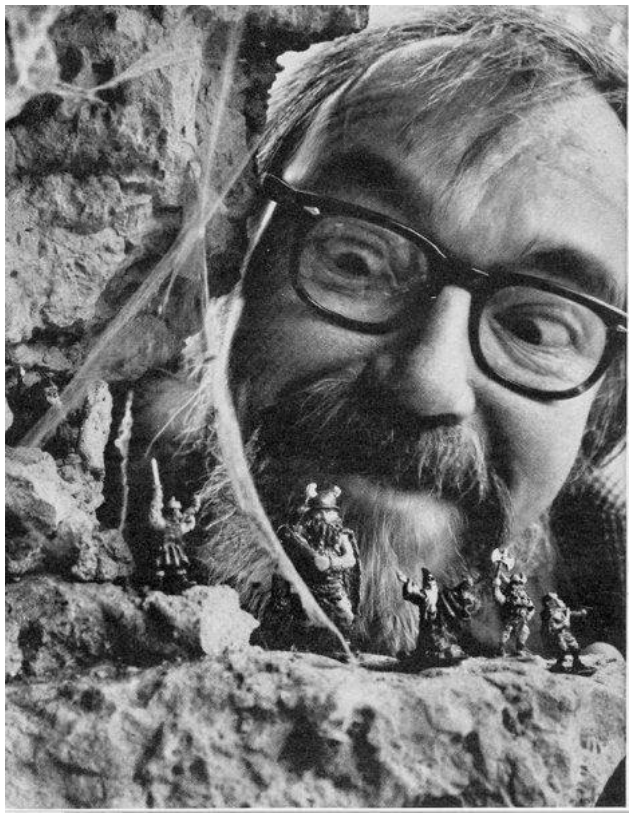


"One more thing: don't spend too much time merely reading. The best part of this work is the play, so play and enjoy!" — EGG, from the preface to Oriental Adventures

The Gygax 75 Challenge

Create a useable RPG campaign setting in five weeks!



Ver 3.2



There is one further subject to be dealt with here, and that is selection of character type. It is pretty obvious that high base scores in the areas of Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Dexterity indicate becoming a Fighter, Magic—User, Cleric or Thief (see the upcoming D&D Supplement "Greyhawk" to be released sometime before the summer of this year). But what about those players who roll just average (or worse) totals? They are the ones who should take advantage of the non—human types, for these have built—in abilities despite the general handicap of being unable to work up as high as humans. If the character is poor anyway, will he ever be worked up very high? Possibly, but the odds are against it as a human, but as an Elf, Dwarf, Hobbit, Half—Elf or even some

Other creature some interesting possibilities exist. It is up to the referee to help his players in this area by pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of each type. What do you do if a player opts to become a Golden Dragon? Agree, of course. Allow the player to adventure only with strictly Lawful players, and normal men—at—arms would never go near even a good dragon. He would be Very Young, size being determined by a die roll. Advancement in ability would be a function of game time (the dragon would normally take about four years to grow to its next level) and accumulated treasure -- let us say that for every 100,000 pieces of gold (or its equivalent) the dragon in effect gains an extra year of growth, counting magical items which go into the horde as fairly high in gold value. While the player will be quite advanced at first, those who are playing more usual roles will surpass him rather quickly, and in this way you'll not find a G.D. dominating.

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those in Howard's "Conan" series or Leiber's city of “Lankhmar”. Strange towers, a thieves quarter, and temples of horrible deities add greater flavor to play. The 'Thieves Guild', a society of evil clerics, a brotherhood of lawful men, and so on bring a bit more interest also. If a few warring nobles from the surrounding territory also send large parties of men into the place occasionally some interesting brawls can occur. Honest and dishonest merchants should be indicated, Taverns which drug patrons should likewise be indicated, and so on. In any event be sure and leave room for additional things and expansion.

Step 5 is, as noted, something that you won't immediately have to worry about; but it is a good idea to have a general plan in mind immediately. The general geography of the 'world' should be sketched out, If you plan to make it possible to visit other worlds, times or places the general outline of all such areas should also be sketched out. For example, you might wish to have the Moon an inhabitable (and, inhabited) place which can be traveled to by means of a Flying Carpet, A description of this lunar world should be located somewhere as well as a means of getting there, but only AFTER you have something solid in the way of maps and the like.

Having accomplished those parts of the five steps which are immediately necessary (probably taking a week or so), you are ready to begin to play.

Let us further assume that there are four prospects. These players should begin together and for a time at least operate as a team if possible. Each in turn rolls three dice to record the various scores for the makeup of the character they are to play and how large an initial bankroll the character begins with.

This accomplished, players decide what class of character they wish to play, the type (human, elf, etc.), and the alignment of the character (the latter can be secretly told the referee, with an announced alignment being false). At this stage each player locates his base in some inn or the like, and then they can set forth to explore the town and purchase their adventuring equipment. Those that are careful and/or lucky might also be able to hire a few men—at—arms to accompany them. The latter is particularly true if players pool their funds. In a short time the first dungeon expedition can be made, but that is the subject of Part III of this series, so we will return to it again later.

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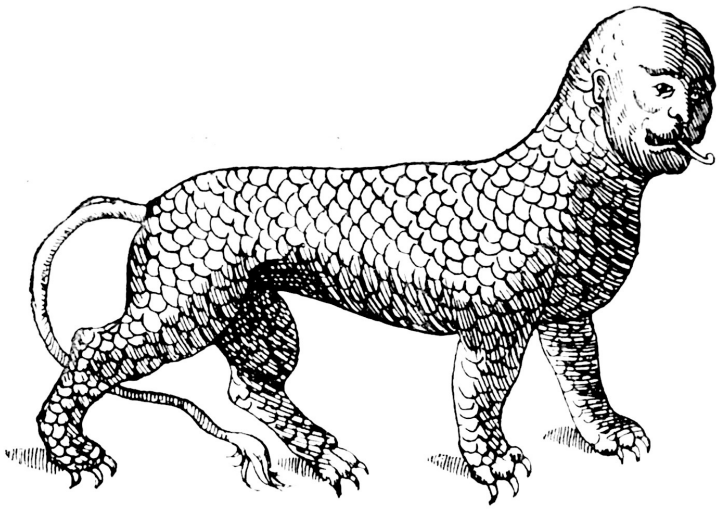
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found where on each level is also most necessary, and it can take as long to prepare as the level itself, for you may wish to include something UNUSUAL (a treasure, monster, and/or trick or trap not shown in D&D) on each level.

