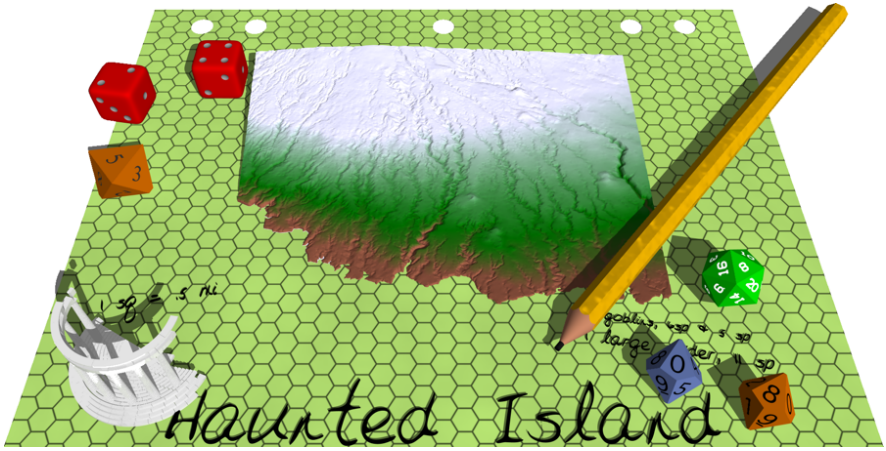
The Adventure Guide's Handbook



For **Gods & Monsters** Adventure Guides

The Gods & Monsters Adventure Guide's Handbook

by Jerry Stratton

http://www.godsmonsters.com/Guide/

In the beginning there was nothing.

God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light.

There was still nothing, but you could see it a lot better.

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The quote on the front page is sometimes attributed to Ellen Degeneres and sometimes to Dave Thomas (presumably of Bob & Doug Mackenzie fame), but I have not seen any attribution that specifies when or where they said it. It's a good quote for adventure writers, however, no matter who said it. Ceci n'est pas un jeu.

Running the Game

The Adventure Guide's purpose is to:

1. Provide the opportunity for adventure.
2. Decide the odds.

Deciding odds is relatively easy. When a player has their character do something that isn't automatically successful, you choose the ability the player rolls against and the ease or difficulty of the roll. There's a table for this in the rulebook. All you need do is decide if the task is "easy", "difficult", "a snap", or "nearly impossible", and so on.

The hard part of being an Adventure Guide is providing the opportunity for adventure. This means creating and role-playing all of the people, creatures, and situations that the player characters encounter.

Providing adventure opportunities involves both preparation and execution. What kind of preparation and execution will depend on the kinds of adventure you and your friends enjoy. Preparation can include drawing maps of places to explore, outlining encounter timelines, and preparing statistics for non-player characters.

Execution can include describing those places as the player characters see them, unfolding encounters according to player character actions, role-playing the other characters and creatures that the player characters encounter, and managing conflicts (fights) between player characters and non-player characters.

As the Adventure Guide, your duty is to present the game world, its inhabitants, and its choices to the players. Other games call your role gamemaster, referee, and storyteller. You are all of those titles. As gamemaster you are the player who can most make or break the other players' enjoyment of the game. As referee you are called on to mediate between the players and the non-player characters and situations in which the players' characters find themselves. As storyteller you will present the various threads, events, situations, backstories, and adventure hooks that the players will choose from to create the narrative of their adventures.

Some players will prefer fewer choices, some more. It is up to you to discover which they prefer and to create the adventure accordingly.

Remember that the players' characters are the heroes of the story. Everything that you create are vehicles for the player characters to be heroic. All of the adventures, the non-player characters, the countries and continents and worlds, are all for their benefit. It's your situation, and their story.

Remember also that role-playing gaming is a shared experience. Everything that you do as Guide you do along with the other players in the game. Role-playing is not an adversarial game, and Guiding is not an adversarial experience. You can't

win if the players lose. “Losing” and “winning” should not retain their traditional meaning in a role-playing game. You aren’t the dealer in blackjack.

Managing Game Sessions

In a moment we’ll start talking about how to create adventures, how to determine the outcomes of the struggles and contests the player characters take part in, and how to manage the world in which these adventures and struggles occur. Right now, I want to talk a little about being an Adventure Guide in general.

Organizing game sessions

As the Adventure Guide, you will have your hands full creating the non-player characters and the adventures. Request an organizationally-minded player to organize the game, to make sure everyone is at the right place at the right time, with the right food and other materials.

Normally you will game in someone’s living room, dining room, or basement. You’ll want a table on which you can roll dice and put snacks, and space for everyone to sit comfortably. Often, you’ll all sit around a kitchen or dining room table, but you can also sit on couches and chairs around a coffee table. Choose a setting that is comfortable and that encourages communication.

Reasons and examples

Being an Adventure Guide is not difficult, but it does require paying attention to other players, and it requires a willingness to deviate from—yet stay true to—your pre-made plans. Within your adventure notes, you will have both reasons and examples. Your notes might say that Count Renard is angry at the peasants because they haven’t been able to pay enough taxes to maintain his lifestyle. As an example your notes might say that if someone tries to organize a county fair, he will forbid this, because it wastes too much money.

But other things are also happening, and if the players choose to have their characters do something that invokes this reason, you’ll need to decide what Count Renard’s reaction will be. You’ll be creating your own “examples”. The players might also anticipate Renard’s reaction and try to convince him otherwise. It’s up to you to judge the difficulty of their success.

What is this game about?

Gods & Monsters is about taking on the role of archetypal fantasy figures, delving into mysterious ruins, meeting strange and exotic creatures, defeating them in

tactical encounters, solving cryptic riddles, and finding arcane treasures in the hoards hidden beyond these exotic creatures and puzzles. Weird places. Exotic creatures. Battle. Treasure. Riddles in darkness. Every adventure should have at least two from that list.

What happens during an adventure?

There are certain things that each player should be doing at any moment during the game. If these things are not happening, chances are good someone isn't having fun.

1. Meeting the inhabitants of the world;
2. Seeing the world;
3. Making a choice for their characters;
4. Solving puzzles as players, using their characters as tools;
5. Resolving issues, such as fights, using game rules;
6. Resolving issues, such as calming a bureaucrat, using role-playing;
7. Talking amongst themselves as characters;
8. Talking amongst themselves as friends.

I may have forgotten something in this list but basically, something needs to be happening for every player at all times. These are things that the players should be doing. It isn't enough that you are presenting one of these to one or two of the players. All of the players need to be doing one or more of these things.

If that something is "talking amongst themselves as friends," you may want to consider if something game-related ought to be happening. Kibitzing among yourselves is a time-honored tradition in role-playing games. Different groups spend differing amounts of time on non-game-related items. But in general, people are at the table to game. Sometimes, kibitzing is an indication that the players have finished their "turn" and it is up to you to present the next situation they find themselves in.

Describe what characters see, but not what characters do: that's up to the players. If nothing is happening, don't spend too much time describing it. There is no need to role-play nothing. If you know, for example, that nothing is going to happen on a seven-day journey, ask the players if their characters are going to do anything in those seven days, resolve those things, if any, and then the journey ends. Move on to the next scene.

Conversely, if the players want to play the whole seven-day journey, you need to make sure that something happens on those days: they need to be meeting inhabitants, seeing the world, making choices, and resolving issues.

Something needs to be happening for every player at all times. Whether fighting toe-to-claw with a dragon or hiding from that dragon behind a rock, you'll need to

ensure that each player has the opportunity to act and react to something in the game.

Even if one of the characters is unconscious, you keep coming back to that player, even if it is only to describe the darkness. There might be a way for the player to bring their character back to consciousness; there might be something in the game that wants to bring that character into the spotlight. And in any case, the player should still be providing advice to the group, and taking part in game banter. If they aren't, draw them out.

Remember that each character is the main character in the story. Whatever the main character does is the focus of the story.

Choosing opponents

You'll notice, in the *Encounter Guide*, that the die you roll to determine survival points for creatures is usually not d10. Combine this with the player characters' automatic first level survival/verve maximum, and player characters can usually defeat opponents that are equal to their own level.

As the characters rise in level, they'll be able to compete against opponents that are of higher and higher relative levels. You'll have to judge how much higher based on their previous experience against such opponents and how much assistance (such as magic items or spells) they have.

In general, the main opponent will be higher level than the characters, but will have lower level henchman and other forces for the characters to struggle against. During the climax of the adventure, they will strive against this primary antagonist that is higher level than they are.

Adventures must respond to player action

Be fair to the players. If they successfully capture the main villain in the opening scene of your planned five-part adventure, don't fudge the roll. The adventure must respond to the players. If the villain's capture leaves a power vacuum, use that. If it doesn't, then the rest of the adventure will be the townsfolk fêting the players.

It follows that you don't want scripted five-part adventures. Create situations, describe the situation in your notes, and have the situation respond to the characters.

Players care when they have choices and a voice. When they don't have choices, when their actions don't matter, they don't care. The NPC who is going to die "five minutes before the player characters arrive even if they show up early, because that's the way the adventure has to work" isn't an NPC they care about.

Their actions don't matter; to the extent they do, the best thing for the player characters to do is stay away. The NPC then remains alive.

When you create these situations, there must be a reason. And since there's a reason, it is possible for the characters to foil that reason. Is the villain trying to frame the player characters? Then the villain will lure the characters into arriving immediately after the murder. *But the player characters can outwit the villain if they figure things out ahead of time.* They might even blunder into outwitting the villain. But the situation must respond to the player characters. They must be able to poke the anthill.

Now, there is a bit of a contradiction here: most adventures happen because the characters arrive. The reason teenagers have been being kidnapped over the last several weeks is, in game terms, because the player characters need an adventure now. All the reasons in the world don't change this. Because of that, however, it is very important for the rest of the adventure to be something they can affect.

Gods and Monsters is not a game of readers discovering storylines. It's a game of heroes taking action. You are playing to find out what happens.

Adventures

I'm going to let you in on a really big Guide secret. Let's say the adventurers are sitting in the tavern and they decide to go west, over the mountains, and you've never even thought about what lies over the mountains or how those mountains might be crossed. What do you do?

Make something up and run with it. Make it up, or steal it, as appropriate. You can steal game ideas from sources as diverse as current events and obscure music. Your favorite books are bound to have great ideas for adventures or obstacles to put the player characters front and center.

That's what you do with everything as the Guide. You make it up, or you borrow it from someone else who made it up. It's not even really a secret. It's merely a question of when you make it up and how far you run with it.

Normally, you'll try to make an adventure up before the game starts. There are only a few basic kinds of adventures. Most adventures are expansions and combinations of the basic adventures.

Adventures at their most basic consist of a group of characters taking part in a set of encounters. The other players will provide the characters. Your job is to provide the encounters. Often, these encounters will be placed on a map that you've drawn. Each encounter might be marked or numbered, and a corresponding adventure key will describe each marked encounter. Often, characters will not meet each encounter. The players will choose which direction to go, and their characters will meet encounters based on that decision.

An "encounter" is either a place, a creature or group of creatures, or an item or set of items. A place is a location, usually one of the most basic parts of your map. A forest, a river, or a castle are all places, as are the rooms within the castle. Places often contain other encounters. A place might contain a creature, an item, or another place, or any combination of these. A wilderness might contain a ruined temple as one place. The key for the wilderness map would then describe the ruined temple as it looks from the outside. But the ruined temple might have its own map, containing all the places ("rooms") inside the temple. Places inside the temple are likely to contain encounters with creatures and with items.

Creatures are any person, monster, or animal that the player characters can interact with. A townsperson is a creature, as is a goblin, a dragon, or a deer or squirrel. A talking mirror might be a creature, if it is intelligent, or an item if not—or it might be both. Creatures will sometimes carry items. The manner in which characters interact with creatures will make or break the adventure in the minds of the players.

Items are things that the characters can take, manipulate, or view. Items can be treasure, tools, machinery, games, toys, furniture, or writing scrawled on a dungeon door. Gold coins are items, as are magic swords, books, or paintings.

Characters will often collect unique and marketable items for later use or sale, or simply because the player feels it is within the character's role to want that particular item.

Campaigns

An adventure is a short story or a chapter in a longer story. A campaign is a series of adventures with some theme binding them together, or with some goal at the end that each adventure rises toward. You won't know what the campaign is during the first adventure, nor will you know the theme. You probably won't know what the campaign is during the second adventure. Because of this, your first few adventures should not be designed with a specific campaign end in mind. The players will pick up on what they want the campaign to be during those adventures.

Think of a campaign as a sculpture. Your friends are the sculptors, hacking away at your block of marble until the campaign shows through. Always pay attention to what they're hacking away at. Even if you think that your group has decided on the campaign in the first session, watch the other players. They may have changed their mind. Sometimes what we think is going to be fun is not what turns out to be fun.

Create something to explore

The first step to creating an adventure is to create something to explore. The adventures on *godsmonsters.com* include a ruined castle with a secret dungeon (*Lost Castle of the Astronomers*, *Illustrious Castle*), a magical underground world with caverns leading to strange places (*Vale of the Azure Sun*), an abandoned mansion (*House of Lisport*), and a pair of fantastic cities and a modern gambling casino (*Helter Skelter*). Other fascinating adventures that I can recommend are an ancient shrine of an ancient race (*Hammers of the God*), the remnants of an ancient city (*Caverns of Thracia*), and a meandering passage through a mountain (*Fell Pass*).

If it's interesting, and it can be explored, it should be a good adventure. Write a short description of what makes it an adventure.

> *The Order of Illustration formed to safeguard knowledge from before the Cataclysm. They traveled west from Crosspoint and established Illustrious Castle on the western face of the High Divide. The city of Biblyon grew around them.*
>
> *The Order destroyed themselves when they tried to summon a demon in their secret underground complex. The demon still haunts the crumbling castle, and it is growing stronger.*

After you know what the adventurers will explore, populate it with monsters and other non-player characters for the adventurers to encounter, as well as traps for them to spring and treasure for them to find. Make maps as necessary, and expand on the history of the location and its denizens as you fill out the maps. Think about reasons for the adventurers to want to go there.

The rest of this section will help you create more interesting and rich adventures, but that's the basic idea. Create something to explore, reasons to explore it, and dangers within it.

Kinds of adventures

Dungeons and ruins

Abandoned underground settings such as dungeons, mines, and ancient cities, as well as above-ground ruins and castles, are wonderful settings for adventures. The 'dungeon' is not totally abandoned: it is now occupied by monsters. Some of its traps may still be functional, and there may be newer traps created by the newer denizens.

Dungeons will also often contain clues as to who used to live there, why, and why they don't live there now.

There are many parts to the fun of dungeon exploration: discovering their existence, traveling to them, entering them, exploring them, and getting out rich and alive.

A variation on the abandoned ruin is the citadel or stronghold created expressly to protect or imprison a special artifact or creature. The traps in these dungeons will often be in full working order.

Intrigue

Adventures of intrigue often happen in cities. The characters might get caught up in a rebellion or in stopping a rebellion, or they might be charged with the investigation of a crime that someone else doesn't want investigated. Or they discover that there's treachery afoot—or perhaps they *are* the treachery.

Adventures of intrigue don't have to be overtly political. The classic hard-boiled detective story is an adventure of intrigue. If the story has "byzantine" plot twists, it is an adventure of intrigue. That's what "byzantine" means: it's from "Byzantium", the Eastern Roman Empire, which was known for its byzantine plots and politics.

Puzzles and riddles

Whatever other kind of adventure it is, adventures are often puzzles that need to be solved. When you present the other players with a puzzle, you'll need the puzzle to make sense, so that you'll know, when they come up with a solution you didn't think of, whether or not that solution will work. You will also need to make sure that you know of some solutions that will work and place clues around the rest of the adventure, but the most important part of puzzle adventures is letting the adventure react, like an ant-hill, to the probing of the player characters.

Tactical

Where political intrigue ends, wars begin. Characters might join an army and fight in a larger battle under higher command, or they might lead their own troops in battle, or they might act as a special strike force.

Characters also can involve themselves in battle because they are protecting someone or a group of people from another group, as in movies like "The Seven Samurai".

Sightseeing

Some great adventures can be had simply traveling from place to place. Adventurers can marvel at new cities, meet new people, and see new things. Characters often travel between adventures, and this travel can itself be an adventure.

Sightseeing adventures are often a collection of "marvels", strange things that they can tell stories about when they retire and return home.

Reasons for adventures

The reasons that characters go on adventures are much more varied. A king might send them on a quest to find a powerful item of magic. During this quest, they travel to strange lands, occasionally enter and search ancient ruins, involve themselves in foreign political intrigues, and protect helpless villagers from danger.

Or people are disappearing from their home town, and they investigate what's happening. During the investigation, they solve a mystery, infiltrate the kidnappers' stronghold, and engage the kidnappers in battle.

Or something evil is happening, and it sounds a lot like something evil that happened a long time ago to a near-mythical ancient culture. Can the adventurers find the ruins of that culture and search for clues as to what is happening before it's too late?

Foreshadowing adventures

Foreshadowing means giving the characters clues to an adventure or adventure goal well before the adventure starts. For example, rather than giving them the tale of Eric the Bald's treasure the night you're going to start running the adventure, you have them hear it in a bar three or four adventures earlier. This adds realism and believability to the game—the game world doesn't look as if it's being created on the spot to fit the plot.

If you have a good idea of the history and cultures in your world, some foreshadowing will happen automatically. If you know that there was a war with goblins fifty years ago, you will have already had veterans of the goblin wars hanging out in taverns, and perhaps teaching the neophyte warriors how to fight. Later on, when you decide to run an adventure in an old, undead battlefield, you'll have the goblin wars ready to use for that purpose.

It is relatively easy to foreshadow adventures. When you get an idea for an adventure sometime in the future, write the idea down. Later, have a troubadour, grizzled veteran, or foreign traveler tell a story about that adventure idea. Sure, when you sit down to actually write the adventure, everything isn't going to match with the story the player characters heard. But that's realistic, too.

The magic items that characters find can also lead them to adventure. If you think that you'd like to have an adventure in an abandoned underground Dwarf stronghold sometime, make one of the magic items that the characters find be from that stronghold. Not only will this add an internal consistency to the game, it will also make the characters that much more likely to want to follow that adventure. They already know that the Dwarfs of that stronghold built some useful stuff!

Layering

If the characters are going to progress through multiple adventures, you will need to provide layers of knowledge in your world, layers which the characters will peel back like an onion. Clues left in previous storylines will grow to adventures after the characters "solve" or "complete" the current storyline.

Getting to the next adventure

Foreshadowing is a useful way of letting the players know where the next adventures are, but remember that having fun is not a riddle for the players to solve. If you and the other players have reached a decision about where the game should evolve or move, but this also requires some action on the part of the player characters, you'll need to let the players know this. You'll need to tell them what their characters need to do, and let them role-playing the characters realizing it. This is often important between adventures, when player character choices determine the *next* adventure.

Designing adventures

There is never a script to a *Gods & Monsters* campaign. *Gods & Monsters* is designed around "sandbox" play. A sandbox is a place for the players to explore. The players know only a vague bit about the world, a little more about the town they're starting in (or visiting). There is no planned story in a sandbox, though a story may become evident after the players dig around. From the townsfolk and travelers the player characters learn about possible adventures, adventures that will trigger their "I will explore the ruins because" sentence.

Reading adventures is the best way to learn how to design them. If you're in a hurry, Jeff Rients has a great tutorial on writing a quick dungeon in *Fight On* #6, "I Need a Dungeon Right Now!" How you build your adventures will depend on what you enjoy about building adventures. I enjoy making maps and concocting stories of ruin. So I'll usually start with a vague idea, sketch a vague map, make a rough list of the things happening in and around that map, make a rough random encounter list, and then finalize the map in Inkscape. After the map is finalized I'll write an introduction to the adventure and a description for each encounter area.

The first adventure is the hardest, because you're starting from scratch. Afterward, I find it's easy to listen to the players, watch their characters' actions, and make new adventures based on what they want to do in the future. When gaming ends for the night, you should know what you'll need to have ready for the next session. If you don't, ask the players what they're going to do next.

Build the town

Many adventures, especially the first, have a town nearby. Towns are complex, and any reasonably-complete description of a town will be unreasonably hard to use. So keep your town descriptions simple. Provide only enough to remind yourself later of the town's feel. Then you can wing it when players ask for more information.

Name the town. Write a paragraph or two describing what it looks and feels like. If the player characters live here, describe it from the view of the townsfolk. If the player characters are visiting, describe from the view of someone walking into it. Consider putting it in a clearing or a valley so that you can describe it as they come over a hill or out of a forest on the outskirts of the town.

Name the tavern. Write a paragraph or two describing what it looks like and feels like when it's busy. Name one of the bartenders or barmaids.

Name either the dry goods merchant or the blacksmith. They will have information about the adventure—rumors, most likely—and will volunteer the information as the player characters buy goods. "Looks like you're setting up for a bit of a walkabout. Hey, be careful out there. You know what I heard?" And then comes a rumor about riches, dangers, and secrets.

Write a paragraph about one of the town leaders. He or she will be how the player characters learn more about the town's political structure. Don't worry if you change your mind later, they were misinformed or lying, or there's been political upheaval.

Write about a survivor. If there are old battlefields nearby, write a paragraph about one grizzled veteran of the war. Or, if there was a disaster long ago, write a paragraph about one survivor. Or if the royal court is (or was) nearby, write about an ancient person who remembers it. This person always hangs out at the local bar that the player characters patronize. The veteran has information that might lead to an adventure! Maybe not this adventure, if you already have a way for the player characters to get there. But sometime later, you'll discover something useful for this person to say. And they'll probably partially, but not completely, contradict your merchant or blacksmith.

Optional: If there is something that this town is known for—riverboats, or the slave-trade, or scholarship—write a paragraph about one person involved in that activity. A riverboat captain, or a boat's carpenter, or a slave trader or slave from a foreign land, or a scholar, or a bookseller. Describe them from the point of view of someone seeing them pass on the street. This person, like the veteran, will have information about adventures, possibly this one but definitely ones in the future.

Create a list of names. Write down six male names and six female names, with a blank space after each name. When the players need to meet someone new, you can quickly choose a name and write who they are in the blank spot. By writing down names ahead of time, you can collect names that reflect the history and feel of the culture. The *Story Games Name Project* can be helpful, but I also like to search on "language names", replacing "language" with a language that's close to what I want for the town. Then modify the names slightly, as necessary.

The Seven Pillars of Adventure

When you're writing an adventure, it may help to keep a checklist of seven important parts of an adventure. You can often build an adventure by working through these pillars in order.

Something hidden, secret, or lost

At the center of the adventure is something that the characters want to find, will find, or must solve, if they wish to fully complete the adventure. The secret is why the adventure exists. It may be the ghost trapped in the dungeons, or the treasure buried by pirates, or a ritual performed long ago. Or it might be a noble family's secret, or the real reason for war, or the true murderer in a murder mystery. The dungeon, castle, conflict, or mystery is built around this kernel.

The adventure's core

The core of the adventure is a place or situation that might even be called the genre of the adventure: an abandoned castle, a dungeon underneath the ground, a

war in progress or one that can be avoided, a mysterious crime, the defense of a town or individual. This is where most of your work writing the adventure's situations, locations, and people takes place.

Discover the possibility of adventure

Somehow the player characters must learn that the adventure exists—preferably in a way that ties them to the adventure, that makes them want to go there. Is one of the relatives of the player characters—or even one of the player characters—suspected in the crime? They may find out about the adventure when they're arrested. Or, through research, they may discover that something they want is rumored to be hidden in a lost castle. Many times, one adventure will lead to another: the captain of the guard had a treasure map, or the castle's scribe recorded that they lost the *Orb of Funiculata* in battle against the Southern Kingdom.

Often in an ongoing game, the possibility of adventure will come first. The player characters have found a sword with Elvish runes on it, so the players decide to travel to the Elvish lands and learn more about the sword. The players have now handed you the something lost and a good deal of the adventure's core, and they've taken care of the possibility of adventure.

Journey to the adventure

The player characters are here, and the adventure is there. The characters need to travel to the adventure. Whether it's through the city streets or through a vast wilderness or down through the sewers beneath their apartment, there is a transition that takes place. What is this transition, and who do they encounter along the way? Will they be traveling from the docks to the castle? What kinds of encounters will they have toward the docks, and what kind of encounters toward the castle? Or will they be traveling from the great city to uncharted wilderness? How will their encounters change as they leave civilization?

Meet someone on the fringe of the adventure

Who lives around the area where the adventure is? Are there goblins near the dungeon? A farmer's family caught up in the war? A streetwalker with her own opinion on the murderer's motive? The encounter on the fringe of the adventure will have some knowledge of the adventure itself (otherwise, they're just part of the journey to the adventure).

They might know something about where the adventure's core is located, or know some legends of how it came to be. They may have been driven out of the area, or drawn to it, or they happen to live there and they've incorporated the adventure's core into their culture and mythology. They might need to be protected from aspects of the adventure or outsmarted to gain entrance to it.

Puzzle or fight through the entrance

There's a reason that the adventure still exists: something blocks the entrance. Perhaps the entrance is hard to find; perhaps it is well-guarded by monsters.

Maybe the local constabulary doesn't want any meddlers. Maybe nobody involved even admits to the existence of the crime. Or their treasure map contains a riddle, and only by solving the riddle can they gain entrance to the treasure vault.

They need to overcome an obstacle for the privilege of taking part in the adventure.

The return home

Don't neglect the aftermath of the adventure. If the player characters are now heroes, play it out. If they're now rich, describe how they're treated, especially compared to how they were treated at the beginning of the adventure.

Or the journey home may be a gauntlet to fight through or avoid, because powerful forces covet the secret they've uncovered.

If they've cleared out a monster-infested castle, who waits to move in as they leave the premises? If they've ended a war, who is happy, and who is unhappy?

Listen to the players

You need a strong vision, but you also need to allow the players autonomy. In order to make an adventure interesting, it has to play on the players' interests for their characters. At first and second levels, look at the "I will explore the ruins because" sentences that the players wrote for their characters. These are what they think they want, and they might be right. Pay attention to them and see if you can incorporate opportunities to engage these goals in the adventures.

More importantly, look at the specialties that the players have chosen for their characters. These are the things that make their characters different, and they should have the opportunity to use these specialties. Their specialties should play a major role in the adventure.

Also, look at the fields and skills that the players have chosen for their characters. In *Gods & Monsters*, skill bonuses don't necessarily make a big difference to play, but they are things that the players care about. They should have the opportunity to use their skills in the game. Skills that are likely to be used with archetypal rolls should play a relatively major role in the adventure; other skills should play a minor role.

Design adventures that make their specialties, fields, skills, spells, and spirits useful.

Be generous

One of the hardest things about being an Adventure Guide is realizing that the players don't see the world from your perspective. The characters have the whole world at their disposal. The players have you and the dice. All that they know about their characters' world comes from the die rolls, your descriptions, and what you accept from their descriptions. Be generous. Be generous with your flavor text, be generous when you answer their questions, and be generous when they act

as if they have misunderstood what you meant to say. Make your die rolls in full sight of the players so that they can see how hard or easy it is for their opponents to succeed.

Build it one step at a time

Do not create an overarching story. Place many options in each adventure to intrigue them for the next adventure, and then let them choose the next adventure. As they progress through these adventures a theme will emerge, and you'll be able to craft the wider vision of what's going on in this world. Know that things are out there, and when the players ask about them, describe them. As they start focusing in on one direction, that's when you start expanding what you know about that destination. For example, your map might show an abandoned temple in the wilderness, but you'll put off writing the temple map key until the players show an interest in it.

Encounter entries

When you design adventures, you will often have entries for non-player characters that the characters may meet. Your notes may be as simple as "There are three ogres here," or it may include a detailed description of the ogre family's interpersonal relationships and what they'll be looking for in any encounter with the player characters. For any encounters that the players may end up interacting

with—especially if they may end up fighting with them—you probably will want to also note, in abbreviated form, the abilities of the creatures in question.

If the encounter listing involves a location, you may wish to include two descriptions, one for you and one for the players. The following example describes three ogres who are in their lair more often at night than during the day. They are evil, fantastic creatures that fight with spears, have a defense of 2, and have 27, 33, and 23 survival points respectively. The encounter is keyed as "23", probably on an accompanying map of the area. The first paragraph is for the players; it is what their characters see. This paragraph is usually set off from the rest of the text in some way, and is called "flavor text". The rest is for the Guide, and may or may not become available to the players' characters, depending on the characters' actions.

23. The Old Grotto

> *Faded marble columns, ancient and cracked, form a semi-circle around a large polished black stone. Vines twist around the columns, and bushes have overgrown the stone, nearly hiding it. Bones and garbage lie scattered about. An oddly warm and rank smell emanates from the cliff area to the south beneath a slight overhang.*

This was once a place of worship for the Ancients. The area to the south is the makeshift home of three Ogres: three brothers who left their clan in the High Divide during a battle with the Dwarves of Feltarn. The brothers don't like fighting; that's why they left. While they will have no qualms about intimidating (and even fighting) weaker groups, they are more than happy to ignore them or (if the visitors provide the alcohol) party with them. The Ogres will also be open to barter. Alcohol, food, and things that make their life easier, are all valuable to them.

