

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.

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- ♦ **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.