(Before the rules for D&D were published 'Old Greyhawk Castle' was 13 levels deep. The first level was a simple maze of rooms and corridors, for none of the participants had ever played such a game before. The second level had two unusual items, a Nixie pool and a fountain of snakes. The third featured a torture chamber and many small cells and prison rooms. The forth was a level of crypts and undead. The fifth was centered around a strange font of black fire and gargoyles. The sixth was a repeating maze with dozens of wild hogs (3 dice) in inconvenient spots, naturally hacked up by appropriate numbers of Wereboars. The seventh was centered around a circular labyrinth and a street of masses of ogres. The eighth through tenth levels were caves and caverns featuring Trolls, giant insects, and a transporter nexus with an evil Wizard (with a number of tough associates) guarding it. The eleventh level was the home of the most powerful wizard in the castle. He had Balrogs as servants. The remainder of the level was populated by Martian White Apes, except the sub-passage system underneath the corridors which was full of poisonous critters with no treasure. Level-twelve was filled with Dragons. The bottom level, number thirteen, contained an inescapable slide which took the players 'clear through to China', from whence they had to return via 'Outdoor Adventure'. It was quite possible to journey downward to the bottom level by an insidious series of slanting passages which began on the second level, but the likelihood of following such a route unknowingly didn't become too great until the seventh or eighth level. Of the dozen or so who played on a fairly regular basis, four made the lowest level and took the trip: Rob Kuntz, now a co-referee in the campaign went alone; and three of his friends managed to trace part of his route and blunder along the rest, so they followed him quickly to the Land of China. Side levels included a barracks with Orcs, Hob-goblins, and Gnolls continually warring with each other, a museum, a huge arena, an underground lake, a Giant's home, and a garden of fungi.

Step 4 should be handled concurrently with designing the first three or four dungeon levels. Here your players will find lodgings, buy equipment, hire mercenaries, seek magical and clerical aid, drink, gamble and wench. The town would do well to resemble some of

Regardless for what setting you opt, keep it secret from your players, or else they can study your sources and become immediately too knowledgable, thus removing the charm of uncertainty. Settings based upon the limits (if one can speak of fantasy limits) can be very interesting in themselves providing the scope of the setting will allow the players relative free-reign to their imaginations.

Typical settings are: Teutonic/Norse Mythology; Medieval European Folklore (including King Arthur, Holger the Dane, and so on); The "Hyborean Age" created by R E Howard; Fritz Leiber's "Nehwon" with Fafhrd and The Grey Mouser; Indian Mythology; and Lost Continents such as Atlantis or Mu. Regardless of the setting you can have it all taking place on an 'alternative earth' or a parallel world. In this way minor variations can easily be explained/justified. When the setting is decided upon some good books dealing with it should always be kept handy. The time has come to begin working on the campaign.

Step 2 requires sitting down with a large piece of hex ruled paper and drawing a large scale map. A map with a scale of 1 hex = 1 mile (or 2 kilometers for those of you who go in for recent faddish modes of measure) (yes, I often use rods, chains, furlongs, and leagues too!) will allow you to use your imagination to devise some interesting terrain and places, and it will be about right for player operations such as exploring, camping, adventuring, and eventually building their strongholds. Even such small things as a witch's hut and side entrances to the dungeon can be shown on the map. The central features of the map must be the major town and the dungeon entrance.

Step 3 involves the decision aspect already mentioned and the actual work of sitting down and drawing dungeon levels. This is very difficult and time consuming.

Each level should have a central theme and some distinguishing feature, i.e. a level with large open areas swarming with goblins, one where the basic pattern of corridors seems to repeat endlessly, one inhabited by nothing but fire-dwelling or fire-using monsters, etc.

As each level is finished the various means of getting to lower levels must be keyed and noted on the appropriate lower levels, so that if a room sinks fours levels it will then be necessary to immediately show it on 4 sheets of graph paper numbered so as to indicate successively lower levels. A careful plan of what monsters and treasures will be

Introduction

How to Set Up Your Dungeons & Dragons Campaign – and Be Stuck Refereeing It Seven Days per Week until the Wee Hours of the Morning!

This rather descriptive and lengthy title appeared at the top of an article written by Gary Gygax for the April 1975 wargaming newsletter, *Europa*. Gary's how-to article suggested a five-step process that is both interesting and practical. I'm not sure it has been improved upon much in the intervening decades of gaming.

Though helpful as advice, Gygax speaks in pretty broad terms. In this workbook I have broken down his advice into creative prompts and achievable tasks that will help you develop a campaign setting over the course of just five weeks.

I have also taken the liberty of reproducing the original article in its entirety in the back of this booklet. A scan of the original is available at the *Internet Archive* (archive.org). The article was advertised as part two of a series. I have been unable to locate part one as of this date. Part three, *First Adventures in Dungeoneering*, contains minimal advice for running a session and a short sample of play. You can read it at gygaxslegendarium.blogspot.com.

Using this workbook, you will:

- Establish a setting concept and pitch
- Develop a basic map for early explorations
- Create a "dungeon" of several levels
- Detail a sizable, nearby town
- Begin the process of expanding your world

You are allowed one week, (no more, no less!) for each step. That may sound a bit overwhelming, but don't overthink it!

Just get started.



Ray Otus
28 March 2020



In the Words of Gary Gygax

Europa, April 1975, pp 18-20

HOW TO SET UP YOUR DUNGEONS & DRAGONS CAMPAIGN - AND BE STUCK REFEREEING IT SEVEN DAYS PER WEEK UNTIL THE WEE HOURS OF THE MORNING!

Part II of a Series by Gary Gygax (USA)

Let us assume that you have shelled out the requisite number of dollars to purchase all of the materials necessary for a D&D campaign - rules, dice, reams of various kinds of paper, pencils, and so forth. Several persons have expressed a desire to play the game, so all you really need now is the games! That's right, folks. The referee of the campaign must structure the game so as to have something to play. He must decide upon these things:

1) The overall setting of the campaign;

2) The countryside of the immediate area;

3) The location of the dungeon where most adventures will take place;

4) The layout and composition of the nearest large town; and

5) Eventually the entire world - and possibly other worlds, times, dimensions, and so forth must be structured, mapped and added.