The Ogres (Metlyl, Tekyrn, and Yskern) are very knowledgeable of the Goblin clans in the area, including their relative strengths, animosities, and homes. They've even had a few run-ins with the Kotorvato (wolf-rider) tribe. While the Ogres won't out-and-out lie to any moderately strong visitors, they won't be averse to saying something like "I heard one of the kotors mention something about that" to any request for information about something the Ogres don't know about. If the Ogres feel they could easily defeat the party, any lies are possible. Still, any charismatic and aware group should be able to acquire useful information from the three brothers.

The Ogres have little in the way of treasure. They've built a spit over a fire pit and put away a little bit of jerky for the winter. They also have three small obsidian wolf-statues "guarding" their fire pit. They took these from the worship area. They are finely crafted, worth about 100 silver coins and with a bulk of 10 each. The Ogres will talk to them as if they were real pets, but they're just joking with potential marks. They might try to convince a gullible person that the little statues are magical and worth trade for lots of money or some real magic, or some task.

Three Ogres (Evil, Fantastic: 5; Move: 12; Survival: 27, 33, 23; Defense: 2; Attack: spears; Damage: d8)

The ogres are here 40% of the time at night and 95% of the time during the day.

Flavor text

When writing flavor text or describing an encounter to the players, consider what their characters see, what they hear, what they smell, what they feel, and what they taste. If you find flavor text difficult to write (but find it easier to have flavor text than to describe encounters impromptu), first list what, if anything, the characters would see, hear, smell, feel, and/or taste. List these sensations in order of the most obvious, and then rewrite it as a descriptive paragraph.

Write about the most obvious features first, then the next-most obvious, and so on. This will help to ensure that if you are interrupted by the players, it will also make sense for the player characters to have ignored what you haven't yet mentioned.

After you write the flavor text, you'll write information that only the Guide knows, but which the characters might discover through careful searching or judicious use of logic. If you expect to make this adventure available publicly, remember that there is never any need to hide things from the Guide. The more relevant information you can give to the Guide, the more prepared the Guide will be for all the strange ideas players come up with. This is also helpful for you: it is amazing what you'll end up temporarily forgetting in the heat of a really good game session. I often bold important sentences or sentence fragments to highlight special abilities and triggering events.

Finally, keep your flavor text short. The players are there to act, not to listen. To paraphrase Vincent Baker, things happen in role-playing games because the players say something; cool things happen because the players say something cool. Design your flavor text with that in mind. Let the players be cool!

Encounter detail

Most of your non-player characters will be described as a short list of statistics, such as the ogres in the example grotto. You can find these statistics in the *Encounter Guide*. Within the encounter description you'll note the creatures' needs and motivations.

Some more important encounters will require more detail. Where necessary, you can add the non-player character's six abilities to the short description, or at least the abilities you expect to need.

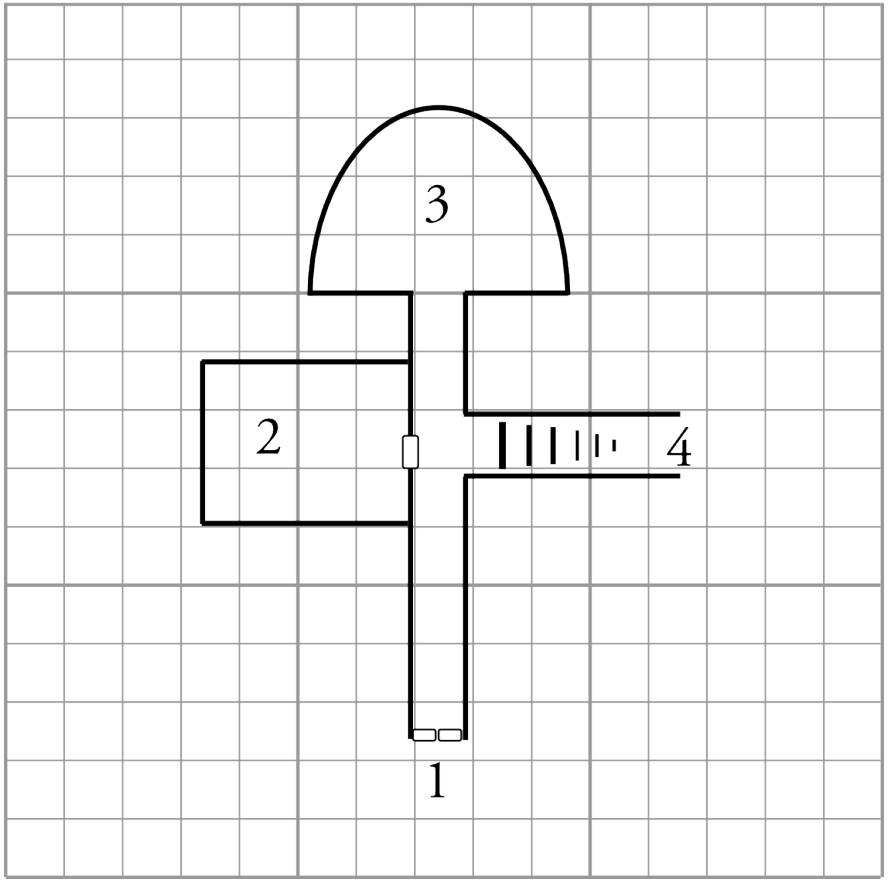
Finally, a few non-player characters are so important that you'll need a full character sheet for them. Usually, this will only be necessary for one or two non-player characters in any adventure. These are the creatures who hold potential of being major antagonists if they survive their encounter with the player characters.

Maps

Grids

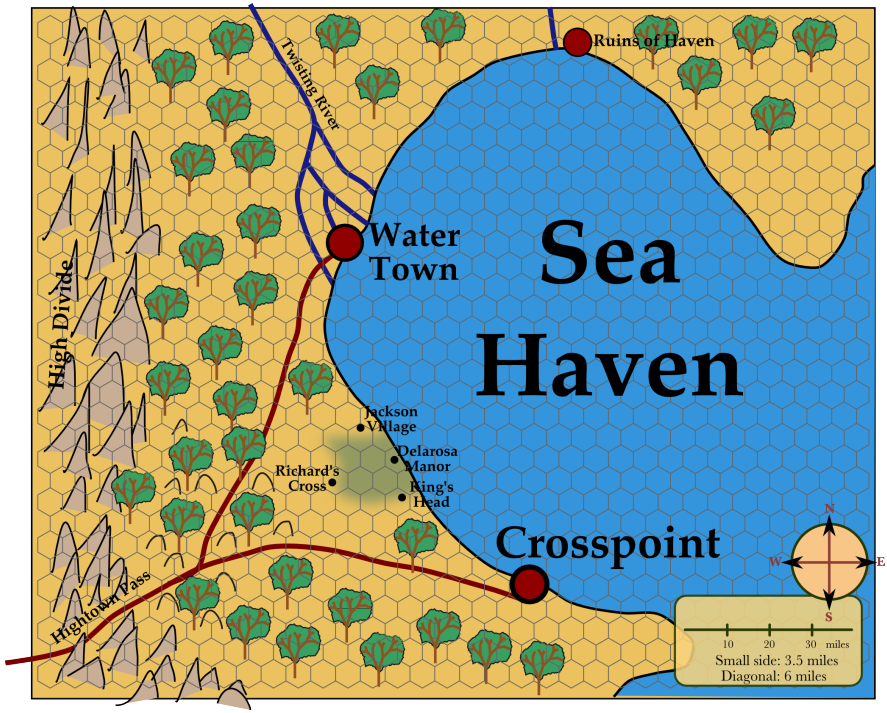
You can find square grids for drawing maps at any good stationery market. If you can find "engineering" pads, some lines will be marked with thicker lines, allowing you to easily count large distances on the map. If the small squares below are 5 feet, then the larger squares are 25 feet.

You may add up diagonals in a square map if you add 40% to the length of a square's sides. For example, if one square is five feet, a diagonal will be seven feet—and the diagonal across a large square is 35 feet. If one square is ten yards, the diagonal will be fourteen yards, and the diagonal across a large square is 70 yards.

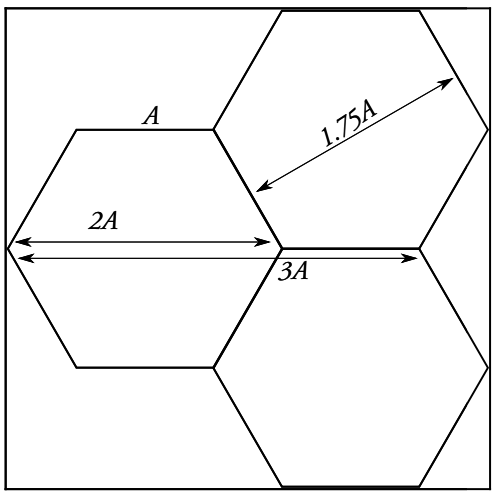


I also have some simple blank maps available as PDF files on the *Gods & Monsters* web site, at *godsmonsters.com/Game/Sheets/*.

Hex grids are useful for wilderness maps, because they provide more directions. Cells in hex maps have six sides, allowing you to easily add up diagonal directions.



If you need to know the math, the distance between two opposing vertices is twice the length of a side. The distance between two sides (how you'll normally measure a hex) is three quarters larger than a side.



This means that if you are counting straight across, each two hexes are three times the length of one of the hex's sides. Usually, you'll want to provide, on the map, the "diagonal" distance as well as the short or long distance, so you won't have to do the math during the game. If you use two as the side distance, the diagonal distance is 3.5; if you use four as the side distance, the diagonal distance is seven.

Walls

In general, your walls on different floors should line up. While there may be walls on lower floors that are not on upper floors, significant walls on the upper floors will almost always be supported by walls or partial walls (such as columns or archways) on lower floors.

Because of this, floor plans for upper floors often look like simplified versions of the floor plans for lower floors.

Ceilings

In any large stone structure, ceilings will usually be vaulted stone. The floors of upper rooms may be wooden beams spread between the stone ground floor and the vaulted stone ceiling of the roof.

The vaulted ceiling uses the weight of the heavy stone (or other amazing material) to support itself, in a bit of real-world architectural magic. Underground, most rooms dug from the dirt or rock will also be vaulted, so that the dirt or rock doesn't cave in on itself after the room is carved from it.

Doors

Always look to the purpose of doors when deciding if they have locks, if they close on their own or stand open, and whether they slide or have hinges.

If in a prison, hinges will be on the jailor's side, for obvious reasons. Similarly, doors with external hinges usually open toward the defender. Otherwise, the attacker could remove the hinges. Decorative doors, on the other hand, usually open outward.

Some doors use pivot hinges, where an internal hinge runs vertically through the door and connects the door to the ceiling and floor. These can be especially useful for large doors in stone castles and at the gates of cities. They allow the door to open outward while still protecting the hinge from tampering.

Geographical Names

On your maps, you'll need names, especially for the geographical features that you have (I hope) placed on your overall area map. You'll want to avoid non-adjective names such as "cliff" or "jungle" or "river". Each should have a name. You can of course make up strange names in strange languages, but it's easy enough to evoke mystery and excitement simply by choose a color, a flora, or a fauna.

The cliffs near the coast are mundane. The White Cliffs of Dover are magical. A forest is a forest, but the Red Forest is its own beast. Even coastlines can be enchanted by naming them the Golden Sands, or naming them after a local tribe, such as the Barbary Coast. Faun River has a different feel than Stag River or Reindeer Pass. The Sunlit Grove should be a fine place for a picnic, whereas

anyone crossing Old Willow Trail at night without magical protection deserves whatever is coming to them.

And when you start feeling like mixing things up, the Wyrmwood Marshes must be the home of some amazing adventures.

If that isn't enough, consider replacing the geographical part of the name with body parts. Wolf Pass can become The Wolf's Throat. The Red Lakes can become the Red Fingers. Stone Giant Hill might be the Stone Giant's Knees. Other evocative names for geographical features are teeth, maw, hand, bones, backbone, fang, and claw.

It's a lot more fun to cross the Devil's Backbone by way of the Lion's Maw than to cross the Generic Mountains through Mountain Pass.

Another great source of names for man-made features and for things near civilization, is professions, especially professions rarely used nowadays: Miller's Crossing, Chandlers Dell, Knight's Road, Woodward Lane, or Divers Alley.

You can add a sense of history to your locations by adding "new" or "old" in front of the name: The New Wyrmwood Marshes or Old Chandlers Road indicate that there's another older or newer place with the same name elsewhere.

You may very well give your locations their descriptive names first, and then decide what they describe. Cool names can guide you to the content behind the names.

Where is my horizon?

Height	Horizon
3 feet	2.3 miles
4 feet	2.7 miles
5 feet	3 miles
6 feet	3.3 miles
8 feet	3.8 miles
10 feet	4.3 miles
12 feet	4.7 miles
15 feet	5.2 miles
18 feet	5.7 miles
24 feet	6.6 miles
30 feet	7.4 miles
40 feet	8.5 miles
50 feet	9.5 miles
75 feet	12 miles
100 feet	13 miles
150 feet	16 miles
200 feet	19 miles
300 feet	23 miles
400 feet	27 miles
500 feet	30 miles
1,000 feet	43 miles
2,000 feet	60 miles
3,000 feet	74 miles
4,000 feet	85 miles
5,000 feet	95 miles
7,500 feet	117 miles
10,000 feet	135 miles
12,000 feet	147 miles
15,000 feet	165 miles
20,000 feet	190 miles

Usually, the limit to how far characters can see will be some obstruction, such as a building, a forest, or some hills. Mist and darkness also limit vision. Sometimes, however, the characters will be on flat plains on a clear day and the only limit to their vision will be their perception and the horizon. Once something goes below the horizon, it can't be seen. But where is the horizon?

This unfortunately requires some math. On an earth-sized planet, the horizon for a six-foot tall person standing at sea level or on flat plains will be about 3 miles. This means that they can see features that are at ground level for up to three miles (depending, of course, on the quality of their vision and the size of the object). Features that are higher than ground level can be seen further. For example, two six-foot-tall people walking toward each other could, assuming all other conditions were perfect, begin to see the tops of their counterpart's head at six miles: once their horizons meet, they are technically in sight of each other.

But, what if they stand on higher ground? This is where the math comes in. However high their eye is in feet, take the square root of that. Then multiply it by 1.346. That's the horizon in miles.

A thing's horizon is the same: the square root of its height in feet multiplied by 1.346. To see how far something can be seen, get that thing's horizon, and add it to the watcher's horizon. That is the distance at which the tip of the thing begins to come over the horizon.

Thus, the tip of a 200 foot tower could be seen coming over the horizon, by a six-foot person standing on a four-foot hill, at about 23 miles. Of course, this assumes that other conditions are fine, that there are no obstructions, and that the player makes a likely difficult perception roll. But we can also see that fifty feet of the tower will be over the horizon for that person at 19 miles—because that's the horizon distance for a 150 foot tower.

Characters walking toward a 12,000 foot mountain will begin to see its peaks from 150 miles away.

The horizon is especially useful for describing geographical features as they come into view. You've got some leeway if you need it; atmospheric conditions can

cause refraction, bringing sights that should be below the horizon into view. And it is still up to you to assign a difficulty level to sighting something above the horizon.

Treasure

There are many different kinds of treasure, but it usually comes as rewards, money, things that can be sold for money, magic items, knowledge, and equipment.

Be careful how much money, magic, and knowledge your adventures contain; too much, and the game becomes less exciting, too little and it can be frustrating.

Rewards

Rewards usually come after the adventure is completed; the adventure was part of a job that the characters were hired to do, and now their employers pay up. Or as a result of their adventure, they've assisted, freed, or otherwise done something nice for someone who rewards them out of gratitude. Rewards don't have to be cash; they can be things that the rewarder feels are important, such as a good horse, a cart full of grain, or their daughter's hand in marriage. Great wizards might grant magical assistance as a reward; gods might grant a boon, and rulers might grant status or land.

Rewards can lead to more adventure: land grants, for example, are often in places that the ruler thinks need taming.

Money

Chests full of gold and silver coins, piles of gold: some creatures collect treasure in the form of money, and sometimes the money is what the characters were after. When money is found in a dungeon, it will often be "old" money from previous monarchies, previous dynasties, or even previous cultures. How this affects its salability is up to you, but in general, the more different it is, the more it becomes easier to melt it down than to use it as real coinage.

Money is the most traditional form of treasure, and carrying sacks of it out of a dungeon can be very satisfying.

Things that can be sold

Most "treasure" in "real" dungeons probably consists of this sort of thing. What we call antiquities have worth beyond what they're made out of. Ornate wine pourers in the shape of dragons, jewelry, crowns, books, artwork, and furniture, all can, if well-made, be worth a lot of money if returned to civilization and sold.

Some such items will be easy to carry back. Others will be more difficult. A crown of gold is easy; a crown of gold in the shape of hundreds of tiny leaves attached to a golden branch will be more difficult. Such an artifact might be worth 1,000 gold coins or more if returned intact, but only fifty or so after being pounded flat due to being stuffed in someone's backpack and trudged across country on the back of a horse, occasionally slung down to the ground or tossed across streams. Give fragile items greater bulk to account for their difficulty to successfully carry.

Magic items

Magic weapons and other artifacts can often be found on the corpses of their previous owners, or locked away in strongboxes in a stronghold whose knights were destroyed centuries past.

Knowledge

Perhaps the greatest treasure is knowledge. Sorcerors are always looking for new spells. Maps lead to greater adventure and greater treasure. And journals provide insight into mysterious creatures, or hint at passes through impassable areas.

The journals of the now-dead denizens of one ruined castle can refer to more ancient ruins, which will contain more ancient treasure and more ancient danger.

Equipment and supplies

When you've been trudging through the desert for weeks and your water ran out two days ago, there is little treasure more appealing than water. Old weapons, extra draft animals, lanterns, flasks, all might be of use to an adventuring party, turning them from "dungeon dressing" into treasure.

Dungeon dressing

"Dungeon dressing" are things that probably don't matter to the success or failure of the characters, but that add to the experience of being in the dungeon, ruins, or other location. Good dungeon dressing invokes a sense of realism, a sense that this dungeon really did exist before the characters found it. This location, whatever it is, had a use, and evidence of that use remains.

To add good dungeon dressing you need to know what the location was used for. What was it used for in general, and what were the last things to happen there? Did the royal family have a big party before the goblin armies surprised their forces and ransacked the castle? Then the royal ballroom will reflect this—there may be decorations, tables set up, and even leftover food, nearly petrified. Did the goblins break in *during* the party? Then there may be skeletons, both of the nobles and the goblins, among the party's detritus.

If this was a place where an individual lived, what kind of an individual were they? Messy? Neat? Self-righteous? Proud?

When describing anything, especially when writing flavor text, consider the *purpose* to which the structure or room was put. Consider what it was *last used* for. Think about its *light sources*, and consider its *state of repair*. How much natural degradation has occurred, how much has occurred from animal sources, and how much from the raids and ransackings of humans or other intelligent creatures.

Light sources

Rooms do not have to have light sources; they can be completely dark. But usually the former denizens needed some way of seeing while in the room. It may be that they brought their light with them, carrying torches or lanterns. or there may be torches or candles ensconced in the walls. Perhaps windows or skylights allow natural light to enter the room. There might even be magical light illuminating the area.

Candle holders can range from simple to artistically complex. They can be carried, built into the wall or furniture, or in the form of hanging chandeliers. Fireplaces and braziers can provide heat as well as a flickering light.

In the time periods of most adventure campaigns, windows were usually either fully open or fully closed: glass wasn't used unless it was for decorative purposes. An unshuttered window let in not only light but also breezes or inclement weather. Clear glass was a mark of luxury and status, and in the early period only let in light for illumination. Glass wasn't clear enough to see through it as we can see through modern glass. It was only in the 1800s that glass-making technology advanced enough to make glass more common in average buildings. Until then, the shutter was the most common way of closing a window to keep the wind out.

Portraits

Portraits are a great place to hide secret spyholes, secret doors, and secret safes. But they also weren't uncommon on their own. A proud person might have a self-portrait. A dedicated follower might have a portrait of their secular or religious ruler. People might also have a portrait of their spouse, their sponsor, their child, their family, and their ancestors. They might have received a portrait of a friend as a gift.

Portraits can give clues to the state of life in the ruins before they were ruins. A portrait made before the mad prince's room was boarded up might show a doorway where there is no doorway now.

Notes and books

Some kinds of people like to keep diaries; others might keep simple notes. Diaries of important or brilliant people can be as good as tutorials. A military leader's diary might have more than information about the way the battles went, it might be a resource for ensuring that battles go well. Diaries can also provide clues to the layout of a building, or about rooms that aren't obvious.

> *As children, we played in our secret attic playground. As adults we planned our wars there.*

Professionals might also have copies of important books relating to their fields. Hobbyists might have books relating to their hobbies. Military leaders, surveyors, and guides might have maps.

People in the past were often much better at drawing than the average person today. It was a useful skill in an era before cameras. Diaries, notes, and maps often contain drawings to supplement the text.

Hobbies or preoccupations

Depending on the time period and the culture, certain hobbies may be prevalent. Many people grow or collect plants, or collect and perhaps catalog rocks, gems, insects, animal heads, or drawings of any of those. Some might collect marvels, or things that were marketed as marvels. Even in the real world unicorn horns were a popular item. All unicorn horns in a fantasy world don't have to be real either.

"Naturalists" might also have the rudimentary tools of scientific inquiry. Scales, magnifying lenses (if your technological level allows it), flasks of various liquids, furnaces, bellows, and tongs might each be useful to various experimenters.

Furniture

If people lived there, the kinds of furniture they kept can provide insight into the kind of people they were and the things they did. Besides normal furniture such as beds, bureaus, tables, and chairs, rooms might contain chamber pots if the structure didn't have indoor plumbing. Kitchens were often completely separate to avoid a cooking fire burning the main building down. Were musical skills common? Musical instruments might be kept for playing or merely as decorations, like dress swords.

Clothing

The kind of clothing a person wears tells something about them and their profession. Many professions have uniforms such as military uniforms, clerical robes, and chef's hats. People have clothing for specific purposes, such as dances, dinners, walking, and sitting. Warriors might have weapons and armor designed solely for parade. Some professions will have functional clothing such as chefs' aprons or warriors' swords and armor. Sometimes they'll keep these in special rooms. Others will keep such clothing in their main room, or in a small room (such as a closet) off of it. Depending on how the location fell into ruin, there may be clothing of different kinds on the dead (if there are any), or set out waiting for their owner to return and prepare for tea.

The material that clothing is made from, and the colors that clothing is dyed, provide more than clues to the culture that made and (possibly) wore the clothing. It provides information about the plant life that the makers used, who they traded with, and even how they used their tools.

Stylistic fads and lost motifs

If you're familiar with architecture, painting, or any form of art, you know that there are styles and motifs that come into and go out of favor over time. The presence of these features tell us not only when the structure or item was created, but who created it and who influenced them. Stylistic variation provides

information in the same way that layers of sediment and human remains do for geologists and archaeologists.

Sometimes such styles evolve naturally, and sometimes they are born from some popular or visionary artist. Including such stylistic markings adds verisimilitude to your ruins. Ruins of different ages will have different styles, and be inspired by different designers or sources.

Perhaps more interesting are the lost motifs that were once universal but have now all but disappeared. These indicate massive social or political upheaval—the kinds of things that make ruins for adventurers to explore. An observer unfamiliar with twentieth century history in our world would notice the near-universal use of the swastika in commercial, functional, and other art up until the forties. It appeared in postcards and in native American-inspired and Near East-inspired art. Go on any tour of a house built before the forties and you're very likely to see decorative pottery and tapestry that includes the swastika symbol on it somewhere.

After about 1940, the swastika nearly vanished from popular culture. Where it continues to appear, its meaning is completely different, cluing our theoretically ignorant visitor into the fact that something major happened involving the swastika.

Clues like that to this kind of major event will not be obvious to the player characters immediately. It will only become apparent over time, as they observe (through your flavor text) art objects in the abandoned areas they explore.

Mysteries and clues

Many adventures have mysteries in them. Whether it's the traditional mystery where a crime has been committed and the criminal must be caught; or the mystery of how the castle fell into ruin, or the mystery of how to stop the demon escaped from hell, there is a mystery and the players need to solve it.

The very presence of clues will sometimes be the signal that a mystery even exists. When you design the adventure you must have a clear idea of what happened. From this, you will think up clues and place them in various places and times in the adventure. You'll want to place them liberally: the more important the mystery, the more clues it will have simply because it will impact the world in more places. In real life, there is rarely an event or thing that only has a single clue leading to it.

The player characters are unlikely to find all the clues, but for the most important parts of the mystery that won't matter, because there will be more than one clue available. Which clues they find will affect how they tackle the mystery, of course. If they find all of the clues, the mystery will be easier to solve; the fewer they find, the more difficult it will be. And some side-mysteries might never be solved, because they did not find the single clue that would allow them to solve that sub-mystery. There's nothing wrong with that. There will always be side adventures or extra loot that are fun if found but that don't have to be found.

Abduction

Role-playing games are interactive in a way that other games have not yet reached, and which current technology cannot reach. Player characters can interact with every single part of the game world, regardless of whether the Adventure Guide has previously considered that part. Because you have a high-level overview of what is going on, you can extrapolate consequences you didn't previously think of in response to the strange and wondrous things the player characters try.

When your adventure involves a mystery, you'll need to take advantage of this. You will never place all the clues that can exist, because the world is too big for that. You can't foresee all of the possible clues that might exist; there will almost always be more than you can think of during the design process. This doesn't mean that your mysteries are doomed to failure; it means you need to be open to the players searching in unexpected places for unexpected clues.

Because the player characters see the world through you, they must act *abductively*; they can't just deduce the solution from what you tell them. They must poke and prod the world to uncover more clues. When they do this, *they must think out loud*, so that you know what theory they're testing and what clues they're looking for. If their theory is correct and it means that the clue they're

looking for must exist, then the clue does, in fact, exist—regardless of whether you have it in your notes.

They'll basically be making science: constructing theories, making predictions based on those theories, and testing those theories against the world by looking for the clues they predicted.

You will need to encourage them to do this. It isn't enough for them to tell you that they are examining the bedsheets. They need to tell you why they are examining the bedsheets. They need to explain that they don't think the victim ever reached the bed, and so there isn't going to be evidence that it was slept in.

If they don't do this, you need to ask them to do it. If they try to hide their logic from you, you're going to miss some brilliant deductions, and they're going to not get the clues *that really should be there*.

Often, when their theory is wrong, it will not only not produce the clues they were expecting, it will produce clues to another theory. For example, not only do the bedsheets reflect someone having slept in the bed, they also contain hairs that do not belong to the victim, or it looks as though *three* people slept in the bed.

The consequences of not finding clues

Not finding clues does not have to stall the adventure. Not finding the clues will have consequences, and these consequences will mean that the adventure continues. Some clues grow bigger over time. The body in the attic is causing a blood stain in the corner; that stain will grow bigger the longer it takes them to find the body.

Many clues are not just one-time/one-location things. Some clues are events that keep happening: the dog that didn't bark when the intruder stole the horse barks every time a new person approaches the barn. Clues like this don't stop happening just because they've already been seen once. If they did, they wouldn't be clues. The clue is that the dog barks at everyone except the culprit.

For those kinds of clues, the consequence of not finding the clue is that the clue becomes more obvious.

In other cases, the consequences of not finding clues is that the nature of the adventure changes. If the mystery is how to stop a murderer from murdering again, at some point the murderer will try to kill again. Either they'll succeed, and the new murder will produce new clues, or the player characters will be in a position to stop the new murder; the adventure will shift from solving a crime to stopping a crime in progress.

The same can be true of greater mysteries: if the mystery's solution is that an evil wizard is attempting to summon a demon, and the wizard successfully summons that demon, the adventure will shift from stopping the summoning to stopping the

demon. It will shift from stopping something *from* happening to stopping something that *is* happening to ending something that *did* happen.

What comes next?

In 1928, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp analyzed fairy tales for their narrative structure. As part of his analysis, he created a list of things that often happen in order. This list can help you when you're stuck on what to do for the next adventure. Find what just happened on this list, and then look at the next few things to see if they inspire any great ideas.

1. A friend or family member of one of the player characters disappears. For a starting character this can by why the character lost their fortune (their father disappeared) or it might be the start of a quest.
2. A player character (or all of the player characters) are forbidden from doing something. The taboo might be directed at the player characters, or at their family, village, county, or country. It might be a new law, or a long-standing taboo. It should be a line that civilized people do not cross, but heroes do.
3. A player character violates a taboo or something they are forbidden from doing. They might do so deliberately, or they might have been tricked into it by an enemy. Perhaps they freed an evil they must now stop, or they have been exiled from their community for being different.
4. An enemy or potential enemy makes a feint to test the player characters, or enters the narrative looking for something that the character or their family (perhaps the disappearing family member) has.
5. Someone sells or gives information about the player characters to an enemy or potential enemy. Something that is relevant to that enemy's plots and designs is currently in the hands of the player characters. The characters have the potential to foul up those plans, and the enemy knows it.
6. An enemy or potential enemy attempts to deceive a player character, family member, or friend in order to possess that person or some important belonging (often land or an heirloom).
7. The character, a family member, or a friend is deceived and unwittingly helps an enemy by passing information or by transferring ownership of something important.
8. An enemy or potential enemy harms a friend or family member of a player character. The victim might have been kidnapped, robbed, charmed, or cursed; or a curse was cast on their town or crops. Other common harms include planned marriages, imprisonment, and recurring nightmares.
9. The player characters discover that they need something important, or a family member or friend needs something to continue their way of life. The player characters are tasked with acquiring it. Or the characters discover a misfortune or lack in their community—or a community they're traveling through. The characters are requested or commanded to assist.

