



CAIRN

OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

*A classless OSR adventure game about exploring a dark and
mysterious Wood*

1-6 PLAYERS	60-240 min MINUTES	12+ AGE
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CAIRN

Cairn is a classless, rules-light adventure game about exploring a dark and mysterious Wood filled with strange folk, hidden treasure, and unspeakable monstrosities. Character generation is quick and random, adventures are tense and reward careful exploration, and combat is frantic and deadly. Cairn was written by Yochai Gal, drawing on the Into the Odd lineage of OSR design.

A character's role or skills are not limited by a class. Instead, the equipment they carry and their experiences define their specialty. Death is always around the corner, but it is never random or without warning: the game favours fiction-first resolution over dice for difficulty, and reserves rolls for genuinely risky moments.

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Source: github.com/yochaigal/cairn.

PLAYER'S GUIDE

- ♦ [Overview & Principles](#) — Neutrality, classlessness, death, fiction-first play, growth, player choice, and the principles that guide both players and the Warden
- ♦ [Core Rules](#) — Attributes, saves, healing, deprivation and fatigue, armor, reactions, morale, hirelings, combat, scars, and magic
- ♦ [Character Creation](#) — Backgrounds, attributes, hit protection, inventory, character traits, bonds, and omens
- ♦ [Procedures](#) — Dungeon exploration, wilderness exploration, travel, weather, downtime actions
- ♦ [Marketplace](#) — Armor, weapons, transport, upkeep, hirelings, and gear prices

WARDEN'S GUIDE

- ♦ [Saves & Perception](#) – When and how to call for a save, worked examples for STR/DEX/WIL/opposed/aiding-an-ally saves, and how to handle character knowledge and perception
- ♦ [Combat & Difficulty](#) – Running combat and detachments at the table, and calibrating variable difficulty on the fly, with full worked examples
- ♦ [Exploration & Pointcrawls](#) – Dungeon exploration and wilderness exploration procedures, and converting a map into a pointcrawl
- ♦ [Growth](#) – The Triggers framework for character growth, with eight worked examples
- ♦ [Creating Content](#) – Designing new Backgrounds and Monsters, the meaning of Bonds and Omens, and the example party referenced throughout this guide
- ♦ [Naming Procedures](#) – Formulas for naming settlements, factions, realms, and forests
- ♦ [Dungeon Seeds](#) – Principles and a full random-generation procedure for building dungeons, with a worked example (The Fractured Temple)
- ♦ [Forest Seeds](#) – Forestcrawl exploration and a full random-generation procedure for building forests, with a worked example
- ♦ [Setting Seeds](#) – Building a region's people, factions, terrain, weather, points of interest, and paths
- ♦ [Bibliography](#) – Design influences and further reading credited by the original text
- ♦ [Character Sheet](#) – Blank character sheet (printable) with interactive generator

STRUCTURED TABLES

Machine-readable JSON for all procedural generation tables. See the [tables index](#) for the full list and schema.

Entities:

- ♦ [backgrounds.json](#) – 20 Backgrounds with names, starting gear, and roll tables
- ♦ [bestiary.json](#) – 84 monsters with HP, armor, stats, attacks, and traits
- ♦ [spellbooks.json](#) – 100 Spellbooks with effects and mundane effects
- ♦ [reliquary.json](#) – 46 Relics with uses and recharge conditions

Roll Tables:

- ♦ [naming-tables.json](#) – formulas and word lists for settlements, factions, realms, forests
- ♦ [npc-tables.json](#) – quick NPC generation (traits, quirks, motivation)
- ♦ [monster-creation-tables.json](#) – appearance, traits, attacks, abilities combinators
- ♦ [dungeon-seeds-tables.json](#) – purpose, construction, denizens, room stocking (monster/lore/special/trap)
- ♦ [forest-seeds-tables.json](#) – description, trails, POIs, encounters
- ♦ [setting-seeds-tables.json](#) – culture, factions, terrain, weather, paths



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OVERVIEW & PRINCIPLES

OVERVIEW

NEUTRALITY

The Warden's role is to act as a neutral arbiter and portray the rules, situations, non-player characters (NPCs), and narrative clearly.

CLASSLESS

A character's role or skills are not limited by a single class. Instead, the equipment they carry and their experiences define their specialty.

DEATH

Characters may be powerful, but they are also vulnerable to harm in its many forms. Death is always around the corner, but it is never random or without warning.

FICTION FIRST

Dice do not always reflect an obstacle's difficulty or its outcome. Instead, success and failure are based on in-world elements and arbitrated by the Warden in dialogue with the players.

GROWTH

Characters are changed through in-world advancement, gaining new skills and abilities by surviving dangerous events and overcoming obstacles.

PLAYER CHOICE

Players should always understand the reasons behind the choices they've made, and information about potential risks should be provided freely and frequently.

PRINCIPLES

The Warden and the players each have guidelines that help foster a specific play experience defined by critical thinking, exploration, and an emergent narrative.

SHARED OBJECTIVES

Players trust one another to engage with the shared setting, character goals, and party challenges. Therefore the party is typically working together towards a common goal, as a team.

PRINCIPLES FOR PLAYERS

AGENCY

- ♦ Attributes and related saves do not define your character. They are tools.
- ♦ Don't ask only what your character would do; ask what you would do, too.
- ♦ Be creative with your intuition, items, and connections.

TEAMWORK

- ♦ Seek consensus from the other players before barreling forward.
- ♦ Stay on the same page about goals and limits, respecting each other and accomplishing more as a group than alone.

EXPLORATION

- ♦ Asking questions and listening to detail is more useful than any stats, items, or skills you have.
- ♦ Take the Warden's description without suspicion, but don't shy away from seeking more information.
- ♦ There is no single correct way forward.

TALKING

- ♦ Treat NPCs as if they were real people, and rely on your curiosity to safely gain information and solve problems.
- ♦ You'll find that most people are interesting and will want to talk things through before getting violent.

CAUTION

- ♦ Fighting is a choice and rarely a wise one; consider whether violence is the best way to achieve your goals.
- ♦ Try to stack the odds in your favor, and retreat when things seem unfavorable.

PLANNING

- ♦ Think of ways to avoid your obstacles through reconnaissance, subtlety, and fact-finding.
- ♦ Do some research, and ask around about your objectives.

AMBITION

- ♦ Set goals, and use your meager means to take steps forward.
- ♦ Expect nothing. Earn your reputation.
- ♦ Keep things moving forward, and play to see what happens.

PRINCIPLES FOR WARDENS

INFORMATION

- ♦ Provide useful information about the game world as the characters explore it.
- ♦ Players do not need to roll dice to learn about their circumstances.
- ♦ Be helpful and direct with your answers to their questions.
- ♦ Respond honestly, describe consistently, and always let them know they can keep asking questions.

DIFFICULTY

- ♦ Default to context and realism rather than numbers and mechanics.
- ♦ If something the players want to do is sincerely impossible, no roll will allow them to do it.
- ♦ Is what the player describes and how they leverage the situation sensible? Let it happen.
- ♦ Saves cover a great deal of uncertain situations and are often all that is necessary for risky actions.

PREPARATION

- ♦ The game world is organic, malleable and random. It intuitively makes sharp turns.
- ♦ Use random tables and generators to develop situations, not stories or plots.
- ♦ NPCs remember what the PCs say and do, and how they affect the world.
- ♦ NPCs don't want to die. Infuse their own self-interest and will to live into every personality.

NARRATIVE FOCUS

- ♦ Emergent experience of play is what matters, not math or character abilities. Give the players weapon trainers and personal quests to facilitate improvement and specialization.
- ♦ Pay attention to the needs and wants of the players, then put realistic opportunities in their path.
- ♦ A dagger to your throat will kill you, regardless of your expensive armor and impressive training.

DANGER

- ♦ The game world produces real risk of pain and death for the player characters.
- ♦ Telegraph serious danger to players when it is present. The more dangerous, the more obvious.
- ♦ Put traps in plain sight and let the players take time to figure out a solution.
- ♦ Give players opportunities to solve problems and interact with the world.

TREASURE

- ♦ A Treasure is specific to the environment from where it is recovered. It tells a story.
- ♦ Treasure is highly valuable, almost always bulky, and rarely useful beyond its worth and prestige.
- ♦ Relics are not Treasure, though they are useful and interesting.
- ♦ Use Treasure as a lure to exotic locations under the protection of intimidating foes.

CHOICE

- ♦ Give players a solid choice to force outcomes when the situation lulls.
- ♦ Use binary “so, A or B?” responses when their intentions are vague.
- ♦ Work together using this conversational method to keep the game moving.
- ♦ Ensure that the player character’s actions leave their mark on the game world.

DIE OF FATE

- ♦ Occasionally you will want an element of randomness (e.g. the weather, unique character knowledge, etc.).
- ♦ In these situations, roll 1d6. A roll of 4 or more generally favors the players.
- ♦ A roll of 3 or under tends to mean bad luck for the PCs or their allies.

CORE RULES

ATTRIBUTES

Each of the three Attributes are used in different circumstances. (See Saves, below.)

- ♦ **Strength (STR):** Used for saves requiring physical power, like lifting gates, bending bars, resisting poison, etc.
- ♦ **Dexterity (DEX):** Used for saves requiring poise, speed, reflexes, dodging, climbing, sneaking, balancing, etc.
- ♦ **Willpower (WIL):** Used for saves to persuade, deceive, interrogate, intimidate, charm, provoke, manipulate spells, etc.

SAVES

- A save is a roll to avoid negative outcomes from risky choices. Characters roll a d20 and compare the results to the appropriate attribute. If they roll equal to or under that attribute, they succeed. Otherwise, they fail. A 1 is always a success, and a 20 is always a failure.
- ♦ If two opponents are each trying to overcome the other, whoever is most at risk should save.
 - ♦ If two characters need to take an action together, whoever is most at risk should save (usually the character with the lowest relevant Attribute).

HEALING & RECOVERY

- ♦ Resting for a few moments and having a drink of water restores lost HP but may leave the party exposed. Bandages can stabilize a character that has taken critical damage.
- ♦ Attribute loss (see Critical Damage) can usually be restored with a week's rest, facilitated by a healer or other appropriate source of expertise.
- ♦ Some healing services are free, while magical or more expedient means of recovery may come at a cost.

DEPRIVATION & FATIGUE

- ♦ A PC that lacks a crucial need (such as food or rest) is Deprived. Anyone Deprived for more than a day adds Fatigue to their inventory, one for each day. A Deprived PC cannot recover HP, Attributes, or item slots from Fatigue.
- ♦ A PC may also be forced to add Fatigue after casting spells or due to events occurring in the fiction. Each Fatigue occupies one slot and lasts until the PC is able to recuperate (such as with a full night's rest in a safe spot).
- ♦ If a character is forced to add Fatigue to their inventory but they have no free slots, they must drop an item from their inventory.

ARMOR

- ♦ Before calculating damage to HP, subtract the target's Armor value from the result of damage rolls.
- ♦ Shields and similar armor provide a bonus defense (e.g. +1 Armor), but only while the item is held or worn. Some may also provide additional benefits, depending on the fiction.
- ♦ A PC, NPC, or monster cannot have more than 3 Armor.

REACTIONS

When the PCs encounter an NPC whose reaction to the party is not obvious, the Warden may roll 2d6 and consult the following table.

ROLL (2D6)	REACTION
2	Hostile
3-5	Wary
6-8	Curious
9-11	Kind
12	Helpful

MORALE

- ♦ Enemies must pass a WIL save to avoid fleeing when they take their first casualty and again when they lose half their number.
- ♦ Some groups may use their leader's WIL in place of their own. Lone foes must save when they're reduced to 0 HP.
- ♦ Morale does not affect PCs.

HIRELINGS

- ♦ Adventuring parties can recruit hirelings, relying on their unique skills, knowledge, and training to aid in expeditions.
To create a hireling, choose an appropriate role from the Hirelings table in the [Marketplace](#). Roll 3d6 for each attribute and 1d6 for their HP. Give them equipment appropriate to their station, then roll on the Character Traits tables to further flesh them out.
- ♦ Alternatively, choose an appropriate [background](#) and name from the Character Creation guide. Roll (or choose from) the tables for that background. Then roll for Rations, Gold Pieces, Attributes, HP, and age.

DIE OF FATE

- ♦ Optionally, roll 1d6 whenever the outcome of an event is uncertain or to simulate an element of randomness and chance.
- ♦ A roll of 4 or more generally favors the PCs, while a roll of 3 or under usually means bad luck for the PCs.

COMBAT

ROUNDS

- ♦ A Round is roughly ten seconds of in-game time and proceeds with each side taking turns. Each round starts with any PC that is able to act, followed by their opponents. The result of each side's actions occur simultaneously.
- ♦ During the first round of combat, each PC must make a DEX save in order to act. Special circumstances, abilities, items, or skills may negate this requirement. PCs that fail their save lose their turn for this round.
- ♦ Their opponents then take their turn, and the first round ends. The next round begins with the PCs taking their turn, followed by their opponents, and so on until combat has ended with one side defeated or fled.

ACTIONS

On their turn, a character may move up to 40ft and take up to one action. This may be casting a spell, attacking, moving for a second time, or some other reasonable action. Each round, the PCs declare what they are doing before dice are rolled. If a character attempts something risky, the Warden calls for a save for appropriate players or NPCs.

ATTACKING & DAMAGE

- ♦ The attacker rolls their weapon die and subtracts the target's armor, then deals the remaining total to their opponent's HP. Attacks in combat automatically hit.
- ♦ If multiple attackers target the same foe, roll all damage dice and keep the single highest result. All actions are declared before being resolved.
- ♦ If an attack would take a PC's HP exactly to 0, refer to the [Scars](#) table to see how they are uniquely impacted.

ATTACK MODIFIERS

- ♦ If fighting from a position of weakness (such as through cover or with bound hands), the attack is Impaired, and the attacker must roll 1d4 damage regardless of the attack's damage die. Unarmed attacks always do d4 damage.
-
- ♦ If fighting from a position of advantage (such as against a helpless foe or through a daring maneuver), the attack is Enhanced, allowing the attacker to roll 1d12 damage instead of their normal die.
-
- Attacks with the Blast quality affect all targets in the noted area, rolling separately for each affected character. This
- ♦ can be anything from explosions to a dragon's breath or the impact of a meteorite. If unsure how many targets can be affected, roll the related damage die for a result.
-
- ♦ If attacking with two weapons at the same time, roll both damage dice and keep the single highest result (denoted with a plus symbol, e.g. d8+d8).

CRITICAL DAMAGE

- Damage that reduces a target's HP below zero is subtracted from their STR by the amount of damage remaining. The
- ♦ target must then immediately make a STR save to avoid taking Critical Damage, using their new STR score. On a success, the target is still in the fight (albeit with a lower STR score) and must continue to make critical damage saves when incurring damage.
-
- Any PC that suffers Critical Damage cannot do anything but crawl weakly, grasping for life. If given aid (such as bandages), they will stabilize. If left untreated, they die within the hour. NPCs and monsters that fail a Critical
- ♦ Damage save are considered dead, per the Warden's discretion. Additionally, some enemies will have special abilities or effects that are triggered when their target fails a critical damage save.

ATTRIBUTE LOSS

- ♦ If a PC takes damage outside of combat, they should instead receive damage to an Attribute, typically STR.
-
- If a PC's STR is reduced to 0, they die. If their DEX is reduced to 0, they are paralyzed. If their WIL is reduced to 0,
- ♦ they are delirious. Complete DEX and WIL loss renders the character unable to act until they are restored through extended rest or by extraordinary means.

CHARACTER DEATH

- ♦ When a character dies, the player should create a new character or take control of a hireling. They immediately join the party in order to reduce downtime.

DETACHMENTS

- ♦ Large groups of similar combatants fighting together are treated as a single Detachment. When a Detachment takes Critical Damage, it is routed or significantly weakened. When it reaches 0 STR, it is destroyed.
-
- ♦ Attacks against detachments by individuals are Impaired (excluding Blast damage). Attacks against individuals by detachments are Enhanced and deal Blast damage.

RETREAT

- ♦ Running away from a dire situation always requires a successful DEX save, as well as a safe destination to run to.

RANGED ATTACKS

- ♦ Ranged weapons can target any enemy near enough to see the whites of their eyes. Attacks against especially distant targets are Impaired.
-
- ♦ Ammunition is not tracked unless otherwise specified.

SCARS

If damage to a PC would reduce their HP to exactly 0, look up the result on the table below based on the amount of HP lost in the attack. For example, if a PC went from 3 HP to 0 HP, they would look at entry #3 (Walloped).

HP LOST	RESULT
1	Lasting Scar: Roll 1d6. 1: Neck, 2: Hands, 3: Eye, 4: Chest, 5: Legs, 6: Ear. Roll 1d6. If the total is higher than your max HP, take the new result.
2	Rattling Blow: You're disoriented and shaken. Describe how you refocus. Roll 1d6. If the total is higher than your max HP, take the new result.
3	Walloped: You're sent flying and land flat on your face, winded. You are deprived until you rest for a few hours. Then, roll 1d6. Add that amount to your max HP.
4	Broken Limb: Roll 1d6. 1-2: Leg, 3-4: Arm, 5: Rib, 6: Skull. Once mended, roll 2d6. If the total is higher than your max HP, take the new result.
5	Diseased: You're afflicted with a gross, uncomfortable infection. When you get over it, roll 2d6. If the total is higher than your max HP, take the new result.
6	Reorienting Head Wound: Roll 1d6. 1-2: STR, 3-4: DEX, 5-6: WIL. Roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your current attribute, take the new result.
7	Hamstrung: You can barely move until you get serious help and rest. After recovery, roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your max DEX, take the new result.
8	Deafened: You cannot hear anything until you find extraordinary aid. Regardless, make a WIL save. If you pass, increase your max WIL by 1d4.
9	Re-brained: Some hidden part of your psyche is knocked loose. Roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your max WIL, take the new result.
10	Sundered: An appendage is torn off, crippled, or useless. (The Warden will tell you which.) Then make a WIL save. If you pass, increase your max WIL by 1d6.
11	Mortal Wound: You are deprived and out of action. You die in one hour unless healed. Upon recovery, roll 2d6. Take the new result as your max HP.
12	Doomed: Death seemed ever so close, but somehow you survived. If your next save against critical damage is a fail, you die horribly. If you pass, roll 3d6. If the total is higher than your max HP, take the new result.

MAGIC

SPELLBOOKS

- ◆ Spellbooks contain a single spell and take up one slot. They cannot be easily transcribed or created; instead they are recovered from places like tombs, dungeons, and manors.
- ◆ Spellbooks sometimes display unusual properties or limitations, such as producing a foul or unearthly smell when opened, possessing an innate intelligence, or being legible only when held in moonlight.
- ◆ Spellbooks will attract the attention of those who seek the arcane power within, and it is considered dangerous to display them openly.

CASTING SPELLS

- ♦ Anyone can cast a spell by holding a Spellbook in both hands and reading its contents aloud. They must then add a Fatigue to inventory.
-

- ♦ Given time and safety, PCs can enhance a spell's impact (e.g., affecting multiple targets, increasing its power, etc.) without any additional cost.
-

- If the PC is deprived or in danger (such as during combat), the Warden may require a PC to make a WIL save to avoid
- ♦ any ill-effects from casting the spell. Consequences of failure are on par with the intended effect and may result in added Fatigue, the destruction of the Spellbook, injury, and even death.

SCROLLS

Scrolls are similar to Spellbooks, however:

- ♦ They are petty.
-
- ♦ They do not cause Fatigue.
-
- ♦ They disappear after one use.

RELICS

Relics are items imbued with a magical spell or power. They do not cause Fatigue. Relics usually have limited use, as well as a Recharge condition.

CHARACTER CREATION

ROLL OR CHOOSE A BACKGROUND

- ♦ First, roll or choose from the Backgrounds table below. You will refer to that background for the next few steps.
- ♦ Choose a name from the available list, then record each of your character's starting items.
- ♦ Roll on each of the included tables in the background. Record your character's items, skills, or abilities from each result. Some backgrounds may ask you to refer to the tables in the [Marketplace](#) as well.

Each of the 20 backgrounds below has its own name list and starting-item tables. Full background data (names, starting gear, and both roll tables for all 20) is published as structured table data in [backgrounds.json](#); see the [Cairn tables index](#) for the machine-readable version.

BACKGROUNDS

D20	BACKGROUND	D20	BACKGROUND
1	Aurifex	11	Half-Witch
2	Barber-Surgeon	12	Hexenbane
3	Beast Handler	13	Jongleur
4	Bonekeeper	14	Kettlewright
5	Cutpurse	15	Marchguard
6	Fieldwarden	16	Mountebank
7	Fletchwind	17	Outrider
8	Foundling	18	Prowler
9	Fungal Forager	19	Rill Runner
10	Greenwise	20	Scrivener

ATTRIBUTES, HIT PROTECTION, AND TRAITS

- ♦ Roll for your character's Attributes and Hit Protection.
- ♦ Roll for the rest of your character's Traits, and then on the Bonds table.
- ♦ Finally, roll for your character's Age (2d20+10). If you are the youngest character, roll on the Omens table. The result should be read aloud to the other players. The Warden should incorporate Omens into the setting as they see fit.

ATTRIBUTES

- ♦ Player Characters have just three Attributes: Strength (STR), Dexterity (DEX), and Willpower (WIL).
- ♦ Roll 3d6 for each of your character's Attributes, in order. You may then swap any two of the results.
- ♦ Attributes are not universal descriptors. A character with a low STR is not necessarily hopelessly weak; they can still attempt to lift a heavy door or survive a deadly fight! Their risk is simply higher.

HIT PROTECTION

- ♦ Roll 1d6 to determine your PC's starting Hit Protection (HP), which reflects their ability to avoid damage in combat. It does not indicate a character's health or fortitude, nor do they lose it for very long. See [Healing & Recovery](#).
- ♦ If an attack would take a PC's HP exactly to 0, the player must roll on the [Scars](#) table.

INVENTORY

- ♦ Characters have a total of ten inventory slots but can only carry four or five items comfortably without the help of bags, backpacks, horses, carts, etc.
- ♦ Each PC starts with a Backpack that can hold up to six slots of items or Fatigue. Carts (which must be pulled with both hands), horses, or mules can make a huge difference in how much a PC can bring with them on an adventure. Hirelings can also be paid to carry equipment.
- ♦ Inventory is abstract, dependent only on the fiction as adjudicated by the Warden. Anyone carrying a full inventory (i.e. filling all 10 slots) is reduced to 0 HP. A character cannot fill more than ten slots.

INVENTORY SLOTS

- ♦ Most items take up one slot unless otherwise indicated.
- ♦ Petty items do not take up any slots. Bulky items take up two slots.
- ♦ A bag of coins worth less than 100gp is petty and does not occupy a slot.