This might seem to be too large a task, but it isn't really IF you and your players are enjoying the game (and it is odds-on you will!). Furthermore, not all five things need not to be done BEFORE play commences. In fact, most of the fine referees I know of work continually on their campaign, adding, changing, and expanding various parts continually. A thorough discussion of each of the five areas of campaign play is necessary before considering

how to go about involving players in the affair.

Step 1 is something you do in your head. Now fantasy/swords & sorcery games need not have any fixed basis for the assumptions made by its referee (my own doesn't) except those which embrace the whole of fantasy. This sort of campaign can mix any and all of the various bases which will be mentioned below - and then some.

☐ **Seed the map with unusual features:** a valley of hot springs, weathered spires that look like giants, a festering swamp. Treat each place as a character with DNA. D: what is unique about their appearance? N: what is scarce; what do people who live there or visit most need? A: what does the place itself "want" and/or how does it behave? For example: The Blood Marsh is filled with sweet smelling, sticky red flowers. Visitors should bring clean water and bug repellent. The marsh wants to swallow up intruders and occasionally belches forth harmful things of the past.

☐ **Make a list of system tweaks or house rules your setting will require.**

Extra Credit

What comes next? Play, of course. That was the whole point after all. Get it to the table and let your players add to the world. When they speculate or dream, write down the stuff down that you love and make it part of the setting. Forget the stuff that doesn't work! Cross it out; it never happened. Turn your journal into a campaign bible, an artifact that you lovingly craft to share with your players, and maybe with others!

I'd love to hear about your world, and even better I'd love to see some pictures of your journal pages! I'm also interested in your feedback. If you have suggestions, corrections, or improvements pass them along.

If you feel like sharing, contact me at rayotus@gmail.com.

How to Use this Book

So, you want to start your very own campaign.

Perhaps this is your first "world-building" impulse and you don't know where to start, or maybe you have tried to build out a setting before and gotten overwhelmed. This section answers some of the basic questions and fears that may in your way. If you are an old hand at world-building, this section will help set your expectations correctly.

I can't make a whole world in just a few weeks!

That is correct! This is a creative exercise, a way to get a campaign *started.* Hopefully it is just the beginning of something much larger. The results you get from working through the exercises each week will neither be perfect nor complete – *and shouldn't be.* The intent is for you, the GM, to develop the basic ideas and one small area of a new campaign world, then to stay a few paces ahead of the players – building the world out *in the direction of* their interests and needs as they telegraph them to you in play.

What if I fall behind?

No one is standing over you with a headman's axe. At the end of each week, if you aren't finished, simply highlight the tasks you didn't achieve and/or make a quick list of things you still want to do. Then, *move on!* There will be time to revisit the loose ends from earlier weeks after the final week.

I've heard that Ernest Hemingway stopped writing each day in the middle of a sentence – not because he ran out of ideas, but because he knew exactly how he intended to finish that sentence. When he sat back down at his typewriter the following day, there was no agonizing over where or how to begin. No blank page syndrome. He just finished the sentence and kept going.

The loose ends you leave behind will give your project energy and serve as scaffolding or spurs for future construction. Don't think of them as things you didn't get done; think of them as opportunities.

One of the keys to just about any creative effort is to make multiple passes over your material, each time layering on fresh ideas or adding the clarity that comes with hindsight. As you return to these loose ends/opportunities, you will find things coming into focus that were

previously hazy. You may also find that you now have the perfect ideas with which to fill the holes you left behind. You will find that your world becomes richer and richer as you incorporate ideas from actual play events or newly discovered sources of inspiration.

What if I want to work ahead?

Don't. Choose a pace up front. Gygax seems to suggest a fairly tight timeline for doing all the steps – presumably a matter of days. If you have the energy to work in a focused manner for long hours at a time, go ahead and change the time-scale to 5 days instead of 5 weeks.

It's more likely that you are working around the demands of a day job and will need five weeks. Or maybe you just want to spread out the work so that you don't burn out and have time to really explore each step. If you find yourself finishing each step early, then do the "extra credit" assignments or review and tweak the work you've already done to make it better instead of moving to the next week. You might also invent your own exercises. Visit a museum. Take a hike in an area that reminds you of your setting. Do some extra reading to gather inspiration. What you shouldn't do is flex your timeline. A flexible time scale can lead to treating deadlines as optional, which could in turn lead to failure to finish.

What materials will I need?

You will need this booklet and some place to store your ideas. I recommend a tough, physical journal. There is something really satisfying about working in the old school, low-tech mode of physically making marks on paper. Working digitally is also acceptable of course, and is easier in many ways. On the other hand, your workstation will be somewhat less portable and visceral than a journal and a grip full of pens.

Whatever medium you use, allow the process to be messy. Don't try to make your first pass complete, fully organized, or even totally readable. Instead, commit to getting ideas down quickly and then revising them as needed to bring depth and clarity. There will be time later to make your notes presentable, if that's your goal.

What if I want to publish the results?

Get that idea out of your head for now. These exercises help you create a world for play, not for publication. Publishing is beyond the

Week 5: The Larger World

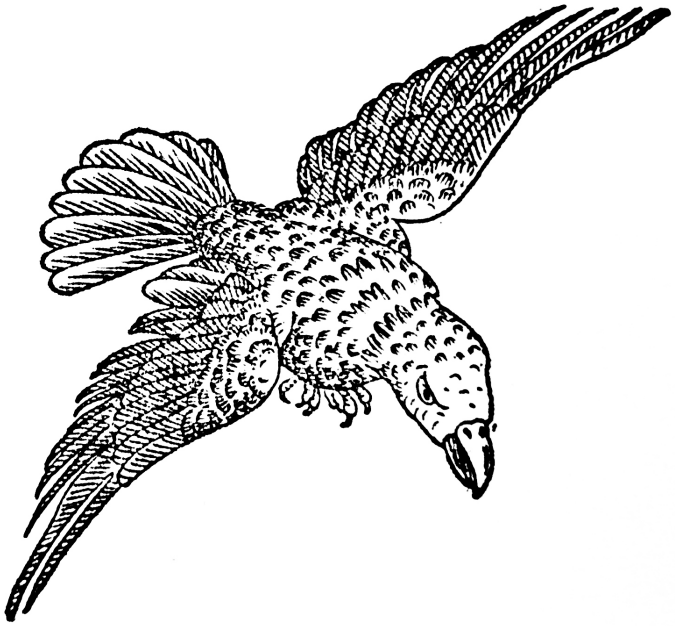
Round out the setting with some meaningful details.

