **Stealth** 16
Vulnerable necrotic
Resistant slashing | Monstrosity Resilience
Immune petrified
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Languages Common, Undercommon

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+2	+3	−2	+1	−3

Monstrosity Resilience. The enameline is resistant to exhaustion and to the frightened condition.

Pounce. If the enameline moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with its Rake attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 STR save or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the enameline can make one Bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Tooth Obsession. When the enameline starts its turn and can see an incapacitated creature that it knows has teeth, it must succeed on a DC 11 WIS save or be compelled to remove that creature's teeth. It spends that turn moving up to its speed toward the incapacitated creature, and if it moves to within 5 feet of that creature, the enameline uses its action to pry out one of the creature's teeth. Attacks against the enameline have advantage until the start of its next turn, as it indulges its obsession. If the enameline takes damage during this indulgence, it can repeat the save with advantage, ending this effect on itself on a success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The enameline makes one Bite attack and one Rake attack, or it makes two Rake attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage, and the enameline attaches to it. While attached, the enameline can't make Bite attacks, it has advantage on Rake attacks against the target, and at the start of each of the enameline's turns, the target takes 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. The attached enameline moves with the target whenever the target moves, requiring none of the enameline's movement. It can detach itself by spending 5 feet of movement on its turn. A creature, including the target, can take its action to detach the enameline by succeeding on a DC 13 STR check.

Rake. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Chatter. The enameline gnashes its teeth together to produce an unearthly gnashing. Each creature within 10 feet of the enameline that can hear it must succeed on a DC 13 WIS save or be frightened until the end of its next turn. A creature that succeeds on its save is immune to this enameline's Chatter for the next 24 hours.

REACTIONS

Bite Back. If a creature grapples the enameline or if a creature removes the attached enameline, the enameline can twist its body, scraping its tooth-covered hide against that creature. The creature takes 3 (1d6) piercing damage.



Mithralemental

This metallic biped strides forth, catching the image of everything it passes in its reflective surface.

Many-Faceted Elemental. Mithralementals hail from the Plane of Earth, and when they make rare trips to the Material Plane, they often appear underground. They bear similarities to earth elementals, but they demonstrate aspects associated with other elemental creatures. They can temporarily liquefy their bodies, heat up patches of their outer shells, and spin themselves about.

Celestial Allies. As living silver, mithralementals often befriend creatures that fight lycanthropes, fiends, and other creatures susceptible to silver weapons. The elementals enjoy good fights against foes that fall to their mighty blows and razor-sharp blades.

Inherently Valuable. Mithralementals tend to avoid the Material Plane whenever possible, because treasure hunters often seek the elementals for destruction and harvesting. Mithralementals weigh between 800 and 1,000 pounds and are made up almost entirely of silver and mithral alloys, meaning their corpses are, in effect, piles of considerable wealth to those able to refine the metals. Though wary of opportunists, they sometimes shed bits of themselves to draw enemy attention and aid trusted friends.



Mithralemental — CR 7

Large Elemental

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)
Hit Points 140
Speed 40 ft., burrow 30 ft.
Perception 11 **Stealth** 9
Vulnerable fire, lightning
Resistant Elemental Resilience
Immune acid
Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.
Languages Celestial, Terran

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+8	−1	+5	−1	+1	+2

Elemental Nature. The mithralemental doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Elemental Resilience. The mithralemental is resistant to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. In addition, it is immune to poison damage, to exhaustion, and to the paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, and unconscious conditions.

Magic Weapons. The mithralemental's weapon attacks are magical.

Metallic Camouflage. The mithralemental's Stealth is 14 while it is among metal objects.

Rust Proof. The mithralemental is immune to any effect that corrodes metal.

Siege Monster. The mithralemental deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. The mithralemental makes three Slam attacks. If two Slam attacks hit one creature, the target must succeed on a DC 16 STR save or be knocked prone.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the mithralemental scores a critical hit, it rolls damage dice three times, instead of twice.

Silver Shard. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (3d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Whirling Doom (Recharge 5–6). The mithralemental spins rapidly, extending its fluid arms. Each creature within 15 feet of the mithralemental must make a DC 16 DEX save. On a failure, a creature takes 27 (6d8) bludgeoning damage and is knocked prone. On a success, a creature takes half the damage and isn't knocked prone.

BONUS ACTIONS

Fluid Form. The mithralemental reshapes its body in one of the following ways until the start of its next turn:

- **Bladed Fist.** The mithralemental's Slam attack deals slashing damage instead of bludgeoning damage. If it scores a critical hit, the mithralemental severs one of the target's limbs.
- **Liquid Metal.** The mithralemental can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing, and its speed increases by 10 feet.
- **Spiked Body.** Spikes erupt across the mithralemental's body. A creature that touches the mithralemental or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 4 (1d8) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Conduct Heat and Lightning. When the mithralemental takes fire or lightning damage, it can store some of the energy of that damage within its body. The next Slam attack it makes before the end of its next turn deals an extra 9 (2d8) fire or lightning damage (the type that triggered this reaction).



Petrijelly

This patch of blue jelly changes color and density to match the stone upon which it clings.

Stony Ooze. Petrijellies dwell in underground areas replete with stone or among aboveground stone free of vegetation. They can trigger a quick alchemical change within themselves to transform into less-maneuverable stone, which matches any stone they currently touch, or back to their more pliable and mobile form. Since they can digest food—organic or otherwise—only in their jelly configuration, they spend most of their existences in that form. However, when sustenance becomes scarce, they climb ceilings or stony overhangs, where they change to stone, entering a sort of hibernation. There, they wait for potential prey they can smash from above. While hunting in this way, they often remain stony to batter still-living prey, provided they can stay within reach of their prey. Petrijellies also instinctively revert to stone when they sense imminent strikes, granting them a modicum of protection against the attacks.

Alchemical Wonders. Petrijellies' mutable composition makes them attractive to alchemists, who use the creature's natural properties to develop petrification poisons or salves to remove petrification. Because a petrijelly remains in a constant form upon its death, these alchemists must procure living samples to craft their concoctions.

Petrijelly — CR 4

Large Ooze

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)
Hit Points 95
Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.
Perception 10 **Stealth** 9
Resistant Ooze Resilience
Immune acid | petrified | Ooze Resilience
Senses keensense 60 ft. (can't sense beyond this radius)
Languages —

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+4	−1	+2	−5	+0	−4

Amorphous. The petrijelly can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing. It can't use this trait while its body is solid.

Crush. If the petrijelly moves vertically, such as falling from a ceiling, at least 10 feet toward a creature or creatures below it, it crushes those creatures. Each creature in its space when it lands must make a DC 14 DEX save. If the petrijelly is solid, creatures in that area take 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 10 feet the jelly falls (maximum 10d6) on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the petrijelly isn't solid, creatures in that area take 9 (2d8) acid damage plus 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage for every 20 feet the jelly falls (maximum 5d6) on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Ooze Nature. The petrijelly doesn't require sleep.

Ooze Resilience. The petrijelly is resistant to the grappled and restrained conditions, and it is immune to exhaustion and to the blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, and prone conditions.

Spider Climb. The petrijelly can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Stone Camouflage. The petrijelly's Stealth is 14 while in rocky terrain. It can use this trait only when its body is solid.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The petrijelly makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d8 + 4) acid damage or bludgeoning damage, depending on if the petrijelly is solid.



BONUS ACTIONS

Harden. The petrijelly solidifies its gelatinous body, becoming like stone. While solid, it gains a +2 bonus to its AC, its walking and climbing speeds are reduced by 10 feet, it becomes vulnerable to thunder damage and immune to bludgeoning damage, and its Slam attack deals bludgeoning damage instead of acid damage. This effect lasts until it uses this bonus action again. If the petrijelly dies while solid, its body remains stone-like, eventually decomposing into crumbles of packed earth.

REACTIONS

Protective Solidification. When the petrijelly is attacked by a creature it can see, it can use Harden to make its body more stone-like if it isn't already, potentially negating the attack or damage.

Scritcher

A skeletal rat scrapes hardened claws on the walls, creating an ear-piercing screech. Its clacking teeth add to the cacophony.

Incessant Scratching. The skeletal remains of dungeon-dwelling rodents exterminated by existing or invading dungeon denizens, scritchers possess a supernatural ability to drive their killers and other prey to distraction by creating haunting sounds with their claws. The scratching haunts those who hear it, inducing a fitful night of sleep as they can't get the sound out of their heads.

Deadly Collectives. Owing to their simultaneous deaths and retaining the rodent's instinctive nature to group together, scritchers often roam their territories in large groups. When they encounter prey, one of their cohort starts scratching a nearby surface to befuddle their prey, leaving it open to attacks from the rest of the group. Despite their seeming lack of intelligence, they can coordinate their attacks with ease, keeping their prey off-balance. Lone scritchers climb walls to keep

out of their attackers' reach long enough to distract their opponents before dropping down and attacking. Though they hunt like living creatures, they don't consume their prey, focusing more on tormenting and destroying the living—especially living humanoids. Because of this, other dungeon denizens or scavengers, such as ghouls or giant insects, often follow in the wake of packs of scritchers, feasting on what remains.

Persistent Tormenters. Scritchers typically manifest in underground locations or dungeons with a concentration of necrotic energy or malice. However, they also appear in urban areas where their living bodies died en masse through especially cruel means. While the reanimating forces drive them to vengeance against their slaughterers, scritchers may remain long after their slayers have perished or fled, tormenting new inhabitants or visitors. They sometimes follow their targets for days, wearing down prey with their incessant scratching and then attacking the exhausted quarry.

Scritcher CR 1/2

Tiny Undead

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 25
Speed 20 ft., climb 10 ft.
Perception 10 **Stealth** 14
Vulnerable bludgeoning
Resistant piercing
Immune frightened | Undead Resilience
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Languages —

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
−3	+2	+2	−4	+0	+2

False Appearance. While the scritcher remains motionless and prone, it is indistinguishable from an inanimate rodent skeleton.

Pack Tactics. The scritcher has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of the scritcher's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Scritching Cacophony. When four or more scritchers are within 30 feet of each other, spells with verbal components can't be cast within 30 feet of one of these scritchers.

Undead Nature. The scritcher doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Undead Resilience. The scritcher is immune to poison damage, to exhaustion, and to the poisoned condition.

Actions

Multiattack. The scritcher makes one Bite attack and one Claw attack.