CHARACTER TRAITS (D10)

PHYSIQUE

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Athletic	6	Scrawny
2	Brawny	7	Short
3	Flabby	8	Statuesque
4	Lanky	9	Stout
5	Rugged	10	Towering

SKIN

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Birthmarked	6	Soft
2	Marked	7	Tanned
3	Oily	8	Tattooed
4	Rosy	9	Weathered
5	Scarred	10	Webbed

HAIR

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Bald	6	Long
2	Braided	7	Luxurious
3	Curly	8	Oily
4	Filthy	9	Wavy
5	Frizzy	10	Wispy

FACE

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Bony	6	Perfect
2	Broken	7	Rakish
3	Chiseled	8	Sharp
4	Elongated	9	Square
5	Pale	10	Sunken

SPEECH

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Blunt	6	Gravelly
2	Booming	7	Precise
3	Cryptic	8	Squeaky
4	Droning	9	Stuttering
5	Formal	10	Whispery

CLOTHING

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Antique	6	Frayed
2	Bloody	7	Frumpy
3	Elegant	8	Livery
4	Filthy	9	Rancid
5	Foreign	10	Soiled

VIRTUE

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Ambitious	6	Honorable
2	Cautious	7	Humble
3	Courageous	8	Merciful
4	Disciplined	9	Serene
5	Gregarious	10	Tolerant

VICE

D10	TRAIT	D10	TRAIT
1	Aggressive	6	Lazy
2	Bitter	7	Nervous
3	Craven	8	Rude
4	Deceitful	9	Vain
5	Greedy	10	Vengeful

BONDS

D20 BOND

1	You inherited a Single Gem (500gp, cold and brittle) from a long-dead relative. It arrived with a warning: squander your newfound riches, and a debt long thought forgotten would be called in.
2	A distant cousin left you a small inheritance. Take 20gp and a Strange Compass (petty) that always points towards something deep in the Wood.
3	You carry a Portrait in a locket (petty) of a past love who disappeared into the Wood long ago. Somehow you know that they are still alive.
4	You found a Tiny Crystal Prism (petty) buried in the dirt. When held up to the light, it shows visions of an unknown location deep within the Wood. Sometimes you feel a presence looking back at you.
5	You once freed a Naiad from a choked stream. In return, it gave you some Silver Moss (petty). Swallow it near water, and the creature will come, once, to repay its debt.
6	You inherited an old Journal, bound in bark. Each evening, its pages are filled with the events of the day, crassly written from the journal's perspective. The writing is crude but accurate.
7	You protect a long-dormant family secret. Take one half of an Ancient Key (petty). They say that if joined with its twin, it opens a Gate through any door.
8	You received a Letter (petty) detailing incontrovertible proof that your true parentage is that of Fae nobility. The note also indicates a date and location where you are to meet the letter's author, deep in the Wood.
9	You owe a great debt to a member of the nobility and carry their Signet Ring (petty), which serves as proof of their protection as well as your obligation.
10	You consumed a Mischievous Spirit that wreaks havoc on your insides, demanding to be taken home, deep in the Wood. It occupies one slot but absorbs one Fatigue each day. It wants you alive (for now).
11	A roaming storyteller once spun you tales of great treasure hidden deep in the Wood. You thought it naught but fancy, till they gave you A Rolled-Up Map (petty) marked with an X.
12	During your travels, you met a dying hunter who asked you to deliver a message to their loved ones. Take a Letter (petty), sealed with tree sap. It is addressed only to the Lord Of Winter.
13	You found a wounded beast in the forest but chose to ignore it. You see it everywhere now, but only when you're alone. It looks sad but not angry. You cannot become panicked when acting alone.
14	You promised a childhood friend that you'd bring them back a rare gift, something unique in all the world. Take a Bracelet (petty) woven from twine and wildflowers.
15	You crossed a creature of the Wood, and it cursed you with a Stone Heart. With each passing month, the stone grows heavier by one slot. Until your debt is lifted, you cannot truly die.
16	You carved a Whistle (petty) from an Oak Lord's branch. Your act did not go unnoticed. You cannot seem to rid yourself of the whistle either.
17	The Dawn Brigade did your family a service, giving you a dried Blood-Red Flower (petty) as proof. When the flower turns white, it means the favor is owed.
18	An entertainer once visited your home, filling it with story and song. He left one day without a word, leaving behind only A Miniature Lute. Something rattles inside.
19	A white crow appeared to you in a dream, holding a twig in its mouth. You awoke the next morning with the Twig (petty) in your hand. You believe it brings you luck. It smells faintly of sulfur.
20	One of your ancestors wronged a Moss Witch, who cursed their bloodline. Your visage causes mirrors to shatter. You've noticed that the shards can sometimes reveal illusions.

1	The once rich waters of a life-giving river have turned black and putrid, tainting the land and sickening those who drink from it. A village elder points to some recent desecration as the cause, but most do not heed their words.
2	It feels like winter has arrived too quickly this year, frost and snows making their appearance much earlier than expected. There is talk of a pattern to the frost found in windows, ponds, and cracks in the ground. It almost looks like a map.
3	A thick, unnatural fog has begun encroaching upon an ancient and holy grove. It is said to be the work of a great forest spirit, angered by nearby deforestation.
4	The night sky grows dimmer each evening, as if stars are disappearing one by one. Rumors of hellish creatures capturing farmers and pulling them into the Woods are spreading like wildfire. Village elders believe the two are connected.
5	The songbirds of the Wood have fallen eerily silent as of late. Hunters claim that a spectral figure has been spotted wandering the forest, gazing longingly at anyone it encounters.
6	Strange, tear-shaped stones have been found throughout the region, sparking a "gold rush" of sorts for jewelers and thieves alike. The locals believe they are the tears of the earth itself, weeping for a great tragedy yet to come.
7	Swarming pests gnaw away at the edges of dreams, and farmers speak of a loud buzzing sound emanating from deep within the Wood. They also say that the sound is getting closer.
8	There is a village known far and wide for its impressive "mother tree," said to shelter the town's secrets in its boughs. Recently it has begun bleeding red sap, worrying the elders.
9	The moon turns a deep crimson, bathing the night in an eerie, blood-red light. Some say it heralds a time of chaos and strife, as the boundaries between the Wood and the mortal realm grow thin.
10	Strange cracks have appeared in the night sky, revealing a swirling vortex of light and color. Some say that the divide between realms is at its weakest in centuries and fear what may emerge from the other side.
11	A night-blooming flower once thought extinct is sprouting up throughout the Wood. Its scent is intoxicating but also causes vivid nightmares.
12	Local livestock have grown increasingly agitated and unmanageable as of late. An old shepherd says it is due to an unsettling howl that emanates from the Wood each full moon.
13	Swarms of insects are fleeing from the Wood in droves, destroying any wooden structures they come across. The sound of their wings hum a familiar tune as they pass overhead, like a forgotten nursery rhyme.
14	Hunters talk of a curse that befalls any who kill a beast with a streak of white fur: soon after, they are found dead in their homes. Each day, there are fewer and fewer creatures to hunt.
15	Folks say that a faint laughter can be heard echoing out of wells all over the city, and that the echoes change to sobs at night.
16	The constellations have slowly started shifting in the night sky, forming unfamiliar patterns that have stargazers and sages perplexed. Even the animals seem disturbed.
17	An ancient tree at the heart of a sleepy village has suddenly withered and died, despite showing no signs of disease. After its trunk was cut, a bloody hand was found in its core.
18	Statues have been weeping blood for months on end, and the wombs of the village have lain barren since. A single child has been the only exception, hidden away by elders overcome with fear and dread.
19	The local fauna is behaving oddly, displaying heightened aggression or fleeing the area entirely. Hunters talk of a shadowy figure that roams the Wood, calling to the animals.
20	Border towns have become riotous in recent weeks after multiple claims of a red-robed figure appearing in their children's dreams, uttering the same warning: A fire is coming, and it will consume everything.

PROCEDURES

DUNGEON EXPLORATION

THE BASICS

- ♦ The dungeon exploration cycle (see below) is divided into a series of Turns, Actions, and their consequences.

On their turn, a character can move a distance equal to their torchlight's perimeter (about 40ft), and perform one

- ♦ action. Players can use their action to move up to three times that distance though that will increase the chance of triggering a roll on the Dungeon Events table.

The Warden should present obvious information about an area and its dangers freely and at no cost. Moving quickly

- ♦ or without caution may increase the chance of encountering a wandering monster, springing a trap, or triggering a roll on the Dungeon Events table.

Although the term "dungeon" is used here, it can mean any dangerous locale (mansions, farmhouses, adventure site, etc).

DUNGEON EXPLORATION CYCLE

- 1 The Warden describes the party's surroundings and any immediate dangers (combat, traps, surprises, etc.). The players then declare their character's intended movements and actions.

- 2 The Warden resolves the actions of each character simultaneously, along with any actions that are already in progress. Remember, the Die of Fate can be a useful tool whenever the Warden is in doubt!

The players record any loss of resources and any new conditions (i.e. item use, deprivation, etc). The cycle then

- 3 begins again. If appropriate, the Warden should roll on the Dungeon Events table. Keep common sense in mind when interpreting the results!

DUNGEON EVENTS

Exploring a dungeon is always dangerous, and time must always be weighed against the risk of awakening the location's denizens, natural hazards, and worse. When the party:

- ♦ Spends more than one dungeon cycle in a single room or location
- ♦ Moves quickly or haphazardly through a room
- ♦ Moves into a new area, level, or zone
- ♦ Creates a loud disturbance

Roll on the table below.

D6	RESULT	EFFECT
1	Encounter	Roll on an encounter table. Possibly hostile. (See Reactions .)
2	Sign	A clue, spoor, track, abandoned lair, scent, victim, etc is discovered.
3	Environment	Surroundings shift or escalate. Water rises, ceilings collapse, a ritual nears completion, etc.
4	Loss	Torches are blown out, an ongoing spell fizzles, etc. The party must resolve the effect before moving on.
5	Exhaustion	The party must rest (triggering another roll on this table), add a Fatigue, or consume a ration.
6	Quiet	The party is left alone (and safe) for the time being.

ACTIONS

- ♦ Actions are any non-passive activities, such as searching for traps, forcing open a door, listening for danger, disarming a trap, engaging an enemy in combat, casting a spell, dodging a trap, running away, resting, etc.
- ♦ Some actions have special rules (see below), while others may take multiple turns to complete.
- ♦ Loud or noticeable actions may also trigger an encounter with the dungeon's denizens.

Searching

- ♦ A character can spend a turn performing an exhaustive search of one object or location in an area, revealing any relevant hidden treasure, traps, secret doors, etc.
- ♦ Larger rooms and difficult or complex dungeon terrain may take a few turns to properly search.
- ♦ Searching a room first is a safer way to explore the dungeon, but it has a steep cost: time.

Resting

- ♦ A character can spend a turn resting to restore all HP.
- ♦ A light source and a safe location are required to rest. Present or oncoming danger makes rest impossible.
- ♦ Resting does not restore Fatigue, as it is impossible to safely Make Camp in a dungeon.

PANIC

- ♦ A character that is surrounded by enemies, enveloped by darkness, or facing their greatest fears may experience panic. A WIL save is typically required to avoid losing control and becoming panicked.
- ♦ A panicked character must make a WIL save to overcome their condition as an action on their turn.
- ♦ A panicked character has 0 HP, does not act in the first round of combat, and all of their attacks are impaired.

DUNGEON ELEMENTS

Light

- ♦ Torches and other radial sources of light illuminate 40ft of dungeon and beyond that only a dim outline of objects. Torches last until they are put out by a character or their environment.
-
- ♦ A torch can be lit 3 times before permanently degrading. A lantern can be relit 6 times per oil can, but requires more inventory slots.
-
- ♦ Characters without a light source may suffer from panic until their situation is remedied.

Doors

- ♦ Doors and entryways may be locked, stuck, or blocked entirely. Characters can try to force a door open (or wedge it shut) using available resources (spikes, glue) or through raw ability.
-
- ♦ The party's marching order determines who is most impacted by whatever lies beyond a door.
-
- ♦ A character can detect, through careful observation (listening, smelling, etc.), signs of life and other hazards through nearby doors and walls.

Traps

- ♦ A cautious character should be presented with any and all information that would allow them the opportunity to avoid springing a trap. An unwitting character will trigger a trap according to the fiction, or otherwise will have a 2-in-6 chance.
-
- ♦ Traps can usually be detected by carefully searching a room.
-
- ♦ Damage from traps is taken from Attributes (usually STR or DEX) and not from HP. Armor can reduce damage, but only if applicable (e.g. a shield would not reduce damage from noxious gas).

WILDERNESS EXPLORATION

WATCHES

- ♦ A day is divided into three watches, called morning, afternoon, and night.
-
- ♦ Each character can choose one Wilderness Action per watch.
-
- ♦ If the characters split up, each group is treated as an independent entity.

POINTS

- ♦ Potential destinations on a map are called points.
- ♦ One or more watches may be required to journey between two points on a map, depending on the path, terrain, weather, and party status.
- ♦ The party has a rough idea of the challenges involved to get to their destination, but rarely any specifics.

TRAVEL DURATION

Travel time in Cairn is counted in watches, divided into three eight-hour segments per day. However, as most parties elect to spend the third watch of the day resting, one can use “days” as a shorthand for travel time.

To determine the distance between two points, combine all penalties from the path, terrain, and weather difficulty tables, taking into account any changes to those elements along the route. For travel via waterways, refer to the surrounding terrain difficulty. For especially vast terrain, assign a penalty of up to +2 watches to the journey.

The weather, terrain, darkness, injured party members, and other obstacles can impact travel or even make it impossible! In some cases, the party may need to add Fatigue or expend resources in order to sustain their pace. Mounts, guides, and maps can increase the party’s travel speed or even negate certain penalties.

PATH DIFFICULTY

PATH	PENALTY	ODDS OF GETTING LOST
Roads	None	None
Trails	+1 Watch	2-in-6
Wilderness	+2 Watches	3-in-6

PATH DISTANCE	PENALTY
Short	+1 Watch
Medium	+2 Watches
Long	+3 Watches

TERRAIN DIFFICULTY

DIFFICULTY	TERRAIN	PENALTY	FACTORS
Easy	Plains, plateaus, valleys	none	Safe areas for rest, fellow travelers, good visibility
Tough	Forests, deserts, hills	+1 Watch	Wild animals, flooding, broken equipment, falling rocks, unsafe shelters, hunter's traps
Perilous	Mountains, jungles, swamp	+2 Watches	Quicksand, sucking mud, choking vines, unclean water, poisonous plants and animals, poor navigation

WEATHER

Each day, the Warden should roll on the weather table for the appropriate season. If the “Extreme” weather result is rolled twice in a row, the weather turns to “Catastrophic.” A squall becomes a hurricane, a storm floods the valley, etc.

Weather Type

D6	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
1	Nice	Nice	Fair	Fair
2	Fair	Nice	Fair	Unpleasant
3	Fair	Fair	Unpleasant	Inclement
4	Unpleasant	Unpleasant	Inclement	Inclement
5	Inclement	Inclement	Inclement	Extreme
6	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme

Weather Difficulty

WEATHER	EFFECT	EXAMPLES
Nice	Favorable conditions for travel.	Clear skies, sunny
Fair	Favorable conditions for travel.	Overcast, breezy
Unpleasant	Add a Fatigue or add one watch to the journey.	Gusting winds, rain showers, sweltering heat, chill air
Inclement	Add a Fatigue or add +1 watch. Increase terrain Difficulty by a step.	Thunderstorms, lightning, rain, muddy ground
Extreme	Add a Fatigue and add +1 watch. Increase terrain Difficulty by a step.	Blizzards, freezing winds, flooding, mud slides
Catastrophic	Most parties cannot travel under these conditions.	Tornados, tidal waves, hurricane, volcanic eruption

WILDERNESS EXPLORATION CYCLE

- 1 The Warden describes the current point or region on the map and how the path, weather, terrain, or party status might affect travel speed. The party plots or adjusts a given course towards their destination.
- 2 Each party member chooses a single Wilderness Action. The Warden narrates the results and then rolls on the Wilderness Events table. The party responds to the results.
- 3 The players and the Warden record any loss of resources and new conditions (i.e. torch use, deprivation, etc), and the cycle repeats.

WILDERNESS EVENTS

D6	RESULT	EFFECT
1	Encounter	Roll on an encounter table for that terrain type or location. Don't forget to roll for NPC reactions if applicable.
2	Sign	The party discovers a clue, spoor, or indication of a nearby encounter, locality, hidden feature, or information about a nearby area.
3	Environment	A shift in weather or terrain.
4	Loss	The party is faced with a choice that costs them a resource (rations, tools, etc), time, or effort.
5	Exhaustion	The party encounters a barrier, forcing effort, care or delays. This might mean spending extra time (and an additional Wilderness Action) or adding Fatigue to the PC's inventory to represent their difficulties.
6	Discovery	The party finds food, treasure, or other useful resources. The Warden can instead choose to reveal the primary feature of the area.

WILDERNESS ELEMENTS

Night

- ♦ The party can choose to travel during the night and rest during the day, but night travel is far slower and more treacherous!
- ♦ Traveling at night is always more dangerous! The Warden should roll twice on the Wilderness Events table.
- ♦ Some terrain and weather may be easier to traverse at night (desert, for example). The Warden should balance these challenges along with any other.

Sleep

- ♦ The last watch of the day is typically reserved for the Make Camp action.
-
- ♦ Characters typically need to sleep each day. Anything beyond a minor interruption can negate or cancel the benefits of sleep.
-
- ♦ If the party skips the Make Camp action, they each add a Fatigue to their inventory and are deprived. Additionally, traveling when sleep-deprived raises the terrain Difficulty by a step (i.e. Easy becomes Tough).

Light

- ♦ Torches and other radial sources of light illuminate 40ft ahead of the party, but beyond that only provides a dim outline of objects.
-
- ♦ Characters without a light source may suffer from panic until their situation is remedied.
-
- ♦ Environmental conditions (sudden gusts of wind, dust, water, etc.) can easily blow out a torch.

Light Sources

- ♦ A torch can be lit 3 times before degrading.
-
- ♦ A lantern can be relit indefinitely but requires a separate oil can (6 uses).

WILDERNESS ACTIONS

Travel

- ♦ Travel begins. Obvious locations, features, and terrain of nearby areas are revealed according to their distance. This action is typically taken by the entire party as one.
-
- ♦ The party rolls 1d6 to see if they get lost along the way. This risk can increase or decrease, depending on path Difficulty, maps, party skills, and guides.
-
- ♦ If lost, the party may need to spend a Wilderness Action to recover their way. Otherwise, the party reaches the next point along their route.

Remember to compare the results of getting lost to the relevant path Difficulty.

Explore

- ♦ One or more party members search a large area, searching for hidden features, scouting ahead, or treading carefully.
-
- ♦ A Location (shelter, village, cave, etc.) or Feature (geyser, underground river, beached ship, etc.) is discovered.
-
- ♦ The Travel action is still required to leave the current area, even if it has been completely explored.

Supply

- ♦ One or more party members may hunt, fish, or forage for food, collecting 1d4 Rations (3 uses each). The chance of a greater bounty increases with each additional participant (e.g. 1d4 becomes 1d6, up to a maximum of 1d12).
- ♦ Relevant experience or equipment may also increase the bounty collected.
- ♦ The party may encounter homes and small villages, spending gold and a full watch to resupply.

Make Camp

- ♦ The party stops to set up camp in the wilds. Each party member (and their mounts) consumes a Ration.
- ♦ A lookout rotation is set so that the party can sleep unmolested. A smaller party may need to risk sleeping unguarded or switch off sleeping over multiple days.
- ♦ Party members that were able to rest remove all Fatigue from their inventory.

DOWNTIME

Between game sessions, players can engage in a variety of activities such as research, following up on leads, improving skills, or building relationships. A PC is limited to one Downtime Action at a time. These actions cannot be undertaken in unsafe conditions or while a character is in recovery. A character cannot perform an action if it would put their safety at risk.

MILESTONES

For activities requiring multiple steps, the Warden assigns 1–5 Milestones for players to track progress. Each Milestone represents a comprehensive, non-interactive task. The Warden may present different strategies to achieve these goals, each with distinct Milestones. Depending on the unfolding events in the game, the Warden is also empowered to introduce new Milestones or discard existing ones.

COSTS

PCs can complete individual Milestones by taking a Downtime Action and paying its respective Cost. If a character is unable to pay the Cost, they may have to find some other way to achieve their goal. A few examples of Cost:

- ♦ **Gold:** Direct payment of gold from a character's inventory.
- ♦ **Resources:** Non-monetary costs such as material goods, specific common items, and so on.
- ♦ **Reputation:** Betting on a character's renown, personality, presence, social connections, etc.
- ♦ **Loss:** Offering something specific and unique. A finger, a soul, a Relic, etc.

Some Costs can be reduced or disregarded through character skills, connections, or force of will. For example, a PC may have already acquired the necessary reputation to gain access to a renowned institution, and thus the cost is abated. On the other hand, another character may not be so lucky and must rely on their force of personality instead. In this case, the Warden should state the risk (a permanent ban on entry, a loss of reputation, etc.). The PC then makes a WIL save; on a success, the cost is either reduced or avoided entirely.

DOWNTIME ACTIONS

The following activities represent some of the most common Downtime Actions a player can choose. The Warden can also create custom actions based on the needs of play.

RESEARCH

A PC investigates a question about a bit of lost or forgotten lore, the location of a lost item, the whereabouts of an important NPC, and so on. To take this action, the player must have a clearly formulated question they'd like to answer and a Source of knowledge in the game world that their character can interact with. If the PC does not have a Source, then they can spend a Downtime Action trying to find one. There is no guarantee that they will be successful. Once a question is posed and an appropriate Source has been identified, the Warden should provide any Milestones and associated Costs.

Questions

As always, the question must come from an experience that occurred during play.

Examples:

- ◆ "Where is the Lost Temple of East Nipoor?"
- ◆ "Who in Fortune City might know how to crack an ancient vault?"
- ◆ "Where can I find the cure to curly sickness?"

Sources

A Source is a person, place, faction, or entity that holds either a part or whole answer that the character seeks. They can be NPCs, Factions, spirits, or even other PCs.

Examples:

- ◆ Kewr the Mouth, a frequent contact for the Conclave of Merchants. Despite their excellent relationship with this faction, asking for help in an illicit activity might come at a high cost.
- ◆ A Woodwose who makes his home deep in the Forest of Knives. The party encountered him in an earlier expedition and the meeting did not end well. Still, he is said to know the nature of every herb and their healing properties.
- ◆ The Temple of Puppets, a nomadic circus troupe who have travelled the known and unknown lands. The party assisted one of their members during the Rain of Fire, when even the creatures of the Wood were preparing to flee their homes. If anyone has heard of forgotten places, it's them.

TRAINING

A character can improve their skills with an item or ability, with clear narrative or mechanical results. They might be interested in dealing greater damage with a particular weapon, decreasing their chances of getting lost in rough weather, or learning to read the languages of the ancients. A PC might spend multiple Downtime Actions sparring with a particular weapon, improving their skills week by week. Or they may need to travel to the home of a distant sage, improving themselves through short but intense study.

The player must describe precisely what they'd like to improve and a Master whom they might train with. And of course, the character's inspiration to improve should come from an experience in play. The Warden should provide any Milestones and associated Costs.

Examples:

- ♦ The Two-Handed Parry: When fighting with one hand free, a PC's HP temporarily increases by 1d4. The party took on a hireling from the Cratered Lands, whose fighters emphasize avoiding enemy attacks. She has agreed to train anyone who can best her in hand to hand combat.
- ♦ Herbology: Given proper ingredients, a PC can create a Healing Salve (restores 4 STR) as a Downtime Action. After receiving care from an elderly herbalist in the Verdant Glades, the wounded PC asked to be trained in the healing arts. The Master has agreed, but asked that they collect three rare herbs before training can begin.
- ♦ Troutmaster: When taking the Supply Action, Rations gathered near cold freshwater sources increase by one step (e.g. 1d4 becomes 1d6). The party escorted a stranded naturalist from the famously dreadful Silver Wastes safely back to the city. As thanks, she has offered to train a PC to identify and capture a common lakefish that frequents colder waters.

STRENGTHENING TIES

A character fosters a connection with an NPC or Faction in the game world. First, they must identify the entity with whom they wish to strengthen ties, as well as a specific intent (e.g., building trust, mending a friendship, seeking membership in a Faction, forming an alliance, and so on). The Warden then provides concrete measures (described as Milestones and Costs) that the PC can undertake to advance the relationship. With each completed Milestone, the Warden describes how the PC's relationship has grown or changed.

