

THE LAZY GM'S TOOLBOX

This chapter contains many short descriptions of lazy GM “tools” – small bite-sized tools, tricks, hacks, and techniques you can use in several RPGs to make your life a little easier or otherwise enhance your games for your friends.

HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

The tools in this chapter are presented alphabetically. To get the most out of this chapter, give it a solid skim read to familiarize yourself with what it contains.

You may already recognize some of the tools you find here. Reviewing them can still reinforce the tools you have available in your own mental GM toolbox. Other tools here may be new to you. Read their descriptions so you know what they cover.

Some of these tools may not resonate with you – you may actively *dislike* some of them. That's cool too. You don't need to use all of them (I wouldn't expect you to). Instead, grab onto the ones that speak to you and add them to your toolbox.

Later, you can reference the list of tools in the table of contents of the book to reinforce the GM tools you have at your disposal.

Learn, Run, Evaluate

A good way to use these tools is to find ones that grab you, try them out in a game, and then evaluate how well they worked for you. Most of these tools can be used once so you can get a feel for it before you have to make any sort of larger commitment. Consider them, try them out, and evaluate how well they worked to continually sharpen and refine the tools you have in your toolbox to run great games.

TOOLBOX REFERENCE LIST

Here's a list of the tools described further in this chapter.

1. Abstract Distances
2. Alarms and Timers
3. Blank Battle Mats
4. Book Tabs
5. Break Status Effects
6. Campfire Tales
7. Cheat Sheets
8. Clocks

9. Detailed Maps and Terrain
10. Dials of Monster Difficulty
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42. Reskinning Monster Stat Blocks
43. Repurposing Maps
44. Roll on Multiple Tables
45. Single Target Number
46. Solo RPGs
47. System Cheat Sheets
48. Upward and Downward Beats
49. “X” and “/” for Damage Tracking
50. Zone-based Combat

ABSTRACT DISTANCES

Some RPGs use abstract distances to represent movement and distance in the world: close, near,

far, and so on. Other games use zones – large defined areas in a battle space (see Zone-based Combat later in this chapter). Other still use specific distances measured in squares, feet, or meters. Here’s a quick conversion between abstract distances and specific distances to convert from one to the other:

- **Close / Melee:** 5 feet, 2 meters.
- **Near:** 10 to 30 feet, 10 to 6 meters.
- **Far:** 35 to 60 feet, 7 to 12 meters.
- **Very Far:** Beyond 60 feet, beyond 12 meters.

Your own RPG may have different descriptions of distances than those above.

You can often describe abstract distances by the number of “moves” it takes to get there. A faraway ranged attacker may take “two moves” to reach or a “move and dash” to move. Some characters have increased movement than others which you can account for in your descriptions.

Another lazy trick is to describe a default distance you know falls within a move or a typical area like “25 feet” or “eight meters”. Doing so lets players know they can move to reach someone in their turn if they want to.

For abstract areas of effect, here’s a quick rule-of-thumb for the number of targets that typically fall into an area:

- **Tiny Area** (5-foot radius): 1 or 2 creatures
- **Small Area** (15-foot cone or 10-foot radius): 2 creatures
- **Large Area** (20-foot radius, 30-foot cone): 4 creatures
- **Huge Area** (30-foot radius, 60-foot cone): 8+ creatures
- **Short Line** (30-foot line): 2 to 3 creatures
- **Long Line** (60-foot line): 3 to 4 creatures

Double the number of creatures if the group includes lots of lower-power minions grouped tightly together. Such groups are asking to be blown away.

ALARMS AND TIMERS

When we run our games, we often fall into a state of “flow” where we’re fully engaged in the game and easily lose track of time. Yet time is important when we’re running a game on a schedule. Set alarms and timers to remind you how much time has passed when running your games. A little hourly chime might be enough, or

an alarm set when you think it’s time to take a break – about 90 minutes into a session. If your session includes a big boss battle, set a timer for about ten or fifteen minutes before you plan to run that battle to get things moving to that final confrontation with enough time for the characters to enjoy it.

Keep track of the passage of real-world time in your game so you can keep the pace of your game moving forward and include all the material you want to include in your session.

BLANK BATTLE MATS

Several RPG accessory companies sell blank battle mats that let you draw small travel maps, draw larger combat areas, write down the names of characters in the game, track damage done to monsters, draw side-views of locations, sketch symbols the characters identify, note the target number of the scene (see Single Target Number later in this chapter) and let you jot down anything else you might want to draw out for your own reference or to show to your players. Blank battle mats often come either laminated or treated for wet or dry erase markers and represent a fantastic value for their utility. They’re a fantastic tool for improvisational GMing. The reference page linked from the copyright page of this book includes recommendations for excellent blank battle mats.

BOOK TABS

Many GMs forego physical books at the table but referencing material in books can often be faster than navigating through complicated websites or applications. Adhesive re-usable tabs make physical books even more useful at the table. Put tabs at your most referenced sections of your books and keep a handful of tabs in the back of the book to apply to the pages containing monsters you plan to use in your next session. Using tabs in books makes it fast and fun to look up material in your physical books and help you break away from staring at computers, phones, and tablets during your games.

BREAK STATUS EFFECTS

Some RPGs include debilitating status effects that limit a character’s actions and the agency of their players. Stun, dominate, charm, fear, and other such effects take away the character’s ability to

act, which can be a big downer for players – particularly if they’ve been waiting a while for their turn.

You can off-set these debilitating effects by offering the player a choice to take an appropriate amount of damage at the beginning of their turn to remove the effect and let them act. You can choose this amount of damage (or offer another detriment that *doesn’t* take away their actions) based on the threat that inflicted the status effect or as a percentage of the character’s resources. You’ll have to choose this detriment depending on your system of choice. 1d6 per one-half of a character’s level in psychic damage works for 5e characters, for example.

CAMPFIRE TALES

When the characters take a rest for the night, the GM can ask players to describe what their characters are thinking, feeling, or discussing among themselves during the night. Such campfire tales serve many purposes:

- They help you and your players relax after high-action scenes.
- They offer an opportunity for roleplaying between players.
- They show you what your players are thinking about the game from the point of view of their characters.
- They give you ideas for future adventures.
- They further draw players into the fiction of the game.

Campfire tales work best when the GM prompts players to answer specific questions. You can choose one or two of the following questions to seed the conversation:

- What previous event in your life does your mind wander back to?
- What do you think about events to come?
- What are you looking forward to in the future?
- What frightens you about times to come?
- What memory of your family comes back to you?
- What troublesome memory of your past enters your mind?
- What worries you about recent events?

Start out by asking if anyone wants to jump in with an answer and then walk through your list

of players to make sure everyone gets a chance and has time to think about it. Don’t push them too hard if they don’t have anything – not everyone’s comfortable whipping up such in-world narrative on the spot.

CHEAT SHEETS

It’s often helpful to have a single sheet or a GM screen with useful and vital mechanics for your RPG of choice to help you run and improvise your game. Sometimes a game’s own GM screen has what you need. Other times you’ll want to construct your own. Stitch together screenshots or pictures of useful tables and references using an image editor or presentation software to build your own custom cheat sheet. Useful references might include:

- A list of skills
- Common core mechanics and difficulty tables
- Random NPC names
- Common status effects
- Damage by level or severity
- Simple monster stats
- Encounter building guidelines
- Other commonly referenced tables or lists

Take the time to understand and refine your cheat sheet to focus on the specific tables and lists that help you improvise while running your game.

CLOCKS

A feature evolved from “Powered by the Apocalypse” roleplaying games and “*Blades in the Dark*”, clocks keep track of evolving situations, timed events, and situations where a single success or failure check might not suffice. You can denote clocks by drawing a circle and dividing it into segments with one, two, or more lines. Fill in a segment to mark the progress of the clock. You can, instead, check checkboxes or mark hashes on an index card to represent the passage of steps.

Clocks can work well to track progress of situations like the following:

- Gathering pieces of needed evidence.
- Determining how alert the guards are in an area infiltrated by the characters.
- Quantifying the steps required to convince a noble.

- Determining the number of steps required to disarm a complex trap.
- Noting the steps needed to complete a ritual.
- Denoting the time before a powerful creature arrives.

Clocks can represent both the actions of the characters and the actions of NPCs or the world. They can measure the successes or failures of the characters. Multiple clocks can track escalating situations on two different sides. For example, the characters might need to gather enough evidence in a manor they've infiltrated before they're detected by the guards. You can use one clock to track the evidence gathered and another clock to track the alertness of the guards. As long as the first clock completes before the second, the characters get away without issue. Otherwise complications occur.

DESCRIBE KILLING BLOWS

During combat, when a character lands a killing blow, you can ask the player to describe what the killing blow looks like. This exchange breaks players away from the mechanics of the game and into the fiction while helping them capture their child-like self with ridiculous descriptions (ensure they follow your game's lines and veils). Instead of asking for a killing blow, you can ask "do they die?" to give the player a chance to save the life of the victim should it provide a greater value to the story. Even if the rules say the character couldn't hold back a killing blow – the narrative allows for anything.

DESCRIBE MONSTER PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

When a character lands damage on an opponent, you can ask the player to describe a notable physical characteristic of the opponent they wounded. This exchange lets you better define monsters by their description in the world instead of "ogre 1" or "dire wolf B". "Scarred ogre" or "dire wolf with skunk-stripe" is a lot more evocative. Like describing a killing blow, asking for a monster's physical characteristics breaks players outside of the mechanics of the game and helps them define a small part of the world you describe while also giving you an easy way to differentiate one monster from another.

DETAILED MAPS AND TERRAIN

A blank battle map can serve you well for just about any roleplaying game but sometimes you want more detailed and specific representations of locations and battle spaces. Many publishers offer battle maps, both physical and digital, with professional artwork and design. Some are fold-out paper maps, some are dry-erase laminated maps, some are built into large books that lay flat. Look for maps that fit common situations like roads, lakes, forests, swamps, temples, dungeons, towers, inns, cellars, and so on. Ask yourself if the map you're considering is detailed enough to be better than a drawing on a blank map but generic enough to be useful in several games you run.