"Step 5 is … something that you won't immediately have to worry about; but it is a good idea to have a general plan in mind immediately. The general geography of the 'world' should be sketched out, If you plan to make it possible to visit other worlds, times or places the general outline of all such areas should also be sketched out. … most of the fine referees I know of work continually on their campaign, adding, changing, and expanding various parts." – EGG

Tasks

You made it! At this point you have everything you need to start play. Week 5 (and beyond) is all about having fun. You can do whatever you like this week to help round out the setting, but try to complete at least three of the following tasks.

- ☐ **Sketch out the geography of the continent**, or even the whole world. At the very least jot down a rough idea of what lies to the North, South, East, and West of the area you have drawn.
- ☐ **Outline other worlds/planes the characters could visit** and identify a few places, items, or spells that will transport them there.
- ☐ **Develop a pantheon of gods and powers.** Steal liberally and avoid the trap of making gods with nicely aligned domains. Poseidon was the god of the sea, but also the god of horses.
- ☐ **Create some higher level non-player characters and villains**, including their DNA.
- ☐ **Create a calendar with festivals and other important dates**.
- ☐ **Generate some events and rumors from other lands** that the characters might hear.
- ☐ **Create more major magical relics of the world and a short history for each**: where they were last seen and who/what owned them.
- ☐ **Make encounter tables for each of the terrains** present in your hex map or the nearby lands.
- ☐ **Develop a rival company of adventurers or mercenaries** who will cross paths with the player characters!



scope of the steps and advice in this booklet. However, the more you invest in this creative stage of the process, the more your material will find its "best form" for being communicated to others. Knowing which elements resonate with players, which things to introduce first or emphasize, and what ideas need further expansion are important steps in the journey towards a published setting. In the end, it's largely your choice when and how you share your work. A better question is probably whether you have the drive to get from a set of campaign notes to a published setting. The "last 10%" of any project is 90% of the work!

The first stop for your creation, however, should absolutely be the gaming table. *Play* in your world for a while before you try to write it up for others to use. Actual play will make your setting far stronger.

Do I need to read the article?

The instructions in this booklet are based on the aforementioned article by Gygax. However, the steps for each week are self-contained and should be clear without any previous knowledge of the article, specifically, or world-building in general. Even so, I would encourage you to read the article. Actually, right now is the perfect time, as it will give you a bird's eye view of the project before you begin.

Does it only work for a fantasy game?

The setting you will create assumes a "dungeon" and a "town" with "wilderness" in between. It also assumes some challenges in the form of "monsters" and rewards in the form of "treasures." Feel free to interpret these concepts any way you like, but the underlying structure supports an adventure game in which characters raid a nearby, leveled and mysterious structure in order to increase their fortune. Aside from that, you can work with any game system or genre. For instance, you might develop a cyberpunk setting in which the dungeon is a tower of valuable data protected by monstrous, anti-virus constructs. Characters begin in their secure, home stack and raid the tower virtually by 'jacking in' or may be digital entities themselves. Feel free to get wild; the structure is more flexible than you might think.

How much do the rules I choose matter?

The system you use matters a lot, actually. You can choose about any set of rules and/or genre, as long as you understand the built-in assumptions referenced above: town, wilderness, and dungeon.

However, once you choose a system, this workbook assumes you are building on top of it. If you are an inveterate tinkerer and are trying to (or forced to) design or redesign system elements as you do the exercises, you are committing to a lot of extra work and you may have trouble finishing within the expected time frame.

If you find yourself in this predicament, I have a suggestion. Ignore the problem for now. Go ahead and build out your campaign setting and assume the things you need are in the system. Need a witch hunter class or a sanity mechanic? Need a rack of alien monsters? Assume the system has it … or will. Just keep a list of system elements you need to create or adapt as you go without actually doing the work for now.

Do I have to do the steps as written?

Of course not. This workbook offers a structure and exercises that will get you started. You can see them as the minimum you need to get going or you can look at the spirit of each thing they accomplish and use entirely different methods. For instance, in week three you build a dungeon. There are probably hundreds of tutorials out there that you could use to create several levels of a dungeon – you don't have to use mine. If you get a dungeon sketched out, no matter how you got there, you have met the challenge in my estimation. Having said that, you are once again making the problem bigger if you don't have a method you are already comfortable with in mind. You are going to be making hundreds of choices over the next few weeks and that is a big cognitive load. Why not trust the process and let it take some of the burden off your shoulders?

- **Selka.** This handsome but heavily-scarred woman has lived a hard life in Addak. She and her husband, who was killed several years ago by bandits, worked hauling iron ore from the Godwalls to Ruk. Her savings are nearly gone, but she is owed a large sum of money by Tarkeen, who is trying to welch on the debt because it was owed to her husband, not her. She needs help in "convincing" Tarkeen to cough up the coin! If she gets help, she might be convinced to return the favor and help her new acquaintances. Ultimately, she would like to start a ranch to the north and enjoy some peace and quiet far from the politics and stench of Addak.
- **Inkash Fadima Targoo.** This well-dressed young gentleman is always on the lookout for a new venture. He believes himself to be a great thinker with a silver tongue. His pride is easily wounded, but instead of shrinking into himself, he becomes quiet and plots a way to get revenge on anyone who impugns him. He will attempt to quickly make friends of any newcomers, taking them by the arm and dragging them into the Harpy's Nest for a drink or treating them to a tasty titbit from the House of Bread. Often, however, he has foolishly forgotten his bag of coin at home. Inkash needs protection. He owes a debt to Tarkeen that he cannot pay and Tarkeen's thugs will soon be paying him a visit. Disappearing would also be an effective, if less desirable tactic for Inkash. Above all, he wants to be a big shot in Addak (or somewhere) and firmly believes he will be someday.
- **Merdoz the Maligned.** This hearty soul and loyal henchmen loves the excitement of raiding the tombs and is a passable trap-finder thief. Trouble is he has the reputation of being bad luck. Three times he has been to the tombs but returned alone, the sole survivor of his party. He attributes his luck to knowing when to run. Others suspect treachery. Merdoz needs to break his bad streak and rescue his reputation. He will work for free, but given the rumors it is unlikely characters will (or should?) trust him. It doesn't help that he constantly licks his lips and talks too fast.