Or, as in so many episodes of Star Trek, they choose to assist even though their assistance is unwanted because it's the right thing to do.

10. The player characters agree to a command, agree to assist the victims of a crime, or scheme to counter an unjust command.
11. The player characters leave home for the ruins.
12. The player characters are interrogated, attacked, or in some other way tested to prepare them for meeting a magical or divine power or to receive a powerful artifact. The characters may have to perform some service to gain the trust of greater powers.
13. The player characters acquire an artifact or gain the assistance of magical or divine power in the ruins.
14. The player characters are transferred, delivered, or led to their destination. In an adventure game, player characters should not be led, they should lead. However, some journeys can be mini-adventures, where the goal of the adventure is to defeat the journey: to cross an uncrossable desert, pass through impassable mountains, or discover a hidden path.
15. The characters and their enemy meet and enter into conflict.
16. The player characters are branded so that they are in some way recognizable to their enemies or to a benefactor. This might be a physical brand, such as on odor, a tattoo, or a haircut, or a gift such as a ring or item of clothing. It could be a wound received in combat, or an item the characters stole.
17. The player characters defeat their enemy.
18. Player character actions right a wrong or fill a need. A curse is broken, or the unjustly imprisoned are freed.
19. The player characters return home from the adventure.
20. The player characters are pursued by minions of their enemy or by someone met during a previous adventure. In fairy tales a rescuer might appear, but adventure heroes must save themselves, perhaps with assistance from new friends and new powers (specialties, spells, or improved fighting ability from increased level). The pursuer might be delayed by the characters, the characters might hide from their pursuer, or they might defeat the pursuer. The pursuer might be someone they were utterly frightened of at the start of the adventure, but who they now hold the power to defeat.
21. The player characters arrive home unrecognized or pass through the site of previous adventures unrecognized.
22. An enemy or false hero has taken credit for the player characters' deeds.
23. More difficult tasks are proposed to the player characters. Riddles and tests must be overcome.
24. The player characters are recognized as heroes.
25. An enemy or false hero is exposed in the character's community.

26. The player characters gain new powers. These most often will result from a level increase: the character gains a new specialty, or the ability to cast new spells, or greater skills. New specialties must always matter.
27. The enemy or false hero is punished or repents.
28. A player character becomes transcendent, and leaves the game by taking on non-adventurous roles such as marriage, nobility, or rulership. This ends the game for that character. Often in an adventure game, the end will come for all characters at the same time. Other times, a player will choose to let their character exit and start a new character afterward.

You don't have to, and shouldn't, slavishly follow these steps in order. They're just guides. Often you'll choose one from the first few to start an adventure. After an adventure is completed, choose something after *right a wrong* or *return home*. Some of them, such as gaining new abilities, are under the player's control but can be worked into the game by you. When a character gains a new specialty, especially one of magical or divine import, it should first manifest itself at an important point, such as when the characters face a new task or when they reach a new destination.

Propp also lists six non-player character types to help push the adventure along.

1. The *villain* they strive against, who modern video gamers call the boss.
2. The *donor*, a mentor or benefactor who prepares the characters for their quest by giving them knowledge or a magic item.
3. The *helper*, someone who the heroes meet during their quest who helps them along when the hour is dark.
4. The *princess* or the *king*, who is either the object of the quest or who commands them to take the quest.
5. The *dispatcher*, who makes the characters realize what they are lacking and who sends them into the wild to find it.
6. The *false hero* or *usurper*, who takes credit for player character actions and who tries to benefit from their success or failure. The false hero isn't necessarily aligned with the villain, but their morals are such that they don't mind if their soul is lost as long as they acquire earthly reward. This is the uncouth non-player character who attempts to marry the princess, for example, by taking advantage of the king's misfortune rather than adventuring to save the crown. Often the usurper is aligned with the villain and takes orders from the villain; other times the usurper is merely a once nice person with low willpower who has been duped. This Gríma-like character is to be pitied as much as vilified.

Creatures

Creature level

Most of the grunt encounters of an adventure (you might also hear them called "disposable NPCS" or "mooks") will be lower level than the player characters. For example, at first level the characters might encounter goblins or xolome, at second and third level orcs, skeletons, or walking corpses.

There should be a handful of potential encounters in the adventure that are the same level as or a level higher than the characters, perhaps with special abilities: a large spider or skeleton for first level characters, a crown of eyes for second-level characters, or a giant snake for third or fourth level characters.

The main opponent for an adventure should be higher level than the characters. A good rule of thumb is to take the highest player character level, and then add half the number of characters in the group.

Because creatures can also have special abilities, "stocking the dungeon" is a skill that you'll want to learn: watch how easy or difficult the adventures are, and how that affects how much fun the adventures are to play. Then, in later adventures, adjust the kinds of creatures involved accordingly.

If the main opponent lacks any special abilities or is of animal intelligence, you'll probably want to give it two or three extra levels to make it more challenging.

Creature variety

I find it adds a sense of reality, or grounding, to use only one or two special creatures in each adventure, and slowly cycle in new creatures as the characters gain experience.

In their first adventure, the characters might strive against goblin clans. In their next adventure, their opponents are goblin clans and orc taskmasters. As they delve deeper into the dungeon or forest, they find themselves up against orc clans and maybe an ogre or two, and suddenly there's an element of the undead starting to show: skeletons, maybe the wandering dead. The next adventure involves stranger undead, and maybe the next one is mostly ogres with a smattering of orcs and goblins.

Every once in a while, throw in something completely different: they need to pass through a misty valley far from civilization, and the valley is filled with dinosaurs! Or, throw in a dungeon level filled with creatures of the chaotic mist, or a village that's been taken over by giant spiders.

It's hard to go wrong with giant spiders, skeletons, and dinosaurs.

The right amount of variety keeps the adventures interesting; too much makes them numbing and too little makes them boring. What constitutes too much or too

little will vary from group to group; you'll have to pay attention to the other players.

Wandering monsters

Wandering encounter charts are an acknowledgement that this is not a board game. You don't know how long the players are going to have their characters remain in each location. You can't plan for it by specifically setting each encounter. Your adventure, like their path through it, is not set on cardboard like a boardgame. You need to be able to choose encounters based on their actions and their lack of action.

"Wandering Monsters" are encounters that are not set in advance by the adventure designer. These encounters will be with a creature that inhabits the area the adventurers are in. This flavors an area with inhabitants whose existence is not based on waiting for the players to trigger their scene.

Your wandering monster table also provides you with a simple creature population for the important areas that the adventurers will travel through. Done correctly, this will give you a quick and easy way to see what creatures inhabit the area, and how often, on average, each type of creature is likely to be encountered.

I recommend making a quick overview table first. For example, in a forest far from inhabited areas, you might create a table that emphasizes animals and weird creatures.

Percentage	Encounter	
01-55	Normal Animals	55%
56-75	Fantastic Creatures	20%
76-90	Natural Encounters	15%
91-98	Humanoid Creatures	8%
99-00	Civilized Folk	2%

This tells you at a glance that in this area, only two percent of the characters' encounters will be with what you call "civilized folk". Fully 20% of the characters' encounters will be with "fantastic creatures". And 15% will be with inclement weather or other natural encounters.

In nearby areas you can use the same subtables, merely adjusting the percentages on the main table to make the area more wild or more civilized.

If you enjoy improvising, you can stop there and create the rest during the game. If you prefer details, create a separate table for each item on the main table:

Civilized Folk		
01-50	Humans (d20)	50%
51-75	Elves (2d20)	25%

76-00 Dwarves (2d10)	25%

You can see that half the time, such encounters will be with humans, and if meeting humans there will be 1 to 20 humans in the encounter group.

Fantastic Creatures

01-20 Giant Spiders (2d4)	20%
21-30 Undead	10%
31-40 Dryad (1)	10%
41-50 Rock Dryad (1)	10%
51-60 Yeti (2d6)	10%
61-70 Walking Trees (1d4)	10%
71-80 Owl Dragon (tower, room 2)	10%
81-90 Green Dragon (courtyard)	10%
91-95 Living Light (1)	5%
96-00 Chaotic Mist	5%

There are two items in this list that are further categories themselves: undead, and Chaotic Mist. Presumably, somewhere in this area is a source of undead, and somewhere in the area is a manifestation of the Chaotic Mist. I try to avoid too many levels of tables. One overall table and one breakout table for each entry on the overall table is optimal. But in some cases, such as the Chaotic Mist, or an area where there are lots of undead, it will be easier to segregate those encounters into their own table so that you can see at a glance what's in the Chaotic Mist, or what kind of undead have infested the area.

Two of the encounters in the sample *Fantastic Creatures* table have a location in parentheses, rather than a die roll for how many appear. There is a specific Owl Dragon and a specific Green Dragon living in this area, and no more. Encounters will be with that particular creature. You can get more information about that creature by referencing the encounter location.

"Wandering Monster" encounters from these tables may be chosen by the Guide with or without dice. If the Guide decides that there is going to be a wandering monster encounter, and it will be random, a "65" on d100 would indicate a "fantastic" encounter, and a further "59" would indicate a yeti encounter. Finally, rolling two d6 for "1" and "3" would mean an encounter with 4 yeti.

Natural encounters

Rather than create a system for weather, geography, and climate, I add appropriate weather events and geographical features into the encounter chart.

01-25 light storm (d100 hours)	25%
26-40 fog (d20 yards visibility for d8 hours)	15%
41-50 heavy storm (d40 hours)	10%
51-60 river crosses path (3d6 feet deep)	10%

61-70 thick foliage (d100 yards)	10%
71-79 exceptionally cold (d6 days)	9%
80-87 exceptionally warm (d6 days)	8%
88-95 steep ravine blocks path (d100+100 yards deep)	8%
96-00 quicksand (d8 yards diameter)	5%

Just as for creatures, this makes it easy for me to see, at a glance, what the area looks and feels like. This particular area is fairly wet.

How to populate the overall table

If it's a fantastic area, there should be more fantastic encounters. If it's mundane, more civilized peoples and/or animals. Think about the area in general. Think about the kind of encounters you want for the feel of the adventures that exist there. Are fantastic creatures common or rare? Is the area well-traveled by caravans, farmers, or brigands? Will the adventurers often be huddling in their tents from the damp mist or rolling thunderstorms, or will they be seeking shelter from sandstorms or the blazing sun?

Is there a special category of encounters you want to focus on? If so, give them their own breakout table. Dinosaurs in a prehistoric valley should have their own table. Undead in a necropolis are likely to have their own table. On the other hand, if you consider undead to be another fantastic encounter along with the others, then they don't need their own section.

How to populate the breakout tables

Once you know the kinds of encounters, populate the breakout tables. Try to avoid breakout tables on breakout tables, but if there's an extremely rare set of encounters, give them their own table so that you can track them separately. If there's a rarely-used faerie ring in the area, for example, a separate table for faerie will help keep the encounter chance low while providing a potentially wide variety of faerie encounters.

1. Are any warring factions in the area? If they're sending out patrols those patrols will show up on the *Civilized Folk* or *Humanoid Creatures* tables.
2. If you've sketched up nearby adventures, look at the encounter keys. What creatures will wander, or investigate strange noises, or prowl for victims?
3. What natural features does this area have that might cause problems? Waterfalls, rivers, streams, and canyons, if common, are good natural obstacles to put on the *Natural Encounters* table.
4. What mundane animal and plant life might constitute an encounter?
5. What's the weather like? Interesting weather goes under *Natural Encounters*.
6. Who travels through this area? Do caravans pass through? Where are they from and where are they going?

The answers to these questions will populate your breakout tables. If, after answering these questions, the tables aren't interesting enough, look at nearby areas and see which creatures that live there might pass through here.

Finally, glance through the *Encounter Guide* for the area's environment, and cull common encounters from that for the appropriate tables. If you haven't already chosen a creature that is unique to this area, now's a good time to do that, too. It helps to have one or two creatures, even if they're normal animals, unique to each area, to ensure that each area has its own unique flavor.

How often do encounters occur?

That's up to the adventure's designer and you as the Guide. Usually, encounter chances are listed as a percentage ending in zero, such as 30% or 20%, and a time period, such as once a day, or once an hour, or even every ten minutes. Wandering through a mundane forest, you might specify a 20% chance of an encounter per day. A busy dungeon might incur an encounter 10% each ten minutes or 30% each hour.

If the characters are doing something increases or decreases their chance of an encounter, modify the percentage. You might decide that they have a 24% chance of an encounter because they're making a lot of noise in the forest. Or you might make an extra check whenever they do something that is likely to attract attention.

Large groups will incur more possible encounters than smaller groups. The encounter possibility should assume a medium-sized group of human-sized adventurers: four to seven members. If there are more members, the chance of an encounter will increase.

Group Size	Increase
1	0 (make a quarter the number of encounter checks)
2-3	0 (make half the number of encounter checks)
4-7	normal chances
8-15	5%
16-31	10%
32-63	15%
64-127	20%
128-255	25%
256-511	30%

If there are thirty-three characters and creatures in the group, and the normal chance of an encounter is 30%, the real chance will be 45%. Of course, some of those possible encounters may decide to steer clear of such a large group. Most likely they'll sneak around looking for an opportunity for robbery or mayhem.

Two *small* creatures count as one. Four *tiny* creatures count as one, and eight *fine* creatures count as one. Thus, if the thirty-three creatures above were all pixies

(tiny), they would only count as nine individuals, so their encounter chance would be 35% instead of 45%.

One *large* creature counts as two. One *huge* creature counts as four. One *gigantic* creature counts as eight, and one *titanic* creature counts as sixteen. Three humans (medium), and three horses (large) will be a "group size" of nine.

Usually, encounter checks will be rolled more often in inhabited areas, and less often in wilderness areas. They'll also be rolled for more often in dangerous areas than in mundane areas.

What if the players take precautions?

If the characters act in such a manner that the encounter you rolled doesn't make sense, awesome. Give them some indication that they've dodged a bullet, so that they can bask in their cleverness. They might see the dragon fly overhead looking for prey, and missing them; or they might see the footprints of the ogres outside of their well-hidden campsite. Or they may hear the conversations of the necromancer's guard beyond the wall of trees concealing them from the main road—some indication that their precautions succeeded, at the same time giving them information about what lives in the area and perhaps even clues to this or future adventures.

Bedding down for the night

It makes sense that if the characters are both not moving and not making noise, that they will not randomly wander into an encounter (they're not moving, after all) and that they will be less likely to attract an encounter (they're not walking around in armor, dragging packs around). Depending on circumstances, consider reducing the number of encounter checks by one when the characters set up camp outdoors, and halving them inside a dungeon.

Creating new creatures

When I create new creatures from myths and legends, I like to search a variety of sources. I have a collection of books about mythology and fantastic creatures, and I'll look up the creature in each of those books, taking note of the parts I want to keep, the parts I want to ignore, and the parts I think might be kernels of more interesting ideas. There will often be references to similar creatures in other cultures, and I'll follow up on those references. If these fantastic creatures are real, after all, the same creature may well appear under different names in different cultures, even though in real life some mythological creatures are similar only because they spring from the same human need. In your game world, similar creatures in different cultures might be the same creature seen from different perspectives. I'll also use the Internet as one source for information. Many writers have researched specific creatures of interest and have placed that research on-line.

It is important to reconstruct not just the powers and appearance of the creature, but also its underlying importance, its niche within your campaign world. Find ways to reconstruct the culture of the creature. In real life, the creature's culture is the same as the culture that created it, but in our "real" fantasy, these creatures have their own culture. Determine the powers the creature really has, as opposed to those that are mythological even in the fictional world you are creating. Look for origins. Where did this creature come from? Look for motives. What do these creatures look for out of life? Are they Evil? Good? Ordered? Chaotic? Or do they not care? Are they related to divinity, or to the faerie, or to the giants? Who put them there? What are they doing now? Where are they going? Are they part of some deeper cause?

Don't neglect modern mythology either. Many novelists create marvelous worlds filled with unique versions of mythical creatures, as well as with original creatures.

Fuse all of these sources together and you'll have a creature that, while it is clearly identifiable and could be its mythological counterparts, is also a unique addition to your game world. Every culture remakes its mythology. Be your own culture.

Traps

One of the things that all dangerous, treasure-filled places have is traps. If they didn't have traps, someone would have already taken all of the treasure. Now, because of the traps, someone who might have taken all of the treasure is lying dead in the hallway, or hanging from the ceiling, or stuck to the wall, their corpse glaring back at the adventurers, daring them to go further.

Traps can be pits, they can be poison needles on locks, they can be projectiles that shoot from the wall, they can be blades that slice, walls that tumble, ceilings that fall. The main reason that poison has a section in the rulebook is for traps. When magic is added to the mix, traps can teleport, sleep, talk, and do anything that a magic spell (or divine spirit) can do. The form of a trap is up to your imagination.

Traps pretty much do two things for the characters. First, they warn the characters that they're on the right track. Traps are expensive and inconvenient to make. The existence of one indicates that something worth protecting is nearby. Second, traps provide the opportunity to die in surprising and gruesome ways—or to escape death by cleverness, skill, and luck.

Traps can do two things for the people (or creature) who built them. They can kill, or they can warn. That is, they can be secret, and try to kill everyone who passes that way, or they can be a visible warning that going further runs the risk of death. A trap that isn't visible is not a deterrent. Consider, for example, the curse of the pharaohs. It's displayed prominently to warn tomb robbers away.

Look carefully at your traps. Traps which do not reset after being triggered have probably already been triggered. Traps which do reset have probably been

triggered at least once. There's probably already a corpse or skeleton or two lying around. (Take a look at the opening scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.) If no one else has set off a trap, it means that the player characters are the very first individuals to come this way. There aren't likely any random encounters beyond the trap—random encounters would have set the trap off.

Traps are built using the resources that the original builders had access to, both skills and materials. Poor builders can't build expensive traps. Unskilled builders can't build complex traps (at least not and have them work reliably). Mundane builders can't build magical traps. When sorcerors build magical traps, this means that they knew the magic that went into the trap. If you look through *Lost Castle of the Astronomers*, for example, you'll see that the Astronomers' spell research notes include the spells they used in their traps.

Traps that were built in once high-traffic areas must be easily disabled. Treasure is rarely put into a vault and sealed away; whoever put it there expects to return later.

Remember also that traps have a reason behind their design. Traps on treasure rooms aren't there to kill thieves. They're there to keep thieves from stealing the treasure. Certainly they can do that by killing the thieves, but they can also do that by deterring thieves from entering, by misdirecting thieves, by disabling thieves before they find the treasure, or by keeping thieves from leaving once they find the treasure.

Some of the same logic that goes into writing flavor text can help you decide what form traps will take and what evidence is visible. What is the purpose of the trap, what was it was last used for, and has it degraded in any way? When adding traps to your adventures, put yourself in the shoes of the builders. Anyone can create unbeatable traps on paper. The fun traps are the ones that make sense and which provide an opportunity for the player characters to do something.

Black River Crossing

There is no one way to make a dungeon. How you write yours will depend on what inspires you, what you enjoy doing, and how much time you have. If you enjoy maps, write map-filled adventures. If you don't enjoy maps, keep your grids simple.

That said, here's a simple process for writing a dungeon-style adventure, cribbed from Jeff Rients. If you're in a hurry, you can use this to make a dungeon in half an hour.

Themes!

The first step is to choose three themes. I'm not talking English-major stuff here; I'm talking down-to-earth, nuts-and-bolts ideas. What is the monster theme, what

is the terrain theme, and what is the dungeon theme? That is, who or what are they?

I like spiders, dinosaurs, and skeletons. I'm going to choose "giant spiders" as the monster theme. There will be spiders in this dungeon.

The terrain can be anything from a city, village, forest, or mountain nook, to a cavern, underground lake, or lava river. What makes up the area around the dungeon? I'm going to choose a forest. A really thick forest.

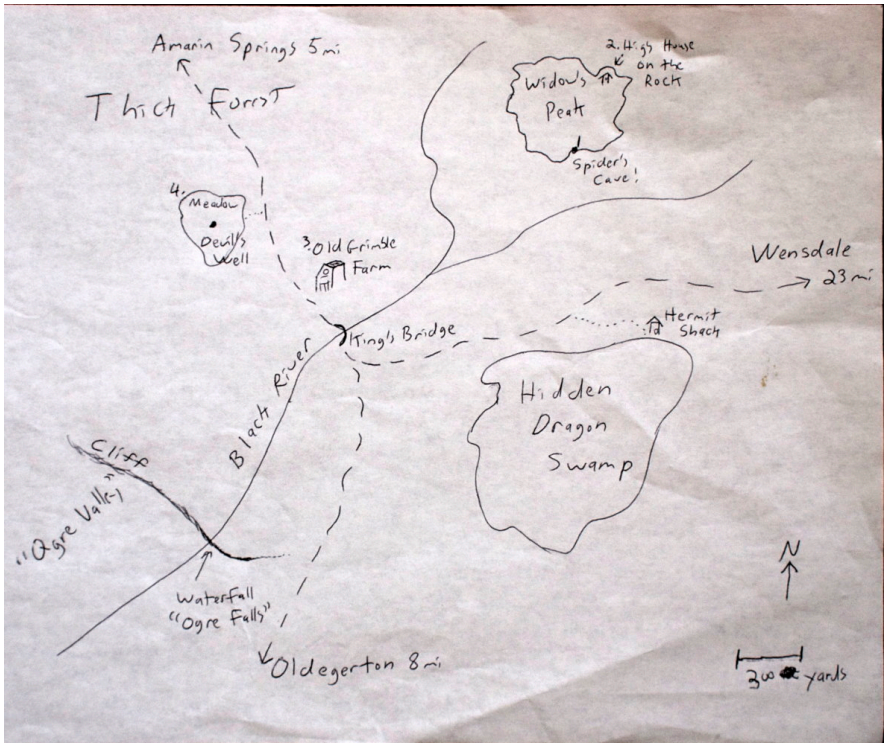
The traditional dungeon is a series of underground rooms, but it can also be rooms in a single building (such as a castle or manor), a series of natural locations (such as meadows, trees, caves, and natural springs), a cavern complex, or a series of small buildings (such as a village or city block). I'm going to choose natural locations.

So this is my theme: giant spiders in a thick forest, spread around natural locations.

Sketch!

The next step is to sketch a simple map. Draw the terrain first, then draw the "dungeon" around or within the terrain. If you're in a hurry, use a pen: it will keep you from revising what you've already done.

You can do this step in a few minutes. You know the terrain, you know what kind of places are in the terrain, and you know what kind of monsters live in those locations. Slap some terrain down, then slap some random places down.



Name and number the locations

You must name the locations. Names help you when it comes time to game: this isn't just a small building with a spider in it. It's an outhouse with a spider in it. Or a spider hiding behind Titan Rock. Or the ruins of Old John Grimble's Farm. Whatever. Name your known locations if you haven't already.

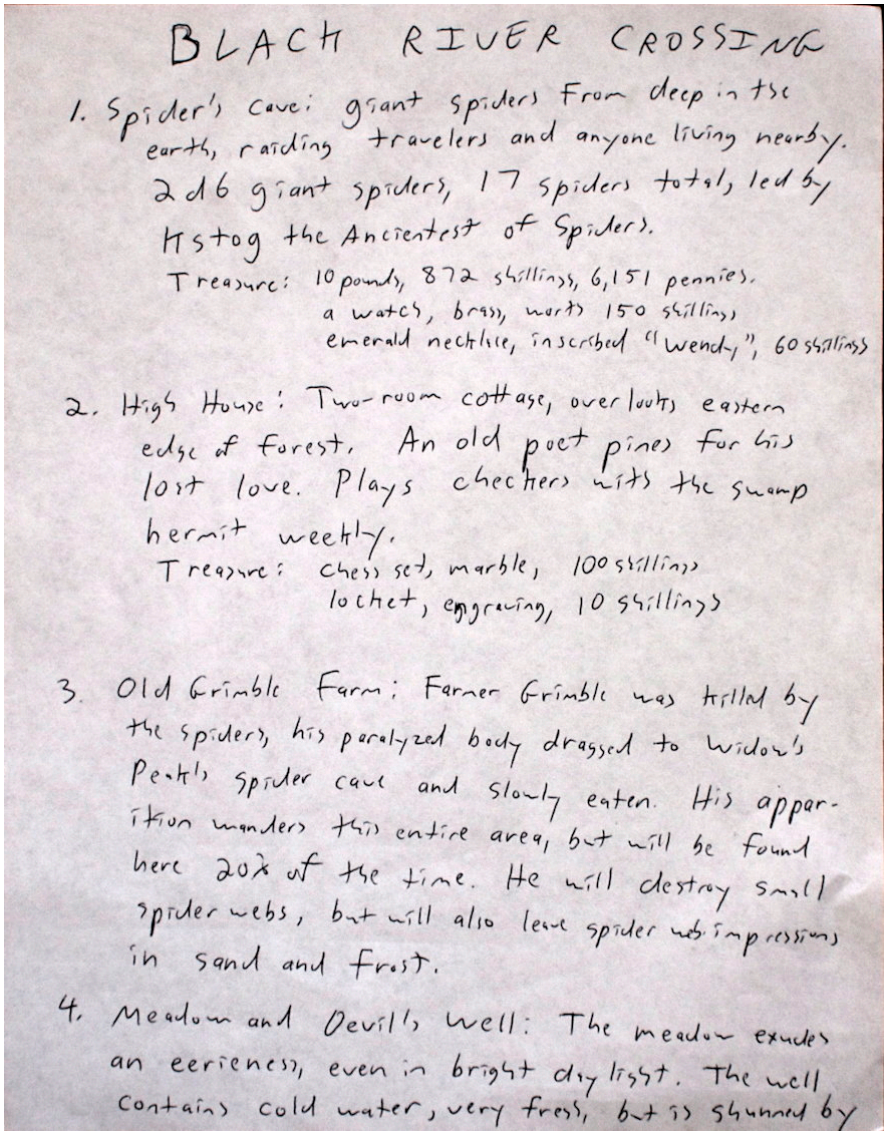
If you have a simple map, write the names directly on the map; if it's more complex, number the locations and put the names on a sheet of paper along with the numbers.

This should take a few minutes, maybe ten or fifteen if you have a lot of locations.

Seed it with monsters and treasure

Your locations have titles. Now add your "theme" monster(s). Then, roll up a random encounter or two, or flip through the Encounter Guide to find something appropriate, and add a few non-theme monsters. Add a few words for each location describing what the creature is doing. Hiding? Ambushing? Prowling? Sleeping? Making tea and cookies? (Nothing wrong with putting a grandmother or

two in your adventures, living out in the middle of nowhere, minding their own business.)



BLACK RIVER CROSSING

1. Spider's Cave: giant spiders from deep in the earth, raiding travelers and anyone living nearby. 2d6 giant spiders, 17 spiders total, led by Hstog the Ancientest of Spiders.
   Treasure: 10 pounds, 872 shillings, 6,151 pennies. a watch, brass, worth 150 shillings emerald necklace, inscribed "Wendy", 60 shillings

2. High House: Two-room cottage, overlooks eastern edge of forest. An old poet pines for his lost love. Plays checkers with the swamp hermit weekly.
   Treasure: chess set, marble, 100 shillings locket, engraving, 10 shillings

3. Old Grimble Farm: Farmer Grimble was killed by the spiders, his paralyzed body dragged to Widow's Peak's spider cave and slowly eaten. His apparition wanders this entire area, but will be found here 20% of the time. He will destroy small spider webs, but will also leave spider web impressions in sand and frost.

4. Meadow and Devil's Well: The meadow exudes an eeriness, even in bright daylight. The well contains cold water, very fresh, but is shunned by

Now you know where the monsters are and what they're doing. Which ones are likely to have some treasure? Write it down. Which ones have killed passers-by and are hoarding stolen treasure? Write that down, too, and maybe a note about where the passers-by came from. There may also be remains of their corpses.

If some of the monsters know each other, note their relationships, how they get along. You can make it as simple as “likes” and “doesn’t like”, or more specific such as “property dispute with”, “stole the sardonyx amulet from”, and “ate its cabbage”.

It should only take a few minutes per location to do this.

Add mystery!

Add something out of place: a mystery, puzzle, or anomaly. Something that doesn’t fit this adventure but leads to new adventure. Something for the characters (and players) to talk about. It might be a foreigner’s corpse, a map that’s clearly wrong, a map of a location that doesn’t exist, alien jewelry, a book in an unknown tongue about an incomprehensible thing, a simple note signed by an unfamiliar person in a nearby city. When in doubt, a map is the easiest and most versatile choice. The mystery will often tie into the “something lost” of subsequent adventures.

For this adventure, the meadow is the mystery. It’s not eerie because of the spiders. It’s older than the spiders. If you drink from the well and then rest in the meadow you’ll need to make a willpower roll or fall into a daze for d4 hours. There’s a 1% chance that if you fall into a daze, you’ll wake up remembering a fantastic land, like the Dreamlands of Lovecraft. Obviously it’s a dream… but it felt so *real*.

If you can’t think of a mystery, don’t worry. You don’t need one for every adventure.