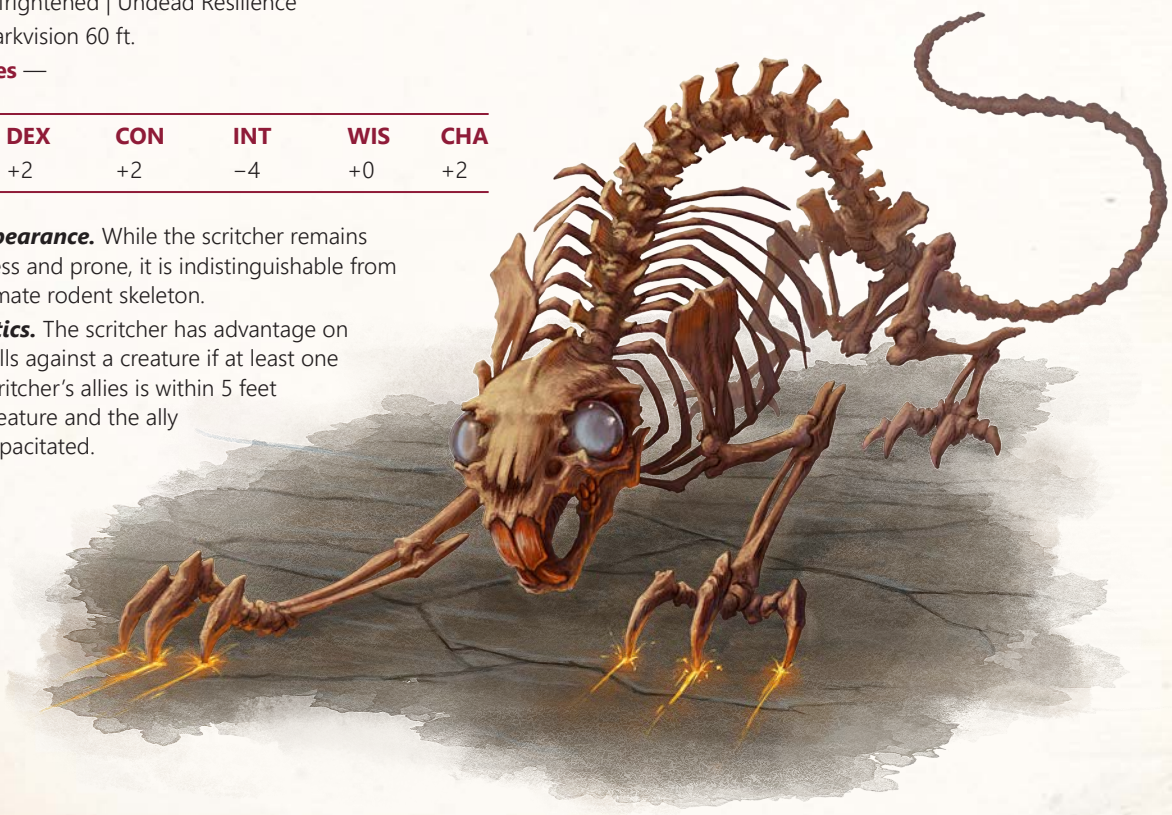
Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

Bonus Actions

Disorientating Scratches. The scritcher drags its claws along a surface, creating an eerie sound that echoes toward one creature the scritcher can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can hear the scritcher and is not immune to the frightened condition, the target must succeed on a DC 12 WIS save or have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. A creature that failed its initial save must repeat the save the next time it takes a short or long rest before 24 hours have passed, gaining no benefit from the rest on a failed save.

Nimble Rush. The scritcher takes the Dash or Disengage action.





Steinesser

A dozen segmented legs hold this worm-like creature aloft. Granite teeth fill the creature's oversized maw, and odd bits of stone poke out from between them.

Underworld Pests. Underdwellers regard steinessers with similar disdain that surface dwellers have for gophers. The creatures have an insatiable appetite for earth and stone and leave furrows and pits in their wake that prove inconvenient at best and deadly at worst.

Stone Foes. Due to a steinesser's appetite and ability to readily tear apart stone, earth elementals and other creatures composed of earth and stone avoid a steinesser or attack it on sight. It also raises ire among deep gnomes, as steinessers cause considerable incidental harm to their homes and their earth elementals allies. Provided xorns have plenty of other material at hand to eat, they don't begrudge a steinesser eating ordinary stone. Though they can tunnel through stone without leaving a trace, steinessers prefer to chew through stone, seemingly indulging in perverse joy when they witness victims fall afoul of the traps they create. Steinesser can also differentiate stone carvings from natural errosion and often vandalize these carvings.

Hydrophobic. Expectedly overconfident against earth-based foes, steinessers are terrified of water, which react violently with their weird flesh. They avoid large bodies of water and migrate to drier dungeon areas when their homes take on even a hint of moisture. Creatures aware of this aversion often create moats to protect their lairs from steinessers, while canny water elementals might cow a steinesser into service to devastate rival earth elementals.

Steinesser **CR 1**

Small Aberration

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 38

Speed 20 ft., burrow 20 ft.

Perception 12 **Stealth** 13

Resistant bludgeoning | Aberrant Resilience

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft.

Languages Terran

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+2	+3	+3	−2	+2	−1

Aberrant Resilience. The steinesser is resistant to the charmed, frightened, paralyzed, and stunned conditions, and it has advantage on saves against spells or effects that would alter its form.

Earth Enmity. The steinesser has advantage on attack rolls against creatures with earthen bodies, such as Constructs and Elementals made mostly of earth or stone, and creatures wielding earthen power, such as spellcasters that cast *move earth*, *stone shape*, or similar spells within sight of the steinesser.

Earth Glide. The steinesser can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the steinesser doesn't disturb the material through which it moves.

Earthen Siege Monster. The steinesser deals double damage to objects and structures made of earth or stone.

Stone Camouflage. The steinesser's Stealth is 18 while in rocky terrain.

Water Susceptibility. For every 5 feet the steinesser moves in water, or for every gallon of water splashed on it, it takes 1 acid damage. In addition, if at least one gallon of water is splashed on the steinesser, it must succeed on a DC 13 CON save or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The steinesser makes two Bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Gravel Spray (Recharge 5–6). The steinesser exhales rocks it hasn't yet digested in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 DEX save, taking 13 (3d8) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

BONUS ACTIONS

Furrow. The steinesser burrows up to 15 feet in a straight line just below the surface of the earth or stone ground, digging up the surface as it moves. A creature in that line must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save or fall prone. Opportunity attacks against the steinesser while it uses this bonus action have disadvantage, unless the attacker has tremorsense.

Walking Sarcophagus

This stone coffin trundles along of its own volition. A faint howling sound emanates from inside the coffin.

Stone-Bound Spirit. Walking sarcophagi are the spirits of humanoids interred in unconsecrated stone or those left to rot on a stone surface. The spirits imprint on the stone and craft a coffin around themselves. Their dependence on stone is so strong they flee from combat when their outer shells are destroyed and seek more stone from which they can craft new encasements. Newly arisen walking sarcophagi search for their killers upon whom they can enact revenge, after which they enjoy entrapping and destroying any humanoids.



Walking Sarcophagus CR 3

Large Undead

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)
Hit Points 69
Speed 30 ft.
Perception 10 **Stealth** 8
Immune necrotic | charmed | Undead Resilience
Senses darkvision 60 ft.
Languages understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	−2	+0	+0	+0	+2

Animating Spirit. The walking sarcophagus is actually a spirit animating a coffin-shaped slab of stone. While the walking sarcophagus has 14 HP or more, the spirit and stone are inseparable, using the statistics presented here. If the walking sarcophagus is reduced to below 14 HP, the stone is destroyed, leaving the animating spirit behind. The spirit uses the statistics of a **specter** but with the walking sarcophagus's remaining HP as its current HP. Every 24 hours the spirit remains without a bonded stone, its HP maximum is reduced by 7 (2d6), destroying the spirit if its HP maximum is reduced to 0. This reduction lasts until the spirit recreates its sarcophagus, at which point its statistics are replaced with those presented here. The spirit must spend 1 hour in contact with a Medium or larger chunk of stone to recreate its sarcophagus.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the walking sarcophagus has disadvantage on attack rolls, and its Perception is 5 when perceiving by sight.

Undead Nature. The walking sarcophagus doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Undead Resilience. The walking sarcophagus is immune to poison damage, to exhaustion, and to the poisoned condition.

Actions

Multiattack. The walking sarcophagus makes two Slam attacks. It can replace one of its attacks with a Lid Grasp attack.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Lid Grasp. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 13). Until this grapple ends, the walking sarcophagus can't use its Lid Grasp on another target.

Create Specter. If a creature entrapped within the walking sarcophagus is Humanoid and has been dead for no longer than 1 minute, the walking sarcophagus raises the creature's spirit as a **specter** in the nearest unoccupied space. The specter is under the sarcophagus's control. The sarcophagus can only have one specter under its control at one time. If the sarcophagus creates another, the previous specter is freed from the sarcophagus's control.

Bonus Actions

Entrap. The walking sarcophagus attempts to pull a Medium or smaller creature grappled by it within its stony confines. The grappled creature must succeed on a DC 13 DEX save or become entrapped. If the creature is entrapped, the grapple ends. The entrapped target is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside the walking sarcophagus, and it takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage at the start of each of the sarcophagus's turns. A creature, including the entrapped target, can take its action to free the entrapped target by succeeding on a DC 13 STR check. The sarcophagus can have only one target entrapped at a time.

Wan Creeper

This chalky vine crawls rapidly along the wall as its powerful thorns dig into the stone.

Nourished by Blood. Castoffs of quick-growing thorny vines found in aboveground forests and gardens, wan creepers lost their pigmentation but infest the floors, walls, and ceilings in their new, underground homes. Wan creepers have adapted to life without readily available water by feeding on the blood of living creatures. It digs its spiky thorns into flesh and absorbs its victims' life-giving fluid. If the creepers go too long without blood, they extend their thorns and hibernate, waiting for creatures to shed blood on the lengthy thorns, rejuvenating them.

Intermittently Avoidable. A wan creeper's pale coloration allows it to blend in with most underground areas. A feeding creeper turns green, however, making it difficult for the creature to hide from and ambush more prey. The creeper is unaware of this color transition and may continue to hunt to satisfy its insatiable thirst, making it easier for canny travelers to spot and evade the suspiciously vibrant greenery untouched by the sun. Greedy for prey, the creeper often drops prey that stops struggling if it can sense more prey nearby. Experienced travelers ensnared by a creeper know they can let their bodies go slack to entice the creeper to release them.