Examples:

- ♦ After returning from an unsuccessful delve into the Roots, a PC discovers that they'd unknowingly brought along a stowaway: an eyeless devourer, barely hatched. They decide to keep the creature and train it in secret.
- ♦ During a play session, a PC becomes friendly with an agent of the Order of the Helm. Impressed by the Order's values, the PC asks what the requirements are to join.
- ♦ An agent for a powerful faction dies during the Battle of Frogs while under the party's care. Now those responsible wish to provide redress, so that the party can once again perform tasks for that faction.

MARKETPLACE

All prices are in gold pieces.

ARMOR

ITEM	PRICE
Shield (+1 Armor)	10
Helmet (+1 Armor)	10
Gambeson (+1 Armor)	15
Brigandine (1 Armor, bulky)	20
Chainmail (2 Armor, bulky)	40
Plate (3 Armor, bulky)	60

WEAPONS

ITEM	PRICE
Dagger, Cudgel, Sickle, Staff, etc. (d6 damage)	5
Spear, Sword, Mace, Axe, Flail, etc. (d8 damage)	10
Halberd, War Hammer, Long Sword, etc. (d10 damage, bulky)	20
Sling (d6 damage)	5
Bow (d6 damage, bulky)	20
Crossbow (d8 damage, bulky)	30

TRANSPORT

ITEM	PRICE
Cart (+4 slots, bulky)	30
Wagon (+8 slots, slow)	200
Horse (+4 slots)	75
Mule (+6 slots, slow)	30
Carriage Seat	5
Ship's Passage	10

UPKEEP & RECOVERY

ITEM	PRICE
Room & Board (per night)	10
Private Room & Board (fits 4)	35
Stable & Feed (per night)	5
Medical Healing	50
Rations (3 uses)	10
Animal Feed (3 uses, bulky)	5

HIRELINGS (PER DAY)

HIRELING	PRICE
Alchemist	30
Animal Handler	5
Blacksmith	15
Bodyguard	10
Local Guide	5
Lockpick	10
Navigator	10
Sailor	5
Scholar	20
Tracker	5
Trapper	5
Veteran Bodyguard	20

GEAR

ITEM	PRICE
Air Bladder	5
Antitoxin	20
Bandages (3 uses)	30
Bathing Goods (Soap, Perfume, etc.)	5
Book	50
Caltrops	10
Card Deck	5
Chain (10ft)	10
Chalk (petty)	1
Chest	25
Chisel	5
Common Agents (Glue, Grease, etc.)	10
Common Tools (Hammer, Shovel, etc.)	10
Compass	75
Complex Instruments (Bagpipes, Fiddle, etc.)	50
Containers (Sack, Waterskin, etc.)	10
Cooking Gear (Pots, Utensils, etc.)	10
Costume Gear (Face Paint, Disguise)	15
Dowsing Rod	15
Expeditionary Gear (Climbing Spikes, Pulley, etc.)	10
Fire Oil	10
Fishing Rod	10
Games (Cards, Dice, etc.)	10
Gloves (petty)	20
Grappling Hook	25
Lantern	10
Mirror	5
Net	10
Oil Can (6 uses)	10
Outdoor Comfort (Blanket, Hammock, etc.)	10
Parchment (3 uses)	10
Pole (10ft)	5
Repellent (Wolfsbane, Mugwort, etc.)	10
Rope (25ft)	5
Sedative	30
Sewing Kit	20
Simple Instruments (Pipes, Lute, etc.)	10
Smoking Pipe (petty)	15
Specialized Tools (Ink, etc.)	20
Spiked Boots	15
Spyglass	40

SAVES & PERCEPTION

Warden's Guide material: how to adjudicate Saves, and how to handle character knowledge and perception at the table.

WHEN TO SAVE

There are three common scenarios in which a player character should save:

- ♦ When avoiding the negative outcome of a risky action.
- ♦ When acting in opposition to another player character, NPC, or creature.
- ♦ When aiding one or more characters in a risky action.

SAVE PRINCIPLES

- ♦ When in doubt, ask whether the party has the time, resources, skills, or advantage to overcome a problem. If the answer is "no," then a save is usually warranted. If the answer is "I don't know," then a roll with the Die of Fate may be necessary.
- ♦ Feel free to say "no," but remember to offer an alternative. If the party cannot proceed due to circumstances beyond their control, give them another option to consider.
- ♦ Character death should never come as a surprise. If the risk is so great that the outcome might be fatal, make sure the player understands what they're getting into.
- ♦ Always provide multiple viable options for the PCs to choose from. The more choices, the more interesting the situation becomes.
- ♦ The outcome of a save need not be a simple binary. You can tailor the results based on the totality of input: the effort, forethought, resources, and skill that went into the roll.
- ♦ Be transparent with players. This doesn't mean revealing all of the world's secrets, but provide each player with the maximum information their character might have.
- ♦ Avoid requiring a dice roll whenever possible. If a PC can solve a problem using purely narrative components, *do not ask for a roll*.
- ♦ Replace multiple dice rolls with a single dice throw. Simplifying results to a single roll can increase tension while maximizing player input.

TRADITIONAL SAVES

STRENGTH

Wolfram dashes through the underground jail cell, a bundle of cloth held tightly to his chest. Lucius and Freya are right behind, fighting off a very large guard and his pet wolf.

Wolfram: *"Remember, they are innocents! They don't need to die!"*

Freya: *"Sorry, I can't hear you through the barks and snarling!"*

Warden: *"Suddenly, the guard stops and whistles, recalling his pet. He then pulls on a lever behind him, and a loud grating sound starts emanating from the other side of the hallway to the East. Then you see what he's done: a thick iron gate is coming down from the ceiling. If it closes, you'll be locked in this section of the jail! Wolfram, you can probably make it through without any risk. Lucius and Freya will need to each make DEX saves in order to make it."*

Wolfram: *"I'm going to stop and hold the gate for as long as I can. What do I risk?"*

Warden: *"The gate is strong. It might break your bones, or you might get stuck underneath."*

Wolfram: *"I toss the bundle through to the other side, then take up a position to grab onto it. Lucius, Freya, you two run ahead. I've got this."*

Lucius and Freya agree, and Wolfram rolls a 13: a success!

Warden: *"You groan as the iron bars press down against your arms and shoulders. Just as you feel like the gate might crush you in two, Lucius and Freya jog past and into safety. You step back and the gate collapses onto the stone floor with such force that the mechanism itself breaks. There is no going back now! The large guard isn't getting through either, though."*

Wolfram: *"It's just as I've always said: 'Through strength, there is virtue.' Or was it, 'There is virtue in strength?' Ah, anyway... Hey, wait for me!"*

DEXTERITY

Freya crouches atop the rafters of a decrepit tavern, spying on a gang of heavily-armed thugs below.

Warden: *"After twenty minutes of cramped discomfort, the care and caution you put into this venture are finally rewarded as one of the men below speaks aloud the location of their hideout. Your mission is complete! What do you do now?"*

Freya: *"I need to skedaddle without these jokers knowing I was ever here. Does it look like they are nearly finished?"*

Warden: *"Actually, one of them is pulling out a deck of cards, and the others are nodding in approval. It looks like they'll be here for a while yet."*

Freya: *"Rats. Well, no time like the present, right? I'm going to sneak back the way I came."*

Warden: *"That's fine, but when you passed earlier there was no one here. That is no longer the case! You'll need to make a DEX save to avoid detection."*

Freya rolls a 16: a fail!

Warden: *"As you crest the final beam, it creaks. All six of the men look up and see you leap into the crawlspace leading out of the main hall and into the kitchens. They didn't get a bead on your face, but they know you're up there! They shout and draw their weapons."*

Freya: *"I have one smoke bomb left, and I plan on using it. I'm going to drop into the kitchens to find a pot. If I recall correctly, water makes the smoke go crazy..."*

WIL

Lucius has been captured after helping a client try to break into the ancient vault of Der Thunn. In a sudden glut of courage, he allowed himself be taken so that the others could escape.

Wolfram: *"Pity about Lucius. But we have to deliver our client to the vault immediately. We can rescue him after."*

Freya: *"I am NOT leaving him behind. You should still go, but I'm going to get him out. I'm a cutpurse, so I have friends everywhere, right? Or perhaps there's some kind of thieves' cant I can use to make connections here?"*

Warden: *"Indeed. You can spend the night trying to make connections among your kind, if you like."*

The party splits up, and Freya learns what she needs to from a local fence. (It costs her one of the Twins, and she is not happy about it). Lucius is awaiting his sentence in a jail beneath the constabulary.

Warden: *"In the dim light of the early dawn, you notice a note slipped through the street vent. It reads, 'Speak the following, and you will be free: "The Pale Man Longs To Die." You have but one chance.'"*

Lucius: *"...What? OK. Someone gave this to me? And I have to speak it aloud... but at the right time, or to the right person?"*

Warden: *"You hear footsteps as the jailer approaches. He jingles his keys as if he intends to open your cell. What do you do?"*

Lucius: *"OK! This is not the right person, I think. Perhaps I'll talk to someone higher up?"*

Warden: *"He opens your cell and beckons for you to come out."*

Lucius: *"Hello friend! Might I speak to your superior? I have some important news that might be very interesting to them..."*

Warden: *"The jailer smirks as he unlocks raises a pair of manacles."*

Lucius: *"THE PALE MAN LONGS TO DIE!"*

Warden: *"The jailer stops in his tracks, then lowers the manacles. He nods once, then gestures that you follow him."*

Lucius: *"Well, that was lucky. What is this, some code for jailers? Executioners? Well, whatever it is, I'm following."*

Warden: *"The jailer guides you into the darkness of the jail, far from the light. As he reaches the far wall, he taps three times on a stone high above his head. After a moment, the wall swings inward, and the guard walks confidently inside, where a dark-haired woman waits at a desk. She smiles at you and gestures that you sit at the chair across from her."*

Lucius: *"Uh oh. Can I go back to my cell, please? I kid, I kid. I take a seat."*

Warden: *"The jailor leaves as you take a seat. The room is small, with only one door on the other side of the woman. A very large man stands outside, his head visible through a small window on the door. The woman smiles again, saying, 'Welcome Mr... Well, it doesn't matter. There is only one reason you are here. You've spoken a code known only to thieves and scoundrels. And which one are you, I wonder?'"*

Lucius: *"What happens now? I don't have anything to barter... Except for perhaps the truth? But that means I have to make a WIL save, right? So that I seem 'convincing?'"*

Warden: *"You'd need to make a WIL save even if you weren't telling the truth. You're definitely the most at risk here, and despite your experience as a charlatan, you think she can probably see through any lie. She and you might not be so different."*

Lucius: *"OK. Madam: I'll be straight with you. My friends and I are here to sneak into the vault of Der Thunn. I only learned of that phrase a few minutes ago. I believe one of my friends (a cutpurse named Freya, you might know her) left me that note. If you set me free, I'll be sure to mention... what's your name, again?"*

Warden: *"Katja. And please, tell me everything."*

Lucius describes the party's plans, and their efforts so far. He makes a WIL save. He rolls a 5, a success! Katja is convinced of his sincerity.

Warden: *"As she listens to your story, Katja frowns, then finally smiles. 'Alright, alright, I believe you. Let's make a deal! You introduce me to this "client" of yours whom you've so kindly escorted into my town, and I'll make sure no one is watching while you slip away. But we have to go right now, before this place implodes. And if that happens, even I can't guarantee your safety..."*

An hour later, Lucius finds Freya, but not the others. She explains that Wolfram and their client have already left for the vault. She agrees to take them there, but says that she needs to make a quick stop first. Something about reclaiming one of her daggers...

OPPOSED SAVES

The party has cornered their opponents (two Bandits and their Hobgoblin chief) against a steep cliff side. Lucius and Wolfram are able to take their turns right away, but Freya failed her initial DEX save and has to go after their opponents. As her friends take on each of their smaller foes, she only narrowly avoids getting her head bashed in by the Hobgoblin!

Freya: *"I don't think I can survive another bout with their leader, so I'm going to try and knock him off the cliff!"*

Warden: *"You are most at risk in this situation, meaning that if you try and push him, you will need to make the appropriate save!"*

Freya: *"And if I fail, I go off the cliff, right? Alright... I think I can do this. But just in case, I'm going to make sure I'm wearing my Catring!"*

Freya rolls a STR save to try and grapple the Hobgoblin and toss him off the cliff. She rolls a 17, a fail!

Warden: *"Their leader picks you up and flings you backward, sending you careening off the cliff. Fortunately the Catring activates its final charge, and you are able to gracefully catch a tree branch jutting off the mountainside 10ft below. It will take you two turns to climb back up, or you'll need to make a DEX save to do it quickly."*

Freya: *"Damn. Well, hopefully my comrades will fare well enough without me until I return..."*

AIDING AN ALLY

The party have just arrived at the entrance to the second level of a long-forgotten mountain tomb. Freya leads the group, followed by Lucius, with Wolfram taking up the rear. Wolfram holds a lit torch, but the others have their hands free.

Warden: *"The path to the North veers over a twisted archway positioned atop a dark chasm. To the East, a rocky path leads downward into the murk below. What do you do?"*

Wolfram: *"Our quarry is said to be at the top of this blasted place! I think we should press on to the North."*

Warden: *"The rest of you agree? Alright, then. Assuming you continue with the same marching orders..."*

Wolfram: *"Wait! Let me go first. My Order can reveal that which is hidden, and I feel something sinister lies ahead in the darkness. I will take the lead, stepping as cautiously as possible, my Voidglass Shard at the ready."*

Warden: *"Wolfram, you carefully start across the bridge, which moans and creaks with each step. It feels solid beneath your feet, though. As the party reaches the midway point, the ground begins to shudder violently, then blossoms with cracks. It looks like it's going to collapse from behind!"*

Wolfram: *"If we run to the opposite side, does it look like we can make it safely?"*

Warden: *"You and Lucius are the farthest ahead and likely the least at risk. But Freya is last and will need to make a DEX save to arrive there safely."*

Freya: *"You just had to take the lead, didn't you, Wolfie? I have a rope. Do I have time to toss it to one of the others?"*

Warden: *"Yes, you can do that. Wolfram has his hands full, so Lucius is your best bet. You can easily throw a rope to him, but a STR save will be required. As you will be the most at risk, you will need to make the save."*

Freya: *"A friend and a rope still seems like a good deal to me. Let's do it!"*

Freya rolls a 5: a success!

Warden: *"As the bridge collapses, Wolfram and Lucius dash to the opposite side with Freya right behind. Just as the ground disappears beneath her feet, she tosses Lucius her rope. As the bridge collapses behind her, she slams into the wall, hanging onto the rope for dear life. Slowly, she climbs along the wall, straining to reach the ledge a few feet above her. Finally, she pulls herself onto the dusty floor."*

Freya: *"That was fun. What's next?"*

KNOWLEDGE

Cairn differs from many modern roleplaying games by not including mechanics for knowledge or expertise. Instead, it is assumed that a character has the necessary knowledge so long as it can be justified in the fiction. Similarly, there are no mechanics that govern a character's perception or ability to "detect" important details in their environment. Instead, the Warden should provide unlimited relevant information about every detail a character can perceive with their basic senses.

Character knowledge is limited only by what can be explained by elements in the fiction. If it is known that a PC comes from an impoverished background and learned how to survive by any means necessary, then their player may argue that their character is better able to track down a notable NPC hiding in the slums. They may know whom to speak to and what sorts of trades might be required to collect the information they need about their target's whereabouts.

If a character has no justifiable knowledge of a subject, then they simply do not know anything about it! However, the Warden may decide to roll the **Die of Fate** to determine if the character has a chance of knowing *something*. The higher the result, the more they might (reasonably) know.

RELICS

When a character first acquires a Relic they are not familiar with, they can either spend time learning more about it (using a Downtime action) or experiment with it. The latter carries some dangers and may even require a successful WIL save to avoid negative consequences. However, it is often more interesting to allow the player to ask as many questions as they like about it and (eventually) to simply *tell them how it works*.

PERCEPTION

When informing the players of what their PCs can perceive, the Warden should provide maximal sensory information pertaining to the objects, characters, dangers, and interactive elements in the given situation. Consider what can be gained by limiting what the PCs know or do not know. Do secrets help create interesting choices and decision points? Do they raise interesting questions? Do they give the players a sense of control over their own actions? The answer to these questions is almost always an emphatic *No*.

Players should feel that the consequences of their character's actions are *earned*, and that they are *deserved*, even if the results aren't always in their favor. True agency comes from providing the players with everything they need to know to make an interesting decision, even if that is simply asking a question about what their character might perceive.

Take for example the following keyed location:

A colony of **bees** furiously circles a massive hive hanging from the branch of a large oak tree. A **man** observes in the shadows beneath the tree, and a rusted **sword** lies on the ground not far from the tree.

Bees: Their buzzing is nearly deafening, creating a wall of sound around the tree.

- ♦ The hive is dripping with honey. It is delicious, and mundane.
- ♦ Any attempt to take honey from the hive is met with an aggressive response from the colony [3 HP, 3 STR, 12 DEX, 4 WIL, sting (d6), *detachment*].

Man: Leans against a long staff, his gaze fixed on the hive. He appears unfazed by the swarm.

- ♦ The man is a magical illusion created by the beekeeper as a means to drive away any potential predators. He will not react to any direct stimuli.
- ♦ If the hive is damaged in any way, the man will scream very loudly, then disappear.

Sword: Shoe prints in the earth lead towards it but stop abruptly a few feet away.

- ♦ The weapon belongs to the skeleton buried just beneath the earth. It is a regular short sword (d6), strangely preserved.
- ♦ Bloodvines [3 HP, 4 STR, 13 DEX, 1 WIL, tendrils (d6, *blast*)] attack anyone that steps close to the sword, sapping 1 STR per round from their target (STR save to escape after the first round).

In this example, there are three potential dangers: the bees, the man, and the Bloodvine plant. The danger from bees is more obvious, as the PCs can clearly see the danger and are familiar with bees already. The man is an unknown entity and could be friend or foe, while the Bloodvines are hidden and act as a sort of trap. The Warden should therefore communicate exactly what the PCs can see, hear, and smell.

The PCs will likely try to interact with the man first or perhaps ask questions about the sword, as these are both fairly passive ways to engage with the scene. When the PCs realize that the man does not respond, they may try to get a closer look or perhaps toss a rock in his direction (avoiding the hive), and so on. If the PCs ask questions about the sword or try to interact with it, the Warden should tell them about the shoe prints in the grass right away.

If the PCs decide to engage with the bee hive, the Warden should “warn” them with a hint of some kind: the bees begin to fly in a more aggressive manner, or the noise they create gets louder, and so on. It is up to the players whether to ignore the clues in front of them and continue, or to stop and ask questions.

COMBAT & DIFFICULTY

Warden's Guide material: running combat and detachments at the table, and calibrating difficulty on the fly.

COMBAT

Combat in Cairn is fast, hectic, and often lethal. In addition, the rules of combat are unique in a few key ways:

- ♦ **Side Initiative:** With the exception of the first round (when PCs must first save DEX to secure their turn), both the PCs and their opponents take turns acting together. The results of a side's individual actions occur simultaneously.
- ♦ **Attacks Automatically Hit:** Combatants typically deal damage to their targets automatically, without rolling to see whether an attack "hits." When multiple attackers target the same foe, only the highest dice result is used in the attack.
- ♦ **Hit Protection and Scars:** Hit Protection acts as a measurement of skill, stamina, resilience, and luck. It also refills automatically when the PC is safe and comfortable. If damage reduces a PC's HP to exactly 0, they receive a *Scar*, which can yield both positive and negative consequences.
- ♦ **Critical Damage:** Damage that reduces a target's HP below zero is subtracted from their STR by the amount of damage remaining. The target must then immediately make a STR save to avoid taking Critical Damage, using their new STR score. On a fail, the target is defeated.

COMBAT EXAMPLE

After days of stepping through endless muck and gloom, the party has finally found the barrow belonging to the Cutlass King, the notorious bandit of a bygone age.

Warden: *"Finally, you reach the point marked on your map, and in the early morning light, the barrow's entrance becomes visible through the thick mist. But as the rolling fog begins to clear, you see a flash of colorful movement near the tomb's entrance."*

Freya: *"Nothing is ever easy, is it? That must be our dear friends from the Ursine Conclave, trying to steal our thunder!"*

Lucius: *"Come now, we don't know that there is an immediate danger. Right?"*

Wolfram: *"It doesn't matter; we must be prepared for whatever comes next. Keep your weapons down, and I'll shout. Perhaps we can avoid bloodshed yet."*

Warden: *"You bark a traditional warning in the direction of the barrow. There is no immediate response, then only a snicker. They appear to be laughing at you! Moments later, three figures step out of the mist and directly into your line of view, each brandishing a weapon. The largest of the three grins as he wields a two-handed war ax, and the other two (a man and woman who are clearly siblings) carry identical swords. Everyone roll a DEX save to see if you can act before they do."*

Wolfram, Lucius, and Freya each save DEX to see whether they can take a turn in the first round. Wolfram and Freya succeed, but Lucius does not.

Lucius: *"Well, shoot. I guess I fumbled my cane sword in all the excitement?"*

Warden: *"Indeed. Alright, Wolfram and Freya, each of you can move and take one action this turn. Assuming they survive, your three opponents will then have a chance to retaliate. Then it will be the PCs' turn to act, including Lucius."*

Wolfram: *"I don't have my crossbow ready, so I'm going to go after the big one with my silver knife. If we can take him down, the others might flee."*

Freya: *"Hey, that was my plan as well! Why don't we both go after him?"*

Wolfram and Freya each make individual attack rolls, but only the highest number counts as damage against the large man [8 HP, 15 STR, 7 DEX, 9 WIL, battleaxe (d10)]. Wolfram rolls a 4, and Freya a 5 and a 1 for each dagger respectively.

Warden: *"You each rush the man with the war ax. He easily sidesteps Wolfram's initial jab but nearly isn't quick enough for Freya! He is nearly eviscerated as her twin daggers slice the air where he stood only a millisecond before. That was a close one!"*

Freya: *"Thanks. That isn't much comfort though."*

It is now the opponents' turn to attack or take an action. Although the description of these events is delivered consecutively, the results happen roughly at the same time. The Warden rolls an attack die for each enemy combatant, targeting each PC only once. The large man rolls a d10 but deals only 3 damage against Freya, while his associates each roll a d6, dealing 1 and a 6 damage against Wolfram and Lucius respectively. As the Warden narrates the results, each player records any lost HP or STR on their character sheet.

Warden: *"Now your opponents will get a crack at it. The large man swings his ax at Freya, but it misses, leaving a wide gap between her and the ax edge. You don't know if you'll be so lucky next time, however. Next, the shorter man stabs at Wolfram, who is the closer of the three. Luckily, the man's blade only glances off his armor. Now on to the man's sister, who nearly takes Lucius's head off with her blade. Somehow the blade doesn't draw blood but instead knocks him back so hard he nearly keels over, and his vision is filled with bright lights and sparkling things."*

Lucius: *"Ouch. I think that takes me to exactly 0 HP. I should check the Scars table, right?"*

Warden: *"Yes, and you'll need to reference how much HP you lost in the attack. Now let's see... You had 6 HP but no armor, and you took 6 damage in the attack. That means you should receive a **Reorienting Head Wound!**"*

Lucius: *"You sound a little too excited about this. OK, it says I need to roll 1d6... I got a 3, which indicates DEX. Now I need to roll 3d6, and if the total is greater than my current Dexterity score, I get to keep it, right? Alright... hey, a 14! That's slightly higher than what I have already! Maybe getting knocked in the head isn't all that bad?"*

Warden: *"Perhaps. One point fewer and you'd have been diseased, and one point greater and you'd lose your hearing for a while. Write down your new DEX score. You really are lucky, you know that? Anyway, it's now time for the PCs to act again."*

Wolfram: *"I shall riposte against the shorter man!"*

Freya: *"I'm going to take another swing at the big fella."*

Lucius: *"I am going to try and stab that woman with my cane sword."*

Wolfram rolls a d6, dealing 2 damage to the shorter man, who has enough HP to absorb the attack. Freya rolls a d6 for each of her daggers, dealing a 1 and a 3. She keeps only the higher die, and the large man is able to absorb the damage, taking his HP down to 0 (but only PCs gain Scars). Lucius rolls a 6 against the woman [5 HP, 11 STR, 8 DEX, 14 WIL]. She loses 1 point of STR in the attack and so must then roll a Critical Damage save using her new STR score.