Tabletop terrain, either 3D printed or manufactured, adds three dimensions to your combat environments but often at high costs, high storage requirements, and limited flexibility. Such displays are often breathtaking for players but have limited flexibility, take up a lot of space, and have high costs.

For online play, digital maps are significantly cheaper and easier to store than physical maps. Several creators offer hundreds of possible battle maps for your games and often published adventures include digital maps for play on virtual tabletops. The resource page linked on the copyright page of this book includes links to popular RPG cartographers to consider.

DIALS OF MONSTER DIFFICULTY

In most fantasy RPGs, you can tune monster difficulty by turning four dials to increase or decrease their overall difficulty in combat. These include:

- The number of monsters in a battle
- The hit points of those monsters
- How many attacks the monster makes
- How much damage the monster inflicts

You can change the overall difficulty of a battle by manipulating these four dials. Lower hit points to get battles over with sooner. Add more attacks or increase damage if a monster isn't meeting its expectations in the story of the game. Find ways for monsters to leave the battlefield early to speed things up or have another wave of monsters attack if things are too easy. Tune the dials to change the pacing, energy, and beats of your game to ensure it's the most fun it can be.

DICE AVERAGES

Sometimes its useful to average a bunch of dice rolls instead of rolling a big handful of dice. Below is a table that converts dice rolls to average dice and back and forth.

# of dice	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12
1	2	3	4	5	6
2	5	7	9	11	13
3	7	10	13	16	19
4	10	14	18	22	26
5	12	17	22	27	32
6	15	21	27	33	39
7	17	24	31	38	45
8	20	28	36	44	52
9	22	31	40	49	58
10	25	35	45	55	65
11	27	38	49	60	71
12	30	42	54	66	78

You can also use this table to convert static numbers into dice equations by looking at the number first and then noting the number and type of dice. For dice numbers or amounts above the scale of the table, add the results of multiple lookups on the chart. For example, if a game asks you to figure out 32d8 (ugh), look at the 12 column (54), and add the 10s column (45) twice for a total of 144.

You can keep a version of this table in your head as well. Reduce the size of a huge handful of dice by removing pairs of dice from the pile and adding their average as a static number. For every two dice you remove, add the maximum value on a single die plus one to the static bonus. 2d4 becomes 5, 2d6 becomes 7, 2d8 becomes 9, 2d10 becomes 11, and 2d12 becomes 13. This way, rolling 8d6 can instead become 2d6 + 21 or 8d8 can become 2d8 + 27. See Minus 3 Plus 1d6 for another way to add some variance to a static number without needing to add up a handful of dice.

DISCUSS LEVELING UP

When it comes time for characters to level, include time in your game to have each player talk about what new powers they received, new abilities they gained, new spells they acquired or anything else they got when leveling up. Even in games that don't have character levels, characters often get *some* sort of improvement. Talking about these improvements with the group has several advantages:

- It shows you what your players are excited about with their character.

- It helps other players learn what other characters have.
- Players can avoid choosing redundant abilities.
- Players can see future synergies between characters.
- It helps remind you and your players who the characters are and what's going on with them.

DOMAIN LIST

A list of the theological domains of your campaign lets you roll to add flavor to items, monuments, locations, NPCs, quests, and other people or objects in your game. You can use the following common list of domains as a model for the gods of your campaign or use it as a baseline on which to add your own domains.

1. Light
2. Dark
3. Life
4. Death
5. Nature
6. War
7. Trickery
8. Knowledge
9. Tempest
10. Harvest
11. The Hells
12. The Abyss
13. Fire
14. Water
15. Earth
16. Air
17. The Sea
18. Undeath
19. Magic
20. Creation

DRAWING MAPS

You may find yourself drawing maps for your RPGs, either when designing a location or when representing existing maps at your table. Use the following key of common easy-to-draw symbols to fill out details of your maps your players can easily understand. Spend time practicing them to wire them into your mental toolbox.

- Door
- Double Door

- Secret Door
- Hidden Trap Door
- Pillars and Columns
- Statues
- Staircase
- Natural Staircase
- Spiral Staircase
- Portcullis
- Bed
- Table
- Throne
- Brazier
- Dias or platform
- Water
- Cliff
- Sarcophagus
- Debris

DREADFUL BLESSINGS

A concept introduced as “doom points” in the roleplaying game *Tales of the Valiant*, Dreadful Blessings are a potential replacement for “legendary resistance” in 5e-based RPGs (games including and derived from the 5th edition of D&D) but you can use the concept in other RPGs as well.

Instead of legendary resistance, give boss monsters several “dreadful blessings” – player visible tokens tied to some aspect of the boss like “Blessings of the Nameless King” or “Blessings of the Dragon Lords”. There’s a finite number of these blessings visible to the players – somewhere between three and five. Physical tokens work well to represent dreadful blessings. You can use these dreadful blessings at any time for many different things including:

- Automatically saving on a saving throw
- Gaining advantage on all attacks for a turn
- Removing or suppressing any ongoing magical effect
- Absorbing hit points from an ally monster
- Recharging limited use effects
- Gaining an extra turn
- Suppressing resistances or immunities
- Smashing down terrain

It’s important to only use these dreadful blessings for the fun of the game, to amplify the threat of a boss when appropriate and ensure a

boss monster fits the narrative of the story. Avoid using dreadful blessings to remove player agency, player choices, or because you’re mad about some ability they have. Delay the use of a dreadful blessing to let some effect of a debilitating effect take place before the boss breaks free. Find ways to give bosses the advantages of a dreadful blessing without eliminating powerful character abilities completely.

ESCALATION DIE

A concept from the 13th Age RPG, an escalation die is a d6 you place on the table during combat encounters. You place the die on 1 at the beginning of the second round of combat designating that all characters gain +1 to attack rolls. Each round the die increases, continuing to add the number to attack rolls all the way to +6.

You can modify the escalation die in lots of ways. You might let monsters gain the bonus to *their* attack rolls as well, or bosses, or only under certain circumstances. You can mix an escalation die with the concept of “clocks” (see “clocks” in this chapter), letting other elements of the encounter escalate as the escalation die increases – either on behalf of the characters or something working against their interests.

The escalation die is a way to increase the pace of combat, adding further excitement to the battle as it continues.

FACTION LIST

Use custom faction lists to tie people, places, and things to the specific factions of a published or your own homegrown campaign setting. Factions can represent gods, governments, criminal organizations, secret societies, cults, mercenary companies, or any named group of people. Here’s an example faction list from the *City of Arches*:

1. The Golden Knights
2. The Knights of the Nameless King
3. The Archkeepers
4. The Children of Ibraxus
5. The Black Hand
6. Children of the Red Rose
7. The Apostles of End
8. Followers of the Three Sisters
9. The Deadland Shadows
10. The Mages of Kartan

Roll on faction lists to tie factions to items, monuments, NPCs, locations and more. Faction lists draw otherwise random elements to the themes of your campaign world making every item or encounter matter to the theme of your campaign.

FLASHBACKS

Flashbacks let players turn the story back to a previous moment in order to change the fiction going on at the present. A player might use a flashback to return the story back to when they were in town to buy an adventuring kit they forgot or for something more dramatic like buying off a guard, picking up an old map in a library, or picking up the right weapon for the right job.

Depending on what the flashback is used for, you might require some form of check to see if they successfully accomplish what they wanted to do previously. Or they might use some other resource for your system to successfully engage in a flashback. You'll have to gauge how mundane or exotic the request is to determine the cost for such a request. Often, for relatively minor activities, you can just let them do it.

Flashbacks have the advantage of reducing the amount of decision paralysis players can feel while in a town shopping. Instead of worrying about every object they might need, you can clarify that they have the opportunity to flashback to buy non-critical items should they wish to in the future.

GENERAL-USE MONSTER TOKENS

Instead of building an expensive and space-consuming collection of custom painted miniatures, consider building a set of generic monster tokens or augmenting your collection with such tokens. Six tokens of several different general-use icons can represent most creatures in a fantasy RPG. Here's a list of potential icons:

- Armored humanoids
- Robed humanoids
- Skulls
- Beasts
- Dragons
- Crowned skulls

Six of each usually serves well, with two for dragons and two for the crowned skulls to represent bosses. Craft physical tokens with a

one-inch hole puncher, one-inch acrylic stickers, and adhesive magnets for the base.

You can include tokens for characters as well, using icons such as swords, daggers, staves, wands, shields, bows, suns, and other icons to represent character classes in your game. The reference page linked on the copyright page includes a reference for printing and crafting your own generic tokens.

For online play, having a set of generic tokens to represent different kinds of monsters can help you improvise combat encounters without needing to find just the right token for just the right monster.

GM TOOLKIT

For in-person games, consider putting together your own GM toolkit with all of the tools and accessories you need to run your games. A GM toolkit might include:

- Dice & dice tray
- Pencils
- Markers
- A blank battle mat
- A cheat sheet for your system
- General-use character and monster tokens
- Index cards
- Initiative cards
- NPC portrait cards

You can store the components of your GM kit in a document pouch, pencil holder, or plastic tackle box.

Like having the eight steps as a common framework for RPG prep helps you get your hands around what you need to run your game – knowing you have the components you need to run your game in your own GM kit can help alleviate some of the nervousness we often feel when getting ready to run our game. You have your tools at hand and you know how these games run – you're all set.

HANDOUTS

Physical handouts help tie players to the in-world fiction of your game. Such handouts can include orders from a boss to a flunky, a secret message between two factions, a scroll written in the ancient times, or any other sort of written information valuable to the characters. Print notes using fancy fonts on copper-colored resume

paper to give them an authentic look. Tear off the edges of the page to make it look hand-made. Such handouts help you focus down your story to the material in the note, give players something tangible to touch, help you clarify important points to the players they might otherwise forget, and draw players into the fictional world. A good handout is a valuable accessory when you have the time and the situation is right for one.