12. **The Temple of the Shepherd.** Though nominally devoted to Dumuzid, there are statues of many gods including his wife Inanna and her older winged sister, Ereshkigal. In fact, there are 12 stone statues, each about 7′ tall. The sculpting is fairly crude and the temple would be entirely unimpressive if it weren't located in such a small town. The priestess Daru and her 5 acolytes care for the building and perform the required rites.

Note that the NPC DNA and extra-credit rumors are woven into the text above.

Hirelings+

Since hireling stats are largely a matter of system, I'll forgo any specifics. But here are some ideas I have for their "DNA." Also some of these aren't exactly hirelings but rather possible patrons. My bad.

- **Saka, Second of Twelve.** A squat, warty human guide with a nose for water. His unusual manner of speech involves repeating the last word of sentences now and then. Now and then. He won't fight unless there's no choice; preferring to use guile to save his skin. He needs gold to support his widowed sister and would like to marry her off so that her fate is no longer his primary worry.
- **Ylla.** An excellent rider and free spirit, Ylla wants *out* of Akkad and will take almost any work that makes that happen. She is a good beast handler and knows a lot about the history and peoples of the area, even though she hasn't traveled much. She has pronounced eye teeth, but make a joke about her "fangs" and you'll regret it.
- **Dar Mokz.** A sallow-faced sorcerer of ill-repute who wants to get into the tombs, but is afraid to do it on his own. He is looking for some beefy adventurers to accompany him. He is greedy for any item of true magic and it is almost certain he will fall under the influence of one supernatural power or another before long. He wants fame and potent magic; what he will do with it if he gets it is anyone's guess. Nothing good.
- **Leskan Dolmar.** Leskan is a promising youth who grew up on one of the king's canal boats — doing repairs, loading freight, and cooking. He yearns for a more exciting life. He will do his share with zest, as long as everyone else takes a turn too. But what he really wants is to be treated as an equal.

Week 1: The Concept

Articulate the big ideas and gather sources.

"Step 1 is something you do in your head. Now, fantasy/swords & sorcery games need not have any fixed basis for the assumptions made by its referee (my own doesn't) except those which embrace the whole of fantasy. This sort of campaign can mix any and all of the various bases which will be mentioned below - and then some. […] Settings based upon limits (if one can speak of fantasy limits) can be very interesting in themselves providing the scope of the setting will allow the players relative free-reign to their imaginations." – EGG

Tasks

☐ **Get/create a notebook.** If you are intimidated by nice journals, get a run-of-the-mill spiral notebook or start by throwing your fancy journal down the stairs a few times and spilling coffee on it to teach it who's boss! Seriously, get something that works for you: fancy or humble, new or used, cheap or pricey, graphed or lined or blank. If you prefer, you can work digitally, of course, keeping a folder of bookmarks, storing docs on a cloud drive, etc.

☐ **Develop your pitch.** Write down 3-7 well-crafted bullet points that will both communicate and "sell" the world to your players. Each bullet should be concise and focused – a few clear sentences is plenty. Emphasize the most essential bits for establishing excitement, expectations, and tone. Your pitch will give players an idea of what they can expect to find (or not find) in your setting and will help them create suitable character concepts.

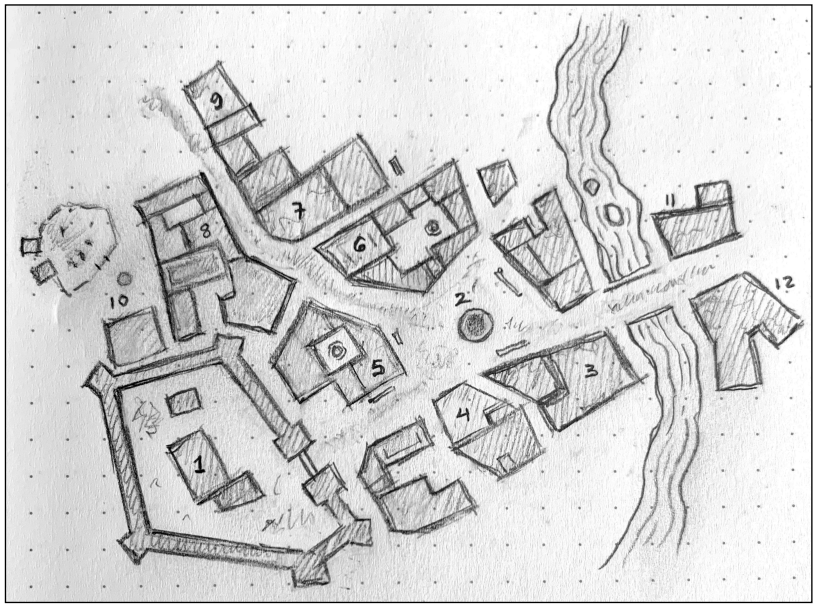
☐ **Gather your sources of inspiration.** List them and provide a sentence or two explaining what each source brings to the setting. Cull your list so that it has no more than 7 entries. (This can be tough, but I think it's important to focus the ideas so you aren't getting dragged in too many directions at first.) Make sure the sources are referenced by your pitch points in some way. Sources are for you; you don't have to share them with players and players shouldn't have to be familiar them. In fact, Gygax would tell you not to share them as they might spoil some of the surprises for players or players might expect you to use parts of them you don't intend to use.

Extra Credit

- ☐ **Assemble a mood board.** You can use an online resource like Pinterest or create an old school collage of images that put you in the right headspace. A mood board is a great resource for quickly introducing the tone of your setting to players, and it can be a 'living document' that you work on over time, possibly together, expanding it as the setting grows. Start with a dozen or two visual references for places, characters, artistic styles, etc. As you work, think about how you decided what fit and what didn't. Make sure the mood board elements support or inform your bullet points.
- ☐ **Practice your pitch!** Try explaining your idea out loud – first to yourself and then to some gamer friends (though maybe not the ones you intend to play with just yet).