Wandering Monsters

Make a wandering monster chart if necessary. *Black River Crossing* has spiders, a hermit, a poet, and Grimble’s ghost. It also has rain, fallen trees, sinkholes, and other travelers, most likely—whatever you add to the adventure, since it’s unfinished.

Here’s an example; there is a 30% chance of an encounter every 6 hours. The *chance of an encounter* can be from every few rounds to every few minutes to every few hours to every few days. Encounters should happen often enough to be interesting. If that part of the adventure is measured in minutes, encounters will have a chance of happening measured in minutes. If it’s a road they’re traveling through and the things they do are measured in days, the chance of encounters will be measured in days.

01-35	Area Encounters	35%
36-65	Natural Encounters	30%
66-95	Normal Animals	30%
96-00	Travelers (d12)	5%

To more easily assign percentile ranges, go to *godsmonsters.com/Guide/monsters/* and list your creatures. It will generate a simple table which you can adjust by percentage; as you change the percentages, it will automatically adjust the ranges for you.

Area encounters

01-25 Giant spiders (d8)	25%
26-45 Goblins (2d8)	20%
46-61 Old poet (location 2)	16%
62-74 Swamp hermit (location 7)	13%
75-87 Grimble's ghost (location 3)	13%
88-95 Webbed spider outpost (d6 giant spiders)	8%
96-00 Wyvern (location 6)	5%

In a webbed spider outpost, webs cover the trees and paths, making it difficult to pass without getting stuck, and impossible to pass without alerting the giant spiders.

Natural encounters

01-20 Rainstorm (d8 hours)	20%
21-35 Fog (d8 hours)	15%
36-50 Thunderstorm (d6 hours)	15%
51-65 Animal trail toward river	15%
66-75 Path blocked by fallen trees and undergrowth	10%
76-85 Animal trail toward meadow, swamp, or peak	10%
86-90 Sinkhole (d8 yards)	5%
91-95 Swamp gas (2d20 yards)	5%
96-00 Swamp gas explosion (2d10 yards, d6 damage)	5%

Animal trails are one to three feet wide and meander toward their destination around hills and natural features. They are a snap to follow: +8 to the roll.

Normal animals

01-22 Mosquitos (d100)	22%
23-39 Spiders (d20)	17%
40-54 Deer (d8)	15%
55-69 Squirrels (d12)	15%
70-84 Foxes (d4)	15%
85-94 Cougar (1)	10%
95-00 Poisonous spiders (d6)	6%

That should give you a start. Obviously, if you finish the encounter key, you'll need to add your own entries into the list. I originally planned giant dragon flies for the swamp, but then I remembered Dave Trampier's wonderful wyvern, and changed my mind. I'm also assuming goblins, perhaps in Ogre Valley or beyond Widow's Peak.

If you're in a hurry, you don't need fully-adjusted breakout lists. Do the overall table, and then number the entries on the breakout lists rather than assigning percentages. You can roll whatever die most closely matches the number of monsters in the list.

The characters will likely take a day or two to explore Black River Crossing, and every six hours gives a good chance of something happening each day.

Using prewritten adventures

When preparing to run an adventure that someone else wrote, read over the adventure a couple of times to familiarize yourself with the settings, the themes, and the encounters. Take notes about what parts you don't like, what parts you might wish to emphasize, what parts you might wish to de-emphasize, and what parts you might wish to remove or change.

Change the adventure to fit snugly within your own campaign. Look at the adventure from the other players' perspectives. If they prefer certain kinds of adventure, you might want to add something of that sort. If they like tactical adventures, you might provide at least a diversion that allows them to take on another group of foes. If they prefer puzzles, play up the puzzles that exist, or add new ones (perhaps replacing one or two of the hack and slash room encounters with a puzzle encounter).

If you are not using the campaign world that the adventure was designed for, or if the adventure was designed without a specific world in mind, change the adventure to fit into your world. Replace the key figures in the game to match figures that already exist in your campaign world, or modify them to fit better with your world. Change names, towns, and creatures as needed. Statues of gods and goddesses should be renamed to match the gods and goddesses appropriate for the area you've dropped the adventure in, for example.

Re-read the adventure after your changes and look for inconsistencies you might have created. Also, keep an eye out for inconsistencies that already exist: some problems will get through the editing process. Sometimes problems that the author considered minor will turn into major problems in your own world. Do not be at all shy about taking a pencil and glue to any adventure! If the adventure is an open source one, take it straight to your word processor or text editor.

You can find great adventures in the magazine *Fight On!*, on the *Dragonsfoot* web site under *Adventure Modules*, and on *The Biblyon Broadsheet* in the *Guidebooks* section. I've also listed further resources at *godsmonsters.com/cool*.


THE LOST CASTLE OF THE ASTRONOMERS
A Gods & Monsters Adventure
ABRICA SOLIS: FORGE OF THE SUN
HAUNTED ILLUSTRIOUS CASTLE
A Gods & Monsters Adventure

Characters

Players

One difference between role-playing games and most games was described by Callan Sweet and Joel Shempert on the *Forge*. Callan wrote "rearranging your character's activities for a better story is a skill" not all players have. "It isn't a skill you should automatically have. One doesn't try and plan out chess for a more exciting game."

When we say that role-playing games don't have winners and losers in the traditional sense, this is part of what we mean. As Joel responded, "if a chess player beats his opponent, but does so inefficiently, it's a legitimate critique to point out how he could have played better, and checkmated 10 moves earlier."

That's not a legitimate critique in *Gods & Monsters*. All it can be is a suggestion. And it's probably not a good one. How you get to success matters as much as succeeding.

Keep this in mind if you have players who are new to role-playing games. There's nothing wrong with trying to win, but in a game where winning means something else it may degrade their enjoyment of the game. The solution is to Guide the player to recognize what is and isn't a win *within the game*. Achieving short-term and long-term goals is a form of winning.

One example of a game everyone's familiar with that is planned out to be more exciting is televised football. When one set of players gets too bogged down, their goal changes from offense to defense. I'm not saying you need to put the other players on the defensive when they start getting bogged down, but it is one option. Even though the overall goal (winning the game by having more points than your opponent) remains the same, the short-term goal has changed. This is part of what random encounters do in *Gods & Monsters*: introduce excitement and convince the characters to move when they stop moving.

Sometimes you'll have to find out what short-term goals interest your friends, and you'll formulate those goals as wins. Like the powers that be who formulate football's rules, it falls on you to plan the session for a more exciting game.

Player characters

Each player controls a character. Each character is always the main character—from the point of view of their player. What they internalize from the game should be able to be seen from the perspective that their character is the protagonist. The core of a *Gods & Monsters* game is the interaction between player and character, and in how the player identifies with their character.

For you, this means that every player character must be meaningful within the game's setting. Over their first level, the player will help you establish in what way their character is meaningful. By the time a character reaches second level, they are above average in their part of the world.

Non-player characters

Only the main NPCs need character sheets. For the rest you'll use an abbreviated form from the *Encounter Guide*. They'll have a level as the kind of creature they are rather than an archetype level. They won't have numbers for the six abilities; you'll estimate their abilities and reactions using their creature level.

Snow guardian: (Fantastic: 7; Survival: 33; Movement: 15; Attack: snow fists; Damage: d10+1; Defense: 8; Special defenses: weapon immunity, not a creature; Special attack: snow blast; Size: Huge)

When you do create a full sheet for an NPC, the NPC does not receive mojo, but they can acquire resources such as fields and skills. Normally, you'll know what they need; as a guideline, give the NPC half the mojo that a player character would have received, and spend it on fields, skills, and equipment as necessary.

If the NPC is on the PC side and is occasionally used as a replacement PC, it should have verve and mojo as normal, but can only use mojo when it is a player character.

Preparing dialogue

There are two types of dialogue you'll have your non-player characters engage in: monologues and responses. Monologues are things that non-player characters say that are not in response to a player character. Keep your monologues short. Most of them should be less than five seconds, and the long ones less than twenty seconds. Anything longer invites players to respond, and then it's no longer a monologue.

Because monologues are meant to block the game, you want to keep them not just short but rare; and when you do have them, make them mean something: keep them dense with information. The song from *Lost Castle of the Astronomers* is a monologue—it's also a lot longer than ten seconds, but as a performance there is the expectation of catcalls and side conversations, so it doesn't completely block play.

Here's a monologue I used in the Weaving Well to introduce an adventure in which the player characters track down missing girls:

> *John: "Lillian, where is Amelie?"*
>
> *Lillian: "I'm not Lillian, dad."*
>
> *John's answer will get the entire tavern's attention:*

John: "I don't care who ye are girl, where's your sister?"

Lillian answers quietly enough that the tavern cannot hear her.

John: "Bevan Casady? She went outside and you didn't tell anyone? Were you dropped headfirst from the crow's nest? Stay here with your mother."

At the mention of Bevan Casady, a man at one of the tables puts his hand to his head and mutters, "Oh, shit." This is Bevan's dad, also named Bevan.

Bevan the Elder: "Ryan, Carlin, come on, we're going to get my son."

That lasts just under twenty seconds, but there's a lot of information in it: his fear of having his daughter outside, his inability to tell his daughters apart, his reference to a crow's nest far from any ocean, and the kind of names common in this area.

Because responses are far more common than monologues, it's a good idea to prepare yourself for what responses major non-player characters will have. Imagine the questions that this NPC is likely to receive from the players. What will be their response? Try to guess likely questions from the following perspectives:

1. Imagine that you're a player character meeting this NPC for the first time.
2. Imagine that the player thinks they're an old friend of this NPC.
3. What is the most important thing this NPC wants to be asked?
4. What is the most important thing this NPC does not want to be asked?

For each question, choose a different player character to pretend to be. You want both likely and unlikely questions, because your players will ask unlikely questions. If it's an important NPC, establish four prepared responses; for less-important NPCs, only one or two are necessary.

Prepared dialogue helps you establish the flavor of the adventure, and helps to ensure that important, obvious information is established and passed on to the players. They also help to guide you into maintaining the personality of the non-player character.

What is evil?

Many of your important non-player characters will be evil. It is the means by which evil attempts to achieve its goals that creates many adventures.

However, it is difficult to play evil; it is difficult to understand the motivations of someone who is evil, and of course evil people don't consider themselves evil. Because of this, it's very easy to have unbelievable villains. In my toolkit, I keep a fortune cookie to remind me why villains do evil things:

For a good cause, wrongdoing may be virtuous.

This is evil: the end justifies the means. Your non-player characters have a reason for acting evil, and to the extent they think about it at all, they believe that this reason justifies their actions. Evil is pragmatic, and depending on their outlook, they may even not believe that their actions are evil because the pragmatic action—the one most likely to bring about their desired end—is never the wrong thing to do.

Evil is pragmatic. It will take the easiest, most expedient route to success. Evil is selfish. When thwarted, it envies the success of others. Evil will justify and rationalize when necessary, by saying that everyone does it, that their goal is more important than minor questions of right and wrong, that everyone's the same and taking sides is unproductive, and that, for a good cause, evil is virtue.

And whenever evil tries to claim that evil is virtuous, they will also denigrate virtue. They will call it naïve, short-sighted, and even evil. If they have political power, they will rail against those evil, naïve reformers. They may even pass laws to imprison those who do good or who call for doing good.

So, look at what your evil villain wants to accomplish. Then, work out how the villain rationalizes it. Depending on the villain's political power, look at how the villain discourages doing the right thing within their sphere of influence.

When your villains interact with the player characters or other non-evil non-player characters, smarter and more charismatic villains will use temptation. They will try to provide false choices, choices where all remaining options look like the wrong thing to do. The victim will be faced with choosing the lesser evil.

One way to do this is to convince the good person to put off making the right choice until only the wrong choices remain. When a problem is young there are usually both good and evil answers; the temptation of evil is to wait until only the evil answers remain viable.

If good and bad options remain, the smart or charismatic villain will try to misdirect the moral questions involved. They may try to divert the question into one more about suffering than right or wrong. In Walter M. Miller's beautiful *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, one such person, a good man who has been tempted, says that "pain is the only evil I know". This argument, that "they'll suffer less" is a great temptation, because doing good often requires standing up against people who will not hesitate to abuse the innocent in their attempts to knock you and your allies back down.

Actions and Reactions

Gods & Monsters is a Dumasian universe where success depends on inborn ability and archetype. Study and hard work help you succeed, but what matters is the character's abilities and archetype.

When a character attempts some action, you'll ask the player to make an ability roll or a reaction roll to determine their success. They might make an intelligence roll to build a bridge, or a strength roll to lift an object. Sometimes, you'll ask them to make such a roll for actions that they don't know they're performing, such as a perception roll to detect an ambush.

You'll usually request a reaction roll when the action would be performed better by an experienced archetype, a long-running character. The ability to detect an ambush is heavily dependent on the character's experience. A longer-running character is more likely to know that an ambush is about to occur than will a new character at the beginning of a story. Reaction rolls are usually *reactive* in nature.

If the character's basic abilities are more important, getting better comes specifically through study or training, and level is mostly irrelevant, you can ask for a roll against an appropriate ability. For example, to lift something, a roll against strength is most important. In general, the only way characters get to lift more, even in books and movies, is by becoming stronger or by practicing weightlifting, not by becoming more experienced.

It's your responsibility to choose the appropriate ability or reaction. Occasionally, you may also choose to apply one other ability as either a major or minor contributor. (This should be rare for reactions, which already contain the effects of two abilities.)

Remember that the group gets only two chances for any roll: one group effort and one individual roll. When you ask for a roll, such as a reason roll to remember something or a perception roll to perceive something, and any member of the group could do it, you should say, "I need one of you to make a _____ roll."

Difficulty

Depending on the difficulty of the action, you may grant a bonus or a penalty to the reaction roll or ability roll. You can do so based on the size of the obstacle or the relative difficulty of the action. Read the guidelines in the rulebook for more information. Often, you'll know intuitively what the penalty or bonus should be for a particular action. But if you don't, you can apply one of two heuristics to figure it out. The first heuristic is to use the **average hero**. The average hero has an ability score of 10. How often should the average hero succeed at this task? That is, what should the player have to roll for their character to succeed if they have an average hero? If the average hero needs a 15 or less to succeed, that's a +5 bonus. If the average hero needs a 7 or less to succeed, that's a -3 penalty.

The other useful heuristic is the **100% rule**. What's the minimum ability score needed to succeed or fail at this task 100% of the time? If it takes a 13 strength to lift this thing 100% of the time, that's a bonus of 7, because 13 plus 7 is 20, and it's impossible to fail when the required roll is 20 or less. If it takes a 4 intelligence to understand this thing, that's a bonus of 16. On the other hand, if it's an extremely difficult task, you might go the other way, and think about who will

always fail. If a 6 intelligence will always fail, then that's a penalty of 6, and if even a 15 intelligence will always fail, that's a penalty of 15.

Be careful when applying both difficulty levels and obstacle size penalties, that you aren't counting some difficulties twice. If they're climbing an 80-foot wall, all you care about is the difficulty of climbing 10 feet of that wall. The obstacle size penalty will handle the fact that it's 80 feet instead of 10 feet.

Fields and skills

Characters have *Fields* to help them succeed. Within each field they have *skills*. Their field expertise applies to all skills within that field. A character with *Engineering* at +2 and the *bridge-building* skill gains a bonus of two when building a bridge.

First, choose an appropriate ability, and then choose the appropriate field and skill. The player can (and should) suggest the appropriate skill, since they know their character better than you do. You will approve or deny that suggestion. For a field bonus to be appropriate, both the field and the skill must be appropriate to the task at hand. Only one field bonus can affect any roll.

The risks

Players should understand the risks of failure. It's often a good idea, before a player makes a roll for their character, to say something like "If you fail this, you will…". The player can then make an informed choice about what action they'll take and what results they'll risk for their character.

One action per roll

Don't divide actions into more than one roll outside of life-or-death situations; and inside of life-or-death situations, multiple rolls should help the character rather than make death more likely. Don't try to work out the physics of an action. Ask for a reasonable roll with a reasonable difficulty level. When you start trying to focus too much on a single character's action, you end up ignoring the other players.

Often, outside of conflict one short scene will be no more than one roll per person. Don't sweat anything smaller than that. Contests don't have a specific time-frame or duration. Generally, they apply to one purpose. This is especially important when players use mojo. Mojo is scarce, and when it is used on a roll its effects should last.

During a conflict, contest rolls will usually be one round's worth of activities, but not at the expense of breaking up the contest into boring rolls. Every action should be fun or exciting or both. That includes every roll.

If an action requires more than one field, it probably needs to be broken into smaller steps, one per field. If a character has Literacy in their Highland Culture field, and they know Frankish from their South Bend Culture field, and they want to read some Frankish text, they will first need to *read* the text using Anglish Culture and then they will need to understand it using South Bend Culture.

If an action requires one field, only one roll need be made, even if the action requires multiple skills within that field.

The consequences of success

There are two types of success, depending on whether the character has the appropriate skill and field. If the character does not have an appropriate skill, any success will be a general one. It will be a success, but it will not bring with it specific long-term understanding. If the character has an appropriate skill they have a deeper understanding of what they've done.

- If a character successfully rolls to build a fire, and they don't have an appropriate skill, they still have built a fire. But if they have an appropriate skill, you can assume the fire is safe, long-lasting, and more resistant to going out.
- If a character tries to communicate in a strange language, they will, without an appropriate skill, get a vague understanding of what the creature is saying. If they know the language, however, they know what the creature is saying.
- If a character reads hieroglyphics without knowing the written language, success means they have a general idea of the nature of the document: whether it is regal or common, whether it announces an event or records a diary. If they have an appropriate language skill, however, they have deciphered the writing.

The consequences of failure

If one of the characters has to know the answer for the game to proceed, then the act of asking the question is all that is necessary. You will usually want to avoid situations where the characters must perform specific actions and know specific facts or be unable to proceed. Where this is unavoidable, however, you will want to make the knowledge or success automatic: since you've designed the adventure so that someone has to know, then someone will know it.

You should also avoid being too tight with world information. On a failed roll, characters will still know or do *something*. If the player fails an intelligence roll to know the history of Castle Oberon, they may still know some relevant information about castles in this world.

Always make sure that you let players know when they fail a roll so that they will know to bid mojo if they desire a success.

Dropping things

If a character runs the risk of dropping something, then besides a reaction roll also use their carry score: if they fail their reaction roll, roll to see which slot they drop, not which item. If they have free slots, they might get lucky and not actually drop anything. For example, if a character has nine slots, you would roll a d10 to see which slot they drop from. Results of 10 will need to be re-rolled. They drop everything in that slot; if there's nothing in that slot, they didn't drop anything.

Mojo

Mojo use always matters. If a player chooses to bid mojo on a roll that doesn't matter, and they bid enough to succeed, you must either make it matter or tell them that while they have bid enough to be successful, spending that mojo will not advance them toward their goals. They can then choose to withdraw their successful bid.

What does it mean to have a skill?

In *Gods & Monsters*, characters can try all sorts of outlandish things. A character with no bridge-building skill might attempt to build a bridge; a character with no literacy may attempt to read a document; a character without fire-building skill can start a fire. In the short term, success is basically the same regardless of whether the character has an appropriate skill. The appropriate skill makes success more likely (because of the Field bonus) but lack of a skill doesn't mean that a character cannot build a bridge, start a fire, or see what a book is about.

As mentioned above, if the character has an appropriate skill their success will be deeper and longer-lasting. The character who builds a bridge without any bridge-building skill will get their friends across the river, just as would a character with a bridge-building skill. Without an appropriate skill, their success is basically limited to this particular scene or action. That bridge won't be trustworthy on their return trip, because the return trip is a different scene.

With an appropriate skill, it's a lasting bridge. Barring an external force, the bridge will be there when they return. If an external force does attempt to destroy the bridge, the bridge will likely receive the character's field bonus as a bonus to surviving.

Time

How long does it take to perform a task? That can vary widely depending on the task in question. You'll need to make a ruling based on how much has to be done to perform the task and how long you and the players think it ought to normally take.

When is a roll required?

In a role-playing game like *Gods & Monsters*, it is easy to see when abilities such as strength, agility, and endurance come into play. The game is played in words and imagination. The player's own physical abilities don't matter. But characters also have charisma, intelligence, and wisdom, and these are more difficult to handle. The player's own charisma, intelligence, and wisdom are also used in the game. If they weren't, the game wouldn't be nearly as much fun.

When a player has their character say and do the right thing, no roll is required. A roll is necessary when there is ambiguity. So if a player has their character offer a dryad a gem the dryad will likely be friendly. If the player takes that friendliness as license to make fun of the dryad, a charisma roll will be required to ensure that the jest is taken as intended.

If a player chooses to have their character look in a desk drawer, they'll find what's obvious in the desk drawer. If they say merely that they're searching the room, a perception roll might be required to recognize that the desk drawer is important.

Also, the player characters are always the center of attention. Unless there is a specific rule covering a situation, players will make the reaction and ability rolls that affect their character. When a player tries to have their character bluff their way past a guard, a charisma roll (with appropriate modifiers, including their opponent's wisdom or charisma) might apply. If a non-player character tries to bluff a player character, the player gets to make a perception roll (with appropriate modifiers according to the non-player character's skill and charisma).

Player knowledge, character knowledge

When characters know more than their player does, the player can roll dice to gain access to that knowledge. A player who knows nothing about building bridges can still have their character make an intelligence roll to successfully do so. What happens when the player knows more than the character does?

One answer is to treat game encounters as puzzles and obstacles for the player to solve. The players can act on the knowledge that they have. Their characters can know both what the players know and what is on their character sheet.

Another answer is to treat the encounters as a chance to roleplay the character. Where the player and character have possibly different knowledge, the player must choose:

1. the character would know this;
2. the character would not know this;
3. the character might know this.

For the first two cases, no roll is required. In the latter case, the player can determine a difficulty level as normal for any other knowledge the player is attempting to access via their character.

Neither of these answers are right or wrong. Both answers are valid, and both can be fun. They also overlap. Even with the second answer, player knowledge will still inform character knowledge but to a lesser extent. But it does help to make sure that everyone is on the same wavelength when it comes to player vs. character knowledge. If you see a conflict, you may wish to bring the issue up and make a group decision.

Otherwise, however, when players use player knowledge as character knowledge, and it makes reasonable sense, allow it.

Where it doesn't make sense is usually when a player wants to introduce modern technology into a medieval and/or magical game. If they try to introduce something that shouldn't exist, just tell them "that knowledge doesn't exist here".

Imparting information

A major part of *Gods & Monsters* is the Adventure Guide describing what the player characters see, what they know, and what they can reason.

There are some things you'll tell them in your flavor text. The only way they aren't going to know it is if they interrupt you before you finish reading the text. Describe the scene in order of what is most to least obvious so that interruptions don't leave the characters ignoring the dragon in the room.

Other things you'll tell them if they ask—the act of asking gives them the answer.

Some things they don't have to ask about: when the time is right you'll ask them to make a reaction roll. If they succeed, you'll give them the information. For example, if they're about to be ambushed, you'll ask one of them to make a perception roll. If they succeed, you'll describe something that lets them know there's an ambush.

Many things you'll tell them if they ask a question and then make an ability or reaction roll, depending on the question. For example, they might ask you what their character knows about ancient King Eglund. You'll have them make an intelligence roll, and if successful they know something about King Eglund.

Sometimes you'll have both automatic on questioning and roll-required information. When this happens, it might appear, after they roll and fail, that they've really succeeded. You are, after all, giving them information. If this is an archetypal roll, make sure that they know they failed. Otherwise, they won't know to bid mojo for more information.

Absolute numbers and abstract rolls

Gods & Monsters walks a fine line between abstract and absolute measures of what characters can do. Characters have specific amounts of money. Players keep a list of exactly what the character carries. Within the rules there is a chart of movement rates with exact speeds. This Adventure Guide's Handbook includes a complex chart detailing the distance to the horizon.

They are there for uncontested actions and for guidelines. In general, however, whenever a character is in some sort of contest or conflict, they will make an ability roll or a reaction roll. This gives them the opportunity to be lucky and unlucky, and to do amazing things using mojo.

In general, if you are comparing a character's ability in a contest with the world, and there is a question of success or failure, the player will need to roll.

Automatic success and failure

When a player must roll less than zero to succeed, there is no chance of success (unless they can use mojo). When a player must roll less then 20 (or more) to succeed, success is automatic. If the player doesn't know what number they need, you might still ask them to roll; but if the character reasonably knows that their success or failure is automatic, there's no reason for the player to roll.

Degrees of success

There are three basic kinds of degrees of success. When you call for a random roll, and you decide that on a "difficult" success they found out one thing, but on a "nearly impossible" success they find out that plus something else, that's a roll that has different degrees of success. You'll need to make sure that if the player's roll succeeds at the *difficult* level but fails at the *nearly impossible* level, that the player knows there are more successes. Otherwise, they won't know that they can potentially spend mojo to gain that extra level of success.

The obstacle size can also result in potential degrees of success. If the players are tracking an enemy, and the enemy is twenty miles away, the obstacle size will mean a penalty of seven to the roll. Normally, this means that if they succeed at a penalty of 7, they track successfully and if they fail with that penalty, they are randomly lost.

But if, between the player characters starting and arriving at where their target was, the target has moved further, the obstacle size may change. *Each action is a single roll* still applies. If this means that they now fail, and they can use mojo on the roll, give them that opportunity.

But there's another, more amorphous, psychological degree of success. Normally, all that matters in *Gods & Monsters* is whether or not the roll was greater than the target number or less then or equal to it. It's a pass/fail system.

Excessive successes, however, are psychologically very impressive. When a player rolls a one and they needed a thirteen or so to be successful, that's a cool thing, and if you want to apply that to the level of success, by all means do so. When a player makes their roll by ten points or more, you can give them more a detailed, deeper success. Some special description that lets them know that their character is outclassing whatever it is they're doing. They'll notice a few more things about the brigands who attempted to ambush them, or they've got a more detailed knowledge of the myth that they were rolling to know, or something like that. It won't necessarily mean much to the game, but it will mean a lot to their character image.

Mojo and degrees of success

Mojo cannot be used by the player to arbitrarily create greater degrees of success; this way lies madness. Unless there were known target numbers, or target numbers that should have been known but that come up later due to obstacle size, mojo isn't appropriate. Don't call for or accept it.

Mojo needs to be used for known or distinct targets, or it will end up being siphoned off far too quickly.

Experience

Player characters increase in level by gaining experience points. They have four ways of gaining experience: using mojo for archetypal rolls, meeting strange creatures, defeating opponents in conflict, and looting treasure after defeating opponents in conflict. Player characters will gain experience from mojo immediately, as described in the main rulebook. It is your responsibility to keep track of the rest until the adventure is completed.

Long adventures

If a character gains enough experience to jump two (or more) levels before the adventure is finished, give them their experience total as of the previous day, so that they will gain their next level or come close to it, and will hopefully not jump multiple levels at the end of the adventure.

Meeting strange creatures

Groups gain experience for engaging encounters outside of conflict in the adventure.

For every encounter that the characters engage, add up the levels of the creatures in the encounter and multiply by twenty. Each player character gains that many experience points, even if they weren't personally involved with the encounter.

Groups only gain this experience once for any encounter. Engaged encounter experience is awarded at the end of the adventure.

An engagement is any non-conflict interaction between the characters and the encounter. It can include acquiring information from the encounter through interrogation, accepting a job from the encounter, or engaging it in a discussion.

For example, the characters meet an army. If they fight that army, they'll gain experience points as normal for the conflict. If they negotiate with the army's leader, however, they have engaged the leader, and gain experience for that. The individuals in the army are not a planned encounter, and they haven't engaged those individuals in any case, so they don't get experience for engaging the army.

If, on the other hand, the guide has planned encounters with specific individuals within the army and the characters do engage one or more of those individuals, the group will receive experience for engaging those specific individuals.

If the characters are given a job by a great wizard, that wizard is a planned encounter. The group gains experience by engaging that planned encounter. Random encounters are usually part of the adventure and are thus possible engagements as well.

It is possible to gain experience for engaging a planned encounter as well as for a conflict with that encounter, if the characters do both.

Remember that characters also regain verve during an engagement.

Conflict

Groups gain experience for engaging in dangerous conflicts.

The group gains four experience points for every survival point of their defeated opponents.

If the total levels of the defeated opponents for that day were greater than the total levels on the player character side, the group gains 200 experience per excess level.

If any of their opponents were at least the same level as the highest level character, the group gains one hundred experience per opponent level for that opponent.

This experience is calculated for each period between rests, usually each game day, and comes from opponents who were decisively defeated (not necessary killed).

If a character gained a level during the day, use their lower level for that day.

An opponent may only be decisively defeated once during any one adventure. Opponents who are not part of the adventure are not worth experience. Villagers or townsfolk who are not part of the adventure are not measured, nor are "opponents" who were not opponents. The defeat of an unaggressive traveler, for example, does not garner experience for the characters. Random aggressive encounters are usually part of the adventure and count toward the opponent total.

Experience points for conflict are awarded at the end of the adventure, but are calculated daily. Divide the group's experience total for the day's adventure by the number of characters present for that day's adventuring. This is how much each character receives for that day's adventuring once the adventure is over. A day's adventure is the period between resting for verve restoration.

Group effort

If any of the encounters were part of a group effort, use the group's survival points, not each individual's. For the level of the encounter, use the median level of the group plus the group's group effort bonus.