Unusual Lineage. A wan creeper lengthens as it consumes blood, eventually doubling in size. When it reaches this length, it finds a sharp surface upon which it severs itself in half. The two creepers become autonomous and often remain in the same location, provided they have enough food available.

Wan Creeper CR 6

Medium Plant

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 133

Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

Perception 14 **Stealth** 16

Vulnerable slashing

Resistant bludgeoning, necrotic, poison | poisoned | Plant Resilience

Senses keensense 60 ft. (can't sense beyond this radius)

Languages —

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
+3	+3	+3	−4	+4	−2

False Appearance. While the wan creeper remains motionless—and if it hasn't used Thorny Strangle within the past hour—it is indistinguishable from a seam of pale stone.

Plant Resilience. The wan creeper is resistant to exhaustion and to the paralyzed, petrified, and unconscious conditions.

Spider Climb. The wan creeper can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The wan creeper makes two Thorned Vine attacks.

Thorned Vine. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 10 (3d6) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 15) if it is a Medium or smaller creature. The wan creeper has two vines, each of which can grapple only one creature.

BONUS ACTIONS

Thorny Strangle. The wan creeper digs its vine deeper into a creature it is grappling. The target must succeed on a DC 15 STR save or be unable to speak or cast spells with verbal components and begin suffocating as the creeper cuts off the target's airflow. At the start of each of the strangled creature's turns, it takes 7 (2d6) piercing damage, and if it is a creature with blood, it must succeed on a DC 15 CON save or have its HP maximum reduced by an amount equal to half the damage taken, due to blood loss. This reduction lasts until the creature finishes a short or long rest. If the target's HP maximum is reduced to 0, it dies. These effects last until the creature ends or until the creeper uses this bonus action on another creature.



APPENDIX B: RANDOM TABLES

This appendix presents a series of tables that a GM can use to help build adventures within dungeons and ruins. The tables can be used to provide random enhancements and trappings, hooks to bring the PCs into the story, sample encounters, and general inspiration.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Sometimes, a little extra help is needed to connect the PCs with the adventure: to answer why they even need to go explore the dungeon or ruins. Such a hook doesn't need to be complicated—and might not even be relevant once they get where they're going—but a logical and consistent motivation truly can be helpful (see **Hooks for Dungeons and Ruins** table).

ADVENTURE HOOKS

d20	Hook
1	A collection of strangely dressed but seemingly wealthy kobolds visited the town tavern several days ago, claiming to be representatives of an advanced underground civilization that had lost contact with the world above. They wanted to establish trade and treaties with the local government. The tavern-goers mocked the kobolds, who promptly destroyed the tavern with strange magic but without injuring anyone. The local bureaucracy would like to hire an adventuring party to find these kobolds, last seen heading toward a cave system that might hide the entrance to their home.
2	A famous ancient and remote ruined city high in the mountains is especially known for its immense statues and elaborate stonework, carved directly into the surrounding mountainsides. Scholars and religious followers make pilgrimages to the city to appreciate and study the works. Fanatic cultists have recently stormed the city, and survivors report that the cultists intend to destroy the artifacts there unless someone can stop them from desecrating the priceless cultural treasures.
3	A farmer had a vision that an ancient forgotten and benevolent deity was calling to them from a temple buried deep underground, and soon after they began demonstrating prophetical abilities. The prophet's new followers started to dig where directed and revealed an entrance to an underground dungeon. This success has attracted even more followers to the prophet, and they would like to hire a party to enter the dungeon and uncover the temple they are certain is there. The priests of other faiths are growing concerned that whatever is granting these visions is not benevolent and that something terrible awaits discovery.
4	A group of bandits is believed to have established a base of operations in an abandoned fortress deep within the woods. Their raids terrorize the local citizenry, and the local leadership is looking for anyone capable of rooting out the ignoble group. The surrounding villages have pooled their resources to entice adventurers and other mercenaries for their assistance.
5	A prophecy states that a powerful, evil warlord will return centuries after their defeat to once again bring the lands under their subjugation. Recent divinations have shown that the prophecy will be fulfilled deep within a dungeon in the heart of the land. Hordes of monstrous creatures have been swarming into the area, preparing for the warlord's return. The party is sent to defeat the burgeoning horde and find a way to stop the warlord's return.



6	A proud family is looking for assistance in exploring the ruins of their ancestral home, long overtaken by the wild. Family legend says that corrupt nobility stole their land and drove them from their estate decades ago, and any proof of those unscrupulous actions could restore their birthright. The family is certain that the evidence can be found there, but agents of the current aristocracy keep away anyone willing to explore the area.
7	A spirit has been seen wandering near the mountains, repeating their walk night after night. Rumors claim that the ghost is showing the way to the entrance of the hidden dungeon where they met their demise and that the spirit can only rest when the dungeon has been conquered. The locals are too concerned for their own safety to attempt the dungeon themselves, and the foolhardy few who tried to follow the spirit never returned.
8	A gynosphinx that is well known to be an authority on a lost civilization suddenly declared the newly discovered local ruins to be their lair, driving scholars and other interested parties away. The sphinx states that the ruins are too dangerous for academics and others to explore haphazardly, and they will only allow entrance to explorers that can prove their competence and their understanding of the people who lived there through a series of quests. A group of academics wishes to hire the adventuring party to assist with those quests and ultimately brave the ruins.
9	An adventuring group in town recently brought back an immense amount of treasure from a ruined city. They tell anyone who listens that they had to leave even more treasure behind, but the ruins grew too dangerous for them to venture deeper. They are happy to give directions for a nominal finder's fee and have no desire to return themselves.
10	An excited scholar is looking for adventurers to act as guards for her next exploratory journey. She recently discovered a map in the university archives that shows the location of a long-abandoned and vast underground city, as well as the magical runes needed to find and open the hidden entrance.
11	An undead army marches toward civilized lands. Legends state that its powerful leader can only be brought low by a legendary weapon reported to lie hidden in the deepest part of a dungeon. The weapon can only be used by a true hero, and the royal family is looking for a heroic group to retrieve it. If a member of the party is deemed worthy to wield the weapon, the kingdom will look to that individual for its salvation.
12	Miners accidentally opened an entrance to an underground labyrinth, and the creatures within soon drove the workers away. The mine contains several veins of precious metals and was particularly profitable before the occurrence. The miners' guild would like to fund a group to clear the mines and help them seal the breach into the labyrinth. The guild is willing to let the adventurers explore the labyrinth but only for a limited period of time before they must seal the breach.

13	Recent high temperatures have caused the waters of a vast lake to recede, revealing the remains of a city flooded long ago. Dangerous plants and amphibious creatures wander these ruins, and other lake creatures might dwell in the deeper pools that remain. Some valuable items have already been retrieved from the city, and everyone is certain more treasure awaits those who can delve deeper into the ruins.
14	Star-crossed children of rival local merchant families have fled their homes. Both sides blame the other, and each family is offering hefty rewards to anyone who can bring the pair home. The families are willing to bargain against each other to prioritize their own child's safe return. Servants report that the pair used to meet one another in an old nearby cave, which serves as the entrance to an underground dungeon, and they remark that perhaps the children ventured deeper to escape their relatives.
15	Strange and dangerous creatures have been coming out of a fracture in the earth recently exposed by an earthquake. Investigators report that portions of ancient buildings and other structures are visible on the other side of the rift and would like to hire an experienced (or foolhardy) group to explore the area.
16	The children of the village have been going missing over the last several days. These children disappeared after being out of sight for just a few moments. One of the remaining village children claims they can hear their vanished companions playing inside nearby ruins—calling to them to come and play. Desperate villagers want the party to investigate the ruins and rescue (or avenge) their children.
17	The heir to a nearby kingdom has been abducted and hidden in ancient ruins located in a rival kingdom. The heir's kingdom cannot send its own forces to retrieve them without potentially starting a major conflict, so the royal family is hiring mercenaries to discreetly do the job. The heir has grown fond of their kidnappers and expresses reluctance to return.
18	Mysterious fey lords are said to gather in ruins within the woods on nights when the moon is full. Rumors also claim that those fey grant boons to those brave enough to play their games throughout the night—looking with particular favor on those willing to wager their memories—so the more one risks, the greater the reward.
19	The new city was built when the old city burned down years ago, some distance away from its former location. The old city was left to ruin, but travelers have recently reported that the buildings seem to be looking in better shape every time they pass the area. It's not that structures are being rebuilt or parts replaced but as if the damage is reversing itself over time. While none of the travelers have seen anyone else in the area, they do report hearing almost inaudible voices as they hurry past. The local council of the new city would like someone to investigate these happenings.
20	The parents of the leader of a local adventuring party wish to sponsor adventurers for the sad task of retrieving their progeny's remains. The group had ventured into the dungeon several weeks ago, and only their mage returned—with the others having been claimed by monsters. The parents just want the remains returned, and the hired adventurers can keep whatever else they find.



ENCOUNTERS

The tables presented in this section can be used to generate encounters for the PCs while exploring dungeons and ruins. The creatures involved can be found in the *Monster Vault*.

The variety of environments possible among dungeons and ruins can vary dramatically, so different types of creatures might be more or less appropriate for a given locale. These tables are also focused on encounters that might be typical in a subterranean dungeon and in the ruins of lost civilizations respectively, so the details might need some finesse, depending on the context of the adventure. The tables are grouped by CR, and it is notable that the CR 15+ encounters might have dramatic ramifications for the game world and could themselves be plot devices for entire campaigns (see **Encounters in Dungeons** and **Encounters in Ruins** tables).

To expand on these tables, any creature that might be at home underground would be especially suitable for dungeons, and any creature associated with urban areas would be especially suitable to encounter in or near ruins. Long-lived creatures, such as many planar beings, undead creatures, and constructs, might also be found in any of these places—perhaps even having been there for a long time, such as when a dungeon was built or before a site fell to ruin.