9. **Anansa's Herbs.** Anana is an apothecary of mediocre talent. She does her best to supply the town with poultices, healing herbs, and other remedies. She will pay handsomely for certain herbs from the blood swamps around Uskad. Anansa has clearly promised herself to a power. Her eyes have vertical slits for pupils and glow eerily in low light. She is hungry to enter the next circle of power within her cult and is secretly working toward that purpose. Even so, she seems harmless enough and willing to help anyone who asks.
10. **Ningara's Fine Steeds.** Between adventurers riding off to the tombs (quite often failing to return) and the ever-present soldiers, Ningara has a booming trade in axebeaks and the sturdier, if slower, giant riding lizards favored by desert nomads.
11. **Ardon's Curiosities.** Ardon Dotoris is a pale foreigner from Zagash. He wouldn't be tolerated by mistrustful townsfolk if he didn't have such interesting things to sell. Ardon pays top dollar for things robbed from the tombs and employs a number of guards to keep his hoard safe. Some say he has a secret trove hidden in the wilderness. He disappears for a few days every so often and often comes back with new items to sell.



4. **Tarkeen's Dry Goods.** Most of the basic goods that travelers need are available here: leathers, travel rations, blankets, lanterns, ropes, picks, etc. Tarkeen hosts invitation-only, high-stakes games in the warehouse behind the shop. He has a facial twitch that is very distracting and a bit frightening. He always needs more gold because he wants to buy out all the buildings in the square. His offers to the other owners are becoming increasingly "aggressive." Rumor is that Tarkeen is backed by a mysterious cabal from Garon.

5. **The Harpy's Nest.** A popular tavern, and a fairly civil if not especially clean one. It is often visited by soldiers from the fort. The owner, Ganek offers decent food and lodging, but demands high prices from travelers because he can. He will not suffer any rowdiness – unless the soldiers themselves cause it (in which case there isn't much he can do). Ganek is in the pay of King Farzanok and watches Tarak and his soldiers for any seditious activity. He always has a wet rag in his hand, which he uses to incessantly wipe down anything in reach. He is hoping for something to happen worth reporting soon because the spy Farzanook sends weekly for the news is getting suspicious of Ganek himself.

6. **Hunzu, Purveyor of Custom Leathers.** Hunzu's leatherwork is well known. Why he prefers to live in this frontier town instead of in the big city is beyond anyone's guess. Rich merchants from Ruk, Garon, and other cities routinely pass through to buy Hunzu's creations. Hunzu also maintains a small tannery downstream, run by his sister Hartha. Rumor has it that Hunzu's powers come from his association with an avatar of Chaos. Some even claim he has grown a tail that he keeps hidden in the loose pants that he wears.

7. **Gralk's Smithy.** Gralk specializes in the tools of violence. He is quite busy and commissions usually have to wait a week or more unless they come with an extra sack of coins.

8. **Utaru the Builder.** Utaru and his crew (most of them his extended family) are responsible for many of the structures in town. Tarkeen, who was recently robbed, has accused Utaru of aiding the thieves who broke into his warehouse because they used an old chimney that had been blocked up. Tarkeen believes only Utaru could have known about it.

Example

Uzrak, Where Gods Walk

All of the examples in this book will focus on the world of Uzrak, a campaign world I'm making up for the Oe D&D "retro-clone" *Delving Deeper* by Simon J. Bull. You can pick it up in softcover for $4.95 (currently) at LuLu.com or download it for free at ImmersiveInk.com. Having said that, the setting is pretty much rules agnostic.

The Pitch

- Player characters are human. Creatures that are either more or less than human come from interactions between gods and mortals or from a more ancient time. These creatures are feared and mistrusted, even if some have become human (e.g. the centaurs).
- Iron tools are relatively new and are antithetical to magic. Most arms, armor, tools, etc. are made of bronze. Those who practice magic – and creatures infused with magic – react badly to contact with iron (blisters and burns or worse). Wearing it interferes with magic powers. Iron weapons are +1 to hit and damage vs. magical creatures, but cannot be enchanted. Characters who do not practice magic may utilize magic items, but risk backlash if they also wear or carry much iron.
- There are only two classes: mages and fighters. Characters may dual-class, but even one level of mage means gaining the weakness to iron. Mages are playing with powers not meant for use by human mortals. At first most mages tap lesser powers for their sorcery, but to gain *real* power many mages devote themselves to, or are simply enslaved by a patron deity. (Cleric spells are open to mages.)
- Powers of Chaos and Law war over the fate of humanity. Humans are seen as a threat because of their proliferation, innovations, and innate self-reliance. The gods struggle to subvert, recruit, or destroy humans, treating them like pawns in some complicated and deadly game. Alignment matters!

Sources of Inspiration

- **Book covers by Jack Gaughan**. Used to inspire characters, creatures, races, and general weirdness/style. Also the use of bright colors, badges of office, etc. will be important for showing allegiances. My mood board.
- **A *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* by Michael Roaf**. Early iron age Mesopotamia is where I'm primarily going to get my technology, architecture, and mythology. Pretty much any picture-heavy book on the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Akkadians, etc. would work. For other cultures, I'll look to ancient India and Egypt, with incidental Norse stuff. However, the setting is *not* historical. File off serial numbers!
- ***A List of Mesopotamian Dieties* from Wikipedia** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Mesopotamian_deities). Why make it hard on myself? This rabbit hole provides more gods and myths than I could read in a lifetime, especially when following the links into the pantheons of nearby cultures.
- ***The Pastel City* by M. John Harrison.** I like how this book treats the landscape as character. The world is steeped in an almost-fecund kind of decay, and is littered with the holdovers of an earlier civilization. This review captures the mood. See also C. A. Smith's ***Zothique***.
- ***Necroscope III: The Source* by Brian Lumley.** The vampire lords, their creatures of shaped flesh, and their eyries are ripped off from this series. They get developed even more in *Deadspawn*.
- ***The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, by Louis Rhead, narrated by Charlton Grifin.** I wanted an audiobook in my list of inspirations to accumulate ideas while walking the dog or driving to work.
- ***Dungeon Crawl Classics* by Joseph Goodman.** I'm pulling ideas about chaotic winds of magic, magical taint, and patron deities from here.