Warden: *"Wolfram, you stab at the shorter man, but he deftly avoids your attack! Freya, your daggers slice at the large man with impressive speed and intensity, and it's clear that you've put him on the defensive, as you can see the sweat begin pouring down the sides of his head. He is running out of steam! Lucius, your cane sword pierces the woman in the stomach! She makes a STR save to see if she can stay in the fight. She rolls a 13, a fail! She goes down!"*

This is the first casualty of the fight, so the woman's allies must make a WIL save to continue or flee. The Warden rolls using the leader's WIL, and he fails!

Warden: *"The short man sees his sister fall and screams a cry of anguish. He drops his sword and commands the larger man to drop his ax. 'Please,' he begs. 'I don't care about whatever is in that barrow. I beg of you: have mercy. Save my sister, if you have the means.'"*

Wolfram: *"My order takes mercy on all folk willing to forge a new path. If we save your sister with our skills and resources, will you vow to pledge yourself to a life of piety, poverty, and kindness?"*

Warden: *"The shorter man nods, then rushes to his sister. The larger man only smiles, then says, 'I ain't swearin' nothin'. But I do what he says, so long as he pays. Just let me keep my ax.'"*

The party bandage up the woman, stabilizing her. Had they not, she would have bled out within the hour. Now out of danger, the PCs take a quick swig of water and regain their lost HP. Lucius tries to impress Freya by showing off the new battle scar on his eyebrow, but it doesn't work.

Wolfram: *"Alright, that's all sorted then. You lot make your way back to town, and we'll convene later. For now, we've got business with this Cutlass King I've read so much about."*

DETACHMENTS

Detachments are large groups of enemies treated as a single entity. They are more difficult to hit and deal damage to multiple opponents at the same time. Crucially, they remain a single unit until they take critical damage, after which they are broken up or defeated entirely. Occasionally, a large creature (such as a dragon or giant) will be treated as a detachment as well.

DETACHMENT EXAMPLE

The party is setting up camp deep in the forest, adjacent to a modest waterfall. It is nearly nightfall, and everyone is on high alert. Unbeknownst to the party, a colony of Traitor-Rats [3 HP, 5 STR, 15 DEX, 4 WIL, bite (d6), *detachment*] makes its home here.

Warden: *"Just as the sun finally dips behind the trees, you each hear an unusual noise, not unlike the tsk-tsk-tsk of an overbearing uncle. As you listen, it begins to grow both in volume and tempo, then quickly becomes somewhat uncomfortable to listen to. As you survey the perimeter of the campsite, you see dozens of small, rat-like creatures with enormous eyes watching your party. They appear to be the source of the strange sound, and they are moving closer! By the way, we're going to treat these creatures as a detachment until further notice."*

Freya: *"Will we need to make DEX saves in order to attack before these things? Assuming they intend to do us harm, that is."*

Warden: *"No, you have enough time to make the first move."*

Freya: *"OK. I'm going to see how many of these things I can take out at once."*

Wolfram: *"I'm going to find their queen and shoot her. Assuming there even is a queen!"*

Lucius: *"I hate to do this, but I am going to sacrifice 1 use of my bandages to use as stuffing for my ears. Just in case."*

Warden: *"Let's start with Lucius, who sacrifices 1 use of bandages and stuffs them in his ears. The sound all but disappears. That ends his turn. Freya, go ahead and roll your attack dice."*

Freya rolls two d4 dice, resulting in a 2 and a 2.

Warden: *"Freya, you run into the mess of creatures, stabbing two of them with the Twins. They perish easily, but two more quickly fill their place. Even at the edge of the swarm, the sound they make is intense. You start to feel confused."*

Warden: *"Wolfram, you move into the colony, passing through the swarm as you search for any sign of a queen. You spend your entire turn searching and are unable to take another action. However, in the fading light, you see a taller creature in the distance, a white stripe on its stomach."*

Wolfram: *"Bingo. That's the one. A careful shot, that's all I need."*

Warden: *"Standing amongst all the creatures, the sound becomes unbearable for both Freya and Wolfram. Please make a WIL save, each of you."*

Freya: *"Uh oh. I rolled a 15, a fail."*

Wolfram: *"I roll an 11, a success!"*

Warden: *"Freya collapses on the ground, the noise in her ears has grown so loud it has become an explosion of agony. Wolfram, you grit your teeth and carry on. Lucius is unaffected."*

Freya: *"Eek. Do I lose my next turn?"*

Warden: *"That's right, but you can try to succeed at a WIL save to snap out of it. A few of the creatures nearby begin to nibble at your clothes as you writhe around. Finally, they attack both you and Wolfram!"*

As a detachment, the Traitor-Rats have both the *blast* property and deal *enhanced* damage. The Warden rolls a d12 twice, dealing 1 damage to Freya and 6 to Wolfram.

Warden: *"Freya, you do not have HP as you are prone. However, your leather armor has protected you from taking any damage from the rats nipping at your back. Wolfram, you take 6 damage, but your HP and armor absorb the bulk of it. Next time you might not be so lucky."*

Wolfram: *"That's OK, because there won't be a next time! I take aim at the taller creature and fire. I realize I have to roll a d4, but that's the best we've got!"*

Freya: *"All I can do is make a WIL save... and it's a success! Phew."*

Lucius: *"I rush towards Freya and try to drag her out of that mess."*

Wolfram rolls a 2, which is enough to deal damage to STR. The detachment must now make a Critical Damage save using its STR Attribute. The Warden rolls a 7, a fail.

Warden: *"The crossbow bolt zings through the air, striking the white-furred creature in the heart. It screeches and keels over, and immediately the terrible noise stops, as the creatures begin to run off! Lucius, you pull Freya out of the danger zone just as she is coming around."*

Wolfram: *"Thank goodness that's done with. I'm going to go grab whatever I just shot, though. Might make for a good dinner."*

The party rests for the night, and dines well.

VARIABLE DIFFICULTY

In Cairn, players are encouraged to overcome problems by asking questions, thinking critically, and working within the fiction of the game world to curry advantage. The following principles and examples should help Wardens create consistent and fair rulings that both challenge and reward players for their effort.

PRINCIPLES FOR VARIABLE DIFFICULTY

- ♦ Reward thinking outside the box. This may be a simple mitigation of risk, a new piece of knowledge, character growth, and more.
- ♦ Modify outcomes according to the effort that went into them. If the PCs worked really hard to make something succeed despite the danger involved, enhance the result to match their trouble.
- ♦ Emphasize fictional consequences rather than mechanical buffs. Purely mechanical rewards are usually hollow and lack the potential of in-world benefits.
- ♦ Many dangers can be mitigated or extinguished given time, effort, and skill. If there is no real risk, just skip the roll!
- ♦ Create situations that emphasize non-mechanical solutions. A problem is more interesting when the key to solving it can be understood purely within the fiction.

EVENING THE ODDS

Freya is facing off against a Wood Troll after being separated from the rest of the party. Pinned between the creature and a cave wall, she has no choice but to engage in direct combat. She has already passed her initial DEX save and thus gets to attack before her opponent.

Freya: *"I know I can't beat this guy fair and square, so I'd like to know if there is anything nearby that might even the odds a bit. I grew up on the streets, which means I know how to fight dirty. I'd like to try and blind him without getting clobbered in the process. What are my options?"*

Warden: *"I'll roll a Die of Fate to see how dusty things are around here. A 4! Alright, there is definitely some dust between you and your opponent, but you might need to get close to him in order to scoop some up. You'll need to make a DEX save."*

Freya rolls a 13: a success!

Warden: *"You grab a fistful of dust off the ground in front of you and toss it straight into your opponent's face. He staggers backward and is unable to defend himself as he fights to clear the grit from his eyes!"*

The Wood Troll loses a turn as he tries to remove the dust from his face. He cannot rely on HP in this state; damage will go directly to STR!

Freya: *"I know I should run for it... but I can't help but take advantage of this situation. I'd like to introduce this fellow to the Twins."*

Freya rolls d6+d6 for her daggers (a 3 and a 5), dealing 5 damage directly to the Wood Troll's STR Attribute. The Warden then makes a Critical Damage save for the Troll, rolling a 19: a fail!

Warden: *"You stab him with both blades, green blood gushing from open wounds as the creature roars out in anger. Let's see if it survives the attack! Oooh, it fails its STR save and takes **Critical Damage!** It's down!"*

Freya: *"Alright, I'm taking this as a sign. Time to make my exit!"*

Freya flees the scene (no DEX save required), leaving the Wood Troll to bleed out. If she had known that it can slowly regenerate its health, she might have stayed...

TEAMWORK

Wolfram, Lucius, and Freya are investigating rumors of an invisible creature that has been attacking locals in the Wood. They've tracked the creature to its island den just 40ft from the shoreline of a poison lake. The lake is separated from the surrounding forest by heavy mud flats.

Warden: *"The creature's footprints end at the shore of a roiling lake that bubbles and swirls violently. Knowing the history of the region, you realize that if the lake water doesn't kill you, the toxic fumes coming from its surface definitely will!"*

Wolfram: *"We know that the blasted thing makes its home on that pile of rocks out there. Obviously we can't swim across, but I have an idea about how we might draw it out! Lucius, I'm sorry but of the three of us, you're the most... soft. In other words, the perfect bait! Let's make it seem as if your cart is stuck in the mud. I've had a blanket rolled up in my pack for a while now. Perhaps Freya and I can hide under it, then pounce on the creature at just the right moment?"*

Lucius: *"I knew I shouldn't have sported my fancy hat today! Fine, let's proceed."*

Warden: *"The party executes their plan as described, creating the perfect bait for their unsuspecting quarry. I'm going to roll a Die of Fate to determine whether the creature even takes notice... a 5! Alright, that means that the creature definitely wants to investigate the situation, but there's a wrinkle as well: it's starting to get dark."*

Freya: *"Presumably this means that Wolfram and I are able to spy on the island while we hide, right? And that Lucius is still looking the opposite way, pretending to fuss over a stuck wheel?"*

Warden: *"Correct. Both Wolfram and Freya can still see through the cart slats that something clambered out from beneath the pile of rocks on the island, scattering them as it moves towards the water. You can't actually tell what moved the rocks, though. It really is invisible! As you watch, something slips into the toxic waters, making a quiet splash. And its ripples are heading in your direction!"*

Wolfram: *"Well, I guess this is as good a time as ever to bring out my Voidglass Shard! It lets me see invisible creatures but packs a wallop! I won't be able to see out of one eye for an hour, during which time my fighting skills will be... less effective. Might I be able to get a shot with the crossbow while looking through the glass?"*

Warden: *"You need two hands for the crossbow."*

Freya: *"I can hold the Voidglass Shard up to his eye."*

Warden: *"That will work, but you won't have an action of your own until after the creature has a chance to react."*

Lucius: *"Um, what about me? I won't be able to see the creature at all, let alone defend myself! I'd like to prepare an action for the moment Wolfram gets a shot off. I still have the large sack from our last caper. I wonder if I could leap on the creature when it approaches, trapping it like a giant fish?"*

Warden: *"That works! You each prepare yourselves for what is to come. Freya and Wolfram, you wait in silence as the ripples come ever closer. Finally, they stop! Freya places the Voidglass Shard on Wolfram's eye as he raises his crossbow. Wolfram, you see a slimy, fish-like creature climbing out of the water, yellowed scales crisscrossing its multi-limbed body. There is a brief, breathless pause and then a loud TWANG as he lets loose a crossbow bolt."*

Wolfram rolls a d8, resulting in a 6! As the creature was unaware of its attackers, the damage goes directly to STR. It makes a Critical Damage save, and the result is a 3: a success.

Warden: *"The creature is impaled by the bolt, green fluid spurting out of its body. Where it lands, the surface hisses as if in contact with acid. It turns towards the cart, but before it can react, Lucius throws his large sack over it. The creature thrashes about inside the sack, twisting in every which way."*

The Warden makes a DEX save for the creature to see if it can quickly break free from the sack. Out of water, it has only 8 DEX. It rolls a 12: a fail. Unable to defend itself, the creature is quickly tied up and placed in the cart, along with a jar of the toxic water for the journey. Working together, the party quickly heads back towards town.

CHARACTER HISTORY

The party are escorting an agent of the Alsace faction deep in enemy territory. Their destination is hidden in a small village protected by tall wooden walls. Their job is to sneak their client into the heavily guarded town and then into the ancient vault of Der Thunn. As they approach the village, the sun is just beginning to set, and Lucius has been sent ahead to investigate, posing as a troubadour from the South.

Warden: *"You approach the walled village, following the dirt trail that leads directly to the town's front gate. Two guards stand on either side of the gate, which is closed. The guards are nearly identical save for a weak mustache sported by one."*

Lucius: *"Ho there, fine gentlemen! May one such as myself inquire as to whether entry to your village would be permissible on this fine evening? I've had a long journey but am flush with gold and would love to spread some of my good luck!"*

Warden: *"The men exchange a look. The mustachioed guard replies, 'No entry after dark. That's the rule.'"*

At this point, Lucius is putting on all his charm and is essentially trying to bribe the guards to gain entry. He is also the most at risk in this situation, as the two men are well-equipped to handle a lone traveler and have backup besides. If it were required, Lucius would make the WIL save and not the guards.

Lucius: *"Yes, I understand. But it isn't quite dark yet, is it? The Sun is only just setting. May I please enter? I'd happily start sharing my newfound wealth with you two first, if you catch my drift. Perhaps I could bring you each a well-earned beer? To show my appreciation, of course."*

Warden: *"The two men exchange looks once more, but this time the other man replies, smirking. 'Well... perhaps this once. The Sun hasn't truly set just yet. And we are quite thirsty, after all.'"*

The Warden made a ruling based on what was known about these men: they were simple village guards, they'd been working a long day, and they love beer. Perhaps with another character, this wouldn't have worked, but Lucius is a Mountebank, and his capacity for winning the confidence of his targets has been well established. The guards let him in.

GREATER RISK FOR GREATER REWARD

The party has sent Freya under the cover of darkness to spy on an enemy encampment. Her goal is to ascertain their enemy's total number as well as what sort of dangers might await there.

Warden: *"Halfway to the camp, you see a light flickering along the trail. Someone is coming toward you! What do you do?"*

Freya: *"I slip into the foliage on the side of the trail, keeping as quiet as possible. Does that require a save?"*

Warden: *"No, because you've got enough of a distance from this person and you don't have any light sources lit. You may hide without risk of being found."*

Freya: *"If it seems to me like this person might belong to the same faction as our enemy, I would like to ambush them and steal their clothes. I don't want to raise the alarm, so I will need to be fast and furious."*

Warden: *"OK. They will need to make a DEX save to react in time to fend off your attack, then. It might not go as cleanly as you hope!"*

Freya: *"What if instead I just knock them unconscious by dropping a tree branch on top of them? I have a hand ax in here somewhere."*

Warden: *"That might work. You'll need to sprint back a bit, climb a tree, and then save STR to determine if you can cut the branch down at just the right moment, without notifying your target. If you fail, you will come down with the branch as well, potentially taking damage and putting yourself in a very vulnerable position."*

Freya rushes back down the trail, climbs a tree, and begins hacking at one of the branches with her ax. She rolls a STR save: a 7, a success! She thwacks the branch at just the right moment, and it falls atop the lone traveler below her, knocking them unconscious. Freya steals their clothes and their torch, then sets off down the trail towards the camp.

COMBAT IS WAR

Wolfram, Lucius, and Freya are on the run from a *detachment* of twelve city guards [4 HP, 1 Armor, 11 STR, 14 DEX, 12 WIL, short sword (d6)], and they are taking shelter in a burnt-out old outpost at the edge of a forest, accessible only by a single ladder. The soldiers each carry a short sword and bow, except for their leader, a tall man with a bright blue epaulet on his shoulder. The soldiers know that the party has taken refuge in the outpost, and are talking among themselves at a safe distance away, just North of where the party is hunkering down. The *detachment* will be treated as a single entity until they take Critical Damage.

Warden: *"The outpost is partly shielded by what remains of its walls, and through the slats, you see the soldiers split off: six head towards the Southwest, adjacent to the treeline, while the rest (including the tall man) move Southeast, where the walls are the most damaged. It looks like they are planning some kind of pincer attack. You have less than a minute to act before they reach the open-side of the shield wall! What do you do?"*

Wolfram: *"I was in the military, so I know how this goes. That man with the fancy tassel is their leader. If we take him out, the rest might flee. I'm going to wait until he is as close as possible, then fire my crossbow at him. If that leaves me exposed, then so be it!"*

Lucius: *"You're always so direct, Wolfie! I'm going to pour some of my famous Miracle Oil on the ladder leading up here. That should both prove effective and entertaining!"*

Freya: *"And what exactly will stop them from simply firing into our hiding spot from the giant holes on the South side? At the very best, they'll just wait until we run out of food. I have another idea: I'll poke my head through the trapdoor and toss Smoke Bombs towards each side of the building. That'll give us an advantage for when these other two plans inevitably fail!"*

Lucius: *"Uh, I guess I'll use my oil just after she tosses the Smoke Bombs, then?"*

Warden: *"That should be fine, yes. But be aware that combat officially breaks out as soon as Wolfram stands to fire. And since you're all at the ready, there is no need to make a DEX save: you go first."*

Warden: *"The soldiers continue their trajectory, until finally the leader draws his sword into the air and screams, 'Charge!' And the soldiers rush towards you. Everything happens at once. Wolfram stands and fires his crossbow at the leader. Since the leader is part of a detachment, Wolfram can only roll a d4."*

The result of Wolfram's attack is a 3, and as the leader's helmet absorbs 1 point of damage, he loses only 2 HP.

Warden: *"The arrow whizzes past the leader's shoulder, tearing his brightly-colored shoulder epaulet. He grimaces and rushes forward towards the East side of the building. Freya, at the same time, you pop your head through the trap door and toss Smoke Bombs on the East and West sides of the building - mark off 2 uses please. Lucius, you stand behind her, and the moment she moves away, you pour some Miracle Oil on the stepladder."*

Warden: *"As smoke fills either side of the building, it becomes impossible to tell friend from foe. A few of the men try to climb the ladder but immediately slide off, landing at the bottom in a heap. Your enemies have essentially lost their turn, but the smoke is starting to dissipate. Amidst coughing and shouts, you hear a voice cry, 'Burn it to the ground!'"*

Wolfram: *"Well that bought us some time, at least. Hey, Lucius, how flammable is that oil of yours?"*

Lucius: *"Very. And it seems we may be running out of options."*

Freya: *"Well, it's been fun, but I'd rather die fighting down there than get burned alive up here with you lot! No offense."*

Wolfram: *"None taken. See if you can take out their leader while we try to open up an escape route."*

Wolfram: *"I'm going to cast Disassemble on myself, then scream 'he's going to tear my arms off!' I will then drop down to the ground and start running around in circles. Lucius, when my arms are removed, I want you to pick them up and come after me."*

Lucius: *"OK. I really hope this works... And if not, well at least we'll go down fighting! Or screaming. Probably the latter."*

Warden: *"Freya, who will be your target and what weapon?"*

Freya: *"Their leader, and I'll be using the Twins."*

Warden: *"Alright. Freya leaps down to the smokey earth, making a beeline for the leader. She draws her twin daggers, but as she is still attacking a detachment, she must still roll only a d4 each dagger."*

Freya makes two d4 rolls, a 4 and a 1. She keeps the higher, and the leader's helmet again absorbs 1 point of damage. The remaining 3 damage is enough to trigger a Critical Damage save on the behalf of the detachment. The result is a 15 (a fail), and with the defeat of their leader, the detachment is both broken and routed.

Warden: *"Freya slashes at the leader, but her dagger misses as he takes a lucky step back. He is less fortunate on her second attack, however, as she stabs him in the chest. He slumps over, and those closest to him shout in surprise; some even begin backing away. It is at this moment that you hear a scream, and then see Wolfram leap onto the ground from the outpost and begin running in circles, followed by Lucius, holding both of his friend's arms. The others then pick up their leader and hightail it back to the edge of the hill amid screams of 'Sorcery!' and 'We weren't trained for this!'"*

Wolfram: *"I knew that would work!"*

Freya: *"I'm pretty sure this was all me, but whatever."*

Lucius: *"Who cares? Let's just get out of here while the getting's good."*

Warden: *"You have an opportunity to flee into the nearby Wood, or across the open fields if you think you can run fast enough. What do you do?"*

EXPLORATION & POINTCRAWLS

Warden's Guide material: running dungeon exploration, wilderness exploration, and converting maps into pointcrawls.

DUNGEON EXPLORATION PRINCIPLES

- ♦ Always clarify what is about to happen. Does that flaming barrel look stable or like it might explode at any minute?
- ♦ Regularly restate a character's surroundings, where they are in physical space, and what their senses are detecting.
- ♦ Describe obvious threats and NPCs first, followed by any distinct and memorable objects in each room.
- ♦ Do not tell characters how they should feel, and only tell them what's happening right now, before their eyes.
- ♦ Provide hints about what lies beyond the next corridor, including odors, sounds, and elevation.
- ♦ Ensure that the players understand their character's place in the Dungeon Cycle. Remind them who has already moved, who has yet to take an action, and so on.

The cost of dungeon exploration is paid in turns. If the party spends too long in one place, acts without caution,

- ♦ makes noise, or enters a new area, they risk a roll on the Dungeon Events table. Players should always be made aware of the cost.

DUNGEON EXPLORATION EXAMPLE

Wolfram, Lucius, and Freya have entered the first level of **Ein Eyton**, a forest temple once rumored to house an infamous death cult. Each character has a torch, but only **Wolfram** has one lit. There are no light sources here beyond the Moon in the night sky. The first room is presented as follows:

THE COURTYARD

A wide courtyard exposed to the **open air**. The **ground** is sandy and rough. **Rubble** is piled near the center of the room. A full-sized **statue** holding a bident is placed in the exact center. A wooden **doorway** to the East is locked with an iron chain. An open stone archway leads towards the West.

- ♦ **Air:** The roof has collapsed, letting exterior lighting illuminate the room.
- ♦ **Ground:** Glitters in the light. A cursory investigation will reveal that the “sand” is actually pulverized bones.

Rubble: Stone chunks from statues resembling people.

- ♦
 - ♦ A red jewel glints within a tight stone fist.

Statue: One eye socket is empty, in the other is a red jewel.

- ♦
 - ♦ The cult’s Death Goddess, marred by time. If the remaining eye is removed, the statue comes to life, slicing the bident in an arc for d6 STR damage. Contact with the bident turns the victim to stone.
- ♦
 - ♦ If the jewel from the nearby rubble is inserted into the statue, nothing happens. If it is removed again, the statue responds accordingly.

-
- ♦ **Doorway:** The door to the Storeroom has nearly rotted away, leaving cracks in the wood. The iron chain is clearly rusted.

Warden: *“You enter a wide courtyard illuminated by moonlight drifting through the collapsed roof. The ground is sandy and sparkles chalk-white in the moonlight. Near the center, rubble piles around a statue of a woman wielding a bident. To the East, a wooden door is closed and chained, while an open archway leads Westward into a dark tunnel. What do you do?”*

The characters then declare their intended actions.