ENCOUNTERS IN DUNGEONS (CR 1–4)

d10	Encounter
1	Two **crimson jellies** have just finished feeding on a **bandit** that was scouting the dungeon when the PCs arrive. The jellies immediately turn their attention to attack the party. The bandit is unconscious, and if revived, they are exhausted with almost no recollection of their past due to the jellies' tainted attacks.
2	A ravenous **gelatinous cube** slides down a nearby passage. The rubble and debris that cover the floor make the ground difficult terrain. The cube's hunger causes it to pursue the party throughout the dungeon until it is dealt with.
3	1d4 + 1 **grimlocks** patrol the region and attack the PCs if detected. Several more grimlocks call this dungeon home, and any that escape the encounter alert the others.
4	1d6 + 3 **kobolds** have been practicing their trapmaking skills in this area. The rooms are filled with components for simple traps and other mechanical devices. The kobolds might assist the PCs in constructing traps if treated kindly. The kobolds also inform the PCs that there might be other traps in the dungeon that the kobolds might have set and forgotten about.
5	1d4 **rust monsters** skitter around the area, searching for metal to devour. They are easily distracted and stop to share the first metal food source they encounter. Once satisfied, they keep to themselves for several days.
6	1d4 **satarre** have been sent to this dungeon to establish a temple to a dark god of the void. They have chosen this area to be the heart of their temple, and the PCs have interrupted them during the construction of their altar. The satarre attack all intruders, driving them away from their dark site.
7	The floors, walls, and ceilings of this room appear to be covered in a carpet of writhing rats. Three **swarms of rats** and two **giant rats** emerge from the undulating mass to attack the PCs as they enter.
8	A **scout** and two **thugs** have entered the dungeon searching for treasure. They are traveling stealthily and, if they notice the PCs, set an ambush, hoping for a quick score. They all flee if any of them are brought below half their hit points.
9	A **priest** and 1d4 **acolytes** have been using the dungeon to hide their sacrifices to their dark gods. They are ready to advance their works by sacrificing intelligent beings, and the PCs would be ideal offerings, if they can be captured alive.
10	A **scout** has entered the dungeon with three **mastiffs**, searching for an elusive **spy** that they believe has fled within to avoid capture. The scout offers a reward to anyone who can help find and subdue the spy.



ENCOUNTERS IN DUNGEONS (CR 5–9)

d10	Encounter
1	A pack of 1d4 + 1 **ghouls** and a **ghast** have made this area their lair. Bones and other gristly remains litter the floor, including the remains and belongings of people the undead dragged down to the dungeon. The undead creatures view the PCs as their latest meal.
2	A **bugbear champion** and 1d6 + 2 **goblins** guard their lair, while the rest of their nascent warband raids nearby settlements. The goblins protect their dozen young and are hostile to any intruders.
3	Five treasure chests sit against the wall opposite the entrance to this room. Four of the chests are **mimics,** which attack when the PCs interact with them. The remaining, real chest contains 200 gold and a large chalice, which is also a mimic that attacks when lifted.
4	This large area is filled with edible mushrooms that are tended by four **mycolid commoners** and a **mycolid spore lord.** The mycolids allow anyone who can communicate with them to eat the mushrooms without issue. The potent magic in the area grants 2d4 temporary HP for 1 hour to any creature that eats these mushrooms while within the dungeon, including the mycolids themselves.
5	A **troll** and its two pet **worgs** have moved into the dungeon, planning to extort all who pass through. The creatures allow the PCs to pass if they can give it enough fresh meat. The worgs flee if seriously injured, but the troll will continue to fight until killed.
6	A **cloaker** hides on the ceiling of this room, ready to pounce when an opportunity presents itself. If the PCs appear too alert or well protected, the cloaker stealthily follows them, hoping to find a better opportunity to ambush the group (ideally while they are resting or sleeping).
7	1d3 **xorn** pass through the dungeon searching for gems to eat. If the PCs carry gemstones or other precious metals, the creatures plead for it—or at least the location of any nearby deposits of precious metals. If the party won't help, the xorn attack.
8	A group of **orcs** have challenged themselves to clear the dungeon of hostile beings and claim the treasures within for themselves. Six orcs plunge ahead into the dungeon, and 1d6 orcs remain behind where the PCs encounter them. They ask to be left alone to complete their trial. Refusal of this request leads to combat.
9	A **drider** has been driven from the city of its brethren and hunts the area for food. The creature now despises those of its former home and seeks new companionship and purpose, so it is not immediately hostile and is eager to converse with intelligent creatures.
10	A **night hag** and their **nightmare** steed dwell in this portion of the dungeon. The pair creep to nearby villages at night, tormenting and capturing the souls of the residents. The hag tries to use their abilities on the PCs when they sleep and otherwise wears the disguise of a lost or captured villager if approached—both creatures attacking if their identities are discovered.



ENCOUNTERS IN DUNGEONS (CR 10–15)

d10	Encounter
1	Two **otyughs** wander the area, partially submerged in dark, stagnant waters. There is a 75% chance they are hungry and will attack. If the creatures are not hungry, they are resting with full bellies. A third **otyugh** is resting underwater and joins the battle if fighting breaks out.
2	Strange misshapen bodies lie draped on the ground, covered by moss and unusual fungal growths. The bodies begin to move soon after the PCs enter the area, revealing three **sporeborn bloatblossoms** and 1d6 **sporeborn skullblooms.** The creatures attack all intruders, pursuing any that flee.
3	Two **gricks** and an **advanced grick** hide in the rubble, waiting for prey. They ambush the first PC who passes close to them. They flee when any one of them is killed.
4	The inky waters of an underground lake hide an **aboleth** lair. The surrounding dungeon is the remnants of an ancient aboleth city, and the creature holds a fierce hatred for any intruder into its lost world. Dungeon natives largely avoid this area. The aboleth immediately attacks any cleric or servant of the divine that it senses but otherwise waits until a PC touches the water before attacking.
5	A **master alchemist** and their guards (three **veterans**) scavenge the area for rare reagents. While open to peaceful discussion, the alchemist is fiercely protective of their formulas and quickly becomes hostile if the PCs pry to deeply into their business.
6	A contract has been placed on the life of one of the PCs. Two rival **assassins** have each accepted the contract and are competing to fulfill the task. The assassins do not interfere with each other's efforts, out of professional courtesy, and might even minimally aid one another if the party proves particularly formidable. But each seeks to land the killing blow on their target.
7	An **invisible stalker** has been sent to retrieve a magic item from a cult of a dark deity that has established a base of operations within the dungeon (six **cultists**, two **fanatic cultists**, and an **unska** in their service). The cultists attack the PCs on sight—and the invisible stalker takes advantage of the diversion to steal the item.
8	A group of **salamanders** have fled their native plane and have made a home deep underground by a magma flow. 1d6 salamanders can be found in the area at any time, guarding the half-dozen fire snakes that recently hatched. The remaining salamanders are elsewhere when the PCs arrive. The untrusting salamanders can be negotiated with, but they will not forgive any harm done to the fire snakes.
9	The ceilings and high walls of the rooms in the area are half collapsed and riddled with large holes, creating unseen byways that a **behir** uses to quickly move around. The behir attacks the PCs in quick bursts before retreating and using these passages to travel to another section of the dungeon. It seeks to weaken the party over time.
10	A **spirit naga** calls this area home. It currently has 1d3 charmed **knight** servants who fight to the death to protect their master. The naga has an extensive collection of magical treasure and attacks the PCs primarily to take theirmagic items and spellbooks. The naga tries to dominate at least one PC to become its latest servant, preferably a spellcaster.

ENCOUNTERS IN DUNGEONS (CR 15+)

d6	Encounter
1	A hungry **purple worm** tears through with a thunderous rumble. The worm attempts to devour any creature in its path. Once it finds a sufficient meal, it departs, leaving a new tunnel in its wake.
2	A **lich** sits idly, alone on a throne of bones, its glowing eyes staring at the PCs. It desires news of the world—and will suffer the presence of those who can deliver, along with a modicum of flattery or deference. If pleased, the lich grants the PCs a minor magic item. Anything else will be met with violence, unconcerned since its phylactery is safely hidden.
3	A **vampire** and two **vampire spawn** servants search for the party. The master has chosen one of the PCs to join their "family" and attempts to kidnap them in the night with plans to turn them into a vampire spawn. The undead try not to directly harm the target, and if successful, they spend the next 1d3 days attempting to convince their captive to join them willingly.
4	A **marilith** and 1d4 **glabrezu** guard a newly created portal that connects to their home plane. The demons try to tempt the PCs to spy for them. If the party fights, the demons taunt them mercilessly about their families and the coming destruction to the lands above.
5	A recent break in the wall reveals a lost room containing the sarcophagus of a **mummy lord** and three of its servitor **mummies**. Any intrusion into the room awakens the creatures from their long slumber. The mummy lord offers the PCs the honor of becoming its servants as it reclaims its past glory.
6	A pair of **pit fiends** and a **solar** battle over an immense vessel that rests within a series of magical circles and is filled with imprisoned souls. Their battle sends small quakes throughout the area, risking the integrity of the dungeon itself. The solar implores the PCs to free the souls while it distracts the fiends, but it is also apparent the solar is badly injured. If the party is able to free the souls (by destroying the circles), the pit fiends will try to recapture as many as they can while avoiding the angel and the adventurers. The dungeon is in danger of collapse if the battle lasts longer than 2 minutes beyond the party's arrival.



ENCOUNTERS IN RUINS (CR 1–4)