Example

The Town of Addak

Addak is a frontier town of roughly 600 people, located between Ruk and the Godswall – where a number of tombs have recently been discovered. Most of the low, mud brick and stacked stone buildings were erected in the last ten years. A small fort anchors the southwest corner of town with 12′ high walls of dressed stone. The soldiers within are the only form of law for miles around and they mostly ignore anything outside the fort's walls. A council of merchants and their thugs have struck a delicate balance that holds when times are prosperous and folds when things get desperate. The town's primary commerce is outfitting adventurers headed for the tombs, buying the things they bring back, and helping them spend their newfound coin.

1. **The Fort and Barracks.** The soldiers within the fort follow Zuul, a general of Ruk. Zuul is forced to house the bulk of his troops in locations scattered well outside the city, due to the king's fears of being overthrown. Tarak, captain of the Addak guard, ultimately controls the town. He lets most things go but will take swift and decisive action if there is a riot, fire, or other threat to the town itself. Tarak is extremely bow-legged and wears a perpetual scowl. He desperately needs new recruits and eventually hopes to chase the centaurs out of the area. Tarak's soldiers know of his obsession with the centaurs and whisper that he has Gralk, the smith, working on a secret weapon.
2. **The "Square."** This roughly rectangular patch of dirt, surrounding a large, common well, is unremarkable but busy. If something goes down in the town it often starts, or ends up here. News travels fast in the square and agitators sometimes use it to declaim. The town Doomsayer, Kezrik, has one milky eye and works himself into a lather trying to convince everyone that the end of the world will happen on the 13th new moon.
3. **The Drowned Dog & Varna's House of Bread.** This ramshackle structure serves terrible but cheap ale. Varna who owns the building has a bakery to one side that more than offsets the ale's sour taste. She wears a headscarf to cover her thinning hair and loves secrets, but is terrible at keeping them. She has heard that a colony of harpies to the east have captured a princess of Zagash.

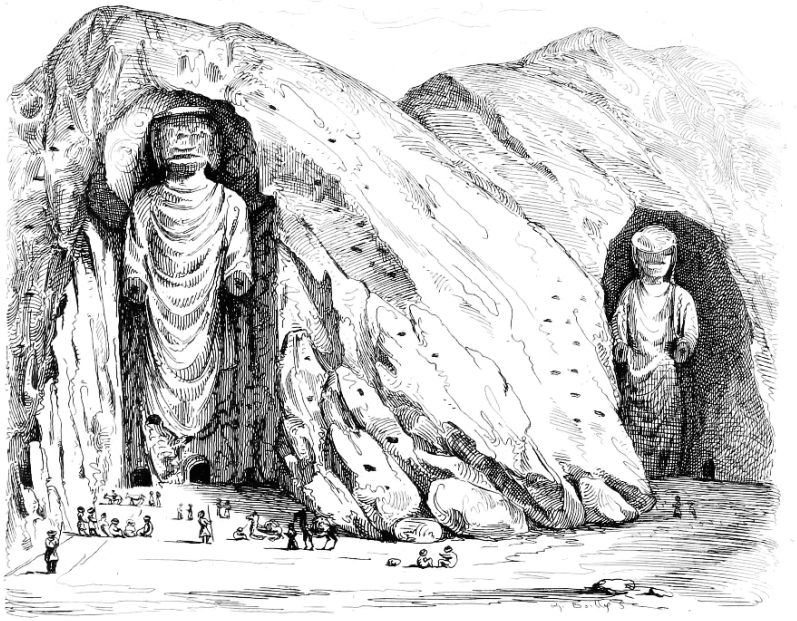
☐ **Create at least 5 NPCs, each with a "DNA."** D is for a Distinguishing trait of feature. N is for what they Need most. A is their Agenda, secret or otherwise; what do they hope to do in the following days, weeks, months, or even years? (Alternately, A could stand for an Asset they have that the players need.)

Extra Credit

☐ **Create 4-5 hirelings or specialists.** These are characters the players might recruit, or NPCs that might try to recruit the characters.

☐ **Generate 7-9 rumors that are going around the town.** The majority of them should be unrelated - at least on the surface. Some should be absolute rubbish.

☐ **Describe stuff!** Take the time to write a few sentences about each structure.



Week 2: Surrounding Area

Map the land around the dungeon and town.

Gygax suggests "sitting down with a large piece of hex ruled paper and drawing a large scale map. A map with a scale of 1 hex = 1 mile … will be about right for player operations such as exploring, camping, adventuring, and eventually building their strongholds. Even such small things as a witch's hut and side entrances to the dungeon can be shown on the map. The central features of the map must be the major town and the dungeon entrance." – EGG

Tasks

☐ **Get a sheet of hex paper.** Draw the following items on it. Name anything worthy of a name. If you don't feel comfortable drawing, lots of hex-mapping programs are available! I'm fond of Hex Kit by Negative Cone of Energy.

☐ **One large settlement** (define large however you like)

☐ **Two other settlements** (camps, larger or smaller towns, a keep, the home base of a fantasy race, etc.)

☐ **One major terrain feature** (covering at least three hexes)

☐ **One mysterious site** for exploration

☐ **One dungeon entrance** – at least!

☐ **Key your map.** The easiest way to do this is probably to number the hex rows and letter the columns. This will give you coordinates to reference. Note down the names of places and terrain types using these coordinates or write them directly on the map.

Regarding Scale

If your hex paper contained 23x14 hexes, a scale of 1 mile to 1 hex would represent an area equal to 322 mi^2 – about half the size of greater London. A 1:6 scale would represent 12,432 mi^2, roughly a third the size of Ireland. You may be tempted to 'go big' but the goal is to define one area in which characters can adventure. You don't need to map the whole world. Scales any larger than 6 miles per hex should be dismissed out of hand. There will be time to draw a larger scale map in week 5. A lot can be done with just a few hexes!

Extra Credit

- ☐ **Pimp your map.** Stain it with coffee, burn the edges a little, or add some color. This will make your map feel like a real document and/or give it some *presence* at the table.
- ☐ **Create a random encounters table.** Make a 2d6 table (11 slots numbered 2-12). Put the least dangerous/most common encounters in the middle of the table and the rarest ones at the top and bottom of the list. Consider making a few of the encounters interesting NPCs. I also suggest including adventure hooks, like "2d4 goblins looting the corpse of a dead noble" instead of just writing "2d4 goblins."