Looting things

Loot is usually its own reward. Loot can, however, be turned into experience gains. Things looted from trapped or dangerous places during an adventure can be donated or lost with no expectation of tangible benefit. When such loot is donated or lost, it becomes experience points: one silver coin is two experience points.

The loot must have been taken in the course of an adventure from evil or hostile owners, or must have been freely given as the result of an adventure from good or allied owners. It must be lost with no expectation of tangible benefit. For example,

donating to a village will give the group experience even though this increases the goodwill toward the characters in the village. “Good will” is not a tangible benefit. On the other hand, a “donation” that is really a bribe to get something from a church official is not experience-worthy. A loss in a gambling casino is not experience-worthy: there was an expectation of an immediate benefit.

However, if the player stipulates that their character will lose, and the Adventure Guide agrees, this counts as a loss worthy of experience. For example, the players might decide to lose their previous adventure’s loot at the beginning of the next adventure, so as to encourage their characters to accept the moving hand of fate. This is how sequels happen. They can designate one character to have squandered the money in the casino, then make fun of that character for the rest of the adventure.

Donations and losses must be to outside of the group: the group must actually lose the loot. Loot must be donated or lost during the adventure it was looted, or as part of the beginning of the next adventure.

If players (or a player) choose to have their characters lose loot, this is an opportunity for the players to exercise more control over the narration than they otherwise do. Players might decide, for example, that their characters should be forced to jettison some of their loot in order to escape pursuers, or leave a dungeon, or cross a bridge. If the Adventure Guide agrees, the players should then role-play their characters’ loss.

This option is useful after a particularly large haul when you’re wondering why your characters will want to adventure now that they have all this money.

Experience from loot is divided equally among all player characters at the time of the donation. Even if one character donates it against the will of other characters, all members of the group share in the experience.

Experience from loot is awarded at the end of each adventure or at the very beginning of an adventure if previous loot is lost before an adventure begins.

When is the end of an adventure?

Most experience comes at the end of each adventure. Usually, an adventure is a set of notes, whether from the *Gods & Monsters* web site—such as *The House of Lisport*—or purchased from someone else, such as *The Hammers of the God*, or downloaded, such as *The Nameless Dungeon*. The adventure ends when you set the notes aside, the player characters rest up for another adventure, and the game session ends.

In some cases, however, that “set of notes” is a huge book containing many adventures. For example, in mega-dungeons such as *The Castle of the Mad Archmage* or *Stonehell Dungeon*, each level is probably its own adventure. Characters will gain their experience when they leave that level, find a place to rest, and after the session ends. Many times, if you are writing your own mega-

dungeon, you won't bother creating the next level until they reach it. Each level is its own set of notes.

Sometimes, after they rest up they will then continue on to the next adventure during the same session. You'll still wait until the end of the session to sum up their experience, and then give it to them at the beginning of the next session.

Gaining new skills and abilities

When characters gain skills and abilities, it doesn't have to mean they suddenly acquired these abilities. Sometimes, they will need to study to learn new skills. Sometimes, the "new" skills can be explained by saying that the character always knew the skill, but "only now have they had reason to use it." Or perhaps, if they did have a reason to use the skill before, but failed to do so, it was because they had grown rusty in the use of that skill since "leaving the farm." After discovering that the skill remains important, they resolved to restore the skill they used to know.

The ability to learn new magic spells can be explained as the result of special insight, perhaps insight gained over the previous adventure.

In general, the players will have to work with the Guide to explain, if such explanation is required, the appearance of their characters' newfound abilities.

Creating new spells

Players of sorcerors will want their characters to research completely new spells. Compare the spell with other spells to determine the new spell's level.

Making new spells is mostly a matter of applying the appropriate mojo. However, no amount of mojo can allow the creation of spells that don't make sense in the game world. You'll need to work with the player to create a spell that both makes sense and is what they want. At various points the two of you should write the spell that their researches are leading toward, giving them the option of diverging to a different spell.

For example, a player might want a spell that lets their character remember, exactly, scenes or objects. So, they write up what they want the spell to do, and you might come back to them with something like *Vivid Recall*, that lets them remember a scene or object within level days. After level days, the recall degrades to a normal memory.

If that's fine, then that's where their research leads. But they might counter that they're going to research a memory spell that lasts forever, not just several days.

You might then counter with something like *Flash Memory*, in which the memorization lasts forever but once remembered is gone completely. If they object that they'd like to view the memory any number of times, you might decide

that as a memory this is an impossible spell (or you might not, it's up to you), and if so, you might give them a reason roll to consider another tack. You might then counter with something like *Crystal Record*, where the memory is stored in a crystal, and may be viewed any number of times over several days.

New spirit manifestations

Unlike spells, which must be researched, divine spirits can do anything within their sphere of influence. If a prophet has a second level water spirit, they can manifest that spirit in any way that makes sense for a water spirit of that power level. The manifestation must be related to the spirit type and it must be religiously inspired; that is, it must be something that a prophet would do to show the power of their god.

If a player suggests a manifestation that doesn't fit an existing manifestation, compare it to the existing ones and guess at a probable level for the desired effects. Don't waste time on this—most of the time when they suggest a new spirit, you're in the moment and don't want to lose it. Just make a quick guess as to how the desired effects compare to other manifestations, and add two levels to your guess. The in-game justification is that the first time you try something new, it's harder to do.

If the player comes to you ahead of time, so that you've got time to more seriously write up the manifestation's effects, you can dispense with the 2-level penalty. The character has clearly been praying for inspiration and faith.

Once you have time to write up the spirit manifestation, decide what the actual level is for the minimum effect, and how it improves as the spirit level increases. Make manifestation levels low and then scale up—this helps to keep the total number of manifestations low, since each manifestation will have a wide range of power.

Decide on the manifestation's spirit types; whether it centers on the prophet, by touch, or can be targeted to someone or something at range; what kinds of targets it can affect; and whether it affects one target, a limited number of chosen targets, all targets, or a group of targets such as enemies or allies, within the area of effect.

You'll also need to decide whether it requires praying (words), moving (gestures), and/or a focus; if it requires a focus, whether this focus is the prophet's holy symbol or some other symbolic thing.

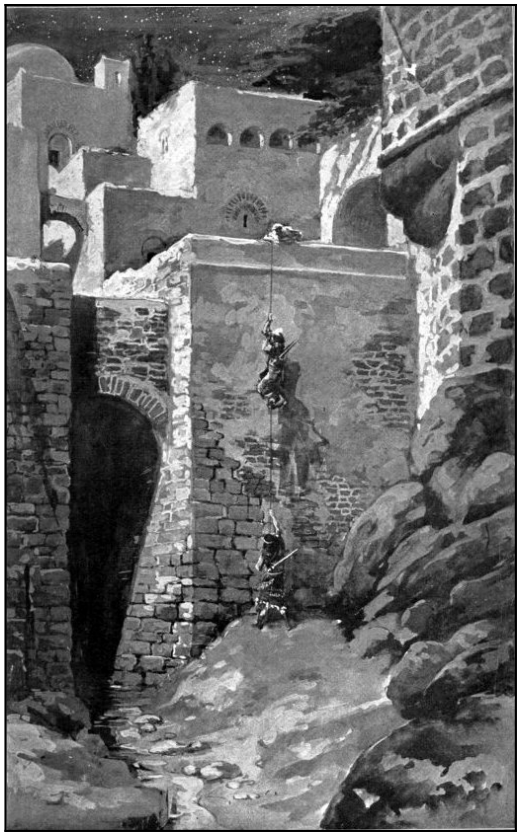
Some spirits can be reversed, and the reverse may be usable by different spirit types.

The rule of thumb is, make spirit manifestations versatile so that there are fewer of them, and only allow manifestations that clearly display divine power.

Fields, skills, and specialties

A field is an umbrella of related skills. One or two fields is likely to make a normal person's profession. Fields describe the profession or kind of profession, and the skills within the field describe specific actions. For example, if your game has a lot of smuggling, you might add "smuggling" to the list of fields. On its own, though, smuggling is not a skill: it doesn't describe a specific action that can be rolled. Some likely skills within the smuggling field might be hide, bluff, or misdirect. These are the actual things a character might do when trying to smuggle something.

A player may choose any field or skill, even one not listed, as long as it doesn't conflict with a restricted field set or a specialty. A field improves the character's ability and reaction rolls, and does not greatly increase the power of the character. You will want to examine new skills to make sure they aren't already covered by existing skills, and to see whether or not they should belong to a specific archetype. Skills should not directly assist archetype-oriented functions such as combat and magic.



If you accidentally allow a skill which shouldn't be a skill, there's nothing wrong with removing it from play or reducing its scope. If removing a skill greatly changes the game, it shouldn't have been a skill in the first place.

Specialties are more powerful. Specialties *can* directly affect an archetype's abilities. Specialties expand on the basic archetypes to create unique characters. If you allow new specialties, you should carefully examine them for prerequisites (other specialties that must be taken first) and requirements (moral code, archetype, minimum level, and minimum ability scores). Also, ensure that the specialty is a single specialty; if it should be two specialties, break it up. Try to keep your specialties fantasy-oriented unless you specifically

wish to break away from the fantasy genre.

When you allow or create a new specialty, always reserve the right to modify it at a later time as you "playtest" it. You'll always discover more about a specialty's scope once it's in play than you could imagine when you were designing it. You should give the player the option of retroactively choosing a different specialty if you modify it so far that they don't want it any more.

Archetype-only abilities

Only members of an archetype can use the special abilities of that archetype. Only sorcerors can cast spells, only monks may use psychic skills, and only warriors can create a combat pool out of their attack bonuses. Where other archetypes can use similar skills, the rules specifically cover their lessened ability. For example, while fighting is the domain of warriors, other archetypes may also fight but with fewer attack bonuses and a lesser facility.

The general rule is that specialized abilities can only be performed by the archetype that has that ability, and less specialized abilities can only be performed by other archetypes with penalties to the roll and less facility with successes. Where this is likely to come into play the most is with thieving abilities. Some of the thieving abilities are things that any adventurer might attempt during their career: disguise themselves, climb a wall, move silently.

You will not want to use the thief rules for non-thieves, except as a guideline for an upper limit of ability. Success rolls will usually be against an ability rather than a reaction (reactions get better with level, and only thieves get better at these skills). For example, if a non-thief attempts to climb a wall, you'll choose an ability (probably the worse of agility or strength) and have them roll against that ability with a difficulty level depending on the wall. A relatively smooth stone wall will likely be at least *extremely difficult*. The character will move more slowly than a thief—probably one sixth movement. And their movement will be louder than walking: they'll be breathing more loudly and letting mortar drop to the ground.

On the other hand, a thief ability as specialized as hiding in shadows will not be open to non-thieves. The thief's *hide in shadows* skill penalizes other characters' reaction rolls. A non-thief trying to hide will at best be able to avoid granting their opponents a bonus to notice them.

What do levels mean?

Levels are more for players than characters. Levels apply to characters only insofar as they are filtered through the narrative that the player constructs for their character. Normally, that narrative involves a neophyte warrior, wizard, thief,

prophet, or monk realizing their potential as they progress through adventures. It's easier that way, and easier is often best. But there's nothing wrong with a player deciding that their first-level warrior is a skilled war hero, or that their first-level sorceror is an ancient wizard. The rules won't change, but if they can construct their narrative appropriately—why they won't defeat scores of goblins single-handedly like they did in the war, or why they aren't using the earth-scorching magic they're famous for—that can be cool.

This also works backwards. Some specialties allow the player to rewrite the past, as long as it doesn't contradict what's happened so far. Levels don't exist to be contradicted. Take, as an example, a tenth-level sorceror with a *teleport* spell, who wants to teleport to a place they visited, briefly, on their first adventure. The player wants their character to be "extremely familiar" with the place so as to avoid injuries.

The character also has the specialty *Foresight*. The player can't, however, choose to say that in reality the character spent months becoming *extremely familiar* with that location. It doesn't fit with what's gone before.

However, there is a third-level spell, *Wizard mark*, that lets them mark a place for later use as "extremely familiar". If the character has that spell now, the player can use foresight to have cast it back in that first adventure—even though the character was first level at the time and, if they'd played it through then, would not have been able to cast a third-level spell. It's the player who is bound by the rules, and the player's character is now tenth level. As long as having cast wizard mark doesn't contradict anything that's gone before, they can have cast it, spending the necessary verve and mojo now.

This is even true if they don't currently have the wizard mark spell! The player can decide to spend the mojo right now to get wizard mark, and then spend the mojo and verve to have cast it way back in that first adventure, as long as knowing wizard mark all that time doesn't seriously contradict anything, which it probably won't.

Bringing in new characters

Bringing in new characters is more difficult than starting a new group. First, you've got to "back-story" some reason for the new character to want to join the existing group. The new character could be a never-before-mentioned relative or friend of an existing character (including, if the new character is replacing a dead character, of the old character). Or, the new character could be searching or striving for the same thing—or a related thing—that the existing group is striving for. Or, they could meet through chance and join up on the hope of glory, money, and/or friendship.

Sometimes an existing non-player character can make a great new character.

The new character's "I will explore" statement should justify why they are joining the existing adventurers, or provide incentive for joining the existing adventurers.

Experience points

A stickier issue is experience points. The obvious thing to do is start new characters with zero experience points. After all, they're new characters that haven't been played before. But not only does this make new characters that much more likely to die off because they're over-matched by things that the existing group can easily defeat, it also isn't true to our fantasy sources. As characters increase in experience, they meet comrades of similar experience.

One solution is to run the new character through a separate set of adventures to bring them partially up to level. This is most viable when there are multiple new characters coming in at the same time, and it can be especially profitable when the new characters are being played by new players. New players are often best started with low level characters so that they can familiarize themselves with the game and with their own abilities. And they are often best started on their own with no experienced gamers becoming impatient or laughing at their lack of expertise. Even good-natured ribbing can sometimes throw a new gamer off.

For experienced gamers who are coming in new or who are replacing a dead or retired character, it makes sense to give their characters enough experience to make them viable as part of the group. Have the player write up an outline of what their character did that makes them this experienced.

How much experience do you give them? This is really up to you and your group. Simple solutions are best: give them enough experience to match the lowest-experience character in the group; or give them two-thirds the experience of the lowest-experience character in the group. I use the latter.

If multiple new characters come in during the same adventure, give them the same initial experience points, even if they come in at different times.

Characters must start at least 300 experience points, plus 100 points per level, away from their next level, so that they have a reasonable amount of time to use their first level mojo.

Mojo

Whatever level a new player character starts at, they get to use the discounted mojo costs during that first level. Characters starting at higher than first level begin with ten plus twice level mojo, modified by their archetypal ability as a major contributor.

Spells cost one mojo per spell level. Mojo spent on equipment is worth level times thirty silver coins.

Moral Codes

Unaligned characters

Being unaligned has advantages, but it also makes characters susceptible to divine charms such as *divine service*. And as they rise in power, they will enter situations where moral code matters, and will be unable to take advantage of those situations.

Characters who do not have a moral code will likely, at some point, have to make a choice. Many specialties require a moral code; if players create their own specialties, watch carefully for indications that a moral code of some kind is required; this can mean that the specialty is about taking a stand, such as an *exemplar* or *merry band*, or that the specialty deals in places of power, such as *power shift* or *staff of power*.

Changing moral codes

At each level advancement, consider whether or not the player character has changed (or, for unaligned characters, gained) their moral code. If you think that the character has been acting in accordance with a moral code other than the one they have on their character sheet, talk about those actions with the player.

Ultimately, it is the player's choice whether their character changes or gains a code.

When a character changes or gains a moral code, it's a bit of a big deal. It should be accompanied by acts of atonement, enlightenment, or righting past wrongs.

Often, especially for unaligned characters, the act that triggered the character's new moral code is the atonement. The many classic Seven Samurai-inspired movies are examples of characters undergoing this type of change.

Ask the player whether they want their character to atone for their past moral code or lack of one; or whether they want their character to right past wrongs (from the perspective of their new moral code) that their character has committed or encouraged. If they do, ask whether they want their character to initiate the atonement, or if they want the game world to somehow require it of them.

In either case, it should make for a great adventure.

Be careful not to shift the focus of the narrative too far away from the other player characters. One thing to consider is that when one character in a narrative undergoes such a change, other characters might be doing the same. This shifts the focus from one player character changing, to some characters changing and others remaining stalwart. The atonement adventure should apply to all of the characters.

Playing Evil

Evil individuals make a choice of being evil, although they aren't likely to call it that. Evil is selfish and manipulative. At the extreme ends, evil is sociopathic. While they won't necessarily call themselves evil, the choice is still made. There are people who pride themselves on successfully manipulating those around them, and who even argue openly that such manipulation is the right way of dealing with others.

Evil often considers itself pragmatic, but usually this pragmatism is short-term. This doesn't make it necessarily the same for every evil person: an evil Elf is likely to see a different short-term pragmatism than an evil Orc. The Elf may have hundreds of years left; the Orc only years.

Player characters should not be evil, unless the entire gaming group wishes to play an evil or mixed-morals party. *Gods & Monsters* isn't designed to support the inter-player conflict that evil player characters will likely cause within adventures.

If one player wants to play an evil character, the other players should be informed. If a player doesn't think that others in the group will be able to act correctly with the out-of-character knowledge that the player's character is evil, consider that those other players are probably not going to enjoy the gaming session either. Any players that aren't mature enough to suppress out-of-character knowledge aren't likely to be mature enough to enjoy the role-playing challenges of playing with a secretly evil character (and that's only the polite way of putting it to the player who wants to secretly play an evil character).

Prophets

Prophets, as might be expected in a game called *Gods & Monsters*, are a special class. Often, their use of *Divine Guidance* will help the player characters know what the right direction is when they're lost during an adventure.

But more than that one spirit manifestation, prophets pray for guidance every time they call new spirits. Their deity will intervene if there's a spirit that their deity wants them to have. Don't hesitate to give prophets spirits other than what the player wanted when there's a good reason from their deity's perspective. Determine one or two spirits that the character should call, and if the character doesn't call that spirit, replace one or two they did call with what they should have. Tell them this when they call the spirits, so that they know their deity has different plans for them.

When that happens, they will probably start looking for an appropriate place to manifest *Divine Guidance*, so be ready with a good riddle, omen, or divine tirade.

Overpowering player characters

Sometimes characters will get into situations they cannot win. They'll take the wrong turn and suddenly face overwhelming odds, or in the course of the adventure they'll face a much stronger opponent. You'll find that players often have their characters fight to the death rather than allow them to be captured and stay alive.

This is not so unrealistic as you might think as the omnipotent Adventure Guide. It is certainly true to much of our pulp sources where heroes fight on against overwhelming odds until completely incapacitated, and it even makes sense in real life. If characters surrender to a small hostile group now, they will only find themselves disarmed and facing a larger hostile group later. This is true whether they're facing bandits or lizard-men. As bad as the odds are now, the odds only get worse after a surrender.

This is especially true if the characters are carrying powerful magic items, or are relying on a sorceror who requires a spell book and spell components. Unless the characters have a good reason to believe they'll be treated well, a last desperate stand with their weaponry and spells intact makes more sense than letting their weapons and spells get taken away. Surrender almost always makes an adventuring party weaker. An infinitesimal chance of survival by fighting now is better than a nonexistent one by fighting unarmed later.

Sometimes you'll have been the one to pit the characters against overwhelming odds for the sake of a greater storyline. You have to be very careful when doing this, and make certain that you understand the situation from the character point of view. The players might know that you wouldn't put their characters in an untenable position, but you can't ask their characters to trust the Adventure Guide. The characters don't know the Adventure Guide. The characters only know their enemies. If the characters can't trust their enemies, the players aren't going to have their characters trust you.

Also, players often resent game master attempts to "railroad" an adventure like this. Players prefer their characters to have choices. If the adventure begins to look more like a railroad that can only go one direction than a path with many branches, players will have less fun, and will take the game less seriously. Within these rules we talk about "characters" and "stories". We use novel-writing terminology as a metaphor for many game-related events, but it is only a metaphor. Your games are not novels. They are not "written" by a single person. If they are stories, they are stories comprised of the combined choices and narratives of every player, and part of the joy of role-playing games is that you are playing to find out what those narratives will be.

Game masters sometimes get frustrated by what they see as player inability to let their characters be captured within the "story", but there's a similar perception on the part of players to game masters: game masters often treat their overwhelming

hordes as if they were one individual, instead of as a number of individuals each of whom would rather not die today.

Or worse, as simply a tool to force a plot line.

It is important to look at these choices from the character perspective. It also helps to look at some examples of captures in our fantasy sources and in real history.

In real life, enemies on the medieval battlefield would often capture enemy leaders and ransom them later. This was partly because both sides were led by nobles who didn't want to set a precedent that nobility should be killed, and who also had the wherewithal to raise money to pay a ransom. This situation doesn't often apply to player characters, but if it does you will want to make sure that the characters know ransoms are expected. And that ransoms, once paid, are honored.

In more modern times, soldiers can be willing to surrender because they know that the other side keeps prisoners of war safe. Armies will keep prisoner of war camps because they know that it makes enemy soldiers more likely to surrender. But, again, POW camps don't usually apply to player characters in a fantasy game. They are not soldiers, and their enemies don't usually have POW camps.

Why should characters surrender?

What reasons do the characters have to surrender? Remember, from a character's perspective, surrender is deadly unless there is a good reason to do it. Characters must have a reason to surrender. In both fantasy and real life, surrender is usually more dangerous than resistance. Criminals don't ask for surrender because they want to be nice to their victims. They ask for surrender so that further resistance will be even more difficult. Normal people often fall victim to that trick, and die. But heroes should be more wary, and usually are.

Can they trust their captors? Without trust, surrender is a dangerous proposition. What have the captors done to show that they can be trusted? Have their captors done anything to show that they cannot be trusted?

Characters are more likely to be willing to surrender if they have met the enemy before and know that the enemy can be trusted to honor the terms of surrender. They are more likely to be willing to surrender if they have seen the enemy act honorably or if they have seen the enemy make an overture of trust. They might be more willing to surrender to a friend, or to an enemy they've dealt with before.

What do the characters have that is irreplaceable? Are the characters carrying items that cannot be replaced and that are worth fighting to the death over? Have they received any indication that captured items will be returned to them? Will the removal of these items make them even weaker compared to their captors? If the characters are carrying irreplaceable items and you think a prison adventure would be fun, you'll need some means of safeguarding those items and ensure that the players know that such means exist.

What time constraints are on the characters? If you've set up a situation where the world will end, or a friend will die, and the characters are under a deadline, they may well see delays as unacceptable, even to the point of death. Capture takes a long time. Captives don't usually have any say over how quickly they get to discuss the terms of their release. Characters under a deadline are less likely to surrender unless there is some indication that they'll be able to quickly continue on their mission.

Edgar Rice Burroughs

I'm a fan of Burroughs' *Tarzan* and find it a useful source for fantasy adventures. As an example, I've just pulled out *Tarzan and the Castaways*, and found a point where Tarzan is a captive. Backtracking to find out how Tarzan was captured, we find that this is a typical example of fighting "to the death". Burroughs (the 'Adventure Guide') has special plans for Tarzan, however, and the enemies capture Tarzan alive.

First, Tarzan hears hunters killing elephants indiscriminately; Tarzan considers himself protector of the jungle, so he tracks them down. They have firearms, he has none. He doesn't care. He tells them he's going to kill them for killing the elephant. Mullargan, the "heavyweight champion of the world", pulls his gun, but Tarzan attacks anyway—and succeeds in disarming Mullargan before Mullargan can fire.

This is a common mistake by beginning game masters: assuming that players will surrender the moment a gun is pulled on them (or, in fantasy, a knife is at their throat). In both fantasy and real life, surrender is dangerous in such situations. If an opponent pulls a deadly weapon on you, you have to assume they mean to kill you. That's the time to resist, and crime statistics back it up: those who resist when a firearm is pulled on them survive more often than those who surrender.

Heroes know this, and they resist. Tarzan doesn't give up because someone else pulls a gun on him. In fact, he initiates unarmed combat against an armed opponent, to avenge a death he cannot reverse. And he's successful.

Further down the page, some tribesmen called the "Babangos" see the fight and decide to capture everyone.

> The Babangos, realizing that the three men below them were thoroughly engrossed and entirely unaware of their presence, advanced silently, for they wished to take them alive and unharmed. They came swiftly, a hundred sleek warriors, muscled and hard, a hundred splendid refutations of the theory that the eating of human flesh makes men mangy, hairless and toothless.
>
> Marks saw them first, and screamed a warning: but it was too late, for they were already upon him. By the weight of their numbers, they overwhelmed the three men, burying Tarzan and Mullargan beneath a dozen sleek dark bodies; Mullargan saw him raise a warrior above his head and hurl him into

> the faces of his fellows, and the champion was awed by this display of physical strength so much greater than his own.
>
> This momentary reversal was brief—there was too many Babangos even for Tarzan. Two of them seized him around the ankles, and three more bore him backward to the ground; but before they succeeded in binding him, he had killed one with his bare hands.

Tarzan, like any good player character, fights to the end. He knows that dangerous creatures lurk in the jungle. And he's right: these are cannibals. They plan to eat him.

After they bind him in combat, they tie him tightly; he's captured. Burroughs knew he was setting up a situation where Tarzan would fight to the death, so he ensured that Tarzan's captors were willing to capture him alive even after Tarzan killed some of them. Of course, Burroughs did this by making them cannibals who prefer living flesh, ensuring that Tarzan is going to do his best to escape as soon as feasible.

Novelists have many ways to capture their "player characters" and they make use of them. Sleep gas, binding during combat, knocking unconscious, nerve poisons. Good authors do not have their main characters captured through a surrender that makes no sense from the character's perspective. Either the surrender was set up ahead of time in a manner that makes surrender reasonable, or the surrender is forced on the characters by knocking them out or tying them up.

In a discussion about this on Usenet, another person gave a different Burroughs example. I don't follow John Carter of Mars, but this example has John Carter surrender without Burroughs having Carter fight to the end. In chapter three of *A Princess of Mars* he is faced by a small army armed with firearms. Carter realizes that fleeing is too dangerous when facing so many firearms. His choices are only to fight or to surrender. He has never met these fearsome enemies before. Without more information, it will make more sense to fight to the death than to surrender.

The Martian leader recognizes this, and decides to defuse the situation. Despite not speaking Carter's language, the Martian must gain Carter's trust.

> The Martians, after conversing for a short time, turned and rode away in the direction from which they had come, leaving one of their number alone by the enclosure. When they had covered perhaps two hundred yards they halted, and turning their mounts toward us sat watching the warrior by the enclosure.
>
> He was the one whose spear had so nearly transfixed me, and was evidently the leader of the band, as I had noted that they seemed to have moved to their present position at his direction. When his force had come to a halt he dismounted, threw down his spear and small arms, and came around the end of the incubator toward me, entirely unarmed and as naked as I, except for the ornaments strapped upon his head, limbs, and breast.

> When he was within about fifty feet of me he unclasped an enormous metal armlet, and holding it toward me in the open palm of his hand, addressed me in a clear, resonant voice, but in a language, it is needless to say, I could not understand. He then stopped as though waiting for my reply, pricking up his antennae-like ears and cocking his strange-looking eyes still further toward me.
>
> As the silence became painful I concluded to hazard a little conversation on my own part, as I had guessed that he was making overtures of peace. The throwing down of his weapons and the withdrawing of his troop before his advance toward me would have signified a peaceful mission anywhere on Earth, so why not, then, on Mars!
>
> Placing my hand over my heart I bowed low to the Martian and explained to him that while I did not understand his language, his actions spoke for the peace and friendship that at the present moment were most dear to my heart. Of course I might have been a babbling brook for all the intelligence my speech carried to him, but he understood the action with which I immediately followed my words.
>
> Stretching my hand toward him, I advanced and took the armlet from his open palm, clasping it about my arm above the elbow; smiled at him and stood waiting. His wide mouth spread into an answering smile, and locking one of his intermediary arms in mine we turned and walked back toward his mount. At the same time he motioned his followers to advance. They started toward us on a wild run, but were checked by a signal from him. Evidently he feared that were I to be really frightened again I might jump entirely out of the landscape.

Burroughs makes absolutely certain that Carter knows it is safe to surrender. The army's leader orders his army to back off so that he faces Carter alone. The leader steps off of his horse, and then throws down his weapons. He speaks clearly (if unintelligibly), and holds the restraint in his open palm. When he has captured Carter and he asks his army to return, they start running. He tells them to slow down and not be so threatening. Carter not only has a reason to trust his enemy enough to surrender, he knows he can trust his enemy even after he has surrendered.

Honorable enemies who seek to capture powerful foes with minimal loss of life recognize that their enemy must trust them. They will make graduated promises and keep those promises even after their captives surrender. And it makes sense for opponents to want the other side to surrender. Surrender minimizes the loss of life on both sides. Groups that accept surrender and treat captives well will find that more opponents surrender rather than fight to the death. This applies to player characters as well as to non-player characters. If the player characters gain a reputation for killing captives or treating them poorly, their enemies will fight to the death or run away if it is safe to do so, but will rarely surrender.

Gender and our taboos

Gender is almost never referenced in the game rules. Assuming basically humanoid races, gender will usually, but not always, be male or female

Gender has no effect on the game rules. There are no rolls for pregnancy, for example. Player characters should never become pregnant, nor should they become parents, unless the player initiates it and requests it. Guides should not require major, permanent changes to player characters without player approval. Similarly, player characters should not be subject to rape or similar humiliations. While it may be realistic in some of the circumstances adventurers find themselves in, this is not a realistic game.