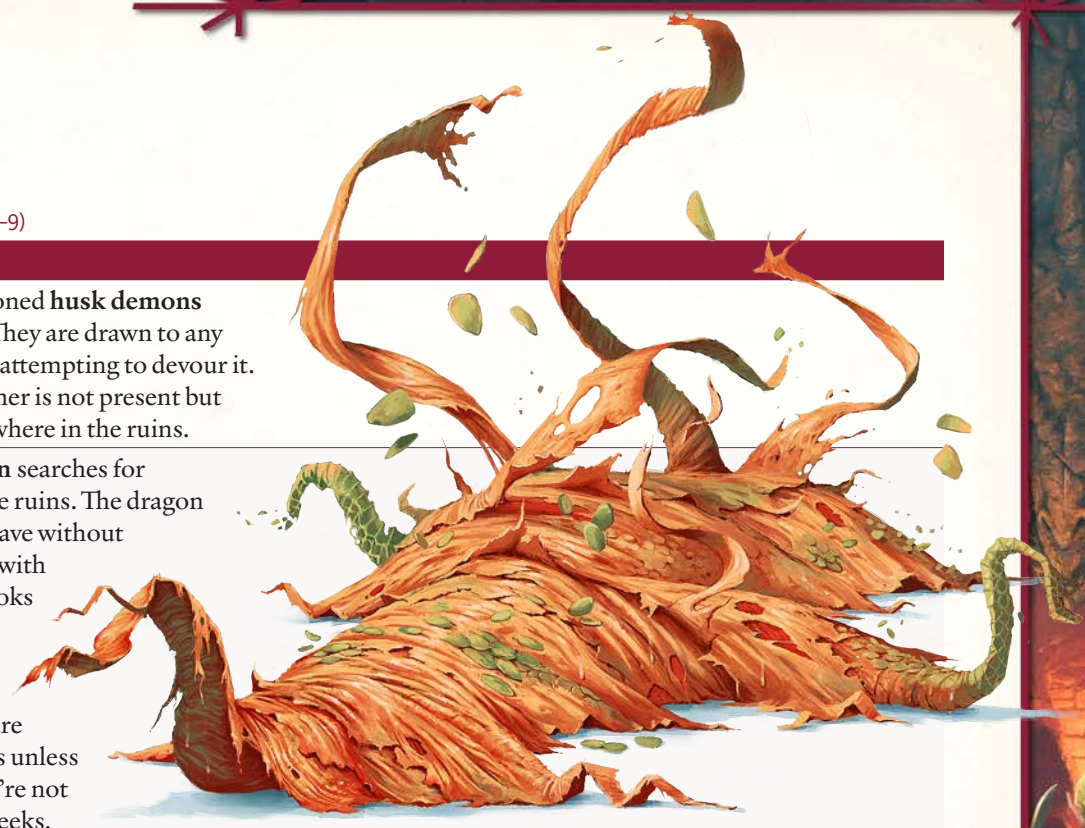
d10	Encounter
1	1d4 + 1 **solodrons** are scanning objects in the area, including the PCs themselves. If the party acts with hostility, the creatures flee, but they return to confront the party after three have reconfigured into a **tripladron**.
2	Five swords of ancient design sit in a rack on one side the room, seemingly in excellent condition. Three of them are **flying swords**, which attack the party if any of the swords are removed from the rack.
3	A **quasit** awaits in hiding, obsessed with finding an arcane caster that will allow it to serve as their familiar. The quasit knows a good deal of information about the ruins and will share its knowledge of the dangers and treasures of the ruins if it can find the right master.
4	Two **star crows** dart back and forth in the area. When the PCs enter, each of the crows chooses a different PC and attempts share their thoughts—the knowledge of the location of the body of a dormant god, whose touch is said to bestow great power. The star crows retreat afterward.
5	Three complete **robot drones** sit at a charging station. Parts and pieces of other robots lay strewn about the area. Two of the creatures were instructed to guard the room and immediately attack intruders. The remaining robot never received instructions, so it does not move when the others attack. It will obey the next creature to give it a command, and it is willing to become the familiar of an interested PC.
6	A **necrophage ghast** searches the ruins for ancient necromantic sources of knowledge. The creature has found some promising rituals in its explorations and is eager to perform new experiments on fresh subjects—such as the PCs. If there is an obvious arcane caster in the party, the creature is willing to talk, though only in the hopes of gaining magical insights.
7	A **mechanist** scours the ruins for anything that can help in their research. They brought along a companion (**thug**) for protection and carrying heavy objects. The PCs encounter the pair as they are on their way out with the latest haul.
8	Four **skeletons** in broken armor sit in chairs at a large round table, facing each other. A pristine longsword lies flat in the center of the table. While covered in dust, it is the only item not showing the decay that marks the surrounding room. The skeletons animate and attack anyone who attempts to touch the sword.
9	A secret door hides a sepulcher, glowing with magic. A guard (**veteran**) was inadvertently trapped within and magically slept, waking only when the door opened. The guard is devastated to learn the fate of their people. They possess a wealth of knowledge of the ruins and will help the PCs in return for news of this modern world.
10	Four young **nobles** are up to something near the entrance to the ruins, along with their three **guards**. They use the remote location to stay away from the prying eyes of their families and the public, and the revelation of their activities would be a scandal. They attempt to bribe or threaten the PCs into silence.





ENCOUNTERS IN RUINS (CR 5–9)

d10	Encounter
1	Two recently summoned **husk demons** writhe on the floor. They are drawn to any creature with a soul, attempting to devour it. Their **mage** summoner is not present but might be found elsewhere in the ruins.
2	A **young void dragon** searches for something within the ruins. The dragon allows the party to leave without incident if appeased with offerings, such as books or other sources of knowledge. Otherwise, the dragon will try to scare the partyaway, unless unless they convince it they're not after the treasure it seeks.
3	A **fire elemental** has been imprisoned in a brazier in this room for untold years. The brazier is already damaged, so any disturbance will free the elemental, after which it immediately flees and gleefully begins to set everything alight and burn everything nearby to the ground.
4	A **hobgoblin commander** and 1d4 + 1 **hobgoblins** believe that their ancestors once lived in these ruins. They are scouring the area for records or other signs of their history and will negotiate with anyone who might have found such information or promises to share this information if discovered. If the PCs do neither, the hobgoblins act to drive them away from the ruins.
5	The one responsible for this site's descent was cursed to become a **death knight** and stand guard over the ruins. Even if defeated in combat, they return in 1d4 days unless either the ruins are completely destroyed or the knight is forgiven by someone descended from the people that once lived there.
6	The **priest** of a dark god has started a ritual to capture the **ghost** of one that once dwelled here. So far, they've managed to contain the ghost in this specific room, and it lashes out in anger at all living creatures. The priest attacks the PCs due to their interruption while avoiding the ghost as much as possible and will flee if the battle goes poorly.
7	One of the **deathless** guards this room, having hid its set of nesting effigies in a chest in one corner. A perceptive PC might notice that the creature is trying to draw attention away from that container.
8	Two **robot wardens** patrol the ruins. They are hostile to anyone who doesn't utter the proper command words, which can be found in a set of well-preserved papers elsewhere nearby. Those with the command words can order the robot wardens to perform tasks, but they cannot leave the ruins.
9	Three swarms of **insatiable broods** have been trapped in this room, desperately waiting to be free and devour the life they can sense beyond. The swarms are unable to pass through the walls and door of the room due to magic scribblings covering their surfaces, but they can escape through an open door. If the door is closed again, any swarm still inside is trapped once more.
10	Two **succubi** pretend to be captives of a nearby **vrock**. They act like helpless villagers soon to be devoured by their demon captor. The succubi stay with the party as long as possible, emphasizing their fear and helplessness, and try to tempt PCs into evil actions when they can. The fiends fight if their true natures are revealed.



ENCOUNTERS IN RUINS (CR 10–15)

d10	Encounter
1	1d4 + 2 **hell hounds** have been sent to protect the ruins from intruders until their master, a greater demon, arrives to claim the site itself.
2	Two **mages** fight a duel to determine who has the right to claim an ancient spell book supposedly hidden deeper in the ruins, and one has just summoned an **earth elemental**. However, they set aside their differences to team up against the PCs.
3	A **voidling** hovers in the air just ahead, absorbing the ambient light, tentacles oddly inert. It becomes active again if a light source comes within 5 feet of it and then lashes out at the intruders, focusing efforts on the one with the brightest light.
4	An **icthol** and their summoned **vrock** explore the ruins, searching for artifacts. The chol is surprised to see the PCs and hides from the party, if possible, though it attacks if they are clearly in possession of powerful magical items.
5	A **bard** and a **veteran**, and their **shield guardian** bodyguard, are looting the ruins. The bard is overconfident, overly trusting in their amulet that controls the construct. But the amulet is cursed, ensuring that the guardian will attack its wearer at some random moment. And indeed, shortly after they attack the PCs, the shield guardian attacks the bard—followed by all other nearby creatures once the bard is defeated.
6	The room is filled from floor to ceiling with a **virtuoso lich's** frenzied and fantastic historical paintings of the ruins in their prime. Canvases and paints fill several surrounding rooms. The lich is beautiful and charming, wearing paint-spattered clothes—and a glove to hide their desiccated hand—and friendly to those that appreciate their art. But any critique of the work makes them fly into a rage.
7	A **stone golem** is carved to appear as one of the denizens who lived here long ago. It stands guard over large vault doors covered with elaborate runes, wielding a **flying sword** in one hand. The two will independently attack any that attempt to open the doors. The vault appears largely empty, save for a single book.
8	An adventuring group (**bard**, **knight**, **mage**, **priest**, and **druid**) happen upon the PCs. They are feeling like they are in over their heads and will cheerfully offer to accompany the party to explore the rest of the area—and not really taking "no" for an answer. If the PCs insist on leaving these adventurers behind, they will unsubtly continue following from a safe distance.
9	1d4 **clay golems** continually repair this stretch of the ruins, which is noticeably better off for it than other sections but never seems to get finished. Their tools have largely fallen apart, but if repaired or replaced, the results of their efforts will vastly improve, and they will be able to finish this section and move on to another. The golems attack anyone they observe destroying any part of the ruins.
10	A **rakshasa** has disguised itself as the head of a mercantile adventuring party: itself and three **guards.** The rakshasa claims the group is looking for magic items for resale and will happily negotiate with the PCs on the sale or purchase of magic items. However, once the rakshasa feels they have the PCs' trust, they will attack.







ENCOUNTERS IN RUINS (CR 15+)

d6	Encounter
1	An **androsphinx** is in search of a powerful relic, purportedly hidden within these ruins. The creature can't, in good conscience, allow the PCs to explore further unless they can impress it with their esoteric knowledge or with the research and preparation that went into their expedition.
2	A **balor** has been imprisoned here, within a summoning circle, since before the fall of the people that once called this place home. It swears to serve anyone who frees it for one year, and to never take action against that person or their family once the year has passed.
3	A **planetar** has been sent to track down and slay a **pit fiend**, who is here for some unspecified reason. The angel attacks any party that has an evil member, but otherwise, it offers to assist the group when they encounter the pit fiend. The planetar is generally uncommunicative, neither offering assistance in other matters nor providing further details of its mission.
4	An **iron golem** stands guard within the wreck of an alchemical laboratory. Some equipment and rare books are salvageable if care is taken in their removal. The golem remains motionless unless a PC touches a particular finely carved wooden box, which serves as a lich's phylactery. This causes the golem to attack.
5	There's a series of towers that appear to be remarkably well preserved. An **ancient silver dragon** has made them into its lair, luxuriating in its isolated melancholy. The dragon once had a close relationship with those that lived here and feels protective of what remains of their culture. It will become hostile toward anyone who desecrates or destroys the ruins but is pleased with those interested in sharing the people's history with the outside world.
6	The group of seven **archmages** responsible for this site's fall had, once the deed was done, cast a great spell, bringing themselves forward to the present time. Some of them are off studying this era, but 1d3 + 1 archmages remain behind in the ruins, evaluating what they find. They attempt to capture the PCs, interrogating them on the current state of the world.