Wolfram: *“I’ll search the room for clues about its purpose, starting with that glittery ground.”* **Lucius:** *“I’ll check out the wooden **door**, to see if I can figure out what’s on the other side.”* **Freya:** *“I’m going to get a better look at that **statue**. What can I learn without actually getting too close?”*

Warden: *“Alright, let’s start with **Wolfram**. The sand is white, grainy, and clearly not from any beach ’round these parts. Starting at a small lump in the ground, you recognize a half-decayed human skull, meaning that this ‘sand’ is actually bone! What do you do now?”*

Wolfram: *“Gross. I’m gonna poke at it a bit with my sword. Is there is anything hidden in the dust? Something valuable, maybe?”*

Warden: *“No. But you’re at least convinced the ground is safe. And that’s the end of your turn!”*

The Warden then moves to describe another character’s actions, as they are happening simultaneously.

Warden: *“Let’s see what **Lucius** is up to.”*

Warden: *“**Lucius**, the **door** is locked, ancient, and partly rotted away. It bears a rusted iron lock. What do you do now?”*

Lucius: *“As I have no lockpick, I think I’ll put my ear to the door to see what’s on the other side.”*

Warden: *“You place an ear on the door, but hear only a faint rustling on the other side.”*

Lucius: *“How busted is the keyhole? Could I see through it? What about the door itself? You said it was rotted.”*

Warden: *“The keyhole is intact, and too dark to look through. You could shine a light through it, or you could use one of the gaps in the door.”*

Lucius: *“That works. I light my **torch** and hold it aloft so that I can see through.”*

Warden: *"**Lucius**, through the cracks, you can see a gray cement floor. Something gleams on the ground, flickering in the torchlight. It looks like a large, wet footprint!"*

Lucius: *"Eek! I let the others know."*

Warden: *"Got it. Now let's see what **Freya** can find out about that statue."*

Freya: *"Right, remember that I'd like to take a look, but I don't want to get too close."*

Warden: *"You approach until you are about five feet away from the statue. The face looks chipped away, and one of the eyes is missing entirely. However, embedded in the other is a beautiful red jewel! The statue holds a white bident in its hands. Do you interact with the statue further or move along?"*

Freya: *"That's just creepy! I want no part in this, at least not until we learn more about what this room was for. I'd like to investigate that rubble you mentioned before."*

Warden: *"Alright, you move to the rubble adjacent to the statue. It looks extremely heavy and difficult to move. In the light from **Wolfram's** torch, you can see something red and shiny glinting in the cracks of the pile. What do you do?"*

Freya: *"I investigate further, of course!"*

Warden: *"You take a closer look, and spy a red jewel enclosed in a large stone fist. It looks valuable, at least 75gp. It also looks large enough to take up an entire slot!"*

Freya: *"I want it. Can I dig it out easily?"*

Warden: *"The fingers are wrapped around it quite tightly; you'll need to work hard to get it loose or spend an extra turn to extract it quietly. Either choice will likely trigger a dungeon event roll."*

Freya: *"Damn. Fine, I'll do it as quickly as possible, using the edge of my dagger and a block of rubble to pop it out. Noise be damned!"*

Warden: *"Alright, let's see how loud you are..."*

The Warden then rolls on the Dungeon Events table: Environment.

Warden: *"**Freya's** clanging labor echoes against the exposed walls of the courtyard. The silence is broken by a shingle falling from the east wall, clattering onto the stone floor. Lucius, you hear rustling noises drawing nearer from behind the door! At that exact moment, the jewel comes loose."*

Warden: *"And with that, this cycle is over. What do you all do next?"*

Lucius: *"Um, something's coming. Can we please leave, NOW?"*

Freya: *"I'll quickly put the jewel in my backpack."*

Wolfram: *"I think we should head down that stone archway to the West. We can always circle back to this room on our way out."*

Freya: *"Hang on, what about this jewel I discovered? It looks like it could go in that statue's eye..."*

Lucius: *"What are you, nuts? For all we know that statue will come to life and attack!"*

Freya: *"Or maybe it'll open a secret door?"*

Wolfram: *"Enough, let's just move on for now. There is something on the other side of that door, and I do NOT want to find out what!"*

The party moves on to the adjoining hall and the adventure continues.

WILDERNESS EXPLORATION

In Cairn, wilderness exploration and travel is mostly abstract, hand-waving away the minutiae of the journey while still giving the party ample opportunities for interactivity and character agency.

WILDERNESS EXPLORATION EXAMPLE

The party is escorting an NPC between two POIs: a small village situated in the grasslands to a stronghold at the base of an impressive valley. The short journey should only take one day, as travel is limited to *Easy* terrain and is along a clear *Trail* all the way.

At the start of the day, the Warden rolls for the local weather, then adjudicates its potential impacts on the journey that day. It is overcast and breezy (no impact). After each of the following **Wilderness Actions**, the party rolls 1d6 to see if they get lost, and the Warden rolls on the **Wilderness Events Table**.

Day One / Watch One

- ♦ The party takes the **Travel** action. *They do not get lost.*

- ♦ **Events Table: Sign.** One of the characters looks behind the party and spies something glittering in the distance behind them. It disappears after a few seconds. Could that be a spyglass, reflecting in the sun?

Day One / Watch Two

- ♦ The party takes the **Travel** action again, continuing along the same trail and plain. *They do not get lost.*

- ♦ **Events Table: Environment.** The weather has worsened in the evening, and as a result, the plain is muddy and the trail harder to follow. The Warden adds 1 Watch to the journey, as the party is forced to slow their march considerably, only reaching the edge of the grasses by nightfall. The party is forced to find shelter in the open plain rather than at their destination in the adjacent valley.

Day One / Watch Three

- ♦ The party takes the **Make Camp** action. They set up a hastily-made shelter, and each character consumes a Ration. A lookout rotation is set, dividing the night between all four party members.

- ♦ **Events Table: Sign.** The sky clears up enough for the first person on lookout to see a light in the distance, flickering slowly. A campfire! Someone is definitely following them.

Note: the party could have chosen to continue on through the night, but doing so could increase the chance of getting lost and put the party at greater risk!

POINTCRAWLS

Pointcrawls are a way of displaying potential points of interest on a map, including their entrances, exits, and connecting paths. Unlike hexcrawls, which provide omnidirectional paths by default, pointcrawls provide a set number of focused routes between locations. This approach abstracts some of the elements common to wilderness exploration, while maintaining the more interesting tidbits.

Although the standard setting generation procedures in this book assume a pointcrawl by default, most old school adventures do not. Some are hex maps that vary in length, while others simply indicate distances using miles. Fortunately it's fairly simple to convert almost any map into a pointcrawl.

CONVERTING A MAP

The following method relies heavily on the Wilderness Exploration procedures in the *Cairn 2e Player's Guide*.

- ♦ Number any potential points of interest on the map.

- ♦ Identify potential routes between each point, noting obvious roads, trails, and waterways. Indicate any sites that lack connecting routes to other points.

- ♦ Indicate the rough travel time (in Watches or days of travel) between any two points, accounting for the party's speed, terrain, weather, and other elements of play that might affect the journey.

Example

The travel times between each point were determined as follows (assuming that the party is traveling by foot):

The journey between points **1** to **2** is 6 Watches:

- ♦ Add two Watches for the *medium* path distance.
- ♦ Add one Watch for the *trail* through the mountains and forests.
- ♦ Add two Watches for the *perilous* mountain terrain and 1 Watch for the forest.

The journey between **2** and **3** takes 4 Watches:

- ♦ Add one Watch for the *short* path distance.
- ♦ Add one Watch for the *trail* through the mountains.
- ♦ Add two Watches for the *perilous* mountain terrain.

The journey between **2** and **4** takes three Watches:

- ♦ Add two Watches for the *medium* path distance.
- ♦ Add no penalty for traveling on a maintained *road*.
- ♦ Add one Watch for the *tough* forest terrain.

The journey between **4** and **5** takes four Watches:

- ♦ Add one Watch for the *short* path distance.
- ♦ Add one Watch for the *trail* through the swamp.
- ♦ Add two Watches for the *perilous* swamp terrain.

The journey between **4** and **6** takes 4 Watches:

- ♦ Add two Watches for the *medium* path distance.
- ♦ Add one Watch for the *trail* through the plains.
- ♦ Add no penalty for the *easy* plains terrain.

The journey to **7** from any other point should be at least 5 Watches:

- ♦ Add two Watches for the *medium* path distance.
- ♦ Add two Watches for traveling through the *wilderness*.
- ♦ Add one Watch for the *tough* forest terrain.

A worked example map illustrating these seven numbered points and their connecting routes accompanies this procedure in the original source; it is not reproduced here as it is an image asset rather than rules text.

GROWTH

Unlike other roleplaying games, Cairn does not reward player characters for killing monsters, looting treasure, or exploring new places. Instead, it is a character's unique experience in the game world that has the potential to alter their health, abilities, beliefs, bonds, and even their minds.

Just as the in-game world continues to grow and change, so do the player characters. The events, experiences, and encounters of a play session can greatly impact a PC, sometimes in undesirable ways! Keep in mind however that with some notable exceptions (such as *Scars*), growth should always stem from a character's experiences in the game world. Character growth can also depend on the results of Downtime procedures that help a character focus on training or specialization, research, and faction relationships.

PRINCIPLES FOR GROWTH

- ♦ Growth is never arbitrary, but is tied to a specific experience happening in the fiction.
- ♦ It is more important for a character to become more interesting than to become more skilled or capable.
- ♦ Characters experience growth not simply because they've had a new experience but because that experience has affected them a significant way.
- ♦ Place opportunities for growth in as many places as possible.
- ♦ Characters grow as often during a play session as they do during Downtime.
- ♦ Growth should foster further interaction with the game world and its challenges.
- ♦ Growth is not a reward but the logical result of a character's actions.
- ♦ Growth happens most often when a character interacts with something they do not understand or something they were not *meant* to understand.
- ♦ Characters may change in a way that they don't like or may gain new abilities at a cost.
- ♦ Relics, treasure, factions, monsters, and important NPCs are all excellent potential triggers for growth.
- ♦ Characters can change slowly over time or by amassing significant, cumulative experiences around a single type of growth.

TRIGGERS: A FRAMEWORK FOR GROWTH

As characters engage with the game world, they must increasingly adapt to new realities in the fiction. Some of these adaptations are minor and rarely revisited again. Others are cumulative, representing a collection of related experiences. And some experiences are so powerful that their impact is immediate and unparalleled. For each of these it can be helpful to assign *Triggers*, or opportunities for growth. These represent significant turning points in a character's life and should be met with a permanent and related change! Good triggers depend on characters engaging in at least two of the following:

- ♦ A focused, consistent pattern of behavior around a single objective or course of action.
- ♦ Taking an obvious risk with potentially serious consequences, especially when the outcome is unknown.
- ♦ Interacting with a unique item, creature, or entity.

INTERACTING WITH SOMETHING (OR SOMEONE) THEY DO NOT UNDERSTAND

Esme and her comrades were tasked with rescuing a merchant and his daughter that had disappeared into the Moon Hill Woods. On the way, Esme stumbled upon a fallen tree, struck by lightning. Daring to climb inside, she discovered a glowing, egg-shaped object: a Heartseed. Recognizing its value (but not its purpose), she took the seed, ignoring the mumblings of her friends. Over the next few days, Esme noticed crows wherever she went: in the boughs, in the sky, on the trail. Late one night, she had a vision of a terrifying creature built from grass and twigs gazing deep into her soul. She awoke frightened, but kept the visions to herself. She decided to keep the Heartseed, no matter what. Over the coming days, her visions increased in severity and regularity, as did the crows, which now appeared even in town, perched on roofs and doorways. Resolute, she ground the seed into bits with a hammer, then swallowed the resulting mess with water. Only then did the visions cease and the crows disappear. The following day, her skin began to turn green, and small twigs were sprouting from her elbows and chin. Seeking advice from a Bog Witch she'd met in an earlier encounter, she was told that by consuming the Heartseed she had committed herself to the Wood, and that she would soon be bound to the forest forever. She would no longer consume rations, only sunlight and water. She would hear the words of the Wood, as well as the plants and animals that live there. But the witch said that there was a way out, and all that she required was a drop of Esme's blood...

In this scenario Esme made a series of decisions that quickly spiraled out of control: the choice to take the Heartseed despite her friend's warnings, ignoring the crows, disregarding the visions pleading with her to return it, and then finally the decision to ingest the seed itself.

LONG-TERM EXPOSURE OR MANIPULATION OF A SPELLBOOK OR RELIC

*Throughout her adventures, Hazel made frequent use of a Control Plants Spellbook she'd "borrowed" from the abbey where she grew up. Often she would attempt to enhance its power, making WIL saves each time to expand its reach. Of course, not every attempt was successful, and occasionally she paid a heavy price. On one occasion, she and her companions were exploring a jungle temple and stumbled upon a horrific creature made entirely of plant matter. Seeing an opportunity to use the creature's strengths against it, Hazel's allies gathered around her while as she read from the Spellbook. The Warden then asked for a WIL save, as she was trying to cast the spell quickly and under duress. A success! The Warden declared that going forward, she would be able to read from her Spellbook while under duress or time pressure **without** first making a successful WIL save.*

Hazel had previously made multiple attempts to bend the Spellbook to her will with mixed results. She also took a major risk when she tried to cast the spell quickly, and as Spellbooks are unique items of great power, this made her success despite that risk all the more impactful.

FORGING A RELATIONSHIP WITH A BEING OF GREAT POWER

Aster and his comrades came upon a shrine deep hidden in a forest cave. After some research and experimentation (spearheaded by Aster), they were able to free the nearly-mad river god trapped within. As thanks, the deity offered its unknowable essence to anyone willing to receive it. Aster stepped forward and was bound to the god, forgoing his old life and adopting a new religion. A few days later, gills sprouted from Aster's neck after an impromptu dive in a raging river.

Through his attempts to interact with the statue and determine its true purpose, Aster revealed a distinct pattern of behavior, and although the results were uncertain, he still took a serious risk by prostrating himself to an entity he did not know or understand.

OVERCOMING A LONG-TIME WOE, MISDEED, OR FOE

At long last, Oxrable Kinter (or Ox) had finally defeated the serial murderer Tibor Heimshern. But instead of killing him, Ox used the Spirit Siphon to pull the prone man's consciousness straight out of his body. Then to the surprise of everyone at the table, Ox proceeded to drink the man's spirit. The Warden called for a WIL save to overcome Tibor's powerful essence: a success! The Warden then asked the player to reroll Ox's Willpower attribute, saying he could keep the results if they were higher. And they were! However, the Warden also ruled that if at any point Ox had another enemy weak and at his mercy, a WIL save would be required to overcome the murderer's dormant tendencies within his psyche.

Through the dogged pursuit of his powerful enemy, Ox demonstrated a distinct pattern of behavior. Drinking the spirit of Tibor represented a clear risk to Ox, and even though the Spirit Siphon was a known Relic, its ability to move souls between hosts was an obvious case of interacting with an object not fully understood.

INJURY OR CONTAMINATION

After days of searching, Madrigal the Fungal Forager had finally found the source of bellowing sickness that had stricken an impoverished village: a Liverbracket infestation at the bottom of the town's well. It took many hours of diligent work to uproot the fungi network, but in the end, Madrigal left the town in good spirits, his pockets heavy with gold. He then embarked on a ten-day journey across the Lava Flats in search of a Gate he'd heard about. A week later, he noticed a strange discoloration on his canteen, and cutting it open, he discovered that he'd been drinking Liverbracket-tainted water! Strangely, he'd been unaffected by the side-effects common to ingesting the fungus. The Warden explained that this was likely because its effects were being counteracted by Madrigal's overcautious intake of Clustermelon Flower, a potent form of heat resistance, useful when crossing the Lava Flats. He spent a few hours fashioning a new canteen, then set out again. Two days later, Madrigal noticed a series of small bumps on his skin, along with a familiar discoloration. Stranger yet, he'd completely lost his appetite for Rations. The Warden ruled that going forward Madrigal would no longer need to eat typical food but instead could subsist only on decomposed plants and animals. However, if he would ever be drenched in water, he must take a Fatigue, expelling spores the following day.

This example involved only a minor risk, but the interaction between two unique items (the fungus and the flower) were powerful enough to justify a sort of *passive* growth experience. However, it was Madrigal's thoughtful (albeit potentially unnecessary) decision to ingest Clustermelon Flower that acted as the true Trigger in this instance.

LEARNING THROUGH TRIAL AND ERROR

Julius was bookish, nervous, and not particularly strong or dexterous. Over months of adventuring, he had developed a strategy to avoid direct confrontation in combat, which involved throwing a weighted net onto an opponent. While the target was prone and defenseless, Julius, without adequate protection from his allies, would be at high risk, especially when facing multiple opponents. Each time Julius attempted this, his player would need to explain exactly how he approached his target, and if the obvious risks weren't mitigated, the Warden would require a DEX save to succeed. After a particularly risky attempt failed, all of the players (including the Warden) were so impressed by the care and strategy that went into the attempt that the Warden ruled that going forward, Julius would no longer need to make a save when throwing the net in combat. Instead, it would succeed automatically, as Julius had clearly learned how to capture targets in his net safely.

In this example, we can see that although Julius had occasionally failed in his repeated attempts to avoid direct combat by employing a unique battle strategy, the thought and preparation that went into each attempt and the character's insistence to "get it right" were sufficient to grant that character a new ability. Remember that in a typical combat scenario, the PCs have already rolled DEX saves at the beginning of combat, so future DEX saves are really only required when a character puts themselves at further risk through an act of bravery, tries to flee combat, etc. A save isn't necessarily required from the target of an action either, as only the character *most at risk* saves.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE DESPITE A NATURAL TALENT OR ABILITY

*Harrow and his comrades were pursuing a group of brigands led by a notorious werewolf. They'd followed the criminals back to their hideout, approaching at dawn when the outlaws would hopefully still be sleeping off the previous night's activities. Harrow led the party carefully alongside the camp, hoping to slip in silently. This proved to be more difficult than anticipated, as the brigands had posted guards at four separate outposts. The Warden ruled that as Harrow was leading the group **and** had the worst natural ability (his player had rolled a measly 5 DEX), he should make the save the party required to sneak in undetected. He succeeded, and the Warden declared that going forward, the Warden would no longer require Harrow to save DEX in similar situations, due to his character clearly having a natural affinity for sneaking.*

Here is a clear example of a character working against type. The Warden deemed that despite Harrow's relatively low DEX, his decision to lead the party coupled with his ultimate triumph were sufficient triggers for growth.

FACTION ADVANCEMENT

Three weeks ago, Rui was tasked by the **Order of the Helm** with locating a Gate in the Wyskat Forest. She returned earlier than expected, having completed her mission with great aplomb. Her employers were so impressed with her work that she was formally invited to join The Order as an **Initiate**. The Warden explained that the position had no distinct requirements but paid a regular stipend and came with some fraternal benefits. The only requirement would be that she complete occasional tasks on behalf of the Order in pursuit of its cause. If she were to later pursue a higher-level rank, she would be required to formally pledge allegiance to the Order and take their Oath. Rui agrees to join as an Initiate for now, and the Warden describes the Downtime **Milestones** that track Rui's relationship with The Order:

- ♦ Complete one mission on behalf of the order.
- ♦ Complete two missions on behalf of the order.
- ♦ Complete three missions on behalf of the order.
- ♦ Train with a **Protector**.
- ♦ Take the Oath.

The Warden explains that Rui would be provided with a uniform, a shield (+1 Armor), and a fine short sword (d6). Along with the support she would receive at any faction outpost, she would also receive a stipend of 5gp per day while working on faction-related business. She would also be required to check in with a local **Precept** whenever possible. A few sessions later, The Order asks Rui for her assistance with an escort through the **Falal Swamps**. The entire party joins the mission, and despite a near-fatal encounter with a bog demon, the mission is completed successfully. Rui's player marks off the second **Milestone**, as she'd already completed the first prior to joining the faction.

Months go by, and Rui completes two more missions and trains with a Master from The Order. She learns both focus and swordsmanship, increasing her HP and the damage she delivers with a sword. She also learns the faction's true objective and decides their cause is just. She dons an iron helm (+1 Armor, petty) and takes their Oath, accepting that she can never again reveal her face to any living creature so long as she lives. The Warden explains that although Rui still required food, water, and sleep, she no longer becomes deprived from that lack of them.

This example relies on activities that occur both in the game and between sessions, utilizing two separate Downtime procedures (*Strengthening Ties* and *Training*). The **Protector** that Rui trained with acted as Master, and although we don't describe it here, there was likely a second tier of **Milestones** included in that aspect of her journey.

RESOLUTION OF A BOND OR OMEN

Cursed with a Stone Heart after running afoul of a pack of forest druids, Cobb was desperate for a cure. After months of adventuring, it had grown quite heavy, and so his player asked the Warden if he could spend a Downtime action researching a potential cure. The Warden provided the following **Milestones**:

- ♦ Find a Master. Typically that would be a witch, scholar, healer, or powerful spirit.
- ♦ Search out the Master and ask their requirements.
- ♦ Complete these requirements to cure the Stone Heart.

*Cobb spent a few days between adventures talking to local healers and scholars to no avail. Eventually he met a local tracker they'd hired who admitted she'd once seen a Woodwose deep in the forest nearby. In her story, she had tracked a large boar to a silver pool beneath a waterfall. It was there she saw it leap into the water and disappear. Moments later it rose again, but now it had taken the shape of a large man covered in thick green hair. She dropped her weapons and bag, placing them in front of her. The creature stepped from the water, then took some of her dried jerky and left. She said the next day she noticed that an old injury she'd been nursing had completely healed and that it was the Woodwose that had done it. The tracker offered to, for a price, take Cobb and his friends to the pond. He agreed, and the following day they set out to find the Woodwose from her tale (and his player marked off a **Milestone**). In the coming weeks, Cobb and his friends found the creature and won its favor, completing various tasks throughout the Wood. In the end, the Woodwose offered each character a Boon, and Cobb was able to finally rid himself of the curse.*

Cobb's player had rolled a **15** on the Bonds table during character creation, which reads: *You crossed a creature of the Wood, and it cursed you with a Stone Heart (1 Armor). With each passing month, the stone grows heavier by one slot. Until your debt is lifted, you cannot truly die.* In order to cure this illness, he must research the location of a Master, then engage them in a bargain. Fortunately he'd made connections with a hireling the party had utilized in past woodland jaunts, who was more familiar with the nearby Wood and its denizens.

CREATING CONTENT

Warden's Guide material: guidance for designing new Backgrounds and Monsters, the meaning of Bonds and Omens, and an example party used throughout this guide's worked examples.

ABOUT THE EXAMPLE PARTY

- ♦ **Wolfram:** A *Hexenbane* belonging to the *Order of the Blank Eye*. Besides the usual equipment, he carries a Voidglass Shard and the *Disassemble* Spellbook. He has taken a *Vow of Poverty*.
- ♦ **Lucius:** A *Mountebank*. Besides the usual equipment he carries Bandages (3 uses) and Miracle Oil (2 uses).
- ♦ **Freya:** A *Cutpurse*. Besides the usual equipment she carries Smoke Pellets (3 uses) and a Catring (2 charges).

BONDS AND OMENS

Bonds and Omens provide new player characters with adventure hooks, starting gear, and abilities. And while they are distinct from character Backgrounds, they are equally useful for building a setting, or even a complete adventure!

BONDS

Bonds can often tie a player character to another PC, the setting, and its characters. A PC can resolve a Bond by discovering the truth behind its mysteries or by solving its root cause. In this case, the character should experience Growth of some kind, and the Warden can optionally create a new Bond for the PC. Player characters are not required to resolve their Bonds.

Bonds should:

- ♦ Give a character an item (often *petty*) or a unique ability.
- ♦ Encourage character engagement with the implied setting.
- ♦ Flesh out a character's history without relying on events tied to specific Backgrounds.
- ♦ Provide a character with a quest, opportunity, or plan of action.