HOUSE RULES

Modifying game systems to suit each group's preferences is as venerated an activity as playing RPGs themselves. When creating house rules for your system, consider the following guidance:

- Ask yourself why you're including the house rule. Is it important enough to bother changing the rules?
- Talk to your players about the design of your house rules. Don't develop them in a vacuum. Do your players understand them and like them?
- Start first by understanding and running the system *without* house rules before you decide to implement your own. Sometimes you have to play the game to really understand what's going on.
- Consider testing house rules on the GM side before implementing them for the whole game. Try a house rule for one scene, one combat encounter, or one session before making it a permanent rule.
- Keep house rules as simple as you can so you and your players understand how they work within the rest of the rules of your system of choice.

INDEX CARDS

Index cards are fantastic, affordable, and flexible tools that serve many different purposes in our tabletop RPGs. These uses include:

- Using as initiative cards or tents.
- Tracking damage done to monsters.
- Writing down magic item descriptions to hand to players.
- Writing down secret notes for players.
- Noting quests the characters can choose from.

- Writing down zones for zone-based combat areas.
- Use as an X card for safety tools (see chapter \$).
- Noting abbreviated stat blocks for monsters.

Keep a stack of index cards in your GM kit and you won't be disappointed.

INITIATIVE SYSTEMS

Different RPGs often include different systems for managing turns in or out of combat. Often we can use alternate systems for managing turns and initiative in our games regardless of the system we play. Here are several simple systems:

Around the Table. A simple and fast system for turn order has players and the GM roll initiative and then start at the person who rolled the highest. Turn order then goes either clockwise or counter-clockwise around the table. For online play, you can instead go up or down the list of characters. To add some variance, you can have the order go clockwise (or up the list) on an even initiative roll or counter-clockwise (or down) if the result is odd.

Side-Based Initiative. Players elect a single player to roll initiative against the GM – either with or without modifiers if desired. Whichever side wins goes first. Characters and monsters on each side can go in any order they choose. This style of initiative can take longer than going around the table because players have to discuss who goes when but some players enjoy the extra tactical complexity of choosing who goes before or after who.

Players Go First. An easy diceless system has players go first in whatever order they choose before the monsters go. Under certain circumstances the GM might determine that the opponents surprised the characters and thus they go first but no initiative order needs to be rolled or tracked. The GM might account for characters going first by adding more monsters, bigger monsters, or both. See Dials of Monster Difficulty in this chapter for details.

Elective Action Order. Elective Action Order is an initiative style popularized by Fred Hicks and Leonard Balsera in the game *FATE Condensed*. In this initiative system (sometimes referred to as popcorn initiative), the GM and players decide who goes first based on the story and situation in the world. Then, each acting player chooses who goes next – either a player or opponents. Ask

players to choose who goes next *before* they take their turn so the next player is ready to go when their turn comes up. Players can select monsters or other players. Choosing monsters last often makes sense but gives the GM the opportunity to have monsters go twice in a row since GMs can select themselves at the beginning of the next round. This initiative style works well for games using *Powered by the Apocalypse* or games like *Daggerheart* where monsters react to the characters instead of having their own turn.

Drawing Initiative Cards. The game *Dragonbane* by Free League Publishing has players draw cards from a face-down deck of numbered cards starting at 1 and ending at the maximum number of different creatures in combat including player characters and opponents. Those drawing the lowest card go first. A single suit from a regular deck of playing cards or a set of numbered index cards can work well for this initiative style.

LIGHTNING RODS

GMs sometimes find themselves building monsters or encounters designed to thwart the powerful abilities of their characters. Instead, consider building encounters and including monsters that *lean in* on powerful character abilities. These “lightning rods” can draw powerful character abilities, letting players feel good about the powers of their characters and giving you a better handle on the overall threat of an encounter when desired (often for boss battles but not always). Here are some common lightning rod monsters:

- Lots of little monsters in a tight formation with fewer hit points than a fireball.
- Big monsters with poor defenses against mental attacks – easily charmed, dominated, stunned, or banished.
- Medium-sized monsters with poor spell defenses who are easily crowd controlled.
- Big monsters with lots of hit points but lower defenses for single-target heavy hitting characters.
- Undead and fiendish monsters for clerics and paladins.

When considering your characters in step 1 of the eight steps of the Lazy GM, think about what sorts of monsters and encounters showcase the players’ favorite character abilities and styles and

consider including encounters like these in your game.

This concept shouldn’t be overused. RPGs often work well when the threats of monsters go up and down either determined randomly or based on the situation as it unfolds during the game. But sometimes, particularly in more character-focused high-fantasy RPGs, designing encounters around the capabilities of the characters helps showcase those characters and make the game more enjoyable for your players.

LUCK POINTS

Introduced in *Tales of the Valiant* “luck” is a system you can bring to many different RPGs. When a player fails a significant check, like an attack roll or saving throw, they gain one luck point. After they roll a future check, they can turn in a luck point to gain +1 on the roll or turn in three luck points to re-roll the roll. A player can’t have more than five luck points. Once a player would gain a sixth potential luck point, they instead roll 1d4 and now have that many luck points. This part of the rule prevents hoarding.

It’s generally considered good form for a GM to let a player know when adding a point or two would turn a failed roll into a success.

MASHING UP MULTIPLE RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Random encounters can add excitement to travel through dangerous overlands or dungeons but sometimes feel stale or one-dimensional.

Consider combining two encounters by rolling twice on a random encounter table and mashing up the results. Perhaps the characters stumble upon a group of ogres fighting back a pack of dire wolves, or come across a band of knights fighting off a wave of trolls. Mixing up multiple random encounters multiplies the value of any single random encounter list and introduces complications with interesting choices for the characters. Which side do they join with? Do they instead wait for it to be over? Such mashed up encounters might not be one group fighting another but two groups meeting and forming a new alliance. A group of bandits might offer payment to shiftier wererats to conduct a robbery. Add interesting situations by rolling two encounters and mashing up the results. See more examples of rich encounters in the Overland

Travel and Exploration adventure type in chapter \$.

MINIATURES

While a set of general-use tokens makes improvisational play easier, lowers costs, and takes up less space than painted or unpainted miniatures; miniatures often better capture the look of the specific monsters the characters face. You can limit painted or unpainted miniatures to just the player characters, using tokens instead for monsters or go all-in on miniatures for characters and monsters but at a high price in cost and storage. Keep in mind that the *number* of miniatures you have for any given monster matters if you plan to run a lot of that type of monster. This leads to a nearly bottomless well of desire for miniatures: you want all the right ones and enough of them to fill out any given battle.

For online play, miniatures are much less of a problem. Instead, several tools exist to build tokens out of any artwork which can then be cloned any number of times on a VTT. This reduces the cost of miniatures many orders of magnitude between VTTs and in-person play.

Stick to Generic Tokens

As a longtime collector of miniatures, I can tell you that, while miniatures are beautiful and fun to use, the cost in space and money just isn't worth it in the end. A good set of generic tokens takes you far with such a lower cost, faster use at the table, and a greater focus on improvisational play. The fun of a game doesn't come from fancy terrain or perfect miniatures – a great game comes from a GM working with their group to share awesome stories. Avoid fancy tools and focus on running great games.

MINUS 3 PLUS 1d6

If you want to capture the advantages of the speed and simplicity of static damage (see Dice Averages earlier in this chapter) but want to add variance to the results so they're not so predictable, subtract 3 from the static amount and add 1d6. Subtracting 3 and adding 1d6 offers enough variance to make it difficult to pinpoint the results without needing to roll and add a handful of dice. You can suggest to players that they do the same if they have character abilities with lots of dice rolls.

MONSTER STATS BY CHALLENGE RATING

Whatever RPG you're playing, it's useful to note statistics and mechanics to help you build and improvise a monster quickly. Different systems handle generic monster statistics in different way – seek out tables, supplements, or reference guides that offer statistics for generic monsters at different difficulties, levels, or challenge ratings. Spend time understanding these tables so you can quickly build monsters when needed and get comfortable reskinning these generic stats to flavor monsters in your game (see Reskinning later in this chapter).

MUSIC

Some GMs and players love to have music playing in the background during a game. Other's don't. If you're interested, ask your players if they want some background music for your game. Some light background music can keep the game from feeling too sterile if everything's dead quiet. Several producers create musical tracks specifically for roleplaying games. Video game soundtracks also work well as background music for RPGs. Consider building playlists for "relaxing", "sinister", and "combat" music from your favorite sources. Ensure they have enough tracks to last throughout a session without repeating. Some music streaming services include many RPG-related playlists as well.

NPC PORTRAITS

Pictures of NPCs help solidify NPCs in the minds of your players. Some companies sell decks of cards with NPC portraits on one side and other information on the other. You can use these cards to represent important NPCs, selecting the card with the most appropriate picture as needed. Alternatively you can print artwork from books and show those portraits to players during the game. If you play online, you can screen capture art from PDFs or other digital sources and display that artwork to your players. Many artists sell affordable art for NPC portraits you can share with your group to represent NPCs.

ORACLE DIE

Many solo RPGs include a concept known as an "oracle die". Often GMs use oracle dice to answer possible "yes / no" questions when randomness

can be a factor. You can use a six-sided die as a simple oracle die to answer lots of questions, beyond just yes and no. One way is to use it as a “table-less” oracle die in which lower numbers represent less extreme results and higher numbers represent more extreme results. You can use this table-less oracle die for things like:

- Weather (lower is less extreme)
- Distance (lower is closer)
- Behavior (lower is more benign)
- Hostility (lower is less hostile)
- Awareness (lower is less aware)

You can also use dice to determine who a creature targets in combat. Rolling for targets ensures you’re not playing favorites or picking on any particular character.

PAGE NUMBERS

Along with book tabs, denote the page numbers of the books you’re using in your GM notes for things like monsters, spells, or magic items. Doing so makes it much faster to look up material in your sourcebooks during play. Opening up and referencing an RPG sourcebook during a game isn’t a sign of defeat – they’re meant to be used at the table.

You can also recommend that players likewise note the page numbers on their character sheets for things like spells or character powers so they too can quickly reference them during play.

Page numbers are the hyperlinks of books going back thousands of years.

Be kind to your future self and note page numbers to speed up referencing during play.

PLAYER ROLES

Some RPGs include the concept of “player roles”. These shouldn’t be confused with the *character* roles you might find in exploration or dungeon crawling adventure types. Instead, the players themselves take on roles to help manage and keep track of the game. These roles can include:

Cartographer. This player draws maps of the locations the characters explore, noting where they’ve been and what paths remain unexplored as the characters travel through the unknown. These maps don’t have to be fancy – they can be simple line and box charts to represent rooms and passages.