PEOPLE AND PLACES

It can be hard to come up with appropriate names and descriptions for every locale or NPC that comes up in the game. Luckily, random-generation tables help simplify a GM's life, especially in the on-the-fly moments in the middle of a game. To randomly roll up something interesting about a ruined keep, tower, or dungeon, or any NPCs encountered while exploring them (or between excursions!), consult the tables in this section or choose something appropriate.



NAMES OF RUINS

d20	Name*	d20	Name*	d20	Name*	d20	Name*
1	Baldrick's Basin	6	Herring's Bluff	11	Northward	16	Southern Oaks
2	Breckenridge	7	Hillshire	12	Quarry	17	Storm Spire
3	Eaglewing	8	Lakeshore	13	Raven Rook	18	Westmount by the Lake
4	Halo's Bend	9	Longthorpe	14	Redsand	19	Wolfenstone
5	Hendrick's Folly	10	Meadowbrook	15	Shepard's Pike	20	Wrenrock

(*) Roll a d4 to add Castle, Hall, Tower, or Palace to the name.

POINTS OF INTEREST NEAR RUINS

d20	Point of Interest
1	1d10 birds, protecting and incubating an unusually large egg.
2	A beautiful elf who is cursed to turn into a sapling when the sun rises.
3	A large stone in a clearing appears to be a tribal meeting place. There are signs of generations of use within the area, and the ground and stone are worn but show no recent activity for at least a month. Tracks and paths lead away from the area in dozens of directions.
4	A loud, croaking giant toad is giving birth to hundreds of tadpoles.
5	A river dammed with items of clothing and armor.
6	A small clearing in the underbrush with a smooth, featureless stone at its center. The stone sits with an eerie stillness. Moving near or onto the edge of the stone reveals that there is no sound, no wind, and no perturbations of any kind at the rock.
7	A thousand slugs swarm within one tree, making awful, repetitive music as they rub against each other.
8	A transient slaver camp of 1d6 slavers with several hounds. Dwarven slaves are tied together away from the tents, looking quite distressed.
9	An unusually well-tended mushroom garden. Picking mushrooms here raises the ire of nearby nymphs, but respecting the garden might win over their approval.
10	Buckets hang from trees, collecting sap. The sap causes immobilization in the living.
11	Cabin carved into the trunk of a single tree. It is many stories tall, and the tree is still alive.
12	Flowers that follow movement and understand Common.
13	Graves in an improvised graveyard, many without markings stating who—or what—has been buried there. One of the graves seems to have been dug up recently.
14	Hot spring heated by shallow lava/magma tubes (40% in use when discovered).
15	Petrified bear with a dead basilisk nearby. Bear is actually a famous missing druid.
16	Pile of humanoid fingers with all the bones removed.
17	Remains of a beast are being devoured by 1d8 scavenging wolves, crows, and other creatures. If there are four or more wolves, they attack rather than flee from their find. The carcass is unrecognizable, though it's huge.
18	Sentient quicksand coaxes in its victims with lies.
19	Three skeletons hang from a tree, flailing helplessly. A nearby sign warns, "Rough Road Ahead."
20	Watering hole looks to be seldom-used by local wildlife. A giant aquatic eel waits beneath surface.

NAMES OF FAMOUS NPCS

d100	Name	d100	Name	d100	Name
1–2	Ademia Strom	35–36	Gallaharra Troye	69–70	Pin Bellner
3–4	Amarra Bandarrion	37–38	Geffen Cauldry	71–72	Quadina Redrook
5–6	Aryn Sparrowhawk	39–40	Gorick Broadback	73–74	Rem Gunthwai
7–8	Aster Balleenen	41–42	Gracen Hoth	75–76	Shenea Dronsch
9–10	Aureus Splitarrow	43–44	Grumm Orcheck	77–78	Sillari Kern
11–12	Baelnor Vaeswan	45–46	Har Vin'ter	79–80	Sils Worel
13–14	Baldrick Buntd	47–48	Jagod Di	81–82	Sir Drexel of Yourn
15–16	Bevel Left	49–50	Jaq Le'quet	83–84	Stewart Inkpot
17–18	Borodred Hillsson	51–52	Justed Antenitor	85–86	Syrulliana Di' Annte
19–20	Breck Veldtner	53–54	Kofgen Krevnar	87–88	Tact Haelstrom
21–22	Col Suttle	55–56	Lav Ichafor	89–90	Thayadora Ableten
23–24	Cordast Chin	57–58	Luxara Domar	91–92	Turnip Bellwater
25–26	Corina Camberline	59–60	Megard Frunthwill	93–94	Tybris Strutt
27–28	Donald Whent	61–62	Milsa Tresant	95–96	U'legraf Gar
29–30	Eli Bannaran	63–64	Mimos Allerdraak	97–98	Ung Dag
31–32	Elrik Von Sorensen	65–66	Nanoka of Karr	99–100	Weylan Farce
33–34	Fen Ulvcreen	67–68	Oenn Whitsun		

NPC DESCRIPTIONS

d100	Description
1–2	A blond and pudgy cook with a penchant for proper seasonings. This cook is exceedingly suspicious of strangers—paranoid that they are after "secret ingredients."
3–4	A certified genius who hates yes-or-no questions and always answers with, "Yes and no may come may go, but maybe lasts forever."
5–6	A cook famous for cultivating the rarest herbs and strangest cheeses.
7–8	A disciplined game hunter who will not name the creature they are seeking.
9–10	A feverishly sick individual, gagging repeatedly. Without care, they will die before the night is through.
11–12	A middle-aged herbalist who is bitterly estranged from their spouse and two sons.
13–14	A petty lord who has risen from the dead and doesn't recall why or how.
15–16	A powerful magician and pathological liar with a dire need to impress others.
17–18	A ranger obsessed with dark elves, their culture, and their goddess.
19–20	A wealthy wool merchant whose considerable worth actually comes from no-questions-asked dealings in second-hand arms.
21–22	A wise and friendly alchemist traveling in an old wagon overladen with clinking bottles and dusty books.
23–24	An alcoholic elven scholar who claims drinking is all part of the "research."
25–26	An obese half-demon mage with a pompous and unfounded air of nobility—and an extreme case of sloth.
27–28	Armorer of regional fame. Known for specialty helms.
29–30	Awkwardly drags a heavy chest with a muddy tapestry draped over it.
31–32	Barbarian clad in a manticore pelt. Primary interests are feats of strength, drinking ale, and singing.
33–34	Beggar with a penchant for gambling. Unfortunately, luck is seldom on their side, which is how they lost both legs.
35–36	Bent on chronicling their whole life as it happens to them. Carries a huge number of scrolls and quills.

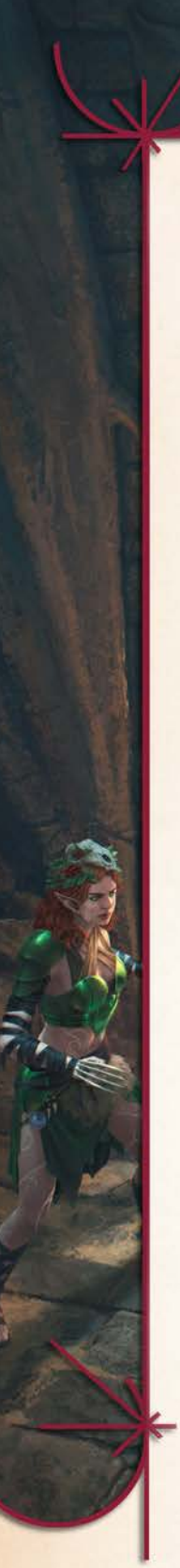


37–38	Blind and zealous. A pious goat herder who asks too many questions.
39–40	Claims to be a well commissioner, investigating the town well, but carries no credentials.
41–42	Deranged, emaciated halfling who insists the PCs possess an item that belongs to them—to the point of violence.
43–44	Disheveled-looking knight, formerly in the service to the lords of the desert. Psyche is broken in two as the result of a mage's curse—with one personality harboring more sinister motives.
45–46	Extremely geeky and shy teen with an insatiable bloodlust and incredible prowess in physical combat.
47–48	Former squire with desire to be extremely helpful but always ends up being useless.
49–50	Gruff and cross-eyed dwarf who recently had his beard shorn by an elven rival. He burns with thoughts of vengeance.
51–52	Gruff dwarf skilled in crafting fine hammers of destruction. Has an unusual disdain for ale and a passion for tea.
53–54	Has a plague and is terribly infected with contagious boils.
55–56	Head of a flourishing estate that thrives on blood sport.
57–58	Horrendously pompous lordling. Claims to be the heir to a particular castle, though he is the third son in the family.
59–60	Husky individual with no neck. Owes a lot of money to the wrong sort of people. Looking for investors.
61–62	Illusionist who never tires of scaring the daylights out of unsuspecting folk.
63–64	In disguise walking among mortal men, this is the demon architect responsible for building a prominent city of hell.
65–66	Local farmer and hunter, well-respected in the community for generous donations of fruits and vegetables. Their apples are cause for celebration.
67–68	Looking for expert miners and dungeoneers to help excavate dwarven artifacts from the nearby ruins of a silver mine, mostly as trap fodder as they delve deeper.
69–70	Looking for someone to kidnap a family and frame a corrupt lord (percentage of plunder is negotiable).
71–72	Lovely woman who has lost her way. Her accomplice robs travelers even as they give her directions.
73–74	Middle-aged, balding, and fat. A famous musician with an extra finger.
75–76	Obsessed with drinking and dining in the city.
77–78	Part of an envoy to discuss important matters of state, except they seem to have arrived in completely the wrong place for that kind of business.
79–80	Recently escaped from a secret underground deep gnome encampment.
81–82	Selling two-headed kittens with a sign that reads, "I'll pay you 1 gp to take one."
83–84	Smooth-talking pirate, looking for a ship and companions for a profitable adventure.
85–86	Soldier obsessed with duty to their kidnapped lord.
87–88	Tattooed head-to-toe with strange, archaic runes. Those with knowledge of the arcane see that the bearer carries a second soul trapped within their body.
89–90	The rumor and information collector for a demon lord. Skulks about asking questions and spying on people of power, import, or wealth.
91–92	Tired bricklayer, works building dungeons and lives in a trance-like state, possibly connected to a nasty wizard employer.
93–94	Town drunk, privy to excellent information. The problem is getting them drunk enough to remember it.
95–96	Traveling antiques dealer who is a large construct. Travels only by foot with wares strapped to an elaborate wood and metal backpack that stretches high into the air.
97–98	World-class poet, collecting local folklore to include in their forthcoming epic.
99–100	Wounded and limping, a rogue seeks revenge on their entire guild.