OMENS

Omens are the seeds of an adventure yet to come, premonitions of a future disaster, or the cause of a problem the characters are currently facing. An Omen is resolved when the characters reveal the truth behind its origin or resolve its dangers. Resolving an Omen should yield Growth of some kind, either for the party as a collective or to an entangled individual. If an Omen is ignored, it should come to pass and wreak whatever havoc it may.

Omens should:

- ♦ Never rely on a specific player character for relevance.
- ♦ Always tell the characters something about the setting they did not already know.
- ♦ Reveal a pattern or other obvious indicator that something terrible is going on.

CREATING BACKGROUNDS

In Cairn, a PC's Background is the most important element of their character, representing their past as well as their present. Backgrounds can influence a character's knowledge, expertise, their connection with the setting, and much more. Backgrounds are also a filter for interpreting the results of a dice roll, or a reason to not roll at all. A Greenwise doesn't need to save DEX when cutting leaves from a poisonous plant, just as a Scrivener knows how to read the older form of a local tongue. Most importantly, Backgrounds tell a story through the character's starting gear and unique history, connecting the PC to a setting and its themes.

PRINCIPLES

- ♦ Players should be excited about rolling on the Background tables.
- ♦ Backgrounds can be archetypal and familiar, but leave room for alternative interpretations!
- ♦ Backgrounds should tell the player something about the implied setting.
- ♦ Each table result should be unique, so that characters with the same Background are still distinct from one another.

ANATOMY OF A BACKGROUND

Theme

Prepare a list of common adjectives that describe your new Background. If designing a profession, ask yourself what would lead someone to take on such a career. If writing something more unique (such as the Half-Witch, for example), consider how such a person's strangeness would alienate them from others or bring them closer. And as you write the Background's starting gear and tables, keep in mind how the game world's implied setting, inspirational materials (books, film, etc.), and existing tropes might influence the results.

Starting Gear

Characters in Cairn are largely defined by their inventory, so starting gear should be the first place to start painting a Background's unique canvas. Each Background has:

- ♦ Gold, food, and some kind of light source. These should still be unique; a Background might start with unusual Rations, a candle helmet, and so on.
- ♦ Up to four *unique* items that reinforce the overarching theme. At least one of these items should be a weapon of some kind.
- ♦ Starting items should occupy no more than seven slots in total, so as to not overburden a character's inventory.

Tables

Tables are where a character's unique story really starts to come together. They also provide a level of diversity so that no two characters are alike. Each Background has a defining question, followed by six rows of answers. The first table question should be tailored around the character's distant or recent past and what experiences led to their present circumstances. The first table should offer the character a unique item, ability, or combination of the two. The second table question focuses on who the character is *today*, and the answers are typically related to a specific item or skill that broadly defines the character.

CREATING MONSTERS

To create a unique monster, follow these steps:

- ♦ Roll on the Monster Appearance table.
- ♦ Roll on the Monster Traits table.
- ♦ Roll on the Monster Attacks table.
- ♦ Roll on the Monster Abilities table.
- ♦ Describe the creature's appearance, abilities, and attacks in plain English.
- ♦ Create the creature's stats according to the principles, definitions, and stat block format below.

The four combinator tables (Appearance, Traits, Attacks, Abilities) are published as structured data – see `monster-creation-tables.json` in the Cairn tables index.

PRINCIPLES

- ♦ Use **Critical Damage** to lean into the threat or strangeness of any aggressive NPC.
- ♦ Use flavor and style to help creatures stand out. Players will remember a pig-faced humanoid looking for his missing sheep more easily than a generic goblin archer.
- ♦ Always adjust creature stats based on what is fun and interesting.

HIT PROTECTION

A creature's ability to avoid danger, whether through toughness, speed, or skill. Give average creatures 3 HP, give harder ones 6 HP, and give serious threats 10 or higher.

ARMOR

For some creatures, this represents their natural toughness; for others, it may be from something that is worn or carried. If a creature is able to withstand an attack without moving, raise this number.

ABILITY SCORE

3 is deficient, 6 is weak, 10 is average, 14 is noteworthy, and 18 is legendary.

STRENGTH

Tracks overall health, physical power, and resistance to poisons. It is the ability of a creature to survive a direct hit, not its ability to avoid danger!

DEXTERITY

Start with **10** as a base, and if the creature is particularly quick, agile, or nimble, increase the number as necessary. If it is slow to respond, bulky, or clumsy, lower the number.

WILLPOWER

Determines a creature's ability to withstand the influence of another, as well as their power over others. It also acts as a measurement of their defense in magical or spiritual matters.

ATTACKS

Typically an object (e.g. sword or bow) or a natural weapon (e.g. claws or teeth).

ABILITIES

A unique action or power the creature can utilize both in and out of combat.

- ◆ If an ability can be meaningfully avoided or defended against through traditional means, it is an Attack and interacts with HP.

- ◆ If an ability cannot be meaningfully avoided or defended against through traditional means, it is an Ability.

- ◆ If an ability only affects a single PC, it should generally have an immediate effect with no chance to Save in that round (possibly not at all).

- ◆ If an ability is capable of affecting a group of PCs, it should generally call for an immediate Save.

MONSTER STAT BLOCK FORMAT

X HP, X Armor, X STR, X DEX, X WIL, Attack (dX, special items, *qualities*)

- ♦ An engaging descriptor of appearance, demeanor, or living habits.
- ♦ A quirk, tactic, or peculiarity that distinguish this creature.
- ♦ Special effect or consequence of critical damage.

MONSTER EXAMPLE

- ♦ **Appearance:** *Hunched + Carapace.*
- ♦ **Traits:** *Moves in a straight line + Weak Spot*
- ♦ **Attack:** *Smashes + Grapples.*
- ♦ **Abilities:** *Disables + Hearing*

A snail-like creature with a hard shell. It moves only in straight lines, and has a soft underbelly. It rolls into opponents, pulling them into its wild orbit. The roar of its movement drowns out any other sounds.

This creature is physically tough, with higher than average **STR** and strong armor. It is probably fast but not maneuverable, and likely doesn't rely on skill or dexterity to avoid danger. It is brutish, but it is still a wild beast and only as willful as any creature just looking for its next meal. It attacks by rolling in a straight line and should impact multiple targets.

Thunder Snail

6 HP, 2 Armor, 14 STR, 6 DEX, 4 WIL, smash & roll (d10, *blast*)

- ♦ Thick-shelled beasts that attack by rolling over their opponents in a straight line. The noise of their tumbling shells is deafening.
- ♦ **Critical Damage:** Target is pulled into its rolling momentum, losing an additional 1 STR per round until freed (STR save to escape).

CONVERTING MONSTERS

There is no perfect system for converting from other systems. Here are some tips that might help with the process!

- ♦ **Hit Protection:** A good rule of thumb is to give the creature +1 HP for every **HD**, on top of a minimum **3 HP** (the average person). HD is equivalent to a d6, which has a *mean* of 3.5. Always start with a creature's **HP** *first, then* do their **STR**.

- ♦ **Armor:** Look for phrases like "as leather" and "as plate" in the original stat blocks. When converting from B/X style games like Old School Essentials, ignore THACO and use descending AC whenever possible (7 = Leather, 5 = Chainmail, 3 = Plate mail). If only ascending AC is given, you can use (12 = Leather, 14 = Chainmail, 16 = Plate mail). Whichever system you're converting from, the Armor values range from 1-3 only.

- ♦ **Strength:** Look at the creature's **HD** and **HP**. If a creature is difficult to kill but *not* because they are nimble or skilled, give them more **STR** (but *not* more **HP**). Start with 10 **STR** (the average) and go up or down from there.

- ♦ **Dexterity:** Start with **10** as a base, and if the creature is particularly quick (often referred to as "speed" or SP), agile, or nimble-fingered, raise the number. If it is slow to respond, bulky, or clumsy, lower the number.

- ♦ **Willpower:** **Morale (ML)** can be a good guidepost, and it typically ranges between 2-12. The greater the creature's personality, spirit, or presence, the higher the WIL they should have. The following table offers a decent guide on converting **ML** to **WIL**.

ML	4	8	10	12
WIL	6	12	15	18

Saving Throws

- ♦ You can rely on *saving throws* to glean more information about a creature's abilities, specifically their ability to avoid death by physical trauma, magic, or poison.

- ♦ Stat blocks will use a shorthand like (E1) or (F1) (Level 1 Elf or Fighter respectively). These are really helpful for quickly identifying the creature's abilities.

- ♦ Consider adding descriptive tags such as "immune to toxic gas" or "good at dodging" based on the saving throws. The following table should help determine which saving throws should result in an increase in one of the relevant ability scores.

SAVE TYPE	ABILITY SCORE
Death or Poison	STR
Wands	DEX
Paralysis or Petrification	WIL or STR
Breath Attacks	DEX or STR
Spells, Rods or Staves	WIL

Combat

- ♦ **Damage Die:** Can typically be copied “as is” from most OSR systems, but it’s a good idea to check with the weapons listed in the Marketplace first.
- ♦ **Multiple attacks:** Convert to *blast* or to multiple dice (e.g. d6+d6).
- ♦ **Devastating Attacks:** Consider making the damage *enhanced*, assign the *blast* tag, or giving the attack multiple dice.

Abilities

- ♦ Sometimes the mechanics of the original system simply *do not translate*. That’s OK! Try to focus on what’s most interesting about the creature, and write a “version” of their ability more appropriate to Cairn.
 - ♦ Abilities can sometimes be made into attacks (with a damage die), leaving Critical Damage to reveal the real impact.
- If the monster has an attack that asks the PCs to attempt to dodge or save against some ability, consider making the ability an out-of-combat “trap” that the PCs can trigger. Otherwise, make it succeed automatically. Combat is dangerous, and it is up to the Warden to properly telegraph danger before the fighting begins.

Magic

- ♦ Magical creatures can “know” a bunch of spells without needing to carry Spellbooks. In this case, make their corpses magical (and dangerous)!
- ♦ Spells are tricky; you can give magic-users Spellbooks, but remember, they might *drop* them when defeated.
- ♦ Consider making some of the dropped Spellbooks implode (use the Die of Fate to determine which).

Use the Fiction

The easiest way to convert a monster from another system is to read the original stat block and any associated text, then write a few sentences about the creature in plain English. Finally, convert what you’ve written to the Cairn monster stat block.

Take for example this creature:

Foxwoman (source stat block)

Can take the form of a fox or a 7’ tall fox-headed woman. *HD 5, Speed 120’, Armor 14, Morale 11, Attack: +4 d8hp (claw, bite or choke)*

- ♦ Defense: Cannot be harmed by metal
- ♦ Special: Can transform into a fox or a maiden with one fox leg hidden (same stats) at will

Using the example above, we can see that she:

- ◆ Appears as a 7-foot tall human woman with the head of a fox.
- ◆ Doesn't have super high HP, and she's quite fast.
- ◆ Has a pretty high **ML**, and she's obviously quite willful.
- ◆ Is agile and lithe.
- ◆ Attacks with teeth and claws (choking her prey if possible).
- ◆ Can transform into a fox at will.
- ◆ Is immune to metal weapons.

What can we learn from this?

- ◆ She's fast, and probably savvy in a fight. If we start from **3 HP** and add 1 **HP** per **HD**, that means she has **8 HP**.
- ◆ Foxes don't have protective hides, and she's otherwise human beside her head. **No Armor**.
- ◆ She is decently strong. A normal human has 10 **STR** and she's a little bigger. **12 STR**.
- ◆ She's fast, hunting prey over the snowy tundra. **14 DEX**.
- ◆ Her **ML** is high, and foxes are known for their cunning. **15 WIL**.
- ◆ For her attacks: claws (d6+d6) and bite (d8).

The final result:

Foxwoman

8 HP, 12 STR, 14 DEX, 15 WIL, claws (d6+d6), bite (d8)

- ◆ Can take the form of a fox or a woman with a hidden fox leg.
- ◆ Immune to attacks from metal weapons.
- ◆ **Critical Damage:** Victim is choked unconscious.

NAMING PROCEDURES

- ◆ Settlements are often named after their unique features: the shape of the river nearby, or the large windmill in the town center. The residents then add a noun or adjective: *Windy Gulch*, *Black Tree Fort*, etc.
- ◆ Important places should have important names, like those of heroes, religious or political figures, and other events. *The Chalet of Saint Ibiza*, *Queen's Harvest*, *Light of the Nine*, etc.
- ◆ Proper nouns can be added to or even replace parts of a name, e.g. **Bruna's Ugly Gulch**.
- ◆ Wild and dangerous places are named after obvious hazards: *Poison Lake*, *Foggy Cliffs*, etc.
- ◆ Some names tell a story: *Luka's Folly*, *Dead Man's Path*, etc.
- ◆ Use the region's local terrain and the location's details where appropriate.

GENERATING NAMES

- ◆ Roll on **names—formula** for each POI.
- ◆ Roll on **adjectives** and **nouns** where appropriate.
- ◆ To roll **1d100**, roll **2d10**, using one die for the tens place, and one die for the ones place.

To name regions based on Terrain, swap out "POI" with the terrain type, and consult **terrain—synonyms** for inspiration.

FACTION NAMES

- 1 Roll on **faction—names—formula**.
- 2 Roll on **adjectives**, **nouns**, and **group—types** where appropriate.

REALM NAMES

- 1 Roll on **ruler—names—formula**.
- 2 Roll on **adjectives**, **nouns**, **terrain—synonyms**, and **ruler—types**, and add "of" or "the" where appropriate.

Optionally, replace any value with the dominant terrain synonym, e.g. "*The Misty Bluffs*".

FOREST NAMES

- ♦ For the adjective, roll a **d10** twice, first for the **tens** place, and then another for the **ones** place. Then repeat the process for the noun (see [forest-name-adjectives](#) and [forest-name-nouns](#)).
- ♦ Change it up! The name *Welcoming Grove* might be more appropriate than *Beckoning Copse* for your setting.
- ♦ Use contrasting words (e.g. *Twisted Canopy*) to evoke an interesting point about the location.
- ♦ Make it sound nice. Alliteration and pleasing combinations can create pleasant sounds. *Whispering Woods* is more pleasing to the ear than *Tangled Woods*.

All of the tables referenced above (Names Formula, Adjectives, Nouns, Terrain Synonyms, Group Types, Faction Names Formula, Ruler Types, Realm Names Formula, Forest Name Adjectives/Nouns) are published as structured data – see [naming-tables.json](#) in the Cairn tables index.

DUNGEON SEEDS

DUNGEON PRINCIPLES

- ♦ **Purpose:** Consider what the dungeon's original purpose was, as well as what it is being used for today. Demonstrate a dungeon's history by including signs of its original inhabitants and their goals. Sometimes a dungeon will have multiple purposes, and these can collide against each other to create tension among its denizens.
- ♦ **Levels:** Though they should make sense as part of the dungeon's construction and purpose, levels should also represent increasing danger. On each level, try to push players to weigh the risk of further exploration versus a potential reward.
- ♦ **Layout:** Create multiple entrances and exits, offer multiple routes, design choke points, and provide hiding spots. Add meaningful and obvious information to room entrances and exits.
- ♦ **Verticality:** Incorporate tall rooms, climbable structures, and paths that allow movement around and over obstacles.
- ♦ **Secret Areas:** Include hidden zones, including at least one that will likely remain undiscovered but is still worth finding. Try to avoid hiding crucial information behind secret rooms.
- ♦ **Rooms:** Vary room shapes, sizes, and functions. Use architectural motifs to connect rooms and provide hints of what's to come. Room descriptions should be easy to map and recall.
- ♦ **Treasure:** Incorporate a variety of treasures beyond mere gold, such as knowledge, allies, trade goods, and artifacts. Add narrative elements to treasure to increase its non-monetary value.
- ♦ **Challenges:** Allow the characters to drive the story by writing challenges without prescribed outcomes. Create a sense of peril, but avoid making obstacles seem unbeatable. Overly dangerous areas and creatures should be obvious. Create encounters that can be avoided with critical thinking and problem-solving, not just violence. Remember that monsters and other obstacles are another way to tell the dungeon's story.
- ♦ **NPCs:** Include engaging NPCs with their own goals and agendas. These characters may *want* to stay in the dungeon; they may even love it! NPCs and monsters should communicate with the PCs, even during combat. Have them make threats, suggest compromises, or try to persuade the PCs whenever possible. Every character wants something, and has a limit to what they might do to get it.
- ♦ **Factions:** Factions should interact with both the characters and one another, acting on their own regardless of the character's actions. Give them hierarchies and divisions that can be exploited.
- ♦ **Puzzles:** Create puzzles that have clear, actionable goals. Puzzles should reinforce the themes of the dungeon and build on its history. Make the challenge of the puzzle obvious, but the solution less so. Allow for multiple solutions, and for players to solve them using intelligence and critical thinking, not just special abilities or tools. Create built-in clues suggesting the puzzle's origin and its effects.
- ♦ **The Dungeon Map:** Put boring or repetitive stuff (exits, room shapes, etc.) on the map, rather than in the room description. Obvious exits should be described using clear, distinct language. Number your rooms to help avoid confusion when referencing the map.
- ♦ **Room Keying:** Emphasize a room's most important aspects (typically obvious threats or NPCs). Describe elements that help orient the party to their surroundings. Be specific, but avoid describing how the characters should *feel*. Only describe what's happening *now*. If there is history here, the characters will discover it in play. Name each room!
- ♦ **Encounter Tables:** Create random events to help make a dungeon feel alive by making exploration tense and unpredictable, as parties may encounter wandering monsters, factions, NPCs, or signs of an approaching threat. Try to provide challenges, moments of respite, or opportunities for roleplay.

CREATING A DUNGEON

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- ♦ A sheet of paper and a notebook. Letter/A4 is fine.
- ♦ Pencils and erasers.
- ♦ At least one d6 and one d20, but 6d6 and 2d20 would be ideal.

Going forward, we will refer to the sheet of paper as the **dungeon map**. As with any other rule, if you don't like a table result, roll again or tweak as desired!

Follow this procedure for any dungeon POIs in your setting. Refer to the dungeon type table results from earlier, reading the results from your map. What image springs immediately to mind? Where is the dungeon located? What does its entrance look like? Don't worry if you can't answer these questions yet. By the end of this process, you should be able to.

OVERVIEW

- 1 Define the dungeon's original purpose, its construction, and finally its ruination.
- 2 Define the dungeon's NPCs and factions, including their unique traits and agendas.
- 3 Finalize the dungeon theme.
- 4 Create the map.
- 5 Stock the dungeon's rooms.

HISTORY

Who built the dungeon? What was it originally used for? Perhaps it was once a great forge, capable of building the world's most powerful weapon. Or maybe it was once a burial site for ancient kings, binding their souls to the lands they once ruled. Roll on the tables below (see the [Dungeon Seeds table set](#)), noting the results in your notebook, keeping the following questions in mind:

"What kind of dungeon is this, and what makes it unusual?"

"Why was this dungeon built, how was it built, and what caused its downfall?"

- ♦ **Purpose:** roll on dungeon-purpose (Original Use / Built By).
- ♦ **Construction:** roll on dungeon-construction (Entrance / Composition).
- ♦ **Ruination:** roll on dungeon-ruination (Condition / Cause).

DUNGEON DENIZENS

Most dungeons will have creatures that *live* there and make it their home. The **dungeon-denizen-traits** table (Virtues / Vices) can be used to describe the general attitude of any or all of the intelligent creatures in the dungeon. Roll on it, writing the results in your notebook. This describes the general attitude of the creatures found in the dungeon.

Meanwhile, every dungeon should have at least one NPC that stands out from all the others. These types *prefer* the dungeon life over any other, but still act differently from their brethren. They should be NPCs that the party can interact with, trade with, hire, aid, and so on. These strange creatures can be deeply involved or entirely neutral towards the dungeon's other denizens and factions. Roll on the Traits table again, writing the results in your notebook, keeping the following questions in mind:

"What do we know about the creatures and factions that occupy the dungeon?"

"What is each faction trying to achieve, and what stands in their way?"

DUNGEON FACTIONS

All dungeons should have one or more factions with their own unique agenda, obstacles, leaders, and hierarchy. Roll on **dungeon-faction-agendas** (Goal / Obstacle).

BUILD A DUNGEON

CREATE THE MAP

- ♦ Roll **6-20 d6** dice on the dungeon map, ignoring any dice that fall off the page. These are the dungeon's *rooms*.

Write the face-up results on the page using the **dungeon-die-drop** table. For example, the number **4** would indicate a **Special** room, which you can denote on the page with the letter "S."

- ♦
 - ♦ If a room feels "too far" from the rest, roll another die and follow the previous process to add a new room.

-
- ♦ Select the room closest to the page border. This is the *entrance* to the dungeon.

-
- ♦ Starting with the entrance, number each room on the dungeon map.

DRAW PATHS

PATH TYPES

- ♦ **Standard** paths are obvious connectors between rooms. *Represented by a thick line.*
 - ♦ **Hidden** paths do not appear on any known maps. Their discovery always requires some kind of cost. *Represented by a dashed line.*
 - ♦ **Conditional** paths may be blocked, or requires specialized tools (hidden levers, climbing gear, etc.) to cross. Others may even be impossible to navigate without a map or guide. *Represented by a crossed line.*
- Starting with the entrance, create 1-4 paths between each room.
- ♦ Create loops, branching hallways, dead-ends, and shortcuts between rooms.
 - ♦ Some paths are Conditional, represented by a crossed line.
 - ♦ Some paths are Hidden, represented by a dashed line.
- ♦ Create intersections (crossed lines) with no rooms in between.

STOCK THE ROOMS

- ♦ Roll on the relevant tables for each room, writing the results in your notebook.
- ♦ For each room, filter the table results through the theme you generated earlier in this process.

MONSTER

Monsters are any dangerous creature that lives in a dungeon. This does not mean it will attack intruders by default! Monsters are not simply “waiting around” for the characters to find them, but instead have their own wants and goals, even if they are simply looking for their next meal. Some monsters can talk, reason, and even beg for mercy. *People can be monsters, too.*

Roll on **dungeon-room-monster** (Group / Activity).

LORE

Lore rooms should build on the theme of the dungeon, provide a valuable lesson, or connect the characters with an NPC or Faction. They might create a dilemma that unites the party or puts them at odds with their mission. At a minimum, these rooms act as a curiosity, adding something memorable to the experience beyond danger and puzzle-solving. Of course, the characters should not know that these rooms do not contain danger or challenges. This helps increase tension in the dungeon, while offering a potential respite and opportunity for growing the narrative.

Roll on **dungeon-room-lore** (Room Type / Clue).

SPECIAL

Special rooms areas are uncommon areas that feature a hidden or interactive element. This element can be a challenge, an obstacle, a puzzle, or all of the above. These rooms should offer difficult choices with long-term impacts. They might make dungeon exploration easier, but with a serious cost.

Roll on `dungeon-room-special` (Special / Feature).

TRAP

A trap is a dangerous and hidden object, typically triggered through interaction with a character. While traps are by their very nature not obvious, a good trap should contain hints as to their presence or the room's true purpose.

Roll on `dungeon-room-trap` (Trap / Trigger).

All of the tables referenced above (Purpose, Construction, Ruination, Denizen Traits, Faction Agendas, Die Drop, Room: Monster/Lore/Special/Trap) are published as structured data — see [dungeon-seeds-tables.json](#) in the Cairn tables index.

EXAMPLE DUNGEON

For this example, let's assume we are looking at a POI generated using the methods described in the Setting Seeds chapter. Our relevant results were:

- ♦ **Terrain:** *Forest*
- ♦ **Type:** *Temple*
- ♦ **Feature:** *Isolated*

WHAT KIND OF DUNGEON IS THIS, AND WHAT MAKES IT UNUSUAL?

A remote forest temple, cut off from the world by a vast ocean of trees and shrubbery.