It is very easy for a game to spin out of control, with lasting detrimental effects to the players' friendships, if these cultural taboos are broken. Players may find it interesting to play through some of these events: characters may become pregnant, may change gender, may lose arms, legs, or senses at the player's request. The Guide, however, should never make the request, even as a suggestion. They must come specifically and explicitly from the player.

The World

There is no default world setting for *Gods & Monsters*. This game is about the characters, and any generic quasi-medieval world will suffice. The *World of Highland* is a combination of the American west and medieval Europe of myth.

There are many pre-designed game worlds on the market that you can purchase, as well as many available on-line. You can use the worlds of any fantasy book series that you enjoy—just remember to keep the players' characters in the forefront of the adventures.

You can also create your own world, basing it on the kinds of adventures you and your friends would like their characters to have.

Concept

When creating your world, think about what sorts of things you want to go on in that world. What books, movies, or other works are your inspirations? If you were writing a movie based on this world, what would be your short description of the concept? For example, you might decide on a world of "worlds within worlds" similar to many of the writings that went on at the turn of the century and later.

> *The Dreamlands are inspired by the dream works of Lord Dunsany and H.P. Lovecraft, the works of Edgar Allan Poe and E.R. Eddison, J. M. Barrie's "Peter and Wendy", L. Frank Baum's "Wizard of Oz", Stephen King's "The Stand" and his "Gunslinger" series, and the Super Mario video games. The Dreamlands are a place of riddles, secrets, hidden treasures, strange creatures, and worlds within worlds. The depths of the deepest dungeon may lead to new lands. Holding the right key may open doors you never knew existed, to places you never believed possible. A castle of ice overlooking a grand waterfall, cities that float in the air. The Dreamlands encompass every form of high fantasy, intense horror, and Byzantine politics. The Dreamlands lack only moderation.*
>
> *Anything is possible, if you but know where to look.*

Conflict

There probably should be some major conflict going on in the world, which the players will, first, be pawns in, and, later, begin to take control of. This conflict might be a war, or it might be a tyrant, or it might be some byzantine politics, or anything else that the players might find interesting to "take sides" on. You shouldn't settle for an overlying conflict immediately, but keep in mind that you'll

want one as the campaign progresses. You will also want to decide, eventually, how prevalent knowledge of this conflict is.

At the beginning of the campaign, the most important "conflict" for the other players will be their characters' immediate survival. But as the campaign progresses, their characters will begin to take a wider view. Listen to what your friends say in-character about what they *think* is going on in the campaign world for some great ideas about what really is going on.

> *The Dreamlands are unraveling. Within the Dreamlands, the world is moving on to a more mundane reality. Lost cities, devoid of life, haunt the edges of some realms. Some realms have been lost, fallen forever into nightmare, the paths to their kingdoms now unknown. Others, at the frayed edges of the Dreamlands, have fallen apart and come back together in a mangle.*
>
> *Different realms have different connections to the Dreamlands. Some realms far from the center of the Dreamlands may not even know of the reality of their existence, knowing of other realms only as murky legends of faerie rings or deep caverns to hell, or castles on the tops of clouds.*
>
> *Most residents of the Dreamlands are not aware of the moving on of their lands, but they will have legends of heroic times, and heroes unmatched by the heroes of the present time—who, often enough, gain their heroism picking at the ruins of the earlier heroes and their battles and great cities.*

Magic

How common is magic? How common are sorcerors? Does every town have its hedge magician who sells cheap magic in exchange for a side of beef or a bushel of tomatoes? Or are sorcerors rare, powerful beings who hide away in remote towers, forever practicing their arcane arts away from any prying eyes?

> *Toward the center of the Dreamlands, magicians are common, great sorcerors rare. Magic is the ability to manipulate the malleable dreamworld itself. As one goes from the center to the edges of the Dreamlands, sorcerors become rare.*
>
> *The Dreamlands may be viewed as a great world tree: on the leaves of the tree is the illusion of separate worlds. Here doorways and openings are required to pass from place to place. At the branches this illusion vanishes. No longer are portals necessary to pass from one world to another. Instead paths lead naturally from branch to branch.*

Sorcerors, Prophets, and Psychics

In myth and legend, there isn't much of a difference between sorcerous magic and divine magic, and psychic skills are mostly an invention of modern fantasy. Depending on the type of campaign you're running, you may decide that three kinds of "magic" is too many. Normally, you would strike either psychics or sorcerors—playing *Gods & Monsters* without Gods, after all, would be a bit odd, although certainly fantasy literature abounds with priests who would best be modeled on the sorceror archetype. You might even decide to strike two and leave only one of the magical archetypes.

Moral codes

What do moral codes mean in your world? Are they part of the foundation of the world? What power do they have in the mortal world? Do they act through deities, or do they have their own messengers or lines of communication?

Some campaigns give everyone, down to the chimney sweeps and street urchins, moral codes. In others, moral codes are mostly invisible until the characters reach higher levels, where they begin to notice the strings behind the curtains, and later the hands holding the strings.

In some worlds there will be secret societies devoted to the furtherance of their moral codes, waiting to induct the appropriate heroes when those heroes have proved their worth. In others, the moral codes will be sources of power for those who follow their path. And in others the codes will be super-intelligent forces vying against each other.

Where to start playing?

Once you know the sort of world you want, you've got two ways of continuing. You can continue to describe the world from the top down, going from the ethos to the parts of the world (continents on an earth-like world), to the kingdoms, major cities and major players in those cities. Or, use a bottom-up approach. Create the place the characters will begin (probably a village or city), and then create the first adventure. Keep a list of possible future adventures as well, so that you can foreshadow them during this first adventure. If you have time, place this first village on a crude map so that you have an idea of what cities, villages, and landmarks are nearby.

If you plan to start the characters in lost dungeons, it often is easier to start them in small towns or villages at the edges of kingdoms. This makes it easier for them to reach the ruins outside of the kingdom. Later, the characters will journey to the great cities of the world. If, however, you plan to start the characters by involving them in Byzantine politics, you'll probably want to start them in a metropolis that

contains such politics. Later, they might also interest themselves in traveling to the once great ruins outside the kingdom's borders.

How to end playing?

Gods & Monsters is designed for long-term play, but nothing lasts forever. While you don't want to have a desired ending for the campaign—you'll want to let the players choose their course through the world—it's a good idea to have ideas about how the campaign *could* end if it had to. You might have ideas for an epic, multi-year adventure, but sometimes unforeseen circumstances dictate an end that comes sooner. It'll help if you always keep ideas in mind for turning the next adventure into the climactic conclusion.

Whatever you choose, endings must be exciting, must build on what has already happened, and must leave the players knowing they've accomplished something.

How much detail?

Don't describe the world in too much detail. Always stay just a few steps ahead of the player characters, so that you can mold the world to the kind of fantasy they enjoy. A couple of paragraphs on concept, conflict, and the supernatural will suffice to start. Your main concern is the first adventure, and your second concern is the town, city, or village the characters begin in. They'll visit the rest of the world later, and by then you'll know more about what it needs to contain.

When rolling dice, roll them where the players can see them, to help them get a feel for how difficult or how easy or how rare or how common events and actions are.

Money

In the rules, all costs are in a single default monetary unit, the "silver coin". In real life, of course, there are many currencies, and the characters will end up finding more than silver coins. You'll need to decide what level of detail you want. The easiest is to have a standard coinage used everywhere. It might be a simple base-10 system:

Coin	Worth
Silver Coin	1 silver coin
Gold Coin	10 silver coins
Bronze Coin	.1 silver coins

Or, you can use a more medieval system with units in twelfths, halves, and sixteenths:

Coin	Worth
Silver Coin	1 silver coin
Gold Coin	12 silver coins
Bronze Coin	1/16th silver coin
Half-bronze	1/32nd silver coin

Or, you can have different currencies in different areas, each with their own names.

Crosspoint mint:

Coin	Image	Metal	Worth	Bulk
Pound	Ship and Sword	gold	20 silver coins	.06
Bishop's Pound	Bishop and Sword	gold	240 silver coins	.6
Shilling	Ship and Sword	silver	1 silver coin	.06
Penny	Cross and Sword	silver	1/12th silver coin	.01
Half-penny	Cross and Fish	silver	1/24th silver coin	.01
Farthing	Plus and Plus	bronze	1/48th silver coin	.04

Great Bend mint:

Coin	Image	Metal	Worth	Bulk
Great Pound	Crown and Sword	gold	120 silver coins	.36
Mayoral Pound	Scroll and Face	gold	20 silver coins	.06
Mayoral Shilling	Face	silver	1 silver coin	.06
Mayoral Penny	Crucifix	silver	1/12th silver coin	.01
Mayoral Farthing	Fish	bronze	1/48th silver coin	.04
Sous Tournis	Crown and Scepter	gold	40 silver coins	.1
Gros Tournis	Crown and Cross	silver	4 silver coins	.1

There might be completely different coinage systems used in the past civilizations that the adventurers are looting. In general, money is worth less in countries outside of where it was made, from 10% to 50% less. Money from one or perhaps two influential trading countries may be worth more than local money, especially if the local economy is depressed.

Remember, however, that in a world where money is made from valuable metals, there is always a built-in support level. At some point it becomes worthwhile to melt the gold, silver, or bronze down and sell the metal. Of course, the metal's value can vary as new mines are found or old ones peter out.

Because the metal in coins has worth, coins—especially gold and silver coins—run the risk of being "chipped" to remove slivers of metal. The slivers are melted down and sold, and the coin (the chiseler hopes) can still be used at face value. This is one of the reasons that modern coins often have reeded edges. The vertical grooves make it obvious if someone has removed parts of the edges of the coins.

Availability of equipment

You may decide to adjust the availability of some equipment. For example, if your fantasy world does not contain firearms (or only contains them in certain areas), characters in your world (or outside of those areas) will be unable to purchase them. The level of technology present in your world may also affect the availability and price of armor (especially the better plate armors).

You might also adjust availability or price of some equipment due to temporary concerns. During periods of war, especially naval war, hemp rope tends to become hard to find and be expensive when available. Substitutions will have to be made; for example, if hemp rope can't be found, the characters may have to use lower quality jute rope. You will then have to decide the effects of the lower-quality substitute that the characters use.

In some cases, items may still be available on the black market but be illegal. Such items will only be available at higher prices and it may be dangerous for characters to be caught carrying such items.

Hamlets, villages, towns, and cities

In the kind of medieval-level populations envisioned in most fantasy games, any urban gathering of 10,000 or more people is a city, and any urban gathering of 1,000 or more people is a town. An area without that many people, but with at least ten houses, is a village; anything smaller that wants to call itself something is a hamlet.

Most urban gatherings are simple villages and hamlets, near a crossroads, a bend in the river, a useful plain, or a defensible point if the area is dangerous. The smaller hamlets might simply be a point where several farming properties abut. Villages aren't going to have a regular market, unless the market is its reason for existing. They'll have only one church. Hamlets won't likely have any church. If they have any religious services at all, it will be a regular mission from a nearby city or town. More likely, however, the hamlet's population will travel to the nearest village for services.

What makes a town or city is usually the presence of some industry or other draw. It might be a cathedral, making the city a religious center. Or it might be a port, making the city a trading center.

There may also be paperwork requirements for being a legal city or town.

Who lives there?

In any village of a hundred people, there are likely to be forty-two adults (age 16 and older), forty children (age 9 and younger), and eighteen kids who might also function as adults. More specifically:

age	village (100)	town (1,000)	city (10,000)
infants (0-2)	16	160	1,600
young kids (3-9)	24	240	2,400
older kids (10-15)	18	180	1,800
young adults (16-24)	16	160	1,600
adults (25-39)	12	120	1,200
experienced adults (40-59)	10	100	1,000
elders (60-)	4	40	400

Wars, famine, and culture, of course, can modify these numbers.

Towns and cities will have more specialization in all of the adult ranges. An elder in a village is an elder, but an elder in a city is an elder in a guild or an elder statesman, for example. The carpenter in a village will do all sorts of carpentry; the city carpenter will specialize in furniture, wheels, stagecraft, or some other form of woodworking.

Villages won't have a craftsman for every craft. The majority of adults in a village are likely farmers. A village will have only a few craftsmen, one to five, and most of them probably in related fields. Anyone needing other craftsmanship will travel to another village, to the market village if one exists, or go to town.

The marketplace

Everyone loves shopping. They're willing to travel great distances for it. This means merchants can set up marketplaces and if they're any good, expect people to come to them. Villages, not large enough to support a daily marketplace, might have a weekly or monthly market in a village square or outside the village. An area with several villages or hamlets might have a market area in some central location that everyone can easily reach. If successful, such a marketplace is likely to support its own village, and will probably even grow to a town, eclipsing the size of the villages it supports.

When marketplace days are rare, they're likely to be special days. Sporting events, such as jousts, will draw visitors in to spend at the market.

Depending on local culture there may also be days when the marketplace is shut down for religious or legal reasons. There may also be rules relaxing some laws on special market days, such as an annual free market where craftsmen who are not part of a guild may legally sell their crafts.

The guild

In a village or hamlet, there's probably only one person doing each of the important tasks that villagers need. As population grows, however, you end up with competing bakers, butchers, blacksmiths, and so on. Often, as competition threatened to cut into their profits, existing craftsmen would join together into a guild. The guild would pool money and influence together to lobby for a monopoly: a law saying that anyone wanting to take part in their trade must be a member of the guild. The guild could then limit the number of competitors in the town or city.

Because of their monopoly, guilds could become very wealthy, and many guilds in larger towns or cities will have ornate guildhalls for meetings and fraternal functions. Guilds will also have a symbiotic relationship with the local government, with guild money bankrolling politicians, and politicians passing guild-friendly laws.

Guilds guide their members starting with their apprenticeship. Apprenticeships often start when the apprentice is twelve to fifteen. From there, the apprentice becomes a journeyman, that is, a guildmember who is legally able to take jobs and be paid for their work. In larger towns, there may also be a master, and, in larger cities, grandmaster career stages. Such terms are only legally available to guild members.

Each guild is likely to have their own mark, which, if they make something tangible, they will stamp on each of their products to prove its provenance.

Guilds control product pricing, member wages, craft quality, and advertising.

In an area that supports guilds there is likely to be a guild for just about anything: actors, apothecaries, armorers, bakers, bankers, blacksmiths, brewers, chandlers, cobblers, carpenters, farriers, fletchers, goldsmiths, masons, merchants, musicians, plumbers, scribes, sculptors, shipwrights, vintners, and weavers.

If they think they can convince politicians to give them a monopoly, any group is likely to try to form a guild so that they can set prices and block competition.

Weather

Special weather is an encounter. Choose appropriate weather for the adventure and locale, and place it in the *Natural Encounters* section of the area's encounter chart.

If weather is a major part of an area's flavor, such as sandstorms in deserts, make sure that kind of weather comes up often enough in the *Natural Encounters* breakout table, and that *Natural Encounters* itself happens often enough in the main table.

Other planes of existence

There are planes of existence beyond the physical plane that the characters inhabit. The most commonly used will likely be the astral and ethereal planes, but depending on the campaign there may be others, such as the planes of existence where the gods live, or the planes of existence where demons live.

These other planes can be another source of adventures, as knowledge not meant for man crosses over.

The astral plane

The astral plane is a spiritual plane. This is where ghosts walk and gods live. Such creatures can often break through to the physical world, especially through dreams.

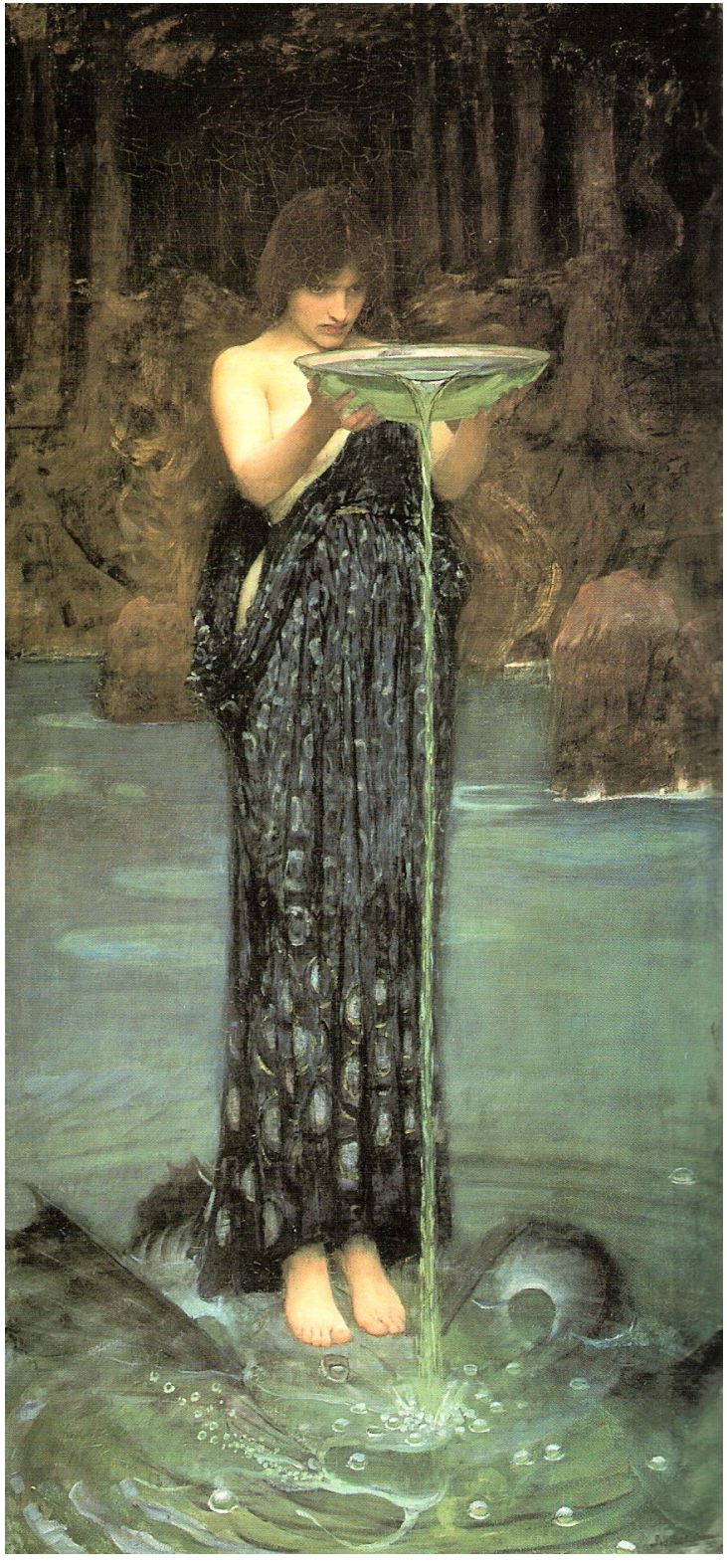
Sorcerors can traverse the astral planes as well, with the right spells: *clairvoyance*, *astral wall*, and dream spells all affect the astral. Monks reach the astral plane through *spirit travel*. Prophets do so with spells like *paths of the dead*.

The ethereal plane

The ethereal plane is an extra dimension that crosses and binds the visible dimensions. Sometimes it is also known simply as the ether.

The ethereal plane may be used to travel long distances in short times, as with the *teleport* spells or *angular path*. It can also be used to temporarily drop out of the world, as with the *lost corner* and *magic box* spells.

Psychics who have *Dimensional Science* travel the ethereal plane.



Arcana

Special effects

In the course of creating adventures, you'll often need to create special effects: magical or divine powers that were used in the past or will now be used to initiate the adventure or by the villains against the party.

It's a good idea to write down the actual spell or spirit manifestation that was used to create the special effect. If it's a spell, some clues to the spell's origin might still be lurking somewhere in the dungeon, or on the person of the sorceror who used it.

Even if they never find the original spell, the groups' sorceror can research it; they can spend mojo to get that spell for themselves. Spirit manifestations are even easier: if the spirit manifestation falls under one of the player character prophet's spirit types, that prophet can have their appropriate spirit use the effect immediately. You'll need to be fair: if you create a *Rock the Boat* spirit manifestation for your Trickster-wielding evil prophet, that's going to fall under the Water spirit type as well.

Think about new spells and spirits with the players in mind: what happens when they gain access to this new power? What is the appropriate level, and what are the appropriate restrictions? Your NPC will follow the same restrictions and use the same foci or ingredients. That makes the world more fun and more immersive.

Within places of power you have more leeway to do weird things, but even then players may choose to engage in a similar ritual, either to recreate the effect or to counter it. You'll need to know the level of sacrifice required to engage in the ritual, and, again, the non-player character must similarly sacrifice. That sacrifice will probably even be a part of the adventure.

Divine Intervention

In fantasy worlds, gods can walk among us. In some campaigns the gods might be amorphous beings who rarely dabble in mortal affairs, such as Cimmeria's *Crom*. In campaigns on the other end of the scale, the gods might be as common as in Greece, where any passing swan can be a god in disguise.

How often do the gods involve themselves in mortal affairs? Are there divine conflicts above and beyond the important mortal conflicts of the game? Or are mortal conflicts also the concern of the gods? Which gods exist? You can pull pantheons from our own history, from fiction, or make up your own. Or you can combine all three.

Motivation

Gods can have many reasons for caring about or playing with mortal fate. These reasons can range from the petty to the grand. There might be a grand conflict playing out between the partisans of each moral code, each trying to gain the upper hand over the other. Or, the gods might be jealous, bickering super-humans, ready to smite rivals on a moment's notice if someone starts thinking they're smarter, faster, or more beautiful than the gods. Such gods can fall in love with mortals, and be jealous of their mortal rivals.

In between, the gods can, rather than taking direct part in mortal affairs, offer aid to mortal heroes, as in the events leading up to the battle of Troy.

Power

It is important in a fantasy game to remember the difference between "the gods" and "God", especially if you are currently a worshipper of a one-omnipotent-god religion. The "one god" is generally an all-powerful being whose self permeates, and probably is, the universe. When God thinks, things happen. In the Jewish and Christian Old Testament, God decided to make the world, and it was made. In pantheonic religions, it isn't as easy to create a world. Maui had to fish land from the ocean to make room for mankind, for example. And before him, other gods argued about how to separate the Earth and the Sky, who themselves were gods. Some gods wanted to destroy Earth and Sky, others wanted to separate the two gods peacefully. After the peaceful option won, battle raged between the factions.

These gods are not omnipotent. They're not someone you want to cross in a fight, unless you're a god yourself, and even then the result is not going to be pretty in mortal lands. These gods have greater or lesser power over, or gain it from, some aspect of nature or mankind, and may see things happen in the world through this aspect. They are difficult to kill—even if you chop them up and spread them to the wind, somehow they manage to find a way back, although their penis might end up in the wrong place. They often live in another place, land, or heavenly plane, such as Mount Olympus or Asgard. They live forever, or at least until killed by another god.

Moral codes

Do gods follow moral codes? In ‘real life’, or at least real legends, gods do pretty much whatever they want, seemingly petty in one story and honorable in the next. In your game, it will depend a lot on what the moral codes mean. Are they simply guides for players? Then they’ll probably be guides for the gods as well. Are they an over-riding ethos, implied if there are exemplars in your game? Then gods who choose a moral code will be bound to them as much as or more than mortals.

Some options are:

- Gods are not bound by moral codes at all, existing independently of them.
- Gods may be aware, unaware, aligned, or unaligned. The more powerful the god, the more likely they are to be aligned.
- Moral codes exist through the gods' creation. Gods are not bound to them in the same way as mortals are.
- Moral codes are the overriding supernatural powers of the world, and bind even the Gods, or exist beyond the Gods as the Gods exist beyond mortals.

Demigods, elder gods, spirit gods, and heroes

The main portion of any pantheon is held by the "normal" gods of that pantheon. Zeus and Hera, for example, among the Greek gods. Many religions include earlier gods whom the current gods overthrew, or who for some reason withdrew on their own. Because of the influence of Lovecraft, these **elder gods** are often seen as immensely powerful, but it doesn't have to be the case. In Greece, the elder gods were mostly vanquished, left to perform elder-god-like things such as hold up mountains.

Heroes are people who have left an astounding impact on the culture and religion. Most of the saints are heroes of Christianity. **Demigods** are those heroes or legends whose exploits resonated so well with either the gods or the people (depending on your theory of where gods receive their power) that they have attained god-like status in the religion. Hercules and Mary are demigods of their respective religions.

Spirit gods are gods invested within a particular location, such as a special grove or river. The influence of spirit gods may wane the further the prophet travels from the spirit god's center of power.

Player character prophets always have access to four spirit types, plus the prophet spirit type. Spirit level is limited by the character's wisdom. If a deity worshipped by a player character is some form of lesser god, then that player's character is or will become the favored prophet of that deity—the only one who is able to use higher-level spirit manifestations and a full complement of spirit types.

Non-player character prophets will have limited access to spirits if they worship demigods, spirit gods, or heroes, and potentially if they worship elder gods.

For NPCs, gods and elder gods will dispense any level of spirits (in some cases, elder gods will not or will be forbidden to). Demigods will dispense spirits of first to eighth level, spirit gods of first to sixth level (up to eighth level within their domain), and heroes of first to fourth level.

For NPCs, gods will dispense five spirit types, demigods four, spirit gods three, and heroes two. One is almost always the prophet type.

Heroes rarely use prophets. The relationship between a prophet and their spirit god is usually even more intimate than with other gods and often has a specific purpose.

Avatars

It is difficult for gods to die on the mortal planes in most fantasy worlds. Gods rarely fully manifest in the mortal world. They normally come in mortal guise, sometimes not even in human form. Zeus was well known for coming in the form of animals or even rain. Jehovah called to Moses as a burning bush.

These mortal forms of gods are called avatars. In Christianity, Jesus, and the flames that came to rest on the apostles' heads, were each avatars of the One True God of Christianity. This is part of the meaning of the Trinity, the "Three who are one". Each form has autonomy, but each form is still but a part of the whole.

Sometimes, the avatar doesn't even know it's a god. Dr. Donald Blake didn't know he was the thunder god Thor, even after he assumed the thunder god's powers.

The avatar may, at times, contain the whole of the god's self. Dr. Donald Blake was Thor, confined for humility to human form. In Kevin Smith's "Dogma", with Jehovah's avatar placed in a coma the god was unable to resume his god-like persona as long as the avatar remained alive but unconscious.

Sometimes, gods come to the mortal planes in avatar form by their own volition. Other times, lesser gods will be forced to come to the mortal planes by their ruling god (Odin, Zeus), either as punishment or to learn some lesson. In some fantasies, even mortals may control when an avatar is formed. H. P. Lovecraft's horrific gods were often unable to take form unless at the behest of mad priests, or at the mention of their name by foolish scholars.

Often, when an avatar is defeated in the mortal planes, the god is unable to return to that plane for a specific period of time.

It is difficult to create hard and fast rules on the use of avatars in your campaign. Avatars can be different from fantasy to fantasy and even from god to god. Their power may wax and wane with the seasons, the stars, or the actions of their followers.

- Avatars might be powerful or weak.
- Avatars might be knowledgeable about their status or oblivious.
- Avatars may have the full knowledge that they have as deity, or they may have only a subset of that knowledge.
- Avatars might be born of mortal blood, or might be created fully-formed by the god as needed.
- Avatars might be mortal or immortal.

- Avatars might be here of their own volition or under orders from another deity.
- Avatars might share in the current vision of their central god-like form, or might know only so much as they knew when they took avatar form.
- Avatars might be oblivious to mortal needs such as hunger and lust, or might be fully affected by such needs.
- Avatars can exist for noble reasons or petty reasons.
- Avatars may exist at will, or at some special occurrence, such as an astrological event or the mention of their name.

Involving the gods

When you choose to involve the gods in your campaign, you need to be very careful. This is a story about the player character heroes, and the player characters need to remain at the center of the story.

All rules are made to be broken, but I might recommend that if player characters meet a god or two at lower levels, that these be powerless avatars, present only to manipulate or guide the heroes. At higher levels, the characters might receive more direct guidance, but will also face more direct dangers as a result of that guidance. If one god is taking an influence in the course of mortal affairs, there is probably at least one other god who is opposing that influence.

The influence of the gods should be slowly revealed over the course of many adventures. Such involvement will not be the stuff of a single adventure.

Worshippers at war

In real life, many wars have been fought over different interpretations of the same religion. For whatever reason, the gods have not intervened directly, and as far as we know not even indirectly, to correct whichever side was wrong. In a fantasy world, with the gods intervening for so many other trivial things, why wouldn't they get involved when their worshippers fight with each other?

It's something you'll need to think about. Some gods probably like it when their worshippers hone their combat ability and ruthlessness on each other. Others might be horrified. They might appear as powerful avatars, or send a prophet or exemplar to teach their followers the right path.

Another interesting question is, what happens when worshippers worship only slightly different pantheons? Is Zeus really Jupiter with a different name? Sometimes, conquering cultures would "assimilate" the ruling gods of their conquered lands into their own pantheons. What happens in "heaven" when this occurs? Is the god truly assimilated? Or merely humiliated? Will such gods seek revenge for themselves or their conquered worshippers?