THINGS FOUND

d20	Item
1	A collection of papers bound in scaly red skin and sealed with a metal lock that lacks a keyhole: the book is bound in the skin of a fire drake, and the lock is of magical origin and can be opened only with fire.
2	A curved dagger with a hilt carved in the shape of a three-headed lion: the lion hilt is the symbol of an elven family of nobility.
3	A detailed drawing of all the members of the PCs' party, along with three other unrecognized persons. Two of the three unknown people have been crossed out in streaks of blood.
4	A dwarven amethyst ring bearing the inscription, "Cracked from the hammer of the Forge Father."
5	A fist-sized metal sphere, detailed to depict four different demons.
6	A legal deed for the ownership of a tavern called the Knotty Pine in a nearby town.
7	A mahogany box, roughly the size of a dozen coins. It does not appear to have any obvious hinges or opening mechanisms: a tiny hidden latch can be found to open the box. Inside are a matching set of 10 golden coins. Each coin is ornately crafted, but slight variations in each suggest that they might have been handmade.
8	A pouch full of luminescent purple algae known to grow only in the deep realms.
9	A precious smoky black stone. When held up to the light, the back of a devil can be seen pressed against the gem, but no matter how it's turned, the creature's face can never be seen.
10	A scroll written in Draconic that describes the mythical creature known as the Hale Fire: one of the first dragons, the Hale Fire was a great black wyrm with only hind legs and gigantic half-feathered wings. Its head was gaunt and boney with a brow encrusted with dozens of curving horns.
11	A silver medallion with dwarven runes, bearing a frothy mug, a hammer, and the symbol of a dwarven god; the medallion once belonged to Thoradrim, a legendary paladin imprisoned by angels after falling into disfavor with his god.
12	A small bag made of chainmail, tightly tied closed and locked. Found inside is a heart made of glass.
13	A small pouch with a moist eye within it. When brought into the light, the pupil quickly constricts; this is the living eye of a dedicated follower of the god of orcs. The original owner can still see from this eye.
14	A small sack filled with eight gears and springs of incremental sizes that appear to be of the same make or set.
15	A small urn containing ashes, carved to look like the head of a platinum dragon deity.
16	A thin strip of paper with three slanted lines on one side and a question on the back reading, "For how long can elderberry wine age?"
17	An enchanted wooden flute of unremarkable craft. When used, the enchanted flute plays a local tavern favorite, no matter what notes the musician plays. A PC must be actively using the mouthpiece for the flute to play music.
18	A pen made entirely of tiny bones, complete with matching inkpot.
19	A basilisk egg is swathed in a bundle of furs and tightly bound within a leather pouch.
20	Three skinny darts and a blowgun cleverly disguised as a finely carved pipe are carefully wrapped in an elegant silken cloth.





TRINKETS AS TREASURES

Not every special treasure needs to be a potent magic item or fist-sized gem. Mixing in mysterious baubles or features can be a lot of fun, adding a flavorful depth by providing GMs easy story prompts and allowing players to find creative uses for strange items. To randomly roll up some interesting trinkets and room features to be discovered by the PCs, consult the tables in this section or choose something appropriate.

Copper Piece Items (1–10 cp)

d10	Item
1	Coral ring with a name carved on one side.
2	Cracked hourglass missing most of its sand.
3	Cylindrical object resembling a toy top.
4	Perfectly intact mounted skeleton of a small extinct fish.
5	Piece of parchment with text too faded to read.
6	Small bag containing fiber that can be used to string a bow.
7	Small knife made of bone, potentially useful in cooking.
8	Small portrait with a broken frame and the subject image scratched out.
9	Unusual instrument now out of fashion, its strings snapped.
10	Well-preserved paw of a small animal.

Silver Piece Items (1–10 sp)

d10	Item
1	Copper alembic with trace amounts of a silvery liquid.
2	Crystal sconce used to hold a light source.
3	Damaged tapestry depicting the sky in vivid colors.
4	Large bone carved in the shape of a boar.
5	Music box that can play only a few notes.
6	Old and incomplete set of silverware.
7	Rough brown pouch containing strongly scented spices.
8	Slightly bent silver key with an elaborate bow.
9	Square wooden puzzle box that appears to be too warped to solve easily.
10	Wooden longsword that weighs less than its material would suggest.

Gold Piece Items (1–10 gp)

d10	Item
1	Bright-red feather, approximately the size of a large dog.
2	Complete deck of cards used for telling fortunes.
3	Cracked but largely intact lens that magnifies and distorts vision when looked through.
4	Insect carapace that still glows with bioluminescent light.
5	Large piece of waxy fabric that appears to be waterproof.
6	Mostly empty journal in which the first pages have the scribblings of someone learning to write.
7	Set of perfectly clear crystal prisms.
8	Small stone box containing a dozen small candles.
9	Thick card with a sketch of a bird, which appears to move when studied long enough.
10	Tiny wooden chair engraved with leaves, possibly created for a fey creature of some sort.

Better Gold Piece Items (11–20 gp)

d10	Item
1	Book that contains only pressed and dried plants, many of which are rare.
2	Clear orb containing a humanoid eyeball that always appears to look toward the viewer.
3	Complete fossil of an insect-like creature.
4	Elaborate, functioning contraption with a complex gear array but no obvious use.
5	Gold-plated bell that sounds clear and loud when rung.
6	Impractical dagger with a soft blade and a hilt made of a semiprecious stone.
7	Medal presented to a soldier from an empire that fell long ago.
8	Small hammer with an ivory handle and a head made of a hard metal.
9	Smooth gray stone with a glyph carved into its face, faintly magical.
10	Sturdy game piece carved of polished granite.

Great Gold Piece Items (21–50 gp)

d10	Item
1	Barrel of a rare and unintentionally aged alcoholic beverage.
2	Cup that makes every harmless liquid poured into it taste like clear, fresh water.
3	Earring carved from a gem that changes colors in different lighting conditions.
4	Gem that glows and emits a loud hum when submerged in water.
5	Handheld statue of a human wearing robes and carved in remarkable detail.
6	Hand-sized white container that indefinitely preserves any food placed inside it.
7	Holy symbol of a forgotten deity, inlaid with precious metals.
8	Jeweled ring with several empty settings, though the remaining gems sparkle brightly.
9	Living bright-red flower that needs neither water nor soil.
10	Three perfectly spherical blue marbles that glow when brought close together.

Room Features for Dungeons and Ruins

d20	Feature
1	A faded map is drawn directly on the stone of the wall, depicting the area as it stood centuries ago.
2	A plant resembling ivy covers the walls and somehow thrives in this dark room.
3	A pristine book lies open on the floor, no sign of damage or even dust.
4	A small pool of water sits in the center of this room.
5	A sound almost too high in pitch to be audible pervades this room.
6	All the furniture that once adorned this room has been smashed to pieces no larger than your hand.
7	Each wall of this room is as reflective as a mirror—but the reflections are slightly delayed.
8	Gathered debris and a pungent scent indicate that this room might currently serve as an animal den.
9	One corner of this room is draped in shadow, and no light seems to penetrate it.
10	Red magma far below shines through small cracks in the floor, bathing the room in an eerie glow.
11	Stacks of decaying parchment sit in an alcove within one of the walls.
12	Strange, glowing symbols carved into the wall pulse every few seconds.
13	The far side of this room is entirely missing, long fallen to a gaping chasm.
14	The floor of this room is covered with broken masks that depict different emotional states.
15	The heads of different creatures are mounted on the wall of this room, some humanoid.
16	The image of a lighthouse is crudely carved in the far wall.
17	The mummified corpse of a creature resembling a treasure chest sits near the door.
18	The room is well lit, despite the lack of any obvious light source.
19	The sound of wind rises and fades while in this room, though the air is still.
20	This room is far colder than its location should warrant.

To move forward, decipher the couplets below.

The first line reveals one word—the next, a second to know.

By adding a letter to the first word—a second can be made.

Unscramble the letters to learn the password conveyed.

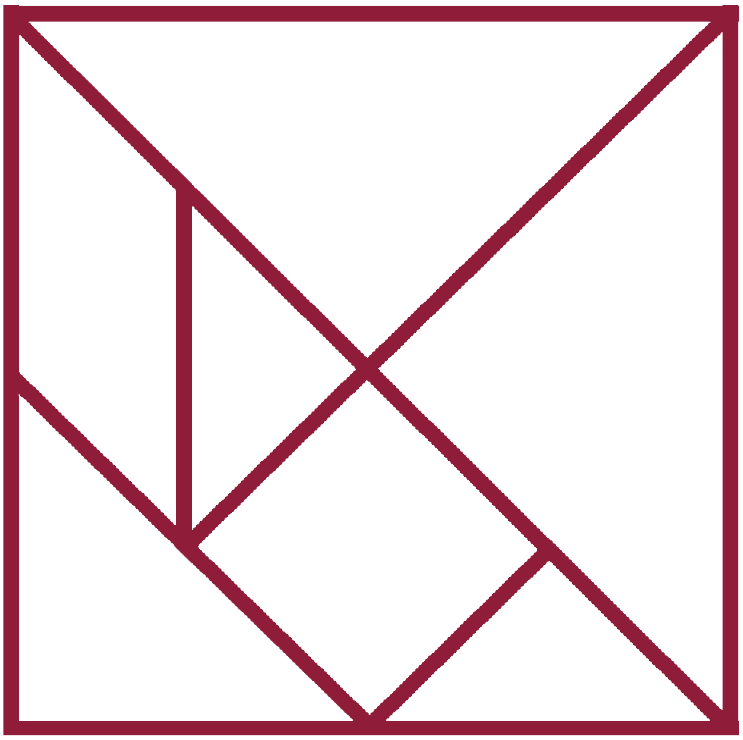
Her writer's tool, she smartly plied
Then hung the sign inviting guests inside

