

# 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*.

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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.

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

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- ♦ 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.”

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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.

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**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**.

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- ♦ **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**).

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**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*.

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- ♦ **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).
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- ♦ **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.

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**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.

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**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.

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- ♦ **Hole:** Tunnel to **8** (30ft).

## WOODTURN

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