More information

For some interesting rules on using gods and avatars in fantasy campaigns, see *The Primal Order* by Peter Adkison. For some great unique gods as well as ideas on creating your own deities, see the Old-school Role-playing Community's *Petty Gods*.

For one take on why gods have fractured reflections across different cultures, see *The Tablets of Enki* at *godsmonsters.com/enki*.

Places of Power

Ley lines. Holy ground. Ancient Indian burial grounds. The Norse called it naming. We call it ritual. Every item has a place, and some of those places have power. This kind of magic draws its power from names, from sacrifices, and from places of power. If you follow the correct instructions, say the right words, in the right place, the hidden world will reveal itself. And the more chanting cultists you have assisting you, the better off you are.

Places of power provide you as the Adventure Guide the flexibility to have anything happen. Within a place of power, villains can use ritual to do just about anything —but only after drawing the attention of player characters by acquiring rare sacrifices and causing strange phenomena in the preparation of their evil schemes.

Places of power have levels, natures (often a sphere of influence), and a moral code.

Absent a specialty that grants it, there is no reliable means of detecting a place of power other than watching its effects.

The products of a ritual, however, and the ritual itself, detect as divine, as magical, and as psychic. They even register on odd wavelengths if the technology exists. Rituals draw on the foundation of the world, below all sources of power.

Moments of power

Acts of extreme evil that cause deaths can create a moment of Evil power for a few hours or days at the killing ground. Sacrifices of extreme good can result in a moment of Good power.

The appearance or death of an avatar can also result in a moment of power. The moment of power will have the same moral code as the avatar.

Rituals in a place of power

Rituals can summon known creatures from this or other planes. They can locate known individuals, create magical or divinely-powered items, and bind individuals to a doom. They can provide protection from the supernatural. They are not spells, powers, or spirits, and their effects will never be as obvious, controllable, or flashy.

Rituals do not require that the preparer or performer be a sorceror, prophet, or monk (although sorcerors and prophets may have access to powers that make them more effective at rituals than other characters). All rituals require a sacrifice,

symbolism (an enclosing magic symbol with symbolic drawings and/or items), and a chant.

Rituals are worked in two parts: preparation and performance. Preparing and performing a ritual is a dangerous, complex, time-consuming task. The ritual must be prepared and performed nearly exactly, or failure will result, and failure during a ritual may well have catastrophic effects, especially if the ritual is partially successful.

Outside of a place of power, rituals have no effect. Rituals take hours or days to complete, and often have multiple stages. No ritual will take less than an hour to complete, and that will be only for the simplest of results. Rituals can only affect targets within sight of the place of power, or for which the ritual performer has something (or someone) deeply attached to the target.

Sacrifice

All rituals require a sacrifice of some symbolic significance to the results. There are no trivial sacrifices. A sacrifice must be imbued with strong emotion, or must be worth a lot of work and time, or must be a truly significant sacrifice to someone, and the nature of the sacrifice must be symbolically important to the ritual's results.

Prepare the ritual (symbolism)

The character preparing the ritual (drawing any magic circles and signs, placing symbolic items, and organizing chanting cultists or sacrifices) must make a reason roll to successfully duplicate the ritual's needs. There may be penalties to this roll depending on how the character learned the ritual; if they translated it from a language they don't know very well, for example, there may be a penalty for that. If their source for the ritual was incomplete, there may be a penalty. Especially difficult rituals will also have a penalty.

During the preparation, proper symbols and iconography must be placed within the ritual circle. Symbolism must provide direction for the ritual. It must be relevant and somehow lead to the desired results of the ritual.

Perform the ritual (chant)

The character performing the ritual (speaking the words, making any necessary movements, and making the sacrifice) must make a willpower or a perception roll to successfully control the ritual. When trying to summon, banish, expel, or dominate a creature, or create a divine item, a willpower roll is required; when trying to control a thing or manipulate a happening, or create a magical item, a perception roll is required. Locating something can be either a willpower or perception roll. Especially difficult rituals will also incur a penalty.

If the character preparing the ritual fails their reason roll, and the character performing the ritual continues anyway, the amount the reason roll was failed by is applied as a penalty to the willpower or perception roll.

When a place of power's moral alignment coincides with the moral code of the person performing the ritual, that person gains the level as a bonus to their willpower or perception roll. When the place of power's moral alignment is opposed to the moral code of the person performing the ritual, apply the level as a penalty to their willpower or perception roll. Irrelevant natures do not affect performance rolls.

Chanting cultists

Prophets can make use of chanting cultists if the place of power matches the ritual performer's moral code. The prophet must make a charisma roll. If successful, the performer gains a bonus on their performance roll. At two or three chanters, there is a bonus of one. For four, five, six, or seven chanters, there is a bonus of two. For eight through fifteen, a bonus of three, sixteen through thirty-one, a bonus of four, etc. The bonus cannot exceed the level of the prophet who is herding the cultists.

Riddles

Riddles hold power. When one person or group challenges another person or group to a riddling contest, and the challenge is accepted, the participants are bound to the results. Any cheating or reneging will bring consequences from the gods or other underlying power of the world.

Riddles can take many forms, but the answer must be obviously true once stated. Answers do not have to be the answer the riddler expects. If the answer is obviously true once stated and follows logically from the riddle, then it is a valid answer.

If a party to a riddle contest does not honor their side of the bargain, the injured party gains one automatic success at an opportune time for an action in opposition to the dishonorable party. The success may be chosen by the player after any roll, and it is the Guide's duty to inform the player if an automatic success at that time gives no real benefit. The injured party also gains a bonus of 1 to any rolls in opposition to the dishonorable party. These benefits last until the dishonorable party honors the agreement made over the riddle. If the riddle contest takes place in a place of power, the injured party bonus is increased by the place's level.

A party that cheats in a riddle contest loses and suffers the consequences. The party trying to answer a riddle may not steal the answer from the riddler. "Stealing" means acquiring it from the riddler's mind or from any item on the riddler's person. Riddles do not understand the concept of extant property; if the answer can be stolen from elsewhere that is not cheating.

The party giving the riddle must not ask an impossible riddle. If they ask an impossible riddle, and are answered with a true answer, one that seems obvious once given, the effects of dishonoring the riddle are doubled if the asker reneges.

Riddles in a place of power increase the place of power's level by one with regards to the riddle's context. Only one riddle may be in effect for any given context.

Rituals that last beyond the sacrifice need a riddle to make them fair. This is why magical traps and defenses often come with riddles.

What makes a riddle?

A riddle is constructed of clues hidden in plain sight with a definite answer. Most of them will be questions or rhymes. The classic riddle is the riddle of the sphinx:

> *What goes on four legs at dawn, two legs at noon, and three legs at evening?*

It's a great fantasy riddle because it doesn't just require an answer, it requires a philosophy. It's also obviously a riddle and obviously a question.

Many riddles consist of two to four contradictory statements, and the answer to the riddle is the thing that matches all of the statements. For example, here are two classic riddles of that sort, one of which answers a definite thing, and one of which requires thinking outside the box.

> *I went to the wood and got it. I sat down and sought it. I kept it against my will, and brought it home.*
>
> *The poor have it, the rich need it. It is greater than god, more evil than the devil, and if you eat it you'll die.*

In the first riddle, the answer is something that people in forests and jungles find all the time: a thorn. The questioner was pricked by a thorn in the wood, sat down and tried to find and remove it, but, as is often the case with thorns, could not.

The second riddle is brilliant; it's the kind of riddle that makes the genre, because it's about language, the basis of all riddles, and is also a riddle of life and desire.

Riddles don't have to require a *spoken* answer. They can also describe actions to take or traps to avoid. Here's a riddle I encountered long ago:

> *Sinister is Dexter and Dexter is Sinister.*

This riddle is a play on language, and will only really work in a world (such as Highland) where both English and Latin exist. Like Tolkien's famous riddle,

> *Ennyn Durin aran Moria. Pedo mellon a minno,*

the translation is the answer. In the first case, knowing that a translation is needed is almost all that's necessary: left is right, and right is left, or, left is good and right is bad, depending on the circumstances.

In Tolkien's riddle, their initial translation is what confused the nine:

> *The Doors of Durin, Lord of Moria. Speak, friend, and enter.*

In both cases what makes them a riddle is that they're not obviously a riddle, but once recognized as a riddle the answer is obvious.

For a different take on obviousness, look at the riddle of St. Ives:

> *As I was walking to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives, and each wife had seven sacks, and each sack had seven cats, and each cat had seven kits. Kits, cats, sacks, wives, how many were going to St. Ives?*

This is a classic example of a riddle that relies on misdirection. It tells us the actual answer in the first line, and then throws number after number at us in the hope that we'll forget the critical information: that the teller is the one person going to St. Ives. The cat-carrying clan was coming *from* St. Ives. Now, if you think about it, he could just as well have met them by overtaking them. After all,

carrying all those cats must slow you down quite a bit! But the rule of riddles is that there should be a single obvious answer, that, however, difficult it is to reason out, is obvious once realized. This riddle meets that requirement, partly because it is a classic form, and once you recognize the form, you recognize that the middle part is irrelevant to the question. But mostly, because counting them up is a confusing answer, and realizing the speaker met them while they were coming from St. Ives is the obvious one.

There's a similar riddle that has been labeled the *psychopath test* in social media. It isn't, but it's a great riddle.

> *A woman, at the funeral of her mother, met a man she did not know. He was amazing, the man of her dreams. She fell in love with him at first sight. But she didn't get his name or contact information and afterward couldn't find him. A few days later, she killed her sister. Why?*

This is similar to the St. Ives riddle in that you could probably come up with a very complex answer to it that technically works, but there is a simple answer that is, once spoken, obvious—and very difficult to guess without going beyond simple human decency. She wanted to meet the man of her dreams again.

> *In marble halls as white as milk, lined with skin as soft as silk, within a fountain crystal-clear, a golden apple doth appear. No doors there are to this strong-hold, yet thieves break in and steal the gold.*

There are so many riddles that refer to eggs but this, I think is the most beautiful. Beautiful riddles are nearly their own genre, filled with simile and high language.

Note, however, that egg riddles are the most easily guessed. Even Gollum guessed Bilbo's, though Bilbo used a more prosaic form, and Gollum hadn't seen eggs for hundreds of years.

Riddles can also be self-referential. Magritte wrote beneath his painting of a pipe that

> *This is not a pipe.*

That was also a riddle. Why wasn't it a pipe? Because *The Treachery of Images* is a *painting* of a pipe. In an adventure, it could just as well be a painting of a door, a cave, or a jewel. Of course, in a fantasy world, Magritte could very well be wrong.

Where can I find riddles?

Old nursery rhymes often contain riddles, as do folk stories. If you can find a book of nursery rhymes or folk stories from a culture similar to the one you're creating a riddle for, you should be able to find some very nice and appropriate riddles.

Think up some topics that would be appropriate for this particular riddle, and then do a web search for "*topic* riddles". Or if the dungeon the adventurers are exploring is based on a particular culture, do a search for "*culture* riddles".

Do a web search for “traditional riddles” if you want to find a general-use riddle but avoid the silly ones that riddles have degenerated into in the modern age. You can easily modify nouns in a traditional riddle to fit the locale and time period. A search on “gaming riddles” and “RPG riddles” will also find traditional riddles, usually with a fantasy bent.

Spells

First-level spells

During their first level, sorceror players can choose which spells their character knows. If you've created a list of spells known by specific cultures or secret societies, some of those spells may not be normally available to that character.

You will need to let the player know that these spells are not common, and that they mark the character as being part of some other culture or group—even if the character isn't actually from that culture or group! The character might have stolen the spell, acquired it through trade, or even created it from scratch; and the story behind how the character acquired the mystery spells may play into the larger adventures that the group takes part in. But when choosing first-level spells the player may choose any spell in the rulebook, as long as they're willing to accept the consequences of that knowledge for their sorceror.

When Spells Collide

When two or more spells, spirits, or psychic effects conflict, you'll have to judge what happens. Here are a few simple guidelines.

Some effects don't really conflict. A *raging storm* does not conflict with *fair weather faith*, for example. The first calls a storm and the other protects an individual from the storm. If a target is under the effect of two *fast friends* spells, and the two friends fight, the target is likely to want to stop the fight, which may trigger a reaction roll, but there's no need to ameliorate either of the effects. Friends sometimes fight, and other friends pull them apart.

If it is possible for the effects to mix, let them. Light and darkness can create a haze, for example, with the level of darkness determined by the difference in levels between the conflicting casting or manifestation levels.

For effects where reactions are allowed because of tension or normal conflict, the reaction will probably be triggered. The target above under the effect of two fast friends spells is likely to get a single reaction roll against the spells.

Where the effects are numerical in nature, there isn't really a conflict, just an adjustment. If both *Indestructible Object* and *Brittle Object* are cast on the same object, adjust accordingly: if one is at +4 and the other at –3, the total is +1.

Magic Items

Magic items are things that carry magic, divine, or psychic powers. Potions, scrolls, amulets, rings, and weapons can carry magic. Each type carries magical effects appropriate to its use.

Some magic items have an intelligence. They can communicate to their bearer, giving advice and information. Normally, intelligent items are permanent items, such as weapons, rings, or amulets. Potions and powders are rarely if ever intelligent. Intelligent items are always created through ritual.

Magic items are created through spells, with the appropriate specialties. Magical and religious artifacts can be created by gods, prophets, and sorcerors in places of power, and sometimes through an act of immense sacrifice by other archetypes.

Some magic items will be created by the player characters. A few might be acquired through their clans or masters. Most are acquired by adventuring in hidden places.

All magic items should have a known origin. Magic items pass from hand to hand and have a mythic history before being lost in a ruined dungeon. You don't need to know everything, just enough to name the item in your notes.

Most magic items are created using a combination of spells such as "Permanent Enchantment", "Protection from Dispel", and "Target Contingency". "Indestructible Object" is used to protect permanent magic items. The alchemical specialties will also be used to create truly permanent magic items, especially potions and scrolls.

It's a good idea to keep magic items relatively rare and reasonably powerful: weapons should have +2 or more to attack and damage rather than +1, for example.

Intelligent magic

Some magic items are "intelligent". They can communicate with their bearer in some way (empathy, telepathy, or speech) and advise the character; some may also attempt to dominate the character. Such items will have an intelligence, a charisma, a wisdom, and a creature or archetype level.

Telepathy or speech is reasonably exact; speech requires that both bearer and sword know the same language. Empathic communication is done through emotion and "urging". The character may feel, at the item's urging, hatred for a particular target if the item is designed for smiting that individual or kind of creature. Or the character may feel the urge to detach her military unit from the whole and circle around to engage the enemy from behind, if the item feels that would be a better tactic.

If the item decides to forcefully control the character's actions, it will force the character into a battle of wills. The character may do the same if the weapon is in control. The character and the item each make a willpower roll. If the party trying to take control fails, nothing happens. If both parties are successful, neither may take any action. If one party is successful, that party is in control of the body.

Items that communicate telepathically gain a bonus of 1 in the contest. Those that communicate empathically gain a bonus of 2. For every moral code side (good/evil and order/chaos) that the item has that the character does not, the item gains a bonus of 1 (the reverse is also true if the character has more moral code parts than the item).

The loser is unable to counter-dominate until the next scene.

Prophets, Sorcerors, and Monks

Sorcerors can enchant almost anything to create a magic item, even mundane items. Prophets prefer to place their spirits in potions, staves, and symbols. Potions require faith on the part of the drinker. Staves represent steadfastness, a prime quality of faith. Monks must use special crystals if they wish to siphon their power for later use.

When a magic item embodies a spell, spirit, or power, and it allows the bearer choice to shape the spell, spirit, or power, the item will usually only be usable by the appropriate archetype: sorcerors for spells, prophets for spirits, or monks for powers. Thus, a necklace of the spell *change shape* into bear could be used by anyone; but a necklace of *change shape* with no restriction could only be used by sorcerors. Only a sorceror can choose how to shape the spell's result.

Spirit items usually specify a default manifestation, but a prophet can channel the spirit into any of the spirit's potential manifestations.

Books

Librams and *Tomes* usually offer some form of magically enhanced training or knowledge. The reader must be both pre-disposed to the training and able to read the book. Usually, this means that certain books require that the reader both know the language and be a specific archetype. The book of the Wudan in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* offered clearly enhanced training to warriors if the warrior could decipher the book. Simply looking at the pictures wasn't enough, nor could the ability to read it help a thief, no matter how skilled.

Magic tomes can be mojo resources, helping increase archetypal fields and skills, or can offer access to new specialties. Books often require months of study to gain the benefits of the teachings therein, and may remain useful to the reader for years.

Incense and candles

Magic incense and candles often affect an area, or help with ritual magic. They are useful for area effect spells and spirits, such as *protections*. They might protect an area from evil spirits, or protect individuals within their radius of effect from magical scrying or mind-reading. They might even protect from physical effects such as poison or extreme cold. They will have a duration (the period of time it takes them to burn out), and candles last longer than incense. Candles can be started and stopped, so as to prolong their usefulness.

Mirrors and paintings

Magic mirrors and paintings often allow strange dimensional effects, such as long-distance travel, or entering another world. They might also invoke spirits or demons for divinatory purposes. Crystal balls offer similar magical effects, commonly allowing their owner to see into the future, observe far away events, or even communicate across great distances.

Potions

Anyone wishing to take advantage of a potion must drink the potion. It is one thing to drink a potion offered by a trusted sorceror, and quite another to drink potions found at random in a dungeon or stolen from an evil wizard's lair. Potions generally alter the body, stature, or physical makeup of the drinker. Potions can heal, they can increase fighting prowess, and they can change the shape of the drinker.

Potions also can offer some mental abilities, such as the ability to control a specific type of animal or monster.

Potion effects are almost always temporary, the major exception being "heal" and "poison" potions. Individual potions can have widely varying durations and numbers of uses, but in general a potion will contain enough for one usage. Potions take effect at the end of the round in which they were quaffed.

Powders and oils

Powders and oils are usually sprinkled or rubbed onto the recipient and offer some protective power or bodily change. An oil might turn the recipient invisible, or grant the ability to walk through walls. A powder might, as in *Peter Pan*, allow flight.

Powders usually take effect immediately. Oils require two to three rounds to apply.

Relics

Relics are a special kind of magic item. Besides being unique, they usually have a mythical status in the world, having been created by or for the Gods, or perhaps with a special purpose at the beginning of recorded history. The Ark of the Covenant was a relic in the Old Testament, and the Grail was a relic in Arthurian legend. Relics carry special responsibilities as well as special powers, and they often have a corrupting influence on the bearer, as the One Ring had on the characters in Lord of the Rings.

Where the acquisition of a normal magic item is the subject of one or two adventures, the acquisition—or disposal—of a relic could well be the entire campaign.

Relics can come in any form, from the One Ring to the Carriage of the Sun to the Mighty Organ of the Great Bard.

Rings, amulets, boots, and belts

Rings and amulets are worn, on a finger or around the neck. They often offer a protective benefit, such as a defense bonus (a "+2 ring" is one that offers a bonus of 2 to defense, and often to reactions), or a protection from missile attacks. They might also offer bonuses to ability scores. Belts especially are known to enhance strength or physical prowess. Boots might assist in running, jumping, or stealth.

Scrolls

Scrolls are spells or spirits inscribed for instant use. Only sorcerors and prophets may use scrolls, and each may use only their own kind of scrolls. Scrolls are usually inscribed to be cast at the spell or spirit's level, plus d6.

A few scrolls are designed to be used by anyone who can read them. These are usually protective scrolls, cursed scrolls, or ritual scrolls.

Wands and staves

Wands and staves often offer powers very similar to spell-based or spirit-based powers, and are often usable only by sorcerors or prophets, depending on the item. Wands and staves are usually "charged": they can only perform their tasks a limited number of times. A wand, when found partially used, will usually have d100 charges remaining. A staff will have 2d20 charges remaining. Wands will function at a sorceror or prophet level of 4+d6, and staves at a sorceror or prophet level of 4+2d6.

Wands usually contain spells. Staves might contain either spells or spirits.

Weapons

Magic weapons are usually swords. The *Green Dragon* of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is a magic sword, as is *Excalibur* from the movie of the same name. Both weapons were magically sharp, able to more easily cut past an opponent's defenses.

Weapon magic is most often expressed in terms of bonuses to attack and to damage. A +2 sword, for example, gives a bonus of 2 to attack and to damage (survival point loss). A +2/+3 sword has an attack bonus of 2 and a damage bonus of 3.

Special weapons might offer other powers, such as increased defense, additional attack forms, or divinatory powers. Often weapons that grant additional powers bear some intelligence or some ability to control the bearer.

Cursed weapons can work in one of three ways: they can force themselves magically to hand whenever the wearer enters combat, they can make the wearer more aggressive, or they can influence the wearer to believe that the weapon aids rather than hinders. Cursed weapons can give penalties to attack and survival point loss, or they can hinder the bearer in other ways.

Magic Item Examples

All magic items should have a story. Rename these items after important historical personages from your own world. Some items will be shrouded in such mystery that the players have no idea where they were made or for whom. But the Guide should have a good idea either of the item's origin or who held it most recently.

Beathachord

This Celtic heirloom of the Carlisles holds a plant spirit at 6th level, permanently manifesting *Helpful Hemp*. The belt is activated by speaking the word "beathachord". The spirit grants the bearer a bonus of 12 lassoing stationary objects. Lasso attempts in combat are at +6 to attack, and evasion against it is at a penalty of 6. It can untie itself on command, and its knots will not unravel unless commanded to do so.

The rope is 24 yards long. Its length will increase to 38 yards as needed, and its bulk is 4. It can hold 120% more than normal when activated, and it has a bonus of 6 on item reaction rolls.

The Belt of Walking

This magic bronze buckle, on a belt of strange leather, is octagonal and engraved with runes on the front and back. The front translates as *disappearance*, and the back as *appearance*. In the underground tongue, these are "grah" and "iehgrah" respectively. *Grah* activates the belt; *iehrah* deactivates it.

The belt is imbued with the spell *angular path* at tenth level. It may be used three times before exhausting its power; it renews itself every new moon.

Other than that it detects as magical, the buckle looks like it's worth two to ten silver coins, depending on who buys it.

The Bull Sword

Known also as the Sword of Taurus, the sword was made by the wizard Measure and the Night Prophet Alazar for use by the evil warrior Taurus the Empty, and has since been used by many warriors before disappearing over a hundred years ago.

The sword grants a bonus of 1 to attack during the day, and a bonus of 3 to attack at night. It also grants a bonus of 2 to the point cost for increased number of actions.

The sword can confer *strength* (as the spell, cast at sixth level) once per day.

The sword is intelligent: it has intelligence 13, charisma 13, wisdom 15, and is Ordered Evil. It has expertise in *War Art* at +2, with the skills *Tactics* and *War Lore*. It may communicate with its bearer through empathy. It is seventh level for purposes of reactions, and, if it takes over the bearer, may act as a seventh level warrior.

Prophets or priests of Christianity who attempt to use the sword must make a willpower roll or go stark raving mad for d4 rounds. At the end of that period, another fortitude roll is required to maintain consciousness. If the character falls unconscious they may be woken normally.

Cape of Shadows

This magic Cape is rumored to originate from the Elves of the Long Lakes, although it has mostly seen service in the hands of human thieves. It attracts shadows and natural darkness, causing the wearer to blend in with natural shadow.

The Cape of Shadows grants thieves a bonus of 4 on Hide rolls and a bonus of 2 on any attempt to surprise. It grants any wearer a bonus of 2 to defense against missile and melee combat. The Cape does nothing to protect from sounds or smells giving the wearer's location away.

Clauricane's Harp

On successfully playing this magic harp, the character and what the character is carrying become invisible. The character may move only at up to normal walking speed while playing the harp. Others will hear the music, but as if from a far distance. A successful perception roll must be made to determine the general direction of the harp (and thus the character).

The harp also masks the character's smell, and muffles the noises the character makes (so that it appears to be coming from far away, as the music).

Using the harp requires skill in harp playing, and an easy charisma roll is required to use the harp.

Elven Shoes

The fabled Elven shoes are not for Humans or Elves, but for horses: three sets are known to exist, though one set was lost in the great war against the goblins (as was the great horse Fiendril and its rider, the Elven warrior Caremesendil). The horseshoes make their steed's movement completely silent. In Elvish, these magic shoes are known as irenafien, "silent as the wind".

Girard's Ring of Invisibility

A simple silver ring, it bears no inscription or patterns except the letters "Gir. Nelson" on the inside. When worn, it becomes invisible. When the wearer becomes unconscious, or sleeps, the wearer also becomes invisible. This magic ring was created by Girard Nelson, a Stigmatic Priest, and sorceror of the Order of Stigmas di Cristo on the western slopes of the High Divide.

The Golden Eyes of Tialnambe

Avieglien the half-Elf crafted three golden eyes after the fall of the elder race of men, to protect those the Elves care most deeply about. Those who wear an eye, as ring or necklace, gain a bonus of four to all defensive reaction rolls, as well as to defense. Whenever desired, the golden eye can light the area ten yards before the bearer, in a sixty-degree arc, with a bright light; or it may shine a beacon one foot wide for sixty yards. Once per day the bearer can call forth a shield through which no normal weapon may pass, neither sword nor missile. Magic weapons might

break through, but are at a further penalty of four to attack. The golden shield lasts for ten minutes.

Only humans or half-humans, with a good moral code, may use the golden eyes. Any of evil moral code who wear a golden eye will feel unease and restless, and will have a penalty of four to attack any creatures with a good moral code.

The golden eyes were made with golden necklaces, but the necklaces, while long-lasting, were not magical and may not have survived the ages. One eye is known to have been placed on a ring.

Jug of Protection

This old and battered jug doesn't look to be worth anything. But beneath the grime and grit of centuries are three words in strange runes. The runes translate as "heal now", "kill now", and "defend now"; they are pronounced maeririalo, mekririalo, and keririaeno, respectively.

Fill the jug with any liquid and speak the appropriate word, and the liquid will become a one-dose potion of either *restore vitality*, *deplete vitality*, or *divine prowess*, according to the word spoken by the bearer. Each are at fifth level, so that restore vitality heals d8 survival or injuries (minimum 5), and deplete vitality causes a loss of the same amount. Divine prowess grants d6+5 temporary survival points and a bonus of one to attack, defense, and any reaction rolls for up to ten rounds.

The jug is imbued with one fifth-level spirit of healing and one fifth-level spirit of war; the spirit of healing (restore or deplete vitality) may be used once per day, and the spirit of war also may be used once per day. The jug is also protected by durability at the fifth level, so that it has +5 to item reaction rolls.

Oil of Clarity

A vial of oil, with enough left for three uses, provides the power of the *Clear Portal* spell at tenth level. This means it can affect a portal up to ten feet in diameter, and it will clear the portal for forty seconds.

Potion of Healing

Perhaps the most common of divine boons, this potion contains a spirit of healing of level 2d4. Normally set to manifest *restore vitality*, it will heal 1d8 points damage when quaffed, for a minimum of the spirit level. Administered by a prophet, however, it can perform any healing manifestation.

The Protective Ring of Boaz

Legends tell of the flight of Boaz into the mountains with the entire Southern armies on his trail following his infiltration of Prince Stomroy's treasure chambers. Rumors place his magic ring in the custody of two or three lesser heroes in the centuries since his disappearance.

The ring grants the wearer a bonus of 2 to defense and to all reaction rolls.

The Sword of Ellesan

Forged by Dwarves and wielded by Elven kings, the sword was broken in the last battle of the Deadless Lord. The Elf call it "Lirel len-Elessan" (which means, simply, "the sword of Ellesan"). It was last wielded by Elessan Torilarvan, whose name means "Sword of the Silver Forest". Fine inscriptions cover the blade. On one side of the blade is written the story of its forging in Dwarf runes. On the other, the story of its creation in Elven script.

The sword has two parts: the hilt and lower part of the blade, and the middle and tip of the blade. Each part grants the bearer special powers. The blade confers protection from undead. No undead may touch the bearer unless the bearer provokes attack. Even then, the bearer gains a bonus of 2 to all reaction rolls against undead attacks.

The hilt has disappeared and is rumored to be in the hands of trolls or giant-kin. See *The Lost Castle of the Astronomers* for one potential resting place.

Adventure of the Empty House

This relatively simple adventure will likely cover only one or two gaming sessions, and can be used to introduce you and your friends to the game. Important features include the introduction of an important city (Crosspoint), and an introduction to the horrors waiting to crawl up from the underground.

This adventure is designed for two to six characters of first level. (When RPG adventures say "for *x* characters", they always mean "*player* characters". They aren't counting the Adventure Guide.) At least one of the characters must be from Crosspoint, all of the characters must be in Crosspoint, and they must know each other enough to band together when the opportunity arises.

Players' Background

One of the player characters' uncles has inherited a house from a less fortunate cousin who died of a rabid dog attack on the waterfront (the dog was found with the body and was put down). The uncle would like to clean the house and repair it enough to sell. He has no use for a house on the waterfront. He is willing to pay twenty shillings (total; the characters can decide how to split the money) to his nephew to hire people to do it. This is a lot of money. He could probably get it done cheaper, but is doing the player character's father a favor.

The uncle hands them the key to the house just as they conclude their meeting.