Example

Timuria Hex Map

After drawing this sketch of Timuria, a region of Uzrak, I realized it had a weird scale. I started with the cities and a 1 mile per hex scale in my head. As I drew the wilderness, I unintentionally shifted scale and was thinking in 3 or even 6 mile hexes. The result is a map has a kind of primitive cartographic scale, where more important things are larger. This is how mistakes become cool features!



Week 4: Town Features

Detail the town where characters will retire to heal and carouse.

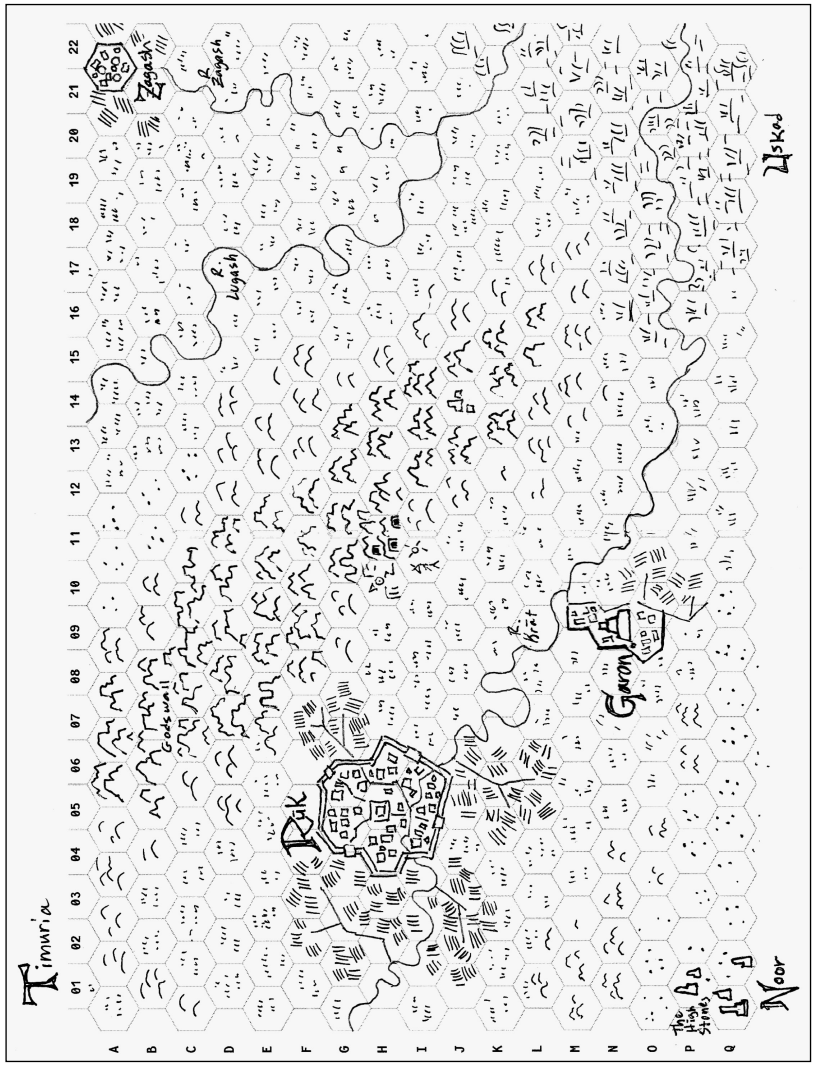
"Here your players will find lodgings, buy equipment, hire mercenaries, seek magical and clerical aid, drink, gamble and wench. [...] Strange towers, a thieves quarter, and temples of horrible deities add greater flavor to play. The 'Thieves Guild', a society of evil clerics, a brotherhood of lawful men, and so on bring a bit more interest also. If a few warring nobles from the surrounding territory also send large parties of men into the place occasionally some interesting brawls can occur. Honest and dishonest merchants should be indicated, Taverns which drug patrons should likewise be indicated, and so on. In any event be sure and leave room for additional things and expansion." – EGG

Tasks

- ☐ **Find or sketch out a city map.** There's not a lot of points to be had for originality here. Finding an old city map or town generator online and pasting a copy of it into your journal is a smart play. You will certainly make it your own in the next few steps anyway.
- ☐ **Look at the equipment lists for your game.** Name several shops were various kinds of items can be bought: a smith for arms and armor, a stable for mounts, etc. You may want to find a fantasy name generator or list at this point. When in doubt name a place after a location's owner, e.g. "Tarn's Leather Goods."
- ☐ **Locate/describe at least five of the following in a short sentence:**
  - ○ A political faction and its rival
  - ○ A place where the characters could lose all their money
  - ○ A place where people gather to hear news or speak their minds
  - ○ A secretive guild hall and its reputation
  - ○ A great place to obtain a hot meal and clean bed (or a crappy meal and a flea-infested pallet)
  - ○ A religious center and the god(s) to which it is devoted
  - ○ A feature unique to this town (view of a natural wonder, a strange clock, a healing spring, etc.)

end of the tunnels lies a clutch of forgotten* eggs that have gone cold and will seemingly never hatch.

The final room is the Theater of Minds. Its arched walls are riddled with countless niches, each holding a strange skull. Each skull, if examined, will prove to have a unique pattern of strange whirls on its inner surface that calls to mind the odd rugose patterns on the red gems. Indeed with a bit of testing and through the process of elimination, characters may be able to find a match or two. (If not, characters might discover a few of the red gems still inside their skulls in the highest niches.) A pedestal in the middle of the room will activate the theater if a gem (inside its matching skull) is placed on it. The pedestal will cause the gem to project scenes (through the skull's eyes) taken from the creature's memories. The visions relate the snake folk's long-forgotten* way of life. The visions may include hazy and fleeting glimpses of ancient mysteries, fabulous treasures, important historical events, and/or strange inventions the world has lost. Trapped halls lead to the final resting place of three very important sister-queens. Their intact skulls/gems will certainly prove illuminating, if the characters can safely bring them out. The hall traps are large blocks of stone that will fall and probably crush anyone breaking the seal of these sacred resting places. The albino cobra belonged to one of the queens; it was her familiar. She granted it long life through sorcery and if her ancient mind is awakened, she will call it to her. First, she will direct it to attack the tomb robbers. Then, she will try to transfer her consciousness into her beautiful pet.