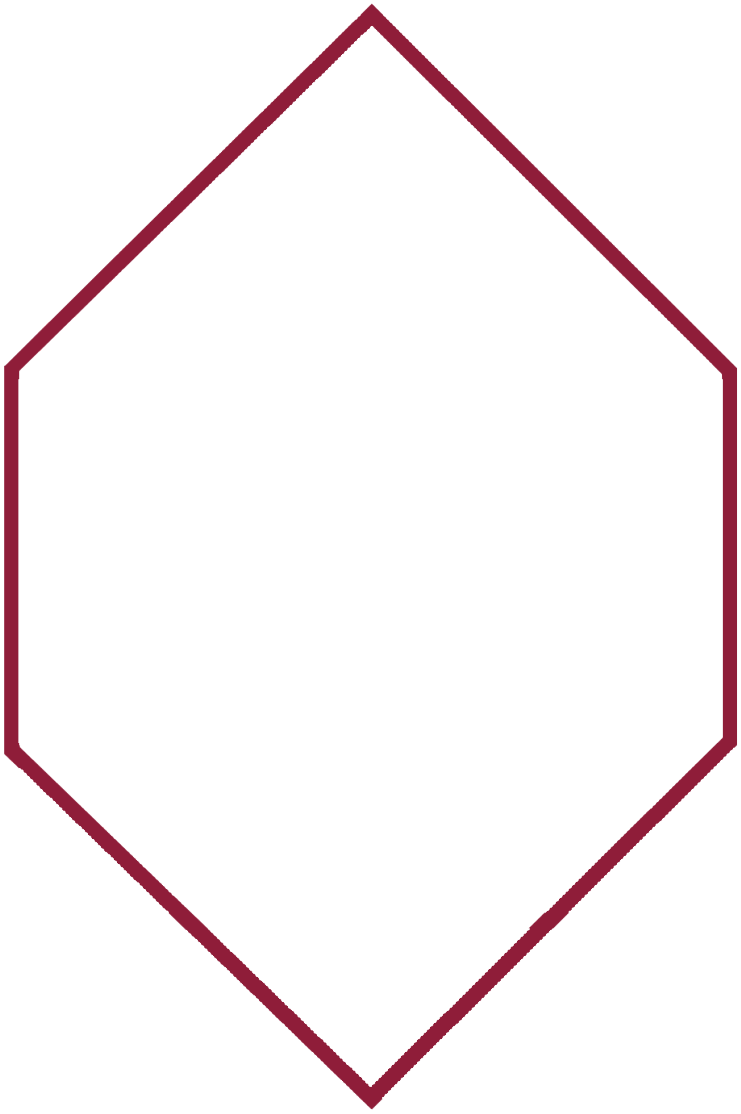
Don't eat the mushrooms or you'll turn green and sick
And an ugly end follows quite quick

A furious lord slapped his man with a shoe
To which the servant replied, "What? Give me a clue!"

After days without food, the man was skin and bones
His mind raced with thoughts of buttery scones

The traveler posed a query
"Does that barrel hold wine for the weary?"





ROYAL LINE PUZZLE HANDOUT RIGHT WALL



ROYAL LINE PUZZLE HANDOUT LEFT WALL



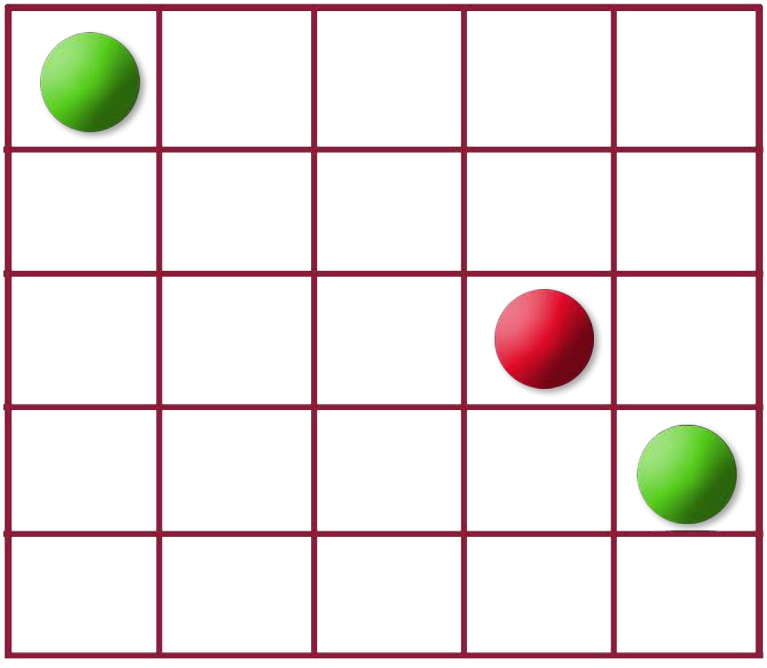
Look to the rising sun
And follow the royal line
Trace the face of the last heir
To appease the spirits here

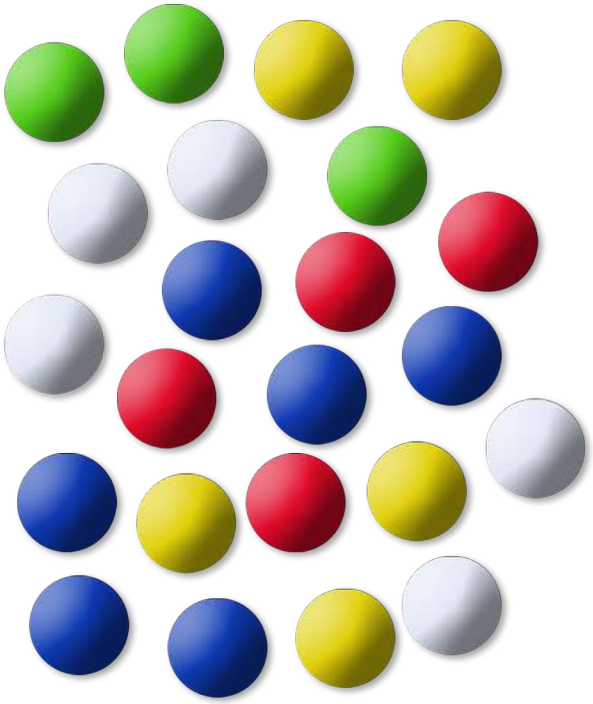
The castle defends the kingdom's end
Wary of a dragon beside its monstrous friend
The lady waits by walls of stone
While her husband is far from home
The knight forsakes the king's might
Preferring to sit to his lady's right
The fiend's proximity would make the king fear
If not for the angel whispering in his other ear

ALCOVE 1 ALCOVE 2 ALCOVE 3 ALCOVE 4 ALCOVE 5 ALCOVE 6 ALCOVE 7



STONE SUBJECTS PUZZLE HANDOUT 2 OF 2





JEWEL GRID PUZZLE

DUNGEON CHARACTER SHEET

NAME

THEME

FEATURES

LIGHTING

CEILINGS

WALLS

DOORS

FLOORS

FACTIONS & GROUPS

DCs & BONUSES

PASSIVE PERCEPTION

PASSIVE INVESTIGATION

EFFECT SAVE

EFFECT ATTACK BONUS

DAMAGE SEVERITY

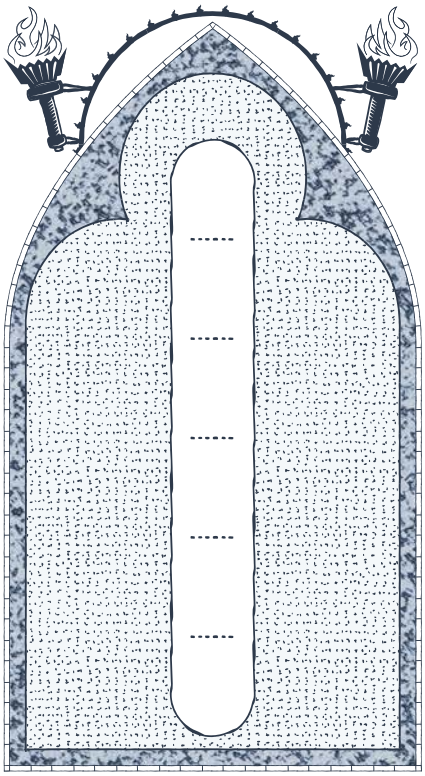
WANDERING MONSTERS TABLE

d12	MONSTER
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	

RANDOM TREASURE TABLE

d12	TREASURE
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	

THREAT LEVEL



ADVENTURE NOTES

CAMPAIGN BUILDER
DUNGEONS & RUINS

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Entrances & Exits

Notable NPCs

Notable Treasure

Notable Secrets

Safe Rooms

Boss Monsters

Traps

Hazards

OTHER NOTES

MAP

KEY

Scale: ☐

N

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MAP



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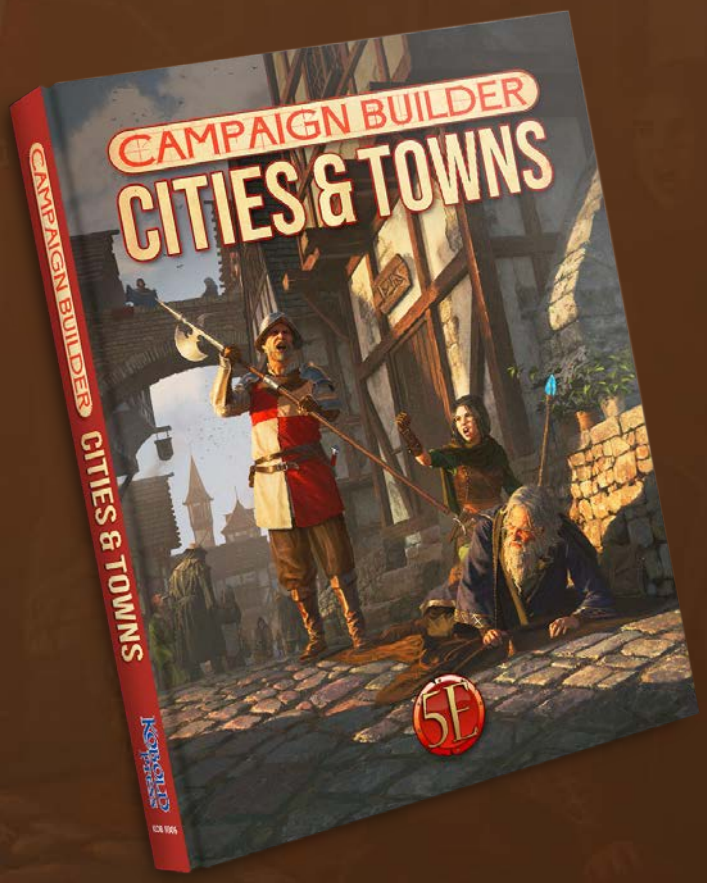
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