Note Taker. This player writes down notes about what happened during the game. These

notes don’t have to be super detailed. They can just be a list of bullets, outlining the major events in the session.

Quartermaster. This player notes any loot, treasure, magic items, and other resources the characters acquire. The quarter master should keep track of this information in a way they can share with the other players. Even if recorded on paper, the quartermaster can take pictures and send the pictures of the list of resources. This list should include every item of note the characters acquire and who takes it. Instead of removing items from the list when a character takes an item, note that the item was given to that character so you have it recorded in two places. This form of double-entry bookkeeping has been in use since the 1300s.

Initiative Manager. The initiative manager asks for people’s initiative results and hands out cards or using some other system to note who’s turn it is.

Rules Assistant. A rules assistant helps look up unknown rules when they come up during the game.

Caller. The caller is a unique role most groups give to the game master. When delegated to a player, the caller is responsible for facilitating the choices and discussion of the group and giving the GM a final answer. It’s important that the caller understands their role – not as the director of the group, but as the facilitator for the group’s discussions. This role includes taking votes for decisions but also talking to those in the minority on a given choice to ensure they’re still ok going with the opposing decision. Like the other roles, a caller takes some of the burden off of the GM to facilitate every choice the group has. If no one stands up to take the role of a caller, the GM can roll to choose one.

PREVIOUS OR UPCOMING RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Not every random encounter has to happen *now*. Some may have happened in the past and some may be coming in the future. Rolling for past or future encounters helps make overland or dungeon locations feel alive. You can roll on a random encounter list to determine if an encounter already occurred at the character’s current location, giving the characters signs to explore or a potential path if they want to follow the creatures from this previous encounter. Likewise, you can roll to determine if an

encounter is on the way. Perhaps a giant is walking through a dense forest but hasn't yet made it to the characters' current location. Rolling for previous or upcoming encounters gives players interesting signs and conditions to explore and agency to choose whether to investigate further or continue on their journey.

PUBLISHED CAMPAIGN SETTINGS

GMs often fall into two groups – those running published adventures in published campaign settings or those running homebrew adventures in homebrewed campaign settings. Running homebrew adventures gives you the benefit of knowing everything about the adventure and the flexibility to build it around the characters and the results of their actions. Yet published adventures offer professional art, design, playtesting, and a structure we might not come up with on our own. Published campaign settings offer the best of both worlds. Campaign settings give us sandboxes of professionally designed worlds with beautiful art, maps, tremendous depth, and enough room to still build our own homebrewed adventures customized around our desires, the characters, and the results of their actions. While many GMs prefer to build their own worlds, few have the resources to build a campaign setting as rich as a larger publisher can. Running homebrewed adventures in published campaign settings offers tremendous value without sacrificing the flexibility of a homebrewed adventure.

The Value of Published Adventures

Published adventures have similar advantages to published campaign settings but, due to the common rigidity of adventures, lack the flexibility we find running homebrew adventures in published settings. Published adventures often include high-value material like detailed maps with keyed encounters, a structure for the story, and detailed NPCs. Even if the story of an adventure doesn't work for us, we can often harvest these components to feed the story we want to tell. When considering a published adventure, be ready to break away from the structure of a published adventure to build the situations you want to run in your own game.

Some GMs see the depth and detail of a published campaign setting as a big disadvantage. How can you digest such huge worlds and make

them manageable for your home game? You don't need to. Focus on the pieces of the campaign setting you need to run your game – often the specific region where your games take place. You only need to bring forward the elements of the campaign world that matter to the characters and the stories you need right now. You can always absorb more as you need.

QUICK MONSTER STATS

Whatever your system of choice, seek tools or tables that help you build and improvise monsters quickly. Some systems include quick monster generation stats in their game master guides. For those that do not, often fans and other publishers offer quick monster stat tables or tools to build monsters in any given system. If you can't find such tools, find the most generic monsters at different power levels for a given system and reskin them to suit any monster you need (see *Reskinning Monster Stat Blocks* later in this chapter).

Add quick monster statistics tables to your toolbox or GM cheat sheet (see cheat sheets on page 5) so you always have monsters on hand.

RANDOM NAMES

A good list of random names is one of the most common GM tools for improvisational play. Often RPG game master guides include lists of random names, sometimes broken down by background or species, but you might need to find your own list of random names. This book includes random names in appendix 5 but you can build our own list of random names to keep on hand on your GM cheat sheet. You don't need thousands of names – maybe fifty to one hundred will do. Wherever you find them, keep a solid list of random names on hand. See chapter 5 for more tricks on naming NPCs.

RANDOM ONLINE GENERATORS

Random tables in books offer lots of utility but sometimes the complexity of rolling on printed random tables ends up eating a lot of time. Multi-roll treasure tables are an example where rolling for a single treasure parcel requires rolling on a cascade of dozens of rolls before you get your answer. Online random generators speed up the process of rolling on lots of random tables. Several random generators exist online, some of

which you can find referenced at the reference link on the copyright page of this book. Find the random generators you love, bookmark them, and use them to speed up your prep when rolling on physical tables takes too much time.

RELICS – SINGLE-USE MAGIC ITEMS

Depending on your chosen RPG, you might have the option to include “relics” as a type of reward. Relics are single-use magic items usable by any character. They allow that character to cast a spell or perform some other magical ability *once*. Once expended, the item loses the ability. Different game systems include lists of possible spells. You can find a list of 5e spells to apply to a relic in appendix \$. Roll on your own custom faction table and on the origin, condition, and item tables in appendix \$ to put together flavorful relics to include in your treasure. Relics containing spells significantly more powerful than the characters’ own power level can be great fun and don’t break your game because they can only be used once. Relics with lower-power abilities might be usable once per day or even at-will if the power is significantly less powerful than the characters’ power level.

RESKINNING MONSTER STAT BLOCKS

Reskinning stat blocks may be one of the most efficient lazy tricks in tabletop RPGs. To reskin, find an existing stat block with mechanics close enough to the monster you have in mind and then use your own description of the monster wrapped around the mechanics of the stat block you chose. A common tip in the old-school RPG movement is “just use a bear” – recommending that the standard bear stat block often has all the mechanics you need and you can reskin it into just about any monster you want whose power and challenge in the world mimics that of a bear. The same is true for other monsters as well. Common stat blocks like humanoid NPCs, ogres, and giants cover a wide range of potential stat blocks at different difficulties. You then wrap these stats with your own description of the monster you want it to represent.

REPURPOSING MAPS

A good set of maps can serve you time and again. You can get a lot of value out of a single well-designed map. Cut off hallways, turn the map 90

degrees, flip the map completely, and change your descriptions of the rooms and halls and you can turn any map into a completely different location. Build a collection of your favorite maps so you always have some on hand. You can find a set of maps in appendix \$ covering a range of common fantasy locations including:

- Castles
- Catacombs
- Caves
- Cellars
- Dungeons
- Inns
- Mines
- Sewers
- Ships
- Temples
- Towers
- Villas

Get comfortable re-using your favorite maps by changing small features, closing off or opening up passages, re-orienting the map, and reskinning its description.

ROLL ON MULTIPLE TABLES

Rolling on multiple tables gives you much more value out of a set of random tables than rolling on each table alone. Mixing the rolls of random tables can inspire ideas you never would have come up with from a single table roll. As mentioned in Mashing Up Random Encounters earlier in this chapter, you can roll multiple times on a single table to mix two ideas together. You can also roll a series of tables to enrich ideas beginning with a “main” list and a “modifier” list.

Main lists might include:

- Locations
- Encounters
- Monuments
- Items
- Treasures
- NPCs

Modifier lists might include:

- Factions
- Conditions
- Origins / Species / Races
- Effects
- Attitudes

- Behaviors
- Distance
- Weather
- Deities
- Historical figures
- Regions

You can find examples of these lists in appendix \$.

You can also further modify rolls on random tables with a roll on your oracle die (see Oracle Die earlier in this chapter)

SINGLE TARGET NUMBER

The *RPGs Index Card RPG* includes an idea transferrable to many RPGs where characters roll against a target number. Instead of having separate target numbers for an opponent's armor class, character saving throws, ability or skill checks, or other rolls against a specific target number – you can declare a single target number for an entire scene. Reveal this target number to your players either verbally, by writing it on an index card, or otherwise displaying it so players know the target number for every roll they're making. For easier or harder checks in a scene you can add or subtract a static number from the check or have the character roll twice, taking the higher for an easy check or the lower for a harder check. You or your players might find this abstracts the mechanics too much but, for some groups and GMs, using a static target number dramatically reduces the amount of discussion around any given roll and speeds up gameplay.

Alternatively, you can describe a *range* of target numbers for a scene, noting the highest and lowest checks to succeed or fail. That way, when players roll, if they roll above a certain number, they know they succeeded regardless of what they're trying to accomplish. Likewise, if they roll *below* the low number, they know they failed. Only when the number lands between the two stated target numbers do you need to figure out if it succeeded or failed for that particular check.

SOLO GAMES

Though common as a group activity, playing solo RPGs is a fun and viable way to enjoy tabletop roleplaying games. In solo games, you serve as both GM and player, either using games dedicated for solo play like *Ironsworn* by Shawn Tompkin or games that include solo modes of play like

Solodark for *Shadowdark* and the solo rules included in the *Dragonbane* RPG.

Solo games come in a variety of flavors including journaling games, more “choose your own adventure” style games, or games that use an oracle die (see Oracle Dice in this chapter) and oracle tables to generate scenarios in your mind that your player plays through.

Playing RPGs solo offer a lot for GMs:

- It lets you enjoy RPGs whenever you have free time. No need for scheduling with other people.
- You can learn a new system or learn things about an existing system you didn't know by playing it from the players' side.
- Playing solo RPGs helps you cross-train your improvisational skills – skills that serve you well when running games for your friends.
- It's fun!