We then roll on the **Purpose**, **Construction**, and **Ruination** tables and get the following results:

- ♦ **Purpose:** The *protection of rare artifacts*. Built by a *fanatical cult*.
- ♦ **Construction:** The entrance is *between a circle of menhirs*, and its foundation is built of the very same *petrified wood* that surrounds it.
- ♦ **Ruination:** *Divided* (literally) by *competing rituals*.

WHY WAS THIS DUNGEON BUILT AND WHAT CAUSED ITS DOWNFALL?

It was designed by an extremist cult of forest druids to house a reality-altering Relic. Its entrance is beneath a false stone in a circle of menhirs deep in the forest. The walls and ceiling of the dungeon are built from petrified wood, as the ancient artifact affects living plants, warping them to its will. A division within the cult faced off over control of the Relic but fell victim to their own hubris and nearly destroyed one another. When two opposing rituals collided, the temple was split in two, divided along Factional lines. The Relic was lost in the aftermath.

Continuing on to the current inhabitants of our dungeon, we get the following results (rolling for two factions):

- ♦ **Denizens:** The creatures living here are *practical*, yet *unimaginative*.
- ♦ **Faction A:** Goal: *Destruction*. Obstacle: *Opposition*.
- ♦ **Faction B:** Goal: *Redemption*. Obstacle: *Tradition*.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CREATURES AND FACTIONS THAT OCCUPY THE DUNGEON?

The current denizens of this dungeon are the descendants of the original factions, are typically pragmatic about their ceaseless war, and cannot imagine a way out.

WHAT IS EACH FACTION TRYING TO ACHIEVE, AND WHAT STANDS IN THEIR WAY?

The **Crimson Path** would like to destroy their former brethren, the **Azure Legion**, but are cowed by their opponent's prowess in battle. The Azure Legion feel great shame over the actions of their forebears and believe that their redemption can only be achieved by way of finding and destroying the temple's hidden artifact. Unfortunately, an ancient custom decrees that no one wearing the Azure cloth may seek the lost Relic.

DUNGEON THEME

With some idea on the history, purpose, and denizens of the dungeon, we finally have our theme. Let's put it all together:

Nestled within a dense, shrouded forest lies a temple made entirely of petrified wood. Built by a fanatical cult called the Children of Eolith, the temple was designed to protect the Woodturn, an ancient Relic that could turn any plant to stone. The cult eventually split into two opposing factions, and when their dueling rituals collided, the temple was shattered, with each Faction taking one half. Today the descendants of these factions still vie for control, destruction, and redemption but are hindered by power imbalances and ancient tradition.

The Crimson Path believe that if the original Relic were recovered, they might bend its power to destroy the Azure Legion forever. However, every attempt to plumb the temple's depths has been countered by their former brethren. A recent attack has left many of their number dead, and the remaining members have since fled the temple to regroup.

The Azure Legion feel a great sense of shame over their ancestor's actions and believe that if the original Relic were destroyed, the temple would be healed again and their shame expunged. Unfortunately, a long-standing tradition prohibits any members from seeking the Relic, so as to avoid the mistakes of the past.

*In the center of the temple (between **3** and **4**), a massive crack (the Fracture) splits the dungeon in two, acting as a sort of demilitarized zone. Both factions realize that only death lies across its threshold.*

*Hidden deep within the dungeon is a Relic called the **Woodturn**. It is capable of petrifying trees, wood, or other plant life through mere contact. If not properly contained, it could turn an entire forest into a wasteland!*

HOOKS

- ♦ The Crimson Path has made a public offer of 300gp apiece for the safe retrieval of an “ancient relic” deep within the temple. The characters will be on their own in dealing with any “opposition.”

The party is contacted by an agent of the Azure Legion, acting in secret. The party is to find and destroy the

- ♦ **Woodturn**, an item of great power lost somewhere in the temple. The mission is to remain a secret, and members of any Faction will likely stand against them. The characters are to be paid 1000gp (total).

THE FRACTURED TEMPLE

Note: the source publishes an illustrative map image alongside this example; as an image asset it is not reproduced here.

FEATURES THROUGHOUT

- ♦ **Light:** Wall sconces are built into the walls in every room. None are lit.
- ♦ **Smell:** Damp, dirt, and hints of sulfur.
- ♦ **Noise:** Distant shouting, along with an occasional rumbling and creaking throughout.
- ♦ **Build:** The walls and floor are made of a white, petrified wood.

ENTRANCE: CIRCLE OF MENHIRS

A small circle of 10’ tall **stones** are set in a circle atop a **grassy** hill. White **trees** surround the glade on all sides.

Stones: Moss-covered, with thin, ruined writing in an ancient script.

- ♦ ♦ An expert in such matters can still determine that the stones are many centuries old.

Grass: A patch in the center of the circle is browner than the rest.

- ♦ ♦ A trap door is concealed underneath. Petrified wooden steps lead down to **1**.

-
- ♦ **Trees:** Petrified. As white as snow.

1 - DINING HALL

Lore: *Dining Hall. Smell.*

Long, rustic **tables** are arranged in horizontal rows. The **smell** of root vegetables and cloves lingers in the air.

- ♦ **Tables:** Large enough for 80 people, used by the cult before the split.
- ♦ **Smell:** Strongest near the North passage (towards **4**).

2 - SITTING ROOM

Special: *Furniture. Falls.*

Plush, **dust-covered** chairs and couches are arranged in a semi-circle around a black, wooden **chair**. The air in the room tastes stale.

- ♦ **Dust:** Most of the furniture appears long-abandoned, but the black chair is dust-free.

Chair: Clean and shiny, as if new. Ankle straps are tied to the underside of the chair, which is bolted to the floor.

- ♦ A thin, nearly-invisible square line is cut around the chair.
- ♦ Sitting in the chair and attaching the straps causes the floor beneath the chair to lower, descending to **3**.

3 - BASILISK LAIR

Monster: *Lizard. Recuperating.*

A Basilisk sleeps on a nest built atop a slab of **wall** on the East side of the room. In the center of the room, a tall glass **cage** runs from the floor to the **ceiling**. A long, broken **chain** is attached to the South wall.

Basilisk: Recuperating after having just birthed a new clutch of three eggs.

- ♦ She warms her eggs by sitting atop them and will not leave them for very long.
- ♦ The eggs are worth 1000gp each. They are *bulky* and extremely fragile.

- ♦ **Wall:** The passage East is still accessible, despite having collapsed. The Basilisk is too large to traverse the rubble.

- ♦ **Cage:** Acts as an observation chute from **2**, where new acolytes were lowered into the chamber to observe the Basilisk.

- ♦ **Chain:** Once used to trap the Basilisk here.

BASILISK

10 HP, 1 Armor, 12 STR, 13 DEX, 13 WIL, bite (d10)

- ♦ Long, serpentine lizards that nest deep below the earth or in brambles just underfoot.
- ♦ Fighting a **Basilisk** without meeting its gaze is difficult (attacks facing it are *impaired*).
- ♦ **Gaze:** A target facing the Basilisk is slowly petrified, from the bottom up, completely frozen after three rounds. An antidote can be brewed from the Basilisk's gizzards. The creature's reflection is harmless.

4 - KITCHEN

Trap: *Poisons. Stepping.*

The withered **corpse** of a man is stretched atop a large butcher block. A **sconce** on the West wall, over the West exit, burns with twin blue flames. Open **cupboards** stand at knee-height on the North wall.

Corpse: Dressed in the Red Robes of the Crimson Path. Looks at least two weeks dead.

- ♦ There are no obvious wounds or markings, save for a green crust around the man's lip.
- ♦ He carries a white dagger made of petrified wood (d8).

- ♦ **Sconce:** Passing beneath the flames releases a poison gas spray into the room, dealing d4 STR damage to anyone nearby (save to avoid losing consciousness).

Cupboards: Bare. The arrangement of the cupboards and the block seem to imply that this room was once a communal kitchen.

- ♦ One of the cupboards has a false back that can be depressed, disabling the poison gas trap for one minute.

5 - STUDY

Lore: *Study. Decor.*

Bookshelves wrap around every inch of wall, their dusty **shelves** stacked with heaps of **books**. An unlit **candelabra** hangs from the ceiling.

- ♦ **Shelves:** Despite the lack of furniture, the room looks like it may have been a well-used study at one time.

Books: Untouched for decades. Clearing the dust from the spines reveal all manner of subjects.

- ♦ Nearly every word in every book has been blacked out in stark black.

Candelabra: Unusual design, worth 500gp (four slots, brittle).

- ♦ The candles (5 uses) are still accessible (assuming they can be reached). When lit, they produce around 20ft of darkness that is impenetrable by non-magical light. They were placed here as a final insult against the old study.

6 - THE FRACTURED HALL

Special: *Smoke. Illusion.*

Swirling **smoke** fills the air in a ceaseless typhoon of ash and embers, obscuring the exits. Faint **movement** is visible through the smoke, as well as occasional shouting from the West side of the room. The **floor** is not level, with the East side raised a full foot higher than the West.

Smoke: Magical, it emits no sound or smell and cannot be dissolved by normal means. The exits in this room are obscured.

- ♦ The doorway near the SW corridor contains the broken statue of a robed figure (see Basilisk, **3**).

Movement: Robed soldiers engaged in melee combat with unseen opponents.

- ♦ There are always at least 3 members of either Faction engaged in skirmishes here. They will generally attack any shapes that try to cross the room but are easily confused by the smoke.
- ♦ Due to the smoke, all attacks within the room are *impaired*.

-
- ♦ **Floor:** Split when the temple fractured. Along with the smoke, navigation in this room is extremely difficult.

DRUID CULTIST

5 HP, 11 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, petrified short sword (d8)

- ♦ Wears a red or blue robe to indicate their factional allegiance. Are otherwise indistinguishable.

7 - FALSE RELIC

Trap: *Crushes. Interacting.*

Four **pillars** are arranged in a **square** pattern around a white **rod** suspended in air.

Pillars: Built from floor to ceiling and made of petrified wood.

- ♦ The space between the pillars is protected by a magical, impenetrable barrier. At least two pillars must be destroyed for the barrier to dissolve.
 - ♦ If two *adjacent* pillars are destroyed, the room will collapse on its occupants (DEX save or take 12 STR damage).
-
- ♦ **Rod:** A facsimile of the **Woodturn** found in **9**, but lacks any real power.

8 - NEST

Monster: *Insectoid. Hiding.*

The floor is heavily broken, segmented by raised **tiles** of petrified flooring. Large **holes** are scattered throughout the low ceiling. There are no obvious exits.

- ♦ **Tiles:** A maze of broken shards. The West exit is entirely obscured by the tiles.

Holes: Created by a *Burrowing Horror*.

- ♦ If the party ignores the ceiling, it attacks the first PC that walks under a hole (ignore HP).
- ♦ A hole on the West side is actually a 30ft tunnel leading up to **9**. Small grooves along the tunnel make climbing easy, provided one can reach them.

BURROWING HORROR

6 HP, 1 Armor, 16 STR, 11 DEX, 4 WIL, bite (d10), acid squirt (d8, *blast*)

- ♦ Huge insectoids with multiple legs and shiny black eyes. Subsists from dirt, roots, and flesh.
- ♦ Burrows just beneath the surfaces to ambush unsuspecting creatures.
- ♦ **Critical Damage:** Target loses a body part. Roll 1d6. 1: Head, 2-4: Leg, 5-6: Arm.

9 - MIRROR ROOM

Special: *Mirror. Opens.*

A **mirror** hangs on a **track** on the West wall. A large **hole** is dug into the ground on the East side.

- ♦ **Track:** Runs in a full circle around the room, allowing the mirror to be moved along the track.

Mirror: If moved to the North wall, the reflection will reveal a small, invisible alcove on the South side.

- ♦ The alcove is hidden behind an otherwise illusory piece of wall. Hidden inside is the **Woodturn**.
- ♦ If damaged, the mirror will explode (d6 STR damage to any nearby). The victim is *deprived*, and their cuts do not heal until they have left the temple.

-
- ♦ **Hole:** Tunnel to **8** (30ft).

WOODTURN

- ♦ A white rod made of polished wood. Touching the rod to any living plant petrifies it. 3 Charges.
-
- ♦ **Recharge:** Burn the rod in heavy flames for a day and a night. Pour the ashes into pure spring water. The rod will reform.

FOREST SEEDS

FORESTCRAWLS

A forestcrawl is a simple method for exploring a large forested area, typically made up of branching trails connecting scattered points of interest. While a forestcrawl has some of the same properties as a traditional dungeon delve, it swaps stone walls and ceilings for the dense, non-linear design of a heavily wooded area. Instead of rooms, points of interest are defined as clearings or major changes in the forested landscape. However unlike exploring a dungeon, characters can take shortcuts, go “off-trail,” or climb trees to get a better look around (with a cost, of course).

EXPLORING THE WOOD

- ♦ Follow the *Dungeon* exploration procedures found in the Player’s Guide, but rather than rolling for Dungeon Events, use the Wilderness Events table instead.
-
- If the party attempts to step off the trail and cut through the forest, the Warden should make any associated costs
- ♦ clear: added travel time, effort, special tools that may be required, and any obvious dangers. Going off-trail also automatically triggers a roll on the Wilderness Events table.
-
- ♦ Points in a forestcrawl are close to each other. When traveling on clearly marked trails, a small forest (10–15 POIs) can be explored in a single Watch.
-
- ♦ Rely on the fiction and common sense to determine how much daylight is available, whether a suitable area is available for rest, and what the costs or dangers the forest may contain in the darkness.

CREATING A FOREST

Follow this procedure for any forested terrain in a region. If a conflict or interesting pattern emerges, be open to restating or modifying any earlier results!

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- ♦ A sheet of paper and a notebook. Letter/A4 is fine.
-
- ♦ Pencils and erasers. Colored pencils or crayons are good, too.
-
- ♦ At least one d6 and one d20, but 6d6 and 2d20 would be ideal.

Going forward, we will refer to the sheet of paper as the **map**. As with any other rule, if you don’t like a table result, roll again or tweak as desired!

OVERVIEW

- 1 Describe the forest.
- 2 Describe the spirit of the forest.
- 3 Create the forest's POIs.
- 4 Create the forest's trails.
- 5 Create forest encounters.
- 6 Name the forest.

FOREST DESCRIPTION

Roll on **forest-description**, writing the results in your notebook. This table both indicates how outsiders perceive the forest as well as any unique natural features it may have. If the forested terrain was generated using the methods described in the Setting Seeds chapter, consider how the associated Landmark affects it as well.

Landmarks help travelers navigate through the dense foliage, acting as geographic reference points: unusually tall trees, watchtowers, and so on. Most forest landmarks are visible only by climbing a tree, though a few are large enough to stand out from the green. Some landmarks are *heard* rather than seen.

THE SPIRIT OF THE FOREST

In some ways, the Wood is a single entity, its brain alive within every tree and plant, connected via a network of thorn and branch. The animals and plants are its limbs, directing its wants, desires, fears, and needs. The creatures that live within its boundaries are its blood, answering its call by delivering much needed defenses and rebuffing interlopers. The Wood will always protect itself and its children. Roll on **forest-traits** and **forest-agenda**, writing the results in your notebook. This describes the general attitude of the creatures found in the forest as well as what the forest *wants* as a whole.

CREATE THE MAP

CREATE POIS

- ♦ Roll **8–12 d6** dice on the dungeon map, ignoring any dice that fall off the page. These are the Points of Interest (POI) in the forest.

- ♦ Write the face-up results on the page using the **forest–die–drop** table. For example, the number **4** would indicate a **Shelter**, which you would denote with the letter “S”.

- ♦ Select two opposite points, preferably close to the page border. These are the forest’s entrance and exit.

- ♦ Starting with the entrance and ending at the exit, number each POI on the map.

- ♦ Roll on the relevant tables for each point, writing the results in your notebook.

- ♦ Filter the table results through the table results you generated earlier in this process.

TRAILS

TRAIL TYPES

- ♦ **Standard** trails are obvious or well-trod routes between two points. *Represented by a thick line.*

- ♦ **Hidden** trails do not appear on any known maps. Their discovery always requires some kind of cost. *Represented by a dashed line.*

- ♦ **Conditional** trails may be blocked, or requires specialized tools (boats, climbing gear, etc.) to cross. Others may even be impossible to navigate without a map or guide. *Represented by a crossed line.*

DRAW TRAILS

Starting with the entrance, draw 1-4 paths between each point.

- ♦ Create loops, branching paths, dead-ends, and shortcuts between points.
- ♦ Some paths are Conditional, represented by a crossed line.
- ♦ Some paths are Hidden, represented by a dashed line.
- ♦ If possible, create intersections (crossed lines) with no points in between.

Create trails by drawing over paths that connect 3-4 points in an obvious, consistent, or interesting manner.

- ♦ Hidden paths and short, isolated routes are not usually a part of a trail.
- ♦ Use colored pencils or crayons to help distinguish different trails.

- ♦ Roll on `forest-trail-types` (Type / Marker) for each trail, recording the results in your notebook.

If some of the results seem incongruous, that's OK! Turn these juxtapositions into questions like "Why *is* there an old logging road leading to the bandit's hideout?" That said, don't be afraid to choose a more appropriate result if you're having a hard time making it work!

MONSTER

Monsters are any dangerous creatures one might encounter in the forest. This does not mean they will attack intruders by default! Monsters are not "waiting around" for characters to stumble upon them, but have their own wants and goals. Some monsters can talk, reason, and even beg for mercy. *People can be monsters, too.*

Roll on `forest-poi-monster` (Monster / Activity).

RUINS

Forests are wild places, but that does not mean people haven't tried to tame them. The remnants of these attempts still show up from time to time, hinting at the folly of those who would stand against the Wood.

Roll on `forest-poi-ruins` (Ruin / Feature).

SHELTER

Despite its wild and unpredictable nature, there have always been those brave, skilled, or foolhardy enough to try and build a life in the Wood. And some do succeed, leaving their mark via smoldering campfire or gray tower, offering a welcome respite to weary travelers.

Roll on `forest-poi-shelter` (Shelter / Feature).

HAZARD

The Wood is a dangerous place and not to be trifled with. The forest and its inhabitants do what they must to survive, and even sated, are still preparing for their next meal. The trees, the plants, and the earth itself will leave deadly traps and dangers to root out those unworthy to pass beneath the boughs.

Roll on `forest-poi-hazard` (Hazard / Feature).

All of the tables referenced above (Description, Traits, Forest Agenda, Die Drop, Trail Types, POI: Monster/Ruins/Shelter/Hazard, Encounters) are published as structured data – see [forest-seeds-tables.json](#) in the Cairn tables index.

EXAMPLE FOREST

THE FOREST

Description: Diseased, Frozen

A thick forest infected with disease and rot. Parts of it are frozen solid.

DENIZENS

Traits: Stable, Territorial

Wish to return to the stability they once knew, but are threatened by ancient forest boundaries.

Forest Agenda: Purification, Infestation

The spirit of the forest wants nothing more than to purify itself of the disease that has taken hold. An infestation of Giant Spiders (9) has spun webs throughout, killing far too many creatures and undermining the ecosystem.

FOREST THEME

For decades, the order and stability of the forest was maintained through an agreement between the forest witch **Anglwyst** and **Sweeney**, the Wood's champion. The witch would use her magic to keep the trees and animals healthy, while the champion would ensure that hunters never kill any creature deemed essential to the Wood (indicated by a shock of white in their fur). Their pact was permanent and immalleable, and the forest was divided, barring both the witch and the champion from crossing its boundary.

After the old witch died, one of her spells grew wild, then dangerous. Now a magical disease has begun to infect the trees and creatures, threatening to consume the entire forest. Hunters call it the *Withering*, because it drains the life of everything it touches.

Note: the source publishes an illustrative map image alongside this example; as an image asset it is not reproduced here.

TRAILS

OLD LOGGING ROAD, TREE CARVINGS

The path between **1** and **5** is blocked by a broad cliff face, requiring climbing gear to ascend. Carvings from the original loggers of this forest still mar the surface of some trees.

TREELINE HEIGHTS, STONE PILES

The monks at **7** left piles of stone alongside the path for each of their fallen members.

FORAGING PATH, DISTANT SINGING

Anglwyst survived largely on the plentiful fruit found on this trail. Her magic was so powerful that echoes of her presence still mark the path: those who travel it can still hear her faint, chipper singing.

DRY RIVERBED, FRESH SPIDERWEBS

A river once ran through the West end of the forest, but it dried up after a drought. Giant spiders travel the path as they make their way to **8**, spinning their web along the trail.

HUNTER'S TRACK, DAMAGED FLORA

Sweeney allows outsiders to hunt their quarry on this trail and no other, so long as they never kill any creature with white in their fur.

POIS

1 - DISEASED CAMPSITE [ENTRANCE]

Ruin: *Petrified Campsite, Overrun With Unusual Flora*

At the forest edge is a dead **campfire** with piles of dark gray **bedding** laid out close by. Plants, flowers, and other **flora** grow thickly over the campsite. A **trail** to the **North** leads into the forest.

- ♦ **Campfire:** The remaining wood is stained a deep gray, is very cold to the touch, and is as hard as iron.

Bedding: Splinters of gray wood are stuck in the cloth.

- ♦ Icy cold to the touch. The space beneath the cloth is partly blue and red, but gray circles grow out of the wood flecks.

Flora: Rare and unique species not common to these parts.

- ♦ Skilled pruning and a few minutes of careful work produces a **Healing Salve** (restore 1d4 STR, 1 use).

Trail: Long grooves in the rough shape of a tree trunk are cut into the ground.

- ♦ Fine spiderwebs block the forest entry, as if no one had walked through in a long while.

2 - AMBER GRAVE

Hazard: *Sap Trap, Ghost Trapped In Crystal*

A rounded copse of vermillion **trees** surround a wide **puddle** of bubbling sap. A pointy green **object** is just visible in the center of the pool.

- ♦ **Trees:** The base of each tree bleeds golden sap that runs into the puddle below. They do not appear to be diseased.

Puddle: 12ft of sticky sap.

- ♦ Ankle-high and extremely sticky. Irritates the skin.

Object: Appears crystalline in nature.

- ♦ Very slippery. Difficult and time-consuming to extract without adequate tools (gloves, a pole, etc.).
- ♦ Trapped inside the crystal is the spirit of a familiar called **Gundersnatch**.
- ♦ If shattered, the shadow of a great bird will rise above the party, then disappear. Any characters with the *deprived* condition will have it resolved.

GUNDERSNATCH

Can communicate telepathically with anyone holding the crystal.

- ♦ Will plead for anyone to destroy the crystal. (A good whack with something hard will do it.)
- ♦ In exchange for his freedom, he will give the party a black feather, telling them that with it they can enter the Anglwyst's Chicken Hut at **4**.

3 - SWEENEY'S CABIN

Shelter: *Hermit's Cabin, Presents a Ready Meal*

Atop a small hill is a wooden **cabin**. Small **logs** are arranged in rows on the West side of the building, and a tall **rack** is installed on the East wall.

Cabin: There is a 3-in-6 chance that Sweeney is here. Otherwise, he is out hunting. A ring of white dust is sprinkled across the doorway.

- ♦
 - ♦ If the dust is disturbed, Sweeney will know and come investigate.

Logs: Arranged in rows of four by four.

- ♦
 - ♦ A stained outline of an animal (bear, rabbit, beaver, etc.) is drawn on each. A drop of white is painted on the rabbit. It looks new.

Rack: Various animal skins are stretched tightly across, drying.

- ♦
 - ♦ Stitched together, the skins are equal to two sets of protective clothing (1 Armor) and are highly resistant to environmental damage.

INSIDE THE CABIN

Very austere, with only a simple **cot** and small dining **table**.

Cot: Speckled with green moss and twigs. Smells faintly of rain.

- ♦
 - ♦ The floor beneath the cot is thick with green moss. If Sweeney places his hands on the moss, it falls away, revealing an underground tunnel to **4**. Only Sweeney can activate this passage.