> *Your uncle is an old man, about sixty, his bald head wreathed in white hair. His demeanor is that of an efficient businessman, which matches his wood-paneled office, but as he hands you the key to the house on the hill, there is an unmistakable sadness in his eyes. As he takes your hand in his gnarled hands, he thanks you for taking this task, and asks you how your father is doing.*

The player may or may not decide to continue the role-playing; you can use the information above and below as you see fit. The uncle is not normally talkative, but is in an expansive mood today should the player characters encourage it.

He will also give them permission, should they ask about it, to decide whether to sell or discard any of the relative's things. They may keep the profit made on any sales.

"The house is mostly empty anyways. There might be some knick-knacks in the main dining area if they haven't been stolen. That's part of why I need you to do this, to get rid of any incentive for thieves to break in. Prepare it for sale."

Guide's Background

A part of the underground has broken through to the basement of the house. Through it, an Oruat (or two) and a giant cucumber escaped. The cucumber may or may not be dead, depending on your needs.

If there are two player characters, use one Oruat: Tanino. If there are three or four, use both Tanino and Koronaeg. If there are five or six player characters, the giant cucumber is still alive in the underground area.

The uncle and his cousin

One of the first things you'll need to do as Guide is to name the player character's uncle. If the character has a surname, use it for both the uncle and the uncle's cousin.

The uncle and his cousin had not seen each other for many years, but they were once inseparable—about forty years past. They did everything together, including courting the same woman. The uncle "lost", but their friendship withstood that. It was only their growing economic and philosophical differences that caused them to drift apart. The uncle, however, still looks back on those days as the best of his life: his greatest friend by his side, his business plan before him, scrimping, saving, and taking calculated gambles in the game of life to get ahead.

His business has become more stable since then. He no longer has to scrimp. The hard times are gone, but so is the challenge. His own children, long grown to adulthood, now handle the day-to-day duties of the business, which is fine by him.

His cousin's wife, always frail, died in childbirth after ten years of marriage. The infant did not survive the birth either. His cousin became a hermit after that, and rarely left the house.

The ripper murders

As the players begin fixing up the house—a job requiring 32 man-days of work—a "jack the ripper" style killing spree begins. The players might or might not realize that their uncle's (and father's) cousin was the first victim.

Starting the night they are offered the job, and every day or two thereafter, there are gruesome murders in the waterfront district. People are speaking of vampires

and werewolves (and possibly witches, depending on the kind of religion and magic in your world).

The Oruat are killing to eat. Every few days they venture out of the basement in search of food, kill some human or animal, and return. Tanino is the one “in charge”, but really they’re two friends lost in a world they’ve never seen before, and unable to return home. Since they’re evil, they don’t care who dies as long as they survive.

The Adventure

The adventure will mostly consist of trying to track down why the doors and shutters keep opening, and why the basement door is stuck, and finally confronting the Oruat either in the basement or perhaps in the upstairs room. This adventure involves only one real variable for you to keep track of: the Oruat. There are few secrets in this house, and no dungeons filled with a multitude of strange creatures. You can add as many variables as you feel comfortable adding. If the player characters are trustworthy, the neighbors may talk to them about the old man, who had been there longer than any of them. Or you might add other events going on in the city, such as a heat wave, a storm, elections, or strikes.

Larger adventures will often have many more variables for you to keep track of. You'll need to simplify your job by ignoring irrelevant variables until such time as they are needed. As you guide players through more adventures, you'll learn to draw in those variables that the characters have set in motion which would normally be outside their current situation, and you'll get better at handling adventures where more things happen.

In between the rest of the adventure, the cleaning, painting, and repair of the house requires about five hours a day to complete, for 32 days divided by the number of working characters.

Crosspoint

> *As you walk up the steep streets of Seapoint Hill, you look around at the warped and weather-beaten homes. If you turn and look down the hill, you see the docks far in the distance, and the fishermen coming in from the bay. The odor of dead fish wavers in the air even this far up. Most people who see you pay no attention to you. Those that do pay attention deliberately ignore you.*

It is early autumn in Crosspoint, the foggy season when fog rolls in from the sea and blankets the town in the evenings. Crosspoint is the largest city on Crosspoint bay, which is the center of a trading route that spreads north to the barbarians and pirates, south to the principalities of Great Bend, and west to the leather road and Black Stag. Ships bound for or from Great Bend to the South regularly enter and leave Crosspoint's harbor, and caravans regularly leave for the north and west.

Closer to the docks, streets are tight and houses snug. Alleys lead circuitously behind and between homes. In autumn (and sporadically throughout the year), fog rises nightly from the bay, and blankets the town when the weather is calm. The ocean to the east and the mountains to the west ensure tumultuous weather year-round.

Crosspoint is built on hills surrounding the bay. As in most cities, the waterfront area is the worst, and the high hills are for those who can afford to isolate themselves from the city.

The neighbors

The neighbors mostly want nothing to do with the house or the adventurers. They work long hours at the docks or in the market and don't want any trouble. Most people in this area rent. Anastor Road runs east-west, down Seapoint Hill toward the docks. The docks are about five blocks further down. Spring Street runs north-south, and is hilly.

Some of the people who live here are on the rise; others are on a downward slide into obscurity and poverty. Bartley Marston, the retired sea-captain who lives behind the abandoned house, is a bit on the positive side of senile, a nice enough man but gruff and set in his ways. You may decide to use him as a bit of comic relief, and perhaps to provide some strange stories about vampires or giant bats in the abandoned house. He was the only person to still visit the old owner when he was alive.

The house and ground floor

> *Your destination, similar to most houses here, is covered in peeling paint. A skeletal oak, untrimmed and hugging the front of the house, has dropped all of its leaves into the porch and front yard, if you can call it a yard. The leaves have begun to rot. The house stands like a haunted house in a haunted neighborhood, with ghosts behind shuttered windows. A damp wind blows dry leaves into the yard to join the wet, rotting leaves already there.*

The house is near the waterfront, halfway down Seapoint Hill. It is old and out of its prime, like most of the houses in this neighborhood.

Light sources

Other than windows, the light sources in this house are candle holders, which may be carried from room to room. There are no built-in light sources, unless you count the fireplace.

Strange noises and invisible creatures

Before the characters meet the Oruat, you should give them strange noises that have no monster behind them. The house is old. A strong wind will cause the walls to creak. The oak out front touches the house; a light wind will cause its branches to scrape against the upstairs wall and shutters. Mice crawl in the walls, and rats

knock things over in the kitchen as they search for new homes if the characters force them out of their old ones. The kitchen snake can easily fit through holes that are practically invisible to unperceptive characters; if they turn their heads, or if it can find a corner to run around, it may well disappear, only to reappear later in another part of the house.

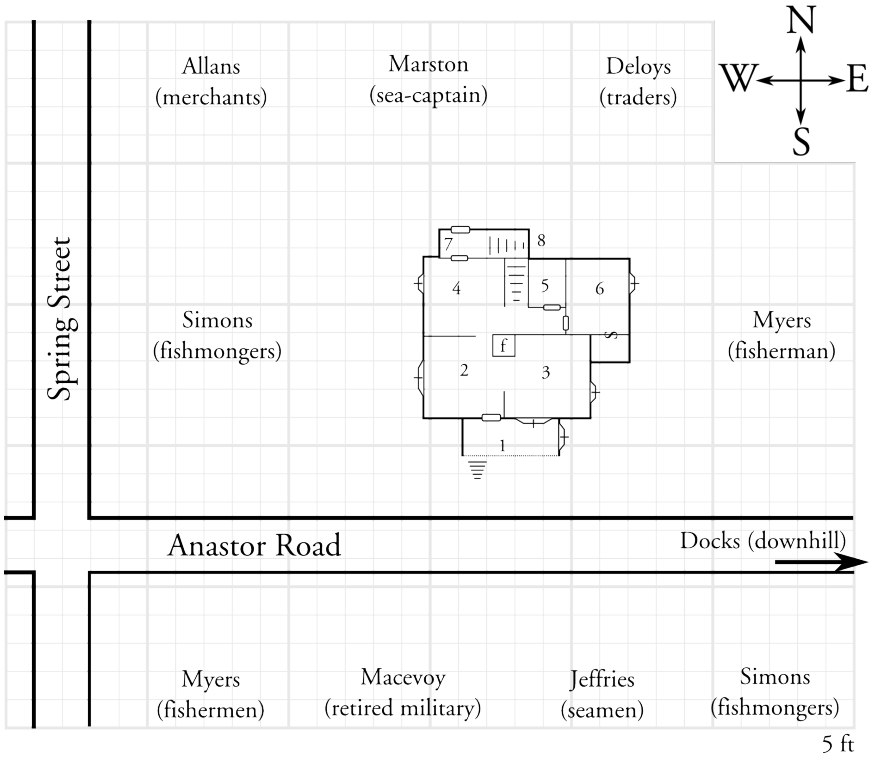
Wandering monsters

There are no random encounters in this adventure. Outside, the only encounters will be with neighbors. Inside, there are five creatures the characters are likely to run into: the Oruat, rats, bats, spiders, and one poisonous snake that likes the kitchen area. Rats and mice are unlikely to be seen unless the characters walk quietly into a room. Mice will not attack. Rats and bats are unlikely to attack, although the rats may try to steal any food that the characters bring. Spiders are not poisonous, and, while ubiquitous, are of the normal, tiny, though plump, variety. (You may use this to your advantage while the characters sleep.) Whenever things slow down, bring in mice, spiders, rats, the snake, and, finally, the Oruat. The Oruat are unlikely to attack any group of three or more, unless the group appears weak or the Oruat are very hungry. **Remember that the Oruat can scream as a special ability.**

Rats (Animal: 1 pt; Move: 10; Survival: 1; Defense: 0; Damage: 1, Number: d4)

Snake: see room 4, the kitchen

Oruat (Evil, Fantastic: 2; Move: 8/20; Survival: 13 (Tanino), 11 (Koronaeg); Defense: 4/5; Attack: short swords; Special: scream)



The front yard

> *An overgrown walkway leads up to stone steps that in turn climb to the front porch. Unkempt bushes grow wild on each side of the walkway. Tangled grass and weeds cover the walkway, and leaves from the oak to the right of the walkway are rotting on the steps.*

The front yard has gone wild, and if they remain or poke around a lot, feel free to give them an encounter with some rats or the poisonous snake.

1. Front porch

> *The boards creak as you step onto the covered porch. Puddles on the porch testify to the awning's poor condition. A porch swing, its pink paint peeling badly, sways slightly in the breeze, its chain links squeaking against each other in time with the wind. The shutters on the door and on the wall are closed.*

If they've been relatively stealthy, let them surprise a rat or some mice, which scurry away as the characters walk in.

2. Dining room

> *You turn the key in the rusted lock, and push the door open. The hinges scream as light pours into the darkened room from behind you. A wide, oval table, slightly warped, dominates the room. There are closed shutters to your left, and an opening to your right leads to another open space. Shelves covered with odd ceramic shapes separate this room from another room to the north.*

The "odd ceramic shapes" are tiny statues of animals and monsters. See room 4, the kitchen, for more information.

The window, when opened, looks over to the Simons' house. The space between the two houses is enough for a single carriage should it be necessary; it clearly hasn't been necessary for a long time.

The old man hadn't used the dining room in years.

3. Drawing room

> *Windows to the east and west allow light into this room; it shines off of the dust of the floors. A few rugs lie in the center and on the sides of the room, and two solid chairs stand at the south wall. The fireplace in the northwest corner still holds a few ashen logs. On a shelf running above a couch along the north wall, a few portraits hang amidst candles in bronze holders.*

The eastern wall is where the piano used to be. There is now a rug there, covering the marks it made on the floor and the difference in coloration due to sunlight.

The piano has long since been sold, but a few portraits remain on the walls. There is a portrait each of the old man and his wife when they were young, and a portrait of the old man's parents (the player character's father's brother and wife).

The piano room has a fireplace (f). However, the chimney is mostly blocked with leaves, dirt, soot, and shit. If the characters start a fire, as much smoke will come into the room as will go out the chimney. There is a 20% chance of the chimney starting fire in the first hour of use, and a 10% chance every hour thereafter. (It isn't really the chimney starting fire, but the stuff in the chimney.) If the chimney starts fire, the upstairs room (3) will be nice and toasty. There will also be a 30% chance of the roof starting fire (which means that the house will start fire) if the chimney fire is not put out within half an hour, and another 10% chance if the chimney fire is not put out within an hour. If the roof does not start fire, the chimney will clean itself out in an hour.

If the roof starts fire and is not put out within the next fifteen minutes there is a 30% chance that it will spread to neighboring houses. This would not be good.

This is where the old man was found with the stray dog (which was blamed for his death). A candle holder on a small end table by one of the chairs is burned down to the nub.

4. Kitchen

> *A small table in the northwest corner of the room still has a plate on it with a smidgen of dried food, and a ceramic mug. Ants mill aimlessly about the table and floor, and around the small urns on shelves in the northeast corner. The south wall is made of shelves, on which stand odd ceramic bric-a-brac. A dragon fights a tiger, a ship sails on the back of a whale, and tiny gnomes frolic with satyrs amidst the old man's plates and glasses. In the southeast corner, a small hole opens onto a fireplace. Cast iron shelves allow the placement of pots and pans.*

The old man had let his servant go, and was handling everything, including cooking, himself. The south wall, with the bric-a-brac, is not really a wall, but shelves. Through the shelves the dining area is visible. The old man used the kitchen table for dining, however, and rarely used the dining room.

The whale is worth five shillings, the dragon and tiger is worth eight, and the tiny gnomes are worth three (two of them are chipped). The plates and glasses are worth about 15 shillings total, and they could probably get 15 to 30 shillings for all of the pots and pans here.

A poisonous snake is here 50% of the time, coiled in the southwest corner.

Snake (Animal: 1/2; Move: 12; Survival: 2; Defense: 2; Damage: 1; Special: Poison, strength 1, damage 1, action time 1 minute)

5. Water closet

> *A white ceramic tub, scummed with layers of grey, is on the right; a large water jug sits next to it on the floor. Brushes, clothes, and soap are on a shelf above the tub, and a razor and mirror are on a table on the other side of the room.*

6. Master bedroom

> *A high, round translucent window allows the morning light into this room. The four squares projecting a light cross upon the floor. Ornate knotwork carvings repeat in square patterns across the nut-brown walls, and a canopied bed stands in the northeast corner beneath the*

window. An ornate bureau with an oval mirror built into it, on the west wall, has underclothing draped over it and a tattered jacket hanging over the side.

The window in this room is a high window, seven feet off the ground and touching the ceiling. Glass is an indication that the owner of this house, at least at one time, had some decent money. This is the only window in the house with glass. It was for his wife. The glass is not modern clear glass, but allows for the detection of movement beyond the window.

The ornate designs on the south wall hide the door to a "secret" closet. This is a style of woodwork that attempts to keep extraneous features (such as doors to minor rooms) from intruding on the design.

The wall slides open to reveal a small room, filled with old clothing. The styles and the holes attest to the age of this wardrobe. A large white pot, stained with age, sits in the front of the closet.

7. Back shed

Hooks hang from the west wall, holding only a single old jacket and a scarf. Old boots are on the floor below the hooks. Stairs go down to the east, and another door is directly opposite you a few feet away.

The door to the basement stairs has a hook-and-eye lock which, when the characters first enter the house, is unlocked. If they lock it, the Oruat will have to break out, though he will try to do so in a manner that allows him to close the door and spike it shut later. The door opens inward, toward the basement. Unless some weird precautions are taken by the characters, the Oruat will be able to remove the hinges to open the door.

Once the Oruat knows that there are people in the house, he will try to keep the basement inaccessible. The obvious choice is to spike the door shut so that it cannot open without forcing it open. Forcing it open when it is spiked shut will require a strength roll at a penalty of four.

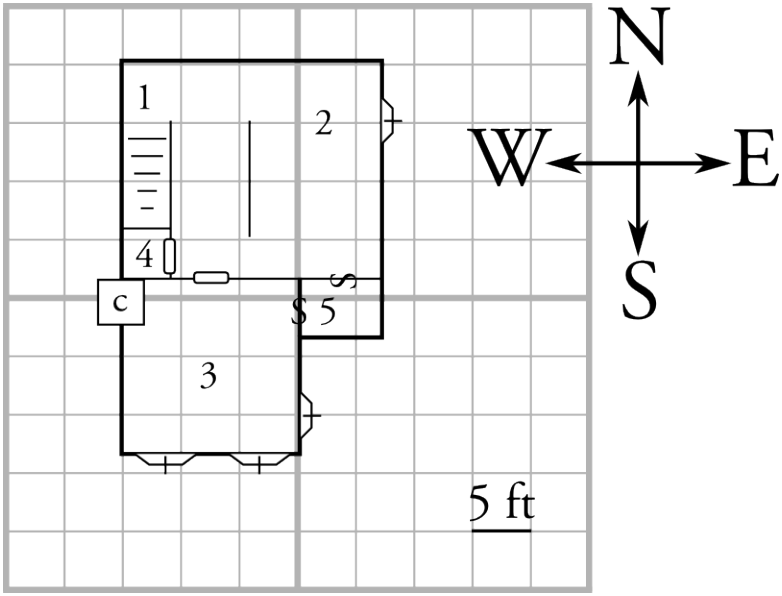
Just about any decent home will have a foundation and a pantry or full basement. Most homes in this area, however, are not decent homes, so the presence of a good foundation marks this as an older home, from before this area was heavily settled by the poorer classes.

8. Empty woodpile

Beneath the upper floor, which overhangs this storage area, bark and bare ground are all that remain of what must have recently held much firewood. It is dank here, and still smells of old wood.

The neighbors have taken his supply of firewood, since he no longer needs it. There is a 10% chance of encountering the poisonous snake from the kitchen (room 4) here.

The Upstairs



1. Landing and hallway

You push abandoned cobwebs out of your way and come to the top of the stairs. The northwest corner of the house is covered in dust and dry strands. A wide hallway doubles back to your right. Through an opening in the east wall a dusty light filters in from an unknown room. As you turn the corner, you see movement through that opening.

The upstairs floor, especially the hallway, creaks lightly with each step. Depending on how much light they have, they may or may not be able to determine from the hallway that the "movement" was themselves reflected in a dusty mirror.

2. Lounge

Rich brown knotwork relief covers the walls of this long room. Shutters are closed on an eastern window, and a small bar lies empty, but for a single bottle, in the southeast corner. There is another open exit on the other end of the wall you just came through. An oval mirror, dusty and tarnished in the northeast corner, reflects not just you but the age and decay of this home.

There was a chandelier here; now only the fixture remains. The old man sold the chandelier for extra cash. The bottle is a mostly empty bottle of rum.

There are two shot glasses on a shelf below the bar, and another bottle of rum. The four stools around the bar are removable, though they should stay with the décor. They're worth two shillings each. The shot glasses are probably worth a quarter shilling total. The mirror is embedded into the north wall in the northeast corner.

He used to spend time here with the old sea-captain, his only friend in his last years.

3. Overlook

> *What once must have provided a panoramic view of the outside is dark and musty. Three sets of shutters are all closed, two to the south and one to the east. The chimney is in one corner of this room, and a small door opposite it lies partially open.*

If the characters lock the doors so that the Oruat cannot get in, the Oruat will open one of the shutters here to get in, and then go downstairs, through the kitchen, and into the basement.

The door to the walk-through closet (room 5) is partly open; the door slides shut to blend with the wall paneling.

4. Hall closet

> *Cedar boxes tower in this room, threatening to fall on you as you open the door outward. The walls are lined with shelves that you can barely reach because of the boxes.*

These are all the things of hers that he hadn't disposed of yet.

5. Walk-through closet

> *The wall panel slides right, revealing a simple closet. It is mostly empty, except for thick, rolling dust balls covering the floor, and the smell of stale mouse turds on the air. Two stylized suits, perhaps twenty years old, hang, faded with dust, from the back wall. A pile of cloth lies in a jumble on the floor, covered in thick dust bunnies. In the far corner is a similarly-covered pair of dress boots.*

The closet is almost empty. He had long since gotten rid of his wife's clothing; they reminded him too much of her and he needed the money for drinking. His own clothing has also seen better times, and he hasn't much of it.

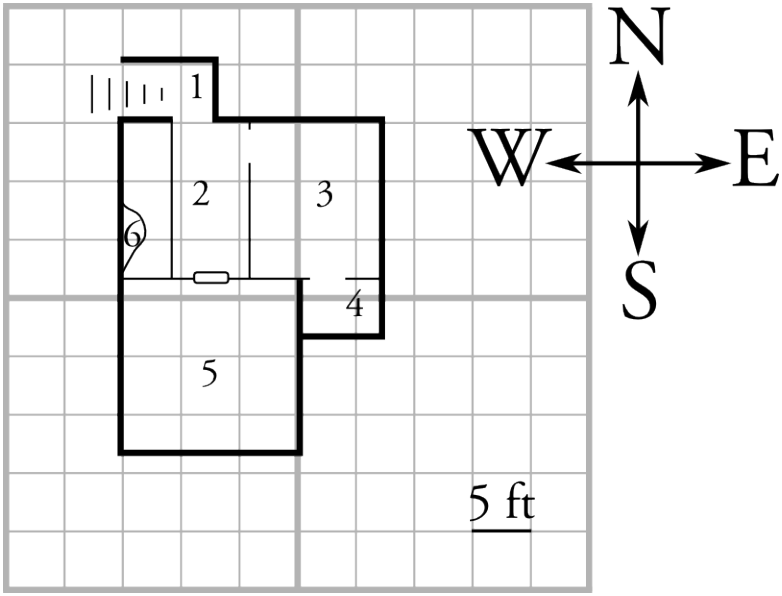
Lost in the corner of the closet behind the boots is a small, simple box with a hinge. Inside is an old ring that the player character's uncle gave to the wife back when he and his cousin were both courting her. The uncle thought it long-since sold as his old friend fell on harder times.

The ring will fetch twenty shillings in the marketplace; if returned to their uncle, however, it has serious sentimental value. He will give them a reward of two pounds in gratitude.

> *Your uncle is visibly moved by the trinket. He almost looks about to cry. He places the ring on his desk and opens a desk drawer to his side and pulls out some money. He offers you two pounds and holds your hand warmly is as he places the money in your palm.*
>
> *"Thank you for all you've done," he tells you. "If there is anything I can do for you in the future, please contact me."*

I'm coming close to breaking a rule here and telling them what they do: they accept the payment. Read the two paragraphs slowly enough that they can refuse the two coins if they wish to do so. Their uncle will be equally grateful in either case.

The Basement



The basement door is barred *on the other side* following the first night the characters enter the house. The characters are unlikely to catch the Oruat by surprise; the door creaks and the stairs creak. If they do manage to come down quietly, however, the Oruat are in room two hanging from the ceiling. They will try to escape as best they can, preferably through the stairs rather than down the hole. If they cannot escape past the characters, however, the hole is their first choice, room five (which has a door that can be blocked) is their next, and tiny room four is last.

The Oruat prefer living in the basement, both because it is familiar as an underground area, and because they want to be ready if the earth opens up again and restores the way home. If they are chased off by the characters, or if they remain and the earth doesn't open up for a few weeks, they are likely to go off in search of another entrance to the underground, first in other parts of the city and then wherever they can find holes in the ground leading to unknown depths. They will likely head to caves in the mountains.

1. Basement landing

> *The air grows drier as you step down the stairs into the stone foundation of the old house. At the bottom of the stairs, an opening on*

the right leads into a fifteen-foot hallway. You can smell roots and old wine.

2. Basement hallway

Deep shelves line the west side of the hall. A few old kegs lie on their side on the shelves, which are cracked and eaten with age. There is an opening on the east wall, through which you can see a few sacks, and a door on the far wall.

The door on the far wall is locked, and requires the house key to open.

3. Storeroom

The dry, cool smell of flour and roots and burlap greets you as you step into this small sideroom. At the south end of the room, a small open doorway leads into a darkened area. A few flasks stand on shelves around the east wall.

This room contains sacks of food: flour, carrots, turnips. On the shelves is a little bit of oil: gold oil, flaxseed oil, and some butter and lard.

4. Tiny storeroom

The sweet smell of onion and garlic permeates this small storage space. Small sacks hang from hooks in the ceiling, and bulge with bulbous roots.

Small sacks of onions, garlic, and bell peppers line the floor. The peppers aren't in the best shape.

5. Locked storeroom

There is a musty, sour smell reminiscent of old wine. Row upon row of empty wine slots cover the far wall. Only a few bottles remain.

There are seven wine bottles, worth about 1 to 5 shillings each, in the wine slots.

6. Hole in the closet

In the cramped space between the shelves and the wall, a long, thin gape in the floor descends into darkness.

The "long, thin gape" is two and a half feet wide and four feet long. It leads down thirty or so feet through cracks and crevasses to the "glimpse of the

underground" (see below). If they examine the opening, claw marks indicate that someone has scraped their way up—and down—the hole. The hole is not straight down. It goes at about a thirty degree angle. At the bottom, they will need to jump down about eight feet from the roof of the underground to the floor.

A Glimpse of the Underground

> *You crawl down the crevasse ten feet, twenty feet, thirty feet, until you come to a wide opening in the earth. The ground is cracked and crushed in a line directly beneath your feet, as if God had taken the two sides in hand and smashed them together. There is a large pile of something wiry just outside of your light. Rocky outcroppings and overhangs make your light cast flickering shadows on the walls.*

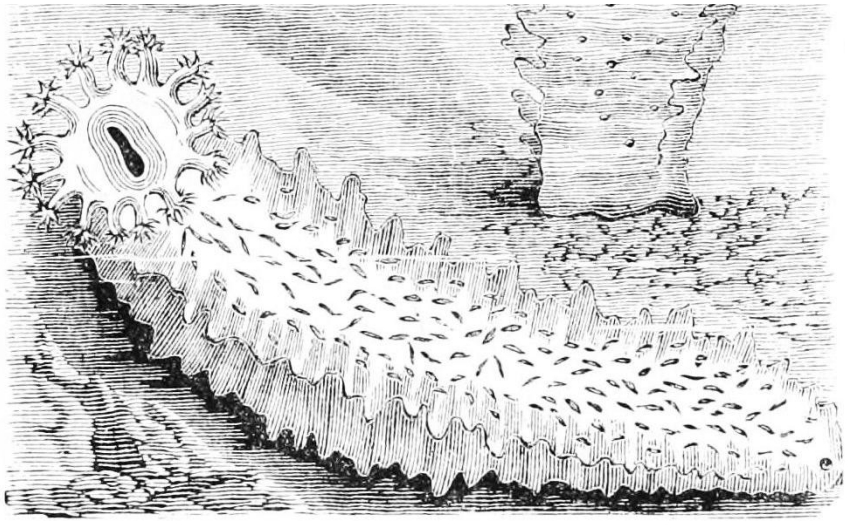
The "something wiry" is either the giant cucumber or its innards. The Oruat do not live here. It is too difficult to climb back up, and they don't like the feeling of being unable to use their wings. They will run here if they fear getting caught.

Giant cucumber innards

If the giant cucumber is still alive, Koronaeg feeds it from their scraps. Koronaeg calls it "paersrole", which in their language means simply "stupid slug". The giant cucumber should not be alive unless the party is experienced enough or large enough to handle it. Otherwise, they will find the dead shell and the rotting innards.

Giant Cucumber (Fantastic: 3; Move: 8; Survival: 17; Attack: Bite, Damage: 1d6; Defense: 0; Special Attacks: internal organs may attack separately, moving at 9, attacking with two tentacles for 1d4 each)

There are a couple of pouches tossed among the bones that the giant cucumber has eaten from. There are a total of 35 farthings, 21 half-pennies, 17 pennies, and 7 shillings among them.



The Wrap-Up

The characters now probably know that there are things that live below. Perhaps they'll want to try and explore further; you may decide that there are more intelligent creatures of the underground who occasionally travel above ground. Or perhaps there is an older city beneath the city of Crosspoint, and something must be retrieved.

Or, the glimpse of the underground can be temporarily forgotten. Depending on how the characters resolve the ripper murders, they may either be heroes, or have to leave town quickly. Their uncle may decide to help them with, for example, a recommendation as caravan guards. Or he might send them after a caravan lost many years ago, that he thinks might still be intact somewhere across the mountains and in the deep forest.

The short swords of the Oruat are well-made, with an interesting snake (or worm) design on the hilt. The leather of the hilt is an unknown animal (an underground creature). The swords are worth ten shillings (each, if there are more than one).

Plot Thickeners

It's a good idea to keep situations fairly simple. The players will complicate things all on their own. Role-playing games are a lot like stories with four or five or more main characters. However, if you wish to add complications to the adventure, you might find it fruitful to give the uncle some nefarious connections, or to make the uncle innocent but not his cousin. Perhaps his cousin's money ran out, and he opened his home to unscrupulous individuals; perhaps as a safe house for pirates. Or some item he acquired in the past is desired by underworld figures or night cults. Who knows where he hid it, or what it even looks like? Is it in one of the boxes of his wife's stuff in the upstairs closet? Is it in plain sight but not obvious?

Maybe it's even hidden underground, stolen by the Oruat before the passage closed.

Another potential plot thickener is a more classic confused parentage: the character the uncle asks to clean the house is the son of the dead man. When the old man's wife died in childbirth, the old man gave up on living and was no longer fit to raise a child. The child was sent to a cousin to raise. If this backstory is used, the player needs to know it (and it's their choice whether it's true), but of course the character may or may not know.

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