SYSTEM CHEAT SHEETS

Most RPGs include GM screens or other cheat sheets with common mechanics, difficulty ladders, lists of the system's skills, and other information valuable to keep on hand. Study these cheat sheets so you know what you have at your fingertips. Print them out if they fit on typical printer paper and keep them in a GM's notebook. If you're not a fan of GM screens being a wall between you and your players, lay them down on the table, face up, so you can still reference the material within them.

You might instead build your own cheat sheet for your system of choice. Take screenshots or pictures of the pages and tables you want and piece them together in a word processor or presentation software to print on a page. You can also look for cheat sheets developed by other community members for the system you're running.

UPWARD AND DOWNWARD BEATS

Games run best when they have a mixture of upward and downward beats – good things happen, then bad things happen, then good things happen, then bad things happen. These oscillating beats shouldn't be perfectly symmetrical but, generally, too many upward beats make the game boring and too many downward beats make the game frustrating. Mix upward and downward

beats throughout your adventure as you run it to ensure players feel a mixture of excitement and relaxation.

Here are some common upward beats.

1. Facing off against weak foes
2. Finding a healing fountain
3. Discovering treasure
4. Finding a valuable clue
5. Rescuing a beloved NPC
6. Identifying and disarming a trap
7. Learning an exciting piece of lore
8. Surprising foes
9. Avoiding a hazard
10. Meeting a friendly ghost
11. Acquiring a map
12. Finding a secret passage or path
13. Discovering a safe room to rest
14. Learning who the culprit is
15. Gaining favor with a lord
16. Receiving accolades
17. Sneaking undiscovered
18. Stealing something valuable
19. Convincing a hostile or dangerous NPC
20. Finding a villain's weak spot

And here are some common downward beats:

1. Fighting a difficult battle
2. Springing a trap
3. Having your food spoiled
4. Being discovered while sneaking
5. Stepping into a hazard
6. Getting lost in a dungeon
7. Being attacked by wall-phasing ghosts
8. Having a boss take on a new form
9. Getting trapped behind enemy lines
10. Losing track of a mystery
11. Having an enemy escape
12. Being captured
13. A beloved NPC dies
14. A character dies
15. Having enemies break your defenses
16. A greater enemy arrives
17. Noise alerts a nearby room of enemies
18. Getting lost while traveling
19. Being surprised
20. Losing something valuable

It's often best to improvise these upward and downward beats instead of trying to pre-plan such situations. You don't need to constantly keep track of upward and downward beats but keep the concept in mind and shift beats when it feels right.

"X" AND "/" FOR DAMAGE TRACKING

If tracking damage done to monsters becomes difficult, you have a couple of tricks that can simplify the task. Instead of subtracting damage from hit points, count damage up from zero. When the damage value crosses the hit points of the monster, it dies or is incapacitated depending on what the characters or the story dictates.

Alternatively, track damage using "X"s and "/"s. Every "X" denotes ten damage. Every "/" denotes five. Cross the "/", turning it into an "X", to go from five to ten. For damage above five or ten points, you can track the remainder in a separate tally. Alternatively, you can ignore the remainder, rounding up or down. This usually evens out across a battle.

For some GMs, using "X"s and "/"s can make it much faster to track damage done to multiple monsters than calculating damage done or subtracting damage from existing hit points.

ZONE-BASED COMBAT

In addition to narrative "theater of the mind" combat and gridded combat on a battle mat, combat zones give you a way to represent complicated combat environments without the need for precise distances.

When using zone-based combat, the GM defines a number of "zones", each with an evocative name and a description of how each zone is oriented with other zones. For example, you might have a large chamber with three zones including "shattered pillars", "sacrificial well", and "throne dais". Each of the three zones are in a line from first to last. Characters can typically move within a zone or move from one zone to another using a normal "move". You still likely want to keep track of which creatures are standing right next to other creatures. Typically spells effect creatures in a single zone but may extend between zones if the effect is particularly large. When comparing precise measurements and speeds, zones might be roughly 50 feet or 15 meters in size.

GMs can represent zones with index cards using the evocative name or write down the zone names on a battle mat. For online play, GMs can represent zones with boxes on a virtual tabletop or send the zone names as a list in a text chat.

Some sort of visual representation of zones can help players who have difficulty visualizing strictly narrative descriptions, a condition known as aphantasia.

ADVENTURE OUTLINES

This chapter contains \$ adventure outlines organized by the eight steps of the Lazy Game Master, each built around the concepts of the adventure types in chapters \$ through \$. These adventure outlines serve several purposes:

- They give you an idea what prep notes might look like following the eight steps.
- They show you the kind of material that goes into each step based on the kind of adventure you're going to run.
- They can inspire your own similar adventures.
- Put together, they can form a small campaign.

These adventure outlines follow the lore of the book *City of Arches* but this lore is easily reskinned to suit a published setting or your own homegrown campaign setting.

These scenarios are not a perfect example of the notes you might write down for your own game. These scenarios **include more information** than you might write down in your own notes for your own game. Your own notes need only focus on the material you need to run your game while these examples have to include enough so you understand the adventure they describe.

These adventure outlines are written from *me to you*. They're more detailed wordy because I have to explain to *you* what's in *my* head. Your own notes need only serve you.

You'll also notice that, instead of a typical "characters" step and notes, I include *character prompts* to inspire you to fill in specific details for your characters. If you decide to run these scenarios, use these prompts to help you fill in specific character details in your own notes.

These adventures make use of the maps found in appendix \$ – though they're not directly keyed room-by-room like a published adventure would be. Instead, they offer loose location descriptions as described in chapter \$ "Develop Fantastic Locations".

These adventures are written to be system agnostic. They use typical fantasy trappings and use some terminology for 5e monsters, spells, and items but should be easily modified to suit your RPG of choice.

THE CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

These adventure outlines follow the characters as they infiltrate and dismantle an artifact smuggling network known as the Midnight Maul operating within and outside the City of Arches. Throughout these scenarios, the characters investigate the operation and thwart the smugglers' plans before a final confrontation in which the characters face demons summoned using powerful artifacts recovered by the Midnight Maul.

If you choose to use these outlines for your own adventures, I encourage you to change them however you need to suit your game.

SCENARIO 1: THE RELIC

In this scene-based adventure (see chapter \$), the characters follow the path of a stolen artifact in the hands of a thief working for a mysterious group of artifact hunters. This scenario is intended for introductory characters.

CHARACTERS

Do the characters know any of the NPCs in this scenario? What do the characters know of the Midnight Maul or the Black Hand? Are characters aware of the legal issues regarding artifact hunting in the city? What would motivate the characters to get involved in the theft?

START

At the city's bazaar, the characters witness the elven thief, **Polyx Gemfinger**, stealing a set of ancient primordial pipes from an old gnome scholar named **Evenos Greenwillow**. If the characters get involved, several **bandits**, hired by Polyx to create a distraction, attack the characters. However the situation resolves, Evenos wants to hire the characters to follow the intended path of the thief and find out who hired him.

SCENES

- From information gathered at the bazaar, the characters follow the path the thief intended to take (or did take if Polyx escaped) through the alleyways behind the bazaar. Spies and bandits might watch the path. Following the trail leads to a ruined fountain where Polyx intended to sell the artifact to a hired tough named **Ward Bluebane**.
- At the ruined fountain, Ward Bluebane and several bandits wait for Polyx, intending to kill him and take the pipes. The characters might fight, intimidate, trick, or follow Ward and the bandits – learning that Ward plans to take the artifact through the Lost Cisterns below the city to a forgotten shrine outside of town.
- While traveling through the cisterns, the characters face scurrying swarms of rats fleeing from a mutated crocodile and rushing water threatens to chew up living things in a big rusty whirling sluice.

- At the exit of the cisterns, the characters face the cult fanatic **Gorvan Shadowcowl** and several bandits waiting for the artifact from Ward. From Gorvan, they learn that a well-organized criminal network seeks artifacts in and around the City of Arches.

SECRETS

- Several artifacts have been stolen in the bazaar recently and dealers of these artifacts have been hurt or killed. Many believe the Black Hand is to blame – the organized crime ring operating out of the Lower Reaches.
- Shady artifact hunters found the primordial pipes in a lost vault in the Cliffs of the Dead and sold them to Evenos.
- The pipes date back to the days before mortals banded together several tens of thousands of years ago.
- The Magistrate of Tombs forbids the sale or transfer of illegally obtained artifacts. These thefts, they argue, are the result of illegal tomb raiding in the city.
- Polyx doesn't know who gave the order to steal the pipes – only where to drop them off. Likewise, Ward Bluebane only knows to take it through the sewers to an old shrine outside of town.
- Thefts occur commonly enough in the bazaar but this theft is very well orchestrated. Only a well-organized and well-funded group could attempt such an operation.
- The theft of artifacts is being conducted by the Midnight Maul, a well-funded group of artifact hunters operating in and around the City of Arches.
- A cult fanatic named Gorvan Shadowcowl follows the forgotten god Nightwhisper. Like the others, he was ordered to bring the pipes to a fallen priest named Xevex Graysallow, an agent of the Midnight Maul, in the center of the marketplace of the City of Arches.

LOCATIONS

- **The Bazaar.** Ramshackle booths, precarious rooftops, wagons of strange fruit.

- **The Alleyways.** Rotted piles of refuse, crates stacked too high, hidden shrine of thieves.
- **The Forgotten Fountain.** Cracked statue of faceless hero, oily bubbling liquid, sewer grate and entrance.
- **The Sewers.** Stinking passages, rushing waters, huge sharp sluices.
- **The Old Shrine.** Shrine to a forgotten god, slippery walls of mud, pool of poisonous water.

NPCs

- **Evenos Greenwillow.** Old gnome sage selling relics in the city's bazaar. Wants to find out who's stealing artifacts from the vendors of the bazaar.
- **Polyx Gemfinger.** Elven thief who steals the pipes from Evenos. He doesn't know who he's working for and just wants a payout.
- **Ward Bluebane.** Freelance enforcer waiting for Polyx. Like Polix, he doesn't know who he works for. Ordered to kill Polyx and bring the pipes to an old shrine outside the Lost Cisterns. Like Polyx, he's eager for a payout.
- **Gorvan Shadowcowl.** Cultist fanatic of the god of bloodshed and assassins known as the Nightwhisper. Gorvan hopes to prove his worth to Xevex Graycowl, an agent of the Midnight Maul artifact hunters.