Table: On the table is a fully prepared meal of roast duck and root vegetables, equal to a full meal for 2.

- ♦
 - ♦ A gift from Anglwyst. If eaten, the meal will reform in d12 hours.

SWEENEY

12 HP, 2 Armor, 13 STR, 15 DEX, 17 WIL, yew bow (d8)

- ♦ A cantankerous, mossy old man. If he is injured, the Wood will protect and even heal him. Each time he dies, he returns more green than before.

Would like to stop the *Withering*, but cannot enter **6** due to his pact with Anglwyst. As a test of their honor and skill, he will ask the party for help expelling the Giant Spiders at **9**.

- ♦ If the party successfully completes their first task, he will give the party a **Pendant of Karnon**, as well as the promise of further riches if they can undo the magic that is ravaging the forest at **6**.

- ♦ If the party is able to disrupt the *Withering*, he will open the secret path to **4**, telling them that they may enter the hut there.

PENDANT OF KARNON

- ♦ A wooden amulet of a bearded, horned man. When in the forest, add a Fatigue to borrow the senses of any nearby creature. *Petty*.

4 - ANGLWYST'S CHICKEN HUT

Shelter: *Hut with Legs, Hunting Is Forbidden*

A cylindrical, chimneyed **hut** covered in thick **foliage** sits at the edge of a small clearing. A wooden **sign** is pressed into the ground at the West entrance. A long spool of **chicken wire** is installed on the North side.

Hut: The front-facing windows are dark, and there is no light or smoke coming from inside.

- ♦ The door has no keyhole and will only open to friends of Anglwyst, Sweeney, or Gundersnatch.
- ♦ If the door is forced open or the hut is threatened, two legs will sprout from underneath and the hut will quickly retreat into the forest.

Foliage: Both the roof and the windows are covered in thick leafy vines.

- ♦ None of the vines touch the ground, as they would be torn were the hut to stand.

Sign: Covered in vines. In red letters it says: "No Hunting Here. Harsh penalties."

- ♦ The witch cast a spell of protection over this place. If an animal is killed here by anyone capable of speech, their killer immediately turns to stone (no save).
- ♦ Nothing dangerous will follow the party into this part of the wood.

Wire: Encircles a small, shriveled garden. A vine-covered stone statue of a young hunter stands in the middle.

- ♦ The shocked-looking hunter (a victim of the clearing's spell) holds a limp rabbit upside-down, a knife held to its throat.

INSIDE THE HUT

Lavishly decorated. A tall wooden **barrel** is set near the North fireplace, a long broom sticking out. A large **stove** is installed on the East wall. A **string** of herbs and root vegetables hang from the ceiling.

Barrel: Joined by thick mortar. Free of dust and empty save for the broom.

- ♦ The barrel can fit up to one person and is capable of flight. Use the broom to "paddle" the air.

Stove: Warm, and large enough to sleep on. A red scarf is tied around one of the iron handles.

- ♦ The scarf given to Anglwyst by Sweeney that is otherwise mundane. Sweeney would love to have it back.

String: Goods of rare and extinct quality. Worth 500gp to the right buyer.

- ♦ A mandrake root hangs from the string. If fed water daily, it will indicate a lie when it hears one. Screams loudly if cut.

5 - TREE AT THE CROSSROADS

Monster: *Grizzly, Guarding*

A long **tree** lays across a small glade at the intersection of two **trails**. A sharp **cliff** to the South offers a steep climb to the bottom.

Tree: Enormous and at least partially hollowed out. Bear prints mark the East entrance.

- ♦ ♦ A Grizzly Bear and her three cubs make this tree their den. They hibernate in the winter, but any other time they are awake. The mother will attack anyone entering the tree (skip the reaction roll).

-
- ♦ **Trails:** Broken leaves and tree rubbings on the trail are clear evidence of the bear's habitation.

Cliff: Metal hoops are pounded into the cliff face.

- ♦ ♦ Installed when the forest was still being logged, but still solid. Perfect for ropes.

GRIZZLY BEAR

6 HP, 15 STR, 13 DEX, 5 WIL, claws (d8+d8)

- ♦ Reddish-brown bears commonly found in mountains, woodlands, and prairies.
- ♦ Prefer to eat fish and meat, and will attack the rare unfortunate who crosses their path.
- ♦ **Critical Damage:** Bite the targeting for an additional d6 STR damage. The target bleeds out very quickly.

6 - GRAY SANCTUARY

Hazard: *Frozen Troll, A Spell Gone Wrong*

A gray forest **sanctuary** stands at the intersection of four trails. In its center, two enormous **statues** appear to be wrestling.

Sanctuary: All nearby plant life is lifeless and dull, as if all color has been bled away.

- ♦ The air shimmers with magic, emanating most strongly above the two statues.
- ♦ ♦ The *Withering* effect is evident even before entering the clearing, as the *Withering* has begun to spread in all directions.
- ♦ Plant matter brought into the clearing will soon begin to petrify, even without direct contact.

Statues: Two wood trolls are fighting over a shiny object held high in the air by the larger of the two.

- ♦ ♦ The object is a **Yore Glass**, a mirror Relic whose magic has disrupted the delicate spell that once made this place a verdant haven for forest life.
- ♦ ♦ The Witch's spell can only be disrupted by removing the mirror from the area or by destroying it completely. It is tightly held by the statue but can be removed by the application of grease, or by breaking the troll's arm.
- ♦ If the spell is broken, the magical effect will end, and the trolls will slowly awaken. They will immediately try to reclaim the mirror.

YORE GLASS

- ◆ Once per day, the holder can replay 5 minutes of their life from the third-person. Long-term use can be addictive.
 - ◆ Suffer *deprivation* if not used regularly.
-
- ◆ **Recharge:** Catch another's reflection in the glass without them knowing.

WOOD TROLL

10 HP, 15 STR, 12 DEX, 7 WIL, bite (d8), club (d10)

- ◆ Large humanoid with elongated arms made of bark or root. They live in forests, sharing a deep connection with the vegetation around them.
-
- ◆ If killed, they will slowly regenerate unless their corpse is taken out of the forest or burned with fire.
-
- ◆ **Critical Damage:** Moss and twigs begin growing out of the target's wounds.

7 - FLOODED ABBEY

Ruins: *Flooded Monastery, Hidden Cache*

Three flooded **buildings** sprout from the center of a small pond, their **conical** roofs peaking out from beneath the waters. On the North side, a dry riverbed runs directly into the pond. The Eastern path is lined with dozens of piled **stones**.

Buildings: Archaic, with subtly beautiful religious iconography. Obviously an abbey.

- ◆
 - ◆ Flooded after the dam at **8** was destroyed.
-

Roofs: The tallest of the three buildings has a glass window high above the water.

- ◆
 - ◆ The window is rusted shut but can be pried or broken open to enter the abbey's Chapter House.
-

Stones: Piled along the Southern side of the Eastern path. Names are engraved on most.

- ◆
 - ◆ The monks left piles of stone alongside the path for each of their fallen members.

CHAPTER HOUSE

Tapestries line the walls of this circular room, its wooden **floor** all but rotted away from water damage. A collapsed bannister on the Southwest side is all that remains of the flooded **stairwell** down into the rest of the building.

Tapestries: Moldy and unsalvageable.

- ♦ ♦ Originally depicted the abbey in its former glory and the monks who lived here.

Floor: One of the wooden boards is less withered than the others. It smells faintly of something floral.

- ♦ ♦ Below the board is a hidden Spellbook, *Yearning Path*.

-
- ♦ **Stairwell:** Completely underwater. The rooms below contain only floating corpses and ruined books.

YEARNING PATH

- ♦ Shows the shortest path to the object of a heart's *true* desire. Smells of lavender. Adds an extra Fatigue if read more than once per day. The process is cumulative.

8 - BLACK MASS

Hazard: *Giant Spider Nest, Injured Creature*

A black **boar** limps noisily near a large **mass** of black thread and trees. Fat, desiccated **carcasses** hang in spun silk from the treetops. A dry **riverbed** to the South is filled with piles of wood.

Boar: Half-wrapped in thick black silk, it mews plaintively.

- ♦ ♦ Poisoned by the spider bite in its hind quarters. If the party comes to its aid, the Wood will remember.

Mass: Threads of thick black silk hold together a 10ft pile of wood.

- ♦ ♦ The nest is home to 3 **Black Silk Spiders**. They will attack anyone that that interacts with their food or gets too close to their nest.
- ♦ ♦ 200gp of black silk can be carefully gathered from the nest. It makes a fine rope (about 60ft) that is also incredibly strong and is sought after for its hydrophobic qualities.

Carcasses: Mostly animal corpses. A human shape is visible through the black webbing.

- ♦ ♦ The human was a hunter who ignored Sweeney's warnings and hunted North of the *Hunter's Track*. On the corpse are Rations (2 uses left), 33gp, and a hip-knife (d6).

Riverbed: Large piles of wood are thrown about. Bits of black silk can be seen tied around the longer pieces.

- ♦ ♦ A former beaver dam that kept the water to a trickle. The spiders brought the dam down to build their nest. The subsequent flooding destroyed the monastery at **7**, but the river only dried up after a drought earlier this year.

BOAR

4 HP, 12 STR, 5 DEX, 6 WIL, tusks (d6+d6)

BLACK SILK SPIDER

4 HP, 4 STR, 13 DEX, 5 WIL, bite (d8)

- ♦ ♦ **Critical Damage:** Poison paralyzes the victim and deals an additional d4 DEX damage. The victim is then dragged to the spider's nest to be eaten.

9 - FISHING HUT [EXIT]

Shelter: *Fishing Hut, Occupied by Army Deserters*

A ramshackle **hut** built beside a small **lake** to the North. **Smoke** streams from a cooking rack on the West side, and loud **voices** echo through the South-facing window.

- ♦ **Hut:** Built from simple logs tied together with rope, which appears fresh. Fishing wire can be seen leading out of the North side and into the lake.

Lake: Placid, but filled with bugs. A path on the West side leads away from the forest.

- ♦ ♦ The lake hasn't been fished for some time and has become overpopulated. Fishing is easy pickings.

-
- ♦ **Smoke:** Spills from a wooden cooking rack adjacent to a pile of fried fish (4 x Rations, 3 uses each).

Voices: Laughing and muffled speech. At least two voices can be heard from inside.

There are three ex-soldiers squatting in this hut. They are pacifists who were forcibly conscripted into military

- ♦ service. They are seeking refuge in the abbey at **7** but haven't made it that far yet. They are jovial and kind-
- ♦ hearted but absolute cowards.

- ♦ They know little about the forest, other than that there used to be a river running South from the lake that ended somewhere near an abbey.

ENCOUNTERS

The full "Forest Encounters" 1d6 table used for wandering encounters is published as structured data – see **forest-**encounters in [forest-seeds-tables.json](#).

SETTING SEEDS

OVERVIEW

The following procedure is designed to help create the *seed* of a setting: the unique topography, natural features, people, and paths that an adventuring party may encounter as they travel throughout a region. We'll start by developing the people that live there, their ambitions and resources, and the factions that affect them. Then we'll generate the terrain of your region, followed by its various points of interest, landmarks, roads, trails, and so on. As with any other rule, if you don't like a table result, roll again or tweak as desired!

Note: the source publishes an illustrative example map image alongside this chapter; as an image asset it is not reproduced here.

THE REALM

A **Realm** is a general term for a related collection of regions, potentially encompassing hundreds of places for the player characters to visit and interact with.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- ♦ A sheet of paper and a notebook. Letter/A4 is OK, but the larger the better. Going forward, we will refer to the sheet of paper as the **map**.
- ♦ Pencils and erasers. Colored pencils if you want to make it pretty or want to indicate terrain with color.
- ♦ At least one d6 and one d20, but 6d6 and 2d20 would be ideal.

THEME

PEOPLE

The most important aspect of a region is its *people*: their character, ambitions, and the resources that tie them to this land. Roll on **culture** and **resources**, then note the results in your notebook.

FACTIONS

A region is typically dominated by one or more factions, each with their own unique **Advantages**, **Agenda**, and **Obstacles**. Each faction should also have one or more representatives, or **Agents**, tasked with helping complete their agenda. Smaller regions with fewer POIs should have 1-2 factions, while larger regions could have as many as 5-6 factions.

Agents are often in charge of completing one or more of the goals of the Agenda of a faction. Particularly large factions may have additional agents, each in charge of a distinct goal. Agents may have personal motivations that differ from the faction's main agenda, a fact that canny PCs can exploit for their own gain.

Advantages

Factions possess advantages that assist them in accomplishing their agenda. Advantages reflect a faction's influence, materials, wealth, and other unique features. Factions leverage their advantages as much as possible when trying to achieve their goals, and at the same time continually work to acquire *more* advantages.

Agendas

Factions will work to complete their agendas independently, enlisting the help of PCs only when that would strengthen their agenda. Agendas are defined by a series of 3-5 goals that build toward a clear objective. Goals are *progressive*, building on the previous successes (or failures) of earlier goals.

Goals should focus on acquiring a distinct advantage in order to proceed to the next goal. At least one goal should deal with the faction's primary obstacle. This may be the first goal, or the last. All agendas have at least one obstacle that stands in the way of their completion. Additional obstacles can arise through faction Actions (see below) or through developments in the fiction.

Completing a faction's agendas should be a significant event, potentially changing the political or natural landscape of a region.

The region map should continually reflect the impact of factions as they work on completing their agendas and acquiring more advantages.

Creating Factions

Roll one or more times on **faction-types**, **faction-traits**, **faction-advantages**, and **faction-agendas**.

Faction Advantages Table

Roll 1d20 to determine the number of advantages the faction has, then roll 1d20 again for each of the corresponding advantages. For example, if a result of "2" was received from the "# of Advantages" column, you would roll on the "Type" column twice, noting each result. Reroll repeated results.

Example Faction

Type

- ♦ **Academics:** *Royal Cartographer's Guild*. Respected and feared, even by the royal family.

Advantages

- ♦ **Apparatus:** *A Map of the Dead*. Legend tells that the map reveals a Gate to the land of the dead.
- ♦ **Renown:** None would dare defy the *Guild* publicly. Their voice carries great weight in the Cities.

Agents

- ♦ Horatia Confi, first of her order. Recovered the *Map of the Dead* for the *Guild*. WIL 15.

Agenda

- ♦ Hire a skilled party to escort Horatia to a location written on the map.
- ♦ Travel through the lands of the dead in search of the *Order's* original founder.
- ♦ Bring the founder back to the Cities. Overthrow the ruler of the Realm.

Obstacle

The *Guild* has been warned that a well-placed operative moves within their ranks.

Faction Rules

- ♦ By default, factions operate independent of the player character's actions. If the PCs do nothing, the faction should still act to achieve their aims.
- ♦ The **Warden** should rely on the fiction to determine whether a faction is positioned to advance their agenda.
- ♦ Some goals may be time-sensitive or depend on explicit circumstances. Other times it might be more appropriate to introduce a new goal after a major event, alliance, or friction between one or more factions, etc.
- ♦ Whenever a faction is positioned to advance a goal in their agenda, roll on **faction-actions**.
- ♦ If two factions are *opposed*, the faction *most at risk* makes a WIL save, using the score of its highest-ranking agent. On a fail, the faction does not roll on the Faction Actions table at this time.

The actions of the PCs can always overrule the necessity for a **faction** action, or in some cases shift the outcome of the roll in a favorable or unfavorable direction.

TOPOGRAPHY

A region's terrain and natural features are an essential part of any map, affecting the local history, resources, settlements, culture, and more.

LANDMARKS

Landmarks are unique, visible POIs that can also be used as geographic reference points: towers, mountains, tall buildings, and so on. They help orient travelers around the map, and are *especially* visible from areas with higher elevation or a clear viewpoint. Landmarks are *represented on the map by a triangle*.

DRAW TERRAIN

- 1 Roll **1d6**, then roll an amount of dice equal to that number on the map. Collect any dice that roll off the page and set them aside.
- 2 Note the face-up result for each die, then use **terrain-die-drop** to mark the terrain type on the map. For example, a die showing a 4 would indicate Tough terrain.
- 3 Draw long, curvy lines across the page, carving up the map around each die.

Roll on the appropriate table for each result (**terrain-easy**, **terrain-tough**, or **terrain-perilous**), writing the terrain and landmark results on the map.
 - ♦ Replace the die with a triangle, writing the landmark result on the map.
- 4
 - ♦ Roll any dice that fell off the map page, repeating the last step until none remain.
 - ♦ If there are any empty spaces in need of terrain, roll a die anywhere you like and use the face-up result as before.

RIVERS, SEAS, AND LAKES

Every region should have some kind of water source. Otherwise, where would the locals get their drinking water or receive news from the rest of the realm?

- ♦ To create waterways, draw a wiggly line from the highest elevation point (e.g. Mountains) to the lowest (e.g. Grassways).
- ♦ If the river runs through terrain that is higher in elevation, it might terminate in a **lake**. If your map has a sea, it might terminate there. Otherwise, the river can continue on off the map page.

WEATHER

The weather can have a great impact on the people, culture, and terrain of a region. It impacts what kinds of clothes the adventurers need to wear, what sorts of tools they'll have to bring, and how tough the journey might be. To determine the average weather of a region, roll on **seasonal-weather** once for each season. Optionally, you may also roll on **unusual-weather** around particular landmarks or terrain.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Points of Interest on a map (or POIs) are generally divided into the following categories:

- ♦ **Heart:** The primary settlement in a region. It isn't necessarily the largest or most important place, but it should always be significant to the region's history and people.
- ♦ **Settlements:** Permanent, largely self-sufficient population centers, typically governed by a political body or faction.
- ♦ **Waypoints:** A safe place to refill supplies, get a good night's sleep, or get directions.
- ♦ **Curiosities:** A wilderness locale of note, somewhere remarkable or strange. It may indeed be hazardous, but only if the PCs interact with it.
- ♦ **Lairs:** An enemy encampment, hive, or source of heightened monster activity.
- ♦ **Dungeons:** An explicitly dangerous locale, dungeon, or adventure site.

DRAW POINTS OF INTEREST

- ♦ Draw the letter **H** close to a water source on the map.
- ♦ Roll 3-8 d6 dice on the map, collecting any dice that roll off the page and setting them aside.
- ♦ Note the face-up result for each die, then use **poi-die-drop** to mark the type of POI on the map. For example, a die showing a 4 would indicate a Lair, denoted by the letter "L" on the page.
- ♦ Roll any dice that fell off the map page, repeating the last step until none remain.
- ♦ Starting with the Heart, number each POI on the map.
- ♦ Roll on the relevant tables for each POI, including the Heart (usually a Waypoint or Settlement). Note the results for each in your notebook.

Some POIs may allow the PCs to see more of the world than what appears on their map.

Roll on **poi-settlements**, **poi-waypoints**, **poi-curiosities**, **poi-lairs**, or **poi-dungeons** as appropriate to the POI type rolled. See the [Dungeon Seeds](#) chapter for how to flesh out each Dungeon POI for your setting.

PATHS

Paths act as geographic connectors on the map, ranging from well-traveled roads and trails to rough wilderness routes. Paths should provide compelling choices between POIs, where factors such as safety, speed, and travel difficulty must be weighed.

PATH TYPES

- ♦ **Standard** paths are obvious or well-trod routes between two POIs. *Represented by a thick line.*
- ♦ **Hidden** paths do not appear on any known maps. Their discovery always requires some kind of cost. *Represented by a dashed line.*
- ♦ **Conditional** paths may be blocked or require specialized tools (boats, climbing gear, etc.) to cross. Others may even be impossible to navigate without a map or guide. *Represented by a crossed line.*

DRAW PATHS

Starting with the Heart, create 1-4 paths between each location.

- ♦ Create loops, branching paths, dead-ends, and shortcuts between POIs.
- ♦ Some paths may be parts of a chain and tied to a particular terrain (mountain passes, rivers, etc.).
- ♦ Some paths are Conditional, represented by a crossed line.
- ♦ Some paths are Hidden, represented by a dashed line.
- ♦ Designate each path using the number of a POI and its connecting point, e.g. 1 ↔ 3. Indicate this in your notebook under the originating POI or in a separate section.
- ♦ Decide whether a path represents a road, a trail, or a wilderness route, and write the results in your notebook.
- ♦ Roll on **path-features** for each path, writing the results in your notebook.

Determine the path distances between POIs, and note the duration on the map:

- ♦ A Watch is 8 hours long. Denote days between POIs wherever possible (typically two Watches and one rest per day of travel).
- ♦ A short distance between POIs takes one Watch to traverse, a medium distance takes two Watches, and a long distance takes three Watches.
- ♦ For Trails, add 1 more Watch, and for Wilderness routes, add 2 additional Watches.

All of the tables referenced above (Culture, Resources, Faction Types/Traits/Advantages/Agendas/Actions, Terrain Die Drop, Terrain: Easy/Tough/Perilous, Seasonal/Unusual Weather, POI Die Drop, POI: Settlements/Waypoints/Curiosities/Lairs/Dungeons, Path Features) are published as structured data – see [setting-seeds-tables.json](#) in the Cairn tables index.

PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ♦ What would draw people to this region? What keeps them here?
- ♦ How do the people here think of outsiders? How do outsiders think of them?
- ♦ What power do the Factions have over the people who live here?
- ♦ Who or what threatens their agendas?
- ♦ How would a faction interact with any newcomers (e.g. an adventuring party)?
- ♦ How does the region's terrain and weather affect the people that live here?

You should now have a sufficient idea about the people and terrain of this region, and your first region is now complete. To expand your realm, repeat the process as many times as you wish.

For example, if my results described a people that were religious and sought conversion, I'd assume they were a proud folk, prone to religious extremes and proselytizing. And if their primary resource was land, yet spices were rare, I'd assume they grew their own food, but due to a religious prohibition their cuisine was often bland.

Presume that for a faction the result was a group of Nomads, with conviction their primary advantage. I could then assume that their elites were a class of religious chiefs. If the faction's agenda was to cultivate a rare resource, but they were hindered by cultural taboos, I might decide that they had hired the party to take on the task instead. Perhaps the object of their quest was a unique plant, only grown in a distant place, and that the mission must remain a secret!

Finally, the party would meet with one of the faction agents: a spy posing as a peddler. Only she could tell them where the plant grew, and how to cultivate it. I keep in mind that this person should likely appear in an important place such as the region's **Heart**.

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- ♦ [Just Use Bears](#)
- ♦ [Pathcrawl](#)
- ♦ [Rationalising Overland Travel Paces](#)
- ♦ [Reinventing the Wilderness](#)
- ♦ [See The Forest For The Trees](#)
- ♦ [Sub-Hex Crawling Mechanics](#)
- ♦ [Time, Gear & Skill: A Different Approach To Skill Checks](#)
- ♦ [Using Landmarks in Wilderness Travel](#)
- ♦ [Why I Use Point Crawls More Than Hex Crawls](#)
- ♦ [Wilderness Paths](#)

WORLDBUILDING

- ♦ [100 Misfortunes on the Road](#)
- ♦ [5-Point Conflict Map](#)
- ♦ [Distant Lands and the Creation Thereof](#)
- ♦ [Factions, Updated](#)
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- ♦ [Writing Failed Careers](#)
- ♦ [Wtf are these goblins doing?](#)

CHARACTER SHEET

A blank character sheet for recording your Cairn character's ability scores, HP, inventory slots, and background. Print this sheet or use the [interactive character generator](#) to create a new character with randomised traits, gear, and spellbooks.

Adventurer

Name

Background

Age

Abilities

STR

DEX

WIL

3-18

3-18

3-18

Hit Protection

Armor

Inventory

Hands

Body

Backpack

Traits

Quirks

Background

Goals

Virtues

Vices

Bonds

Spellbooks

Scars & Notes

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