MONSTERS

- Bandits
- Cult Fanatic
- Tough
- Swarms of Rats
- Crocodile

REWARDS

- **Primordial pipes.** Cast *thunder wave* and *hypnotic pattern* one time each.
- 563 CP, 385 SP, 249 GP
- 7 x 10 GP sapphire gemstones
- 50 GP monstrous opal dangling platinum earrings
- Potion of Greater Healing

SCENARIO 2: THE SINKHOLE

In this dungeon crawling adventure (see chapter \$), the characters witness a collapsing sinkhole in an urban center. They delve into the sinkhole discovering the operations of a hitherto unknown group of smugglers digging for lost artifacts. This scenario uses the map on page \$. It is designed for introductory or low-level characters.

<https://dysonlogos.blog/2025/07/08/index-card-dungeon-ii-map-7-north-sub-dungeons/>

CHARACTERS

- Are any of the characters tied to the missing citizens?
- Do any of the characters have a connection to Xevex Graycowl?
- Do any divine-focused characters have premonitions of the darkness emanating from these lost artifacts?
- What drives the characters to delve into the sinkhole?

START

While traveling through the City of Arches seeking information on the network of relic hunters discovered in scenario 1, the characters witness a strange storm flowing over the city. A sinkhole opens up in front of the characters, swallowing up several citizens of the city.

SCENES

- Witness the opening of the sinkhole. They can choose to help those citizens they can but some are lost further below.
- Delve into the sinkhole.
- Explore the sinkhole.
- Face Xevex Graysallow, an artifact hunter of the Midnight Maul.
- Return to the City with their new information.

SECRETS AND CLUES

- Over the city's long history, many vaults, chambers, and artifacts have gone missing beneath the city and in its surrounding ruins.
- Many of the missing artifacts of the City of Arches are quite dangerous, with strange effects.

- The Magister of Tombs tries to control the acquisition and sale of artifacts throughout the city but illegal smuggling remains a problem.
- Many point the finger at the Black Hand, a criminal network operating beneath the City of Arches in the Lower Reaches for the increase in artifact smuggling. They're only half right.
- Several independent groups of bandits, mercenaries, and tomb robbers operate in and around the City of Arches. Many are small-time groups who get into more trouble than they cause.
- The Midnight Maul is a large and well-organized band of artifact hunters in the City of Arches. They seem well informed and well funded.
- The Midnight Maul isn't part of the Black Hand and the relationship between the two groups is shaky.
- Xevex Graysallow; a sage, cult fanatic, and artifact hunter; seeks necrotic artifacts in the city on behalf of the Midnight Maul. He's known to use undead to do his dirty work.
- Xevex conducted several profane rituals and sacrifices to lower beings to learn more about where to find artifacts of great power and value.
- Xevex is a lower-ranking member of the Midnight Maul.

LOCATIONS

- Sinkhole chamber
- Sundered library
- Flooded tomb of necrotic runoff
- Crypt of shattered sarcophagi
- Shattered staircase
- Shrines of three of the Lower Twelve
- Shattered shrine of the Nameless King
- Stairwell to the corrupted tavern
- Staircase to the sewers below
- Hall of living mosaics
- Forgotten treasure vault

NPCs

- **Cleveland Cloudhunter** – Human carpenter who fell down the sinkhole.

- **Jovan Halfgaze** – Catfolk baker dragged away by Xevex for sacrifice.
- **Xevex Graysallow** – Cult fanatic and sage of the Midnight Maul.

MONSTERS

1. Skeletons guarding Xevex's passage
2. Zombies eating a slain commoner
3. Swarms of rats infesting an ancient corpse
4. A bandit treasure hunter seeking fortune independent of the Midnight Maul
5. Giant centipedes hanging from the ceiling
6. Gray oozes slurping up from necrotic fluid

REWARDS

- 521 CP, 451 SP, 256 GP
- 6 x 10 GP Topazes
- 50 GP piece of glowing meteorite
- Potion of Healing (Greater)
- Abyssal forked rod that casts *Banishment* once.
- +1 Opal-hilted Shortsword called Light's Caress that casts *Healing Word* once per day

SCENARIO 3: INFILTRATION OF REDSTONE KEEP

In this infiltration adventure, the characters infiltrate a keep seeking a powerful tome stolen by the Midnight Maul and sold to a noble of the city. The tome contains information on other relics sought by the Midnight Maul.

<https://dysonlogos.blog/2016/01/08/metivier-manor/>

CHARACTERS

- What roles will the characters take as part of their infiltration? What capabilities do they have that can help them with the quest?
- Do any of the characters have connections to occupants of the keep?

START

On behalf of **Grevory Glassclaw**, an official of the Magistrate of Tombs, the characters rescue the kidnapped kobold sage **Manver Svint** from several bandits in a ruined building on the outskirts of the city. The session starts with the characters kicking in the door and surprising the bandits holding Svint.

SCENES

- Saving Manver Svint.
- Meeting with Grevory and Manver at the Magistrate of Tombs.
- Planning the infiltration of Redstone Keep.
- Infiltration of Redstone Keep.
- Escape with the Book of Endless Night.

SECRETS AND CLUES

- The noble family of Orimos lives in Redstone Keep.
- The second adult son of the Orimos family, Sevlar Orimos, hired the Midnight Maul to find the Book of Endless Night and locate the artifacts contained within.
- Catching the Orimos family in illicit artifact smuggling would cause ripples throughout the Golden Council. Grevory Glassclaw just wants the book, not the scandal.
- The Orimos family has connections to the Black Hand – the criminal network operating

in the Lower Reaches. Orimos's trade caravans smuggle illegal plants from outside the city to the Lower Reaches.

- The Book of Endless Night contains descriptions and locations of several dangerous artifacts.
- Redstone Keep has a secret catacomb and treasure vault in its cellars.
- A hidden passage in one of the sub-cellars of the keep leads to tunnels of the Lower Reaches.
- Sevlar Orimos is a secret cult fanatic of Kryzus, the Horned Lord of Below – one of the lost gods known as the Lower Twelve. He conducts rituals in the cellars below Redstone Keep along with some fellow cultists of the dread lord.
- The Orimos family hired a mercenary company known as the Pale Moon. They are oblivious Sevlar's connection to the Midnight Maul but some know Sevlar is up to something in the cellars.
- Each shift of the Pale Moon has eight guards and two knights in charge of protecting the Orimos family and Redstone Keep.

LOCATIONS

Use these location prompts to fill in chambers of the keep as needed:

- **Mid Level.** hall of statues, hall of large paintings, dining hall, kitchen, pantry, patio, coat closet, stained-glass sitting room, hall of armor.
- **Top Level.** Master bedroom, noble privy, office, servants quarters, children's rooms, walk-in closet.
- **Lower Level.** Storage pantry, chilled storage, statue of the dead, crypts of former knights, shrine of the Kryzus.

NPCs

- **Manver Svint.** Kobold sage who works for the Magistrate of Tombs. He knows how dangerous the Book of Endless Night can be and wants it secured.
- **Sevlar Orimos.** Adult son of the Orimos family who hired the Midnight Maul to find

dangerous artifacts. He's a secret follower of Kryzus the Horned Lord of Below.

- **Javida Orimos.** Mother of Sevlar and matron of the Orimos family. She's unaware of her son's plans.
- **Grabben Orimos.** Father of Sevlar and patron of the Orimos family. Secret smuggler of the Black Hand. Knows his son is up to no good but stays out of it.
- **Dorios Copperpot.** Majordomo of Redstone Keep and lead servant of the Orimos family. He's nervous about Sevlar's recent activities.
- **Emva Trailblade.** Leader of the Pale Moon mercenaries who guard Redstone Keep. She seeks coin and is willing to turn a blind eye to Sevlar's activities.

MONSTERS

- 2 x Knights
- 8 x Guards
- 4 x Cultists
- 6 x Skeletons
- 2 x Specters

REWARDS

- 467 CP, 482 SP, 255 GP
- 9 x 10 GP jade gemstones
- 50 GP shadow-touched glass plain gold band
- Infernal wand that casts *Cloud Kill* once
- Pearl of Power

SCENARIO 4: THE HUNT FOR KADELON HALFBANE

In this investigation-based adventure (see chapter 5), the characters learn that an agent of the Midnight Maul named Kadelon Halfbane works with corrupt nobles, blackmails others, and murders those who get in his way. The characters must hunt down Kadelon, find out which nobles are corrupted, and learn what the Midnight Maul seeks.

CHARACTERS

- What are the characters' connections to one or more of the murder victims?
- What do the characters know about Kadelon Halfbane?
- What connections do the characters have with the nobility of the city?

START

A group of toughs and spies hired by the Midnight Maul attack the characters. On the body of one of the spies, they find a note with several names (see NPCs), including those of the characters. It's signed with a single swirly H. Three additional names are on the list – Catella Oakwind, Penvallen Graycloak, and Gertrude Duskwillow.

SCENES

- The ambush
- Investigating the three names
- Visiting the Oakwind apartments
- Visiting the Graycloak townhouse
- Visiting Duskwillow Manor
- Report findings to the Magistrate of Tombs

SECRETS AND CLUES

- Kadelon Halfbane is the false name of the noble Augustin Lydara. He now works for the Midnight Maul.
- Kadelon is hunting for powerful and dangerous artifacts for the leadership of the Midnight Maul.
- Kadelon Halfbane is corrupting the nobility of the City of Arches and assassinating those he cannot corrupt.

- Kadelon visited three noble families – Oakwind, Graycloak, and Duskwillow – disguised in a black cloak and golden mask.
- Kadelon murdered Penvallen Graycloak. Penvallen's family made it look like an accident because they fear further deaths.
- Kadelon convinced Gertrude Duskwillow to give him access to Duskwillow Estate outside of the village of Peat where the Midnight Maul would like to set up a new headquarters for their artifact hunting.
- Kadelon threatened and coerced Catella Oakwind to give him ten thousand gold pieces to fund the Midnight Maul. In exchange, he wouldn't reveal that the Oakwind family is secretly smuggling illicit goods to the Black Hand in the Lower Reaches.
- There's a secret entrance to the Graycloak townhouse in the sewers.
- The Graycloak family said their patriarch died while training but he was stabbed in the back and the wound doesn't fit the sword found with his body.
- Catella Oakwind is a member of the magistrate of Tombs who oversees the legal acquisition of relics from the ruins outside the city. Many of those relics have gone missing.
- Gertrude Duskwillow recently became infatuated with old and powerful artifacts lost in the city. She's whispered her disdain for the draconian rules of the Magistrate of Tombs.

LOCATIONS

- **Cenotaph of the Fallen Hero (ambush site).** Turned-over wagons, large cracked statue, abandoned buildings.
- **Oakwind Apartments.** Apartment building surrounding a huge oak tree, main and service entrances, half-constructed half-natural halls and rooms.
- **Graycloak Townhouse.** Subterranean entrance, secret office of incriminating evidence, bedroom murder scene.
- **Duskwillow Manor.** Horse stables, macabre paintings, hidden library, secret unholy shrine.

NPCs

- **Kadelon Halfbane / Augustin Lydara** – Elven veteran in league with the Midnight Maul. He's assassinating, coercing, blackmailing, and intimidating nobility to support the artifact collection of the Midnight Maul.
- **Catella Oakwind** – Halfling matriarch of the Oakwind family. She's been blackmailed to support the Midnight Maul by giving them ten thousand gold pieces in funding for the lives of her family members and use of their smuggling operation.
- **Penvallen Graycloak** – Assassinated patriarch of the Graycloak noble family who investigated the Midnight Maul. His family claims it was an accident because they fear reprisals from Midnight Maul. He hoped to expose the Midnight Maul and the nobility they had corrupted.
- **Gertrude Duskwillow** – Middle daughter of the Duskwillow family in league with the Midnight Maul. She agreed to let the Midnight Maul use Duskwillow Estate outside the village of Peat as a new headquarters.

MONSTERS

- Veterans
- Toughs
- Oozes
- Spies

REWARDS

- 412 CP, 526 SP, 198 GP
- 8 x 10 GP garnet gemstones
- Potion of poison
- Plagued flute that casts *insect plague*
- Boots of the Winterlands

SCENARIO 5: JOURNEY TO THE VILLAGE OF PEAT

In this overland and travel adventure (see chapter 5), the characters journey to the village of Peat, south of the City of Arches with plans to further investigate the Midnight Maul and infiltrate a gathering at Duskwillow Estate.

CHARACTERS

What roles fit the characters as they travel?
Which characters make sense for the roles of:

- Pathfinder
- Scout
- Provisioner

What other roles might characters take up such as morale, leader, or others?

START

The characters witness the imprisonment of agents and supporters of the Midnight Maul discovered in the Hunt for Kadelon Halfbane. Investigators found an invitation to a social gathering at Duskwillow Estate outside of the village of Peat, south of the City. Grevory Glassclaw, official of the Magistrate of Tombs, asks the characters to travel to Peat and infiltrate the gathering.

SCENES

- Imprisonment of the accomplices of the Midnight Maul.
- Provision for the journey to Peat.
- Choose a path:
- Well-traveled roads.
- Less-traveled game paths.
- Arrival at Peat.

SECRETS AND CLUES

- The captured agents of the Midnight Maul passed messages to other hidden cells before their capture.
- The nobles at Duskwillow Estates invited nobles of the Doorish Hills to a dinner and social gathering at the estate outside of Peat, four days south of the City of Arches.

- A group of brigands known as the Graystone Regulars harasses travelers along the roads between the City of Arches and Peat.
- The Midnight Maul bribed members of the Graystone Regulars to watch for the characters.
- The Midnight Maul hopes to use the Duskwillow Estate as their new base of operations.
- A small tribe of ogres known as the Fleshrenders operate between the City of Arches and the village of Peat. They worship the demon prince Karigulon.
- The Golden Knights send knight errants along the road between the city and Peat but less so in recent days. Villagers and travelers are often resentful.
- Travelers have spotted strange cultists and spellcasters along the roadways and trails between the City of Arches and Peat.
- Monuments and ruins of days long past jut up from the Doorish Hills between Peat and the City of Arches, exposed by erosion or dug up by greedy treasure hunters.
- The Doorish Hills skirt the ancient Briarheart Forest. Faerie folk and creatures of the wilds sometimes travel out of the forest.

LOCATIONS

Several waypoints mark the way between the City of Arches and the village of Peat. It takes roughly four days of travel to go from the city to Peat.

- **The Smoldering Cairn.** A fire giant cairn haunted by burning undead.
- **Arcane Circle of Chuul.** Overconfident gnomish wizards opened a rift to Chuul through which acidic hell hounds emerged.
- **Academy of Qor.** A forgotten academy overtaken by diseased plant life and haunted by a half-human half-shambling mound professor.
- **The Sphere of the Other Side.** An obsidian sphere summoned by a fel ritual. It summons specters into its foggy surroundings.
- **The Worldwalk Mines.** Ethereal mines dug by sorcery piercing through one world and into

another frozen world. The bodies of titanic frost giants lay deep in the ice.

- **The Orrery of Summer's End.** A magical orrery showing the positioning of the planet, suns, and other celestial objects where travelers come to note the changing of the seasons.

NPCs

- **Knight Captain Bryde.** A planetouched captain of the Golden Knights – overworked and tired of hearing complaints from local travelers.
- **Amanla Landon.** An opportunistic rabbitfolk merchant who brings leatherworks from Peat to the City of Arches and exotic spices from the city back to Peat.
- **Evrant Longtooth.** Lizardfolk hunter who seeks the Fleshrenders.
- **Carolyn Foxglove.** Gnome spy of the Midnight Maul posing as a scout of the Golden Knights.
- **Mason Gloomborn.** Bandit leader of the Graystone Regulars and outcast from Peat.

MONSTERS

1. Fleshrend Ogres seeking their next meal.
2. Knight guards of the Golden Knights weary from travel.
3. Graystone bandits seeking a toll.
4. Spies and veterans hired by the Midnight Maul hunt the characters.
5. A young green dragon seeking a new lair and hunting ground.
6. Priests and acolytes of Sulin seeking the sundial at Pete.

REWARDS

- 422 CP, 459 SP, 269 GP
- 6 x 10 GP bloodstone gemstones
- 50 GP pair of bronze dragon bookends
- Restorative Ointment
- Dust of Dryness
- Efficient Quiver
- Bestial holy game piece that casts *Seeming* once

SCENARIO 6: GATHERING AT THE DUSKWILLOW ESTATE

In this roleplaying and intrigue adventure (see chapter 5) the characters infiltrate a social gathering at Duskwillow Manor outside the village of Peat. There they seek to uncover agents and accomplices of the Midnight Maul and discover the Maul's plan to activate a powerful and dangerous relic at a ruined shrine.

CHARACTERS

What can each character do during this roleplaying and intrigue adventure? What fun activities might more physically-aligned characters engage in during this session? What roles or disguises might the characters don to infiltrate the party? What roles might the characters play to join the party?

START

The characters witness a known agent of the Midnight Maul in Peat. The agent recognizes the characters and flees. Whether defeated or interrogated, the characters learn the time and location of a social gathering taking place at Duskwillow Manor. Lavashta Redwind, a gnome agent of the Magistrate of Tombs here in Peat, suggests the characters infiltrate the gathering at Duskwillow Manor.

SCENES

- Interrogate the agent of the Midnight Maul.
- Meet with Lavashta Redwind, agent of the Magistrate of Tombs.
- Choose roles and discuss approach for the gathering.
- Join the social gathering.
- Identify agents and accomplices of the Midnight Maul.
- Learn of the plot to activate a dangerous relic at the ruined shrine of Father Grimskull outside of Peat.

SECRETS AND CLUES

- Representatives from four noble families and merchant guilds are represented at the gathering: the Spellsong mage's guild, the Duskwillow family, the Vindelar family, and the Pepperbox merchant guild.

- The entire Duskwillow family is firmly entrenched with the Midnight Maul. They're seeking to corrupt or coerce other families and merchant guilds to join them, either knowingly or unknowingly.
- Some members of the Spellsong mage's guild already work with the Midnight Maul. This inner-ring cabal calls themselves the Stars of the Dead Night.
- Representatives of the Pepperbox merchant guild dealt with smuggles of the Black Hand out of the City of Arches but aren't yet working with the Midnight Maul.
- The affluent Vindelar family isn't aware of the criminal activities of the other three groups. They came to the event simply to be with their rich peers.
- The Midnight Maul seeks money, political connections, and access to trading resources, mining resources, and caravan routes throughout the area.
- The Midnight Maul gave a powerful artifact to the Stars of the Dead Night who plan to activate it at a ruined shrine of Father Grimskull, one of the forgotten gods of the Lower Twelve. Unleashing this artifact could have grave consequences for the region around Peat.
- Father Grimskull was a fell god of undeath and forbidden knowledge, sometimes known as the Pale Lord.
- Members of the the Midnight Maul and the Stars of the Dead Night, along with mercenaries they hired, already traveled to the shrine and will begin the ritual the following day. The artifact, the Unholy Thurible of the Pale Lord is able to summon demons and undead.
- The Midnight Maul knows of another buried cache of relics and plans to extract it – eliminating the villagers of the village surrounding the dig.
- Lausus Lionfang, a field agent of the Midnight Maul, has the details of this attack and is at the shrine of Father Grimskull.

LOCATIONS

This scenario uses the Estate Map found in appendix \$. Use the following room descriptions to improvise locations as needed.

- **Ground Floor.** Patio, central foyer, dining room, kitchen, sitting room, library, music room, office, wine closet.
- **Upper Floor.** Balcony, servants quarters, majordomo's quarters, master bedroom, guest rooms, sitting room.
- **Cellars.** Food pantry, butcher's chamber, wine closet, smuggling chamber, hidden shrine, secret exit.

NPCs

- **Kimvall Vindelar** Elf matron of the Vindelar family. Boastful, loud.
- **Imedia Ironbound.** Dwarf merchant of the Pepperbox Merchant guild. Smart, direct.
- **Joyvesa Frostgaze.** Mage of the Spell song Mage's Guild. Sly, quiet, always watching.
- **Helvena Duskwillow.** Eldest daughter of the Duskwillow family in charge of Duskwillow Estate. Nervous, laughs a lot, socializer.
- **Echo Tavestron.** Tiefling majordomo of the Duskwillow Estate. Quiet, loyal.
- **Cecil Dragonblood.** Dragonborn secret agent of the Midnight Maul. Ruthless, cunning.
- **Lavashta Redwind.** Secret agent of the Magistrate of Tombs. Direct, helpful.

MONSTERS

- Mercenary veterans of the Midnight Maul
- Mages of the Stars of the Dead Night
- Guardian helmed horrors and animated armor

REWARDS

- 580 SP, 3,364 GP, 94 PP
- 7 x 50 GP peridot gemstones
- 500 GP unholy glass fine mithral-inlaid lute
- Headband of Intellect
- Outerplanar cracked lamp that casts *Sunburst* once.

SCENARIO 7: THE SHRINE OF FATHER GRIMSKULL

In this combat-focused scenario (see chapter \$), the characters battle members of the Midnight Maul, the Stars of the Dead Night, and the horrors they summon with their unholy thurible at the ruined temple of Father Grims skull.

CHARACTERS

What combat capabilities do each of the characters bring? What types of monsters do they work well against? What elements of their character do the players enjoy using?

START

On their journey to the ruined temple of Father Grims skull, the characters battle mercenary forces protecting the outer perimeter of the shrine. They learn that the Stars of the Dead Night began using their unholy thurible to summon horrors from the lower planes.

SCENES

- Defeat the mercenary sentries outside of the temple.
- Infiltrate the temple and battle the inner ring guards.
- Engage enemies conducting the ceremony.
- Close the unholy rift.

SECRETS AND CLUES

- The Stars of the Dead Night, a secret sect of the Spell song Mage's Guild, learned how to use the Unholy Thurible of the Pale Lord to open a portal to the lower planes, drawing both undead and demons into the world.
- The Midnight Maul and Stars of the Dead Night hope to conscript these summoned beings to battle on their side and hunt down further lost relics.
- The Midnight Maul hired a mercenary fire giant name Sk ratha the Scorched to protect their interests here at the ruined temple.
- The Midnight Maul have campaigns both political and violent. They use anyone to get what they want with both coin and sword.
- Father Grims skull's symbol is a grinning skull with a black rose in its teeth. His domain

includes death, undeath, sadness, defeat, and mourning. He is also a favorite deity of those seeking forbidden relics and lore.

- The Thurible of the Pale Lord can open a rift to the world of Threska, the Desert of Dead Gods. A world of bone deserts and ruined cities with three uncaring suns hanging overhead. Undead and demons alike haunt the barren lands.
- The forces of the Midnight Maul hired a bandit and mercenary army called the Red Teeth to attack the village of Faerie's Blossom so they can access a stash of relics buried beneath the town.
- Scouts of the Red Teeth already ride to Faerie's Blossom with the larger force occupying a ruined keep a half-day's journey away.
- The Midnight Maul and the Stars of the Dead Night already used the Thurible to summon dozens of skeletons which they sent to the ruined keep for the coming attack on Faerie's Blossom.
- The inner ring of leadership of the Midnight Maul is well protected. Few know of the true identity of the Maul's leader, known only as the Lord of Depths.

LOCATIONS

This scenario uses the temple map in appendix \$. Most of the focus is on the large temple area. The other chambers can be explored once the main battles are done.

Carved Pillars. Outside of the temple, the characters engage with several veterans, ogres, and a mage of the Stars of Night scouting the perimeter of the temple.

Temple Entrance. Two mercenary hill giants guard the entrance.

Temple Interior. Huge crumbled statue of Father Grims skull, large summoning portal in the center of the chamber with a rift to Threska, ranged defensive positions on the stairs above.

NPCs

- **Vorys Swifttail.** Lizardfolk scout loyal to the Magistrate of Tombs keeping an eye on the temple and its recent inhabitants. Possibly captured.

- **Aveline Northbond.** Mage and representative of the Stars of Dead Night during the ceremony. Leader of the mages and cult fanatics engaged in the ceremony.
- **Gavis Silverteeth.** Warlord in charge of the Midnight Maul members during the ceremony.
- **Skratha the Scorched.** Fire giant mercenary and guard during the ceremony.

MONSTERS

- **Sentry Party.** Veterans, mage.
- **Entryway.** Hill giants
- **Summoning Chamber Wave 1.** Warlord, veterans, mage, fire giant
- **Summoning Chamber Wave 2.** Lots of skeletons
- **Summoning Chamber Wave 3.** Undead demon of Threska

REWARDS

- 498 SP, 3,465 GP, 105 PP
- 7 x 50 GP jasper gemstones
- 500 GP primordial shadowy gold ewer
- Potion of Growth
- Ring of Evasion
- Undead spiked necklace that casts *circle of death* once

SCENARIO 8: THE DEFENSE OF FAERIE'S BLOSSOM

In this defense-focused scenario (see chapter \$), the characters defend the village of Faerie's Blossom from the marauders of the Midnight Maul. This scenario uses the village map, keep ruins, and underground lake maps in appendix \$.

CHARACTERS

What role can each character take in preparing the town for battle? What types of defensive situations are each of the characters good at? What connections to the village or its residents might the characters have?

START

The scenario begins when the characters intercept a scouting party of bandits and veterans on their way back from reconnoitering the village of Faerie's Blossom. From them (or on their remains), the party learns that the Red Teeth, a mercenary army, is going to attack the village in three days time.

SCENES

- Intercept the scouting party
- Meet with the elders of Faerie's Blossom
- Plan their defense
- Infiltrate the ruined keep (optional)
- Defend Faerie's Blossom

SECRETS AND CLUES

- The Red Teeth are going to attack the village of Faerie's Blossom in three days. They have orders to conscript those strong enough to dig on behalf of the Midnight Maul and kill everyone else.
- The Red Teeth currently operate out of a ruined keep once housing armies of Sevelet, a fire giant warlord in service to the Nameless King.
- The minotaur bandit warlord, Vistan Thunderhoof, leads the Red Teeth, the mercenary company made up of several humanoid species and several giants.
- The human mage Salasta Flametouched acts as advisor to Vistan. She is an agent of the Midnight Maul and it's her duty to prepare

Faerie's Blossom for the extraction of relics below.

- Faerie's Blossom sits atop a series of caverns touched by the land of the Faeries. An archway and several relics of the world of the fey reside below. The villagers keep this secret and consider it forbidden to go down into the caverns.
- Vistan is extremely arrogant and thinks wiping out Faerie's Blossom won't be difficult.
- Vistan and the Red Teeth are likely to attack from the south. They'll split off if they meet resistance, which they do not expect.
- The connection to the land of the Faeries keeps the farmland of Faerie's Blossom lush and the waters clean. The people of Faerie's Blossom know the blessing of the fey is on them but rarely talk about it.
- Glenva the Golden Hart is a duchess of the fey court. She can be called upon at her altar in the caves and, if given a suitable offering, might join in the defense of Faerie's Blossom.
- The Red Teeth have several camps outside of the ruins of Ironblood Keep. Vistan, Salasta, and other lieutenants stay within the broken walls of the keep. Forgotten chambers lie below the keep but dangers within keep the Red Teeth away.

LOCATIONS

- **Faerie's Blossom.** Large lake; temple to Predalion, god of travel and trade; large town hall; shrine to the Summer Queen; secret cove entrance to the Faerie Caves.
- **Faerie Caves.** Lake of colors; chamber of relics; altar to Glenva the Golden Hart.
- **Ironblood Keep.** Former keep of the fire giant Sevelet; fallen walls, crumbling guard towers; forgotten dungeons.

NPCs

- **Nemea Gant.** Halfling village elder of Faerie's Blossom. Thoughtful and observant.
- **Nykka Lowbrow.** Human troublemaker who thinks the whole attack is a ruse. Crass and loud.

- **Vistan Thunderhoof.** Minotaur bandit warlord of the Red Teeth. Ruthless and driven.
- **Salasta Flametouched.** Human mage, advisor, and agent of the Midnight Maul. Manipulative and easily angered.
- **Glenda the Golden Hart.** Fayfolk druid of the land of the Fey. Even-tempered but stubborn.

MONSTERS

- Minotaur warlord
- Mage
- 12 x veterans
- 2 x hill giants
- 4 x ogres
- 54 x bandits

REWARDS

- 528 SP, 2,682 GP, 97 PP
- 7 x 50 GP lapis lazuli gemstones
- 500 GP feytouched garnet ring
- 2 x Potion of Healing (Superior)
- Bracers of Archery
- Fey goblet that casts *heal* once

CAMPAIGN CONCLUSION

If you're using these adventure outlines as a model for your own campaign, the campaign can conclude in several ways:

- The characters could destroy the leaders of the Midnight Maul, ending their threat.
- The characters could bring evidence to the leaders of the Golden Council, exposing corrupted nobles. They could, for example, have witnesses from both Faerie's Blossom, the Shrine of Father Grimskull, and the Duskwillow Estate that exposes the entire network of the Midnight Maul.
- The Midnight Maul's efforts could end at Faerie's Blossom or the Shrine of Father Grimskull when the characters end their activities.

Aim for the conclusion the characters seek as they come closer to the end of the campaign. See Ending Campaigns in chapter 5 for details.

APPENDIX A – AN RPG READING LIST

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

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Tales of the Valiant: Player's Ghode, Monster Vault, and Game Master's Guide. Kobold Press, 2024. <https://www.talesofthevaliant.com>

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Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2018.
Sly Flourish's City of Arches. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2024.
Sly Flourish's Fantastic Adventures. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2017.
Sly Flourish's Fantastic Lairs. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2020.
Sly Flourish's Ruins of the Grendleroot. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2019.
The Lazy DM's Companion. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2021.
The Lazy DM's Forge of Foes. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2023.
The Lazy DM's Workbook. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2018.
The Lazy Dungeon Master. Vorpall Quill LLC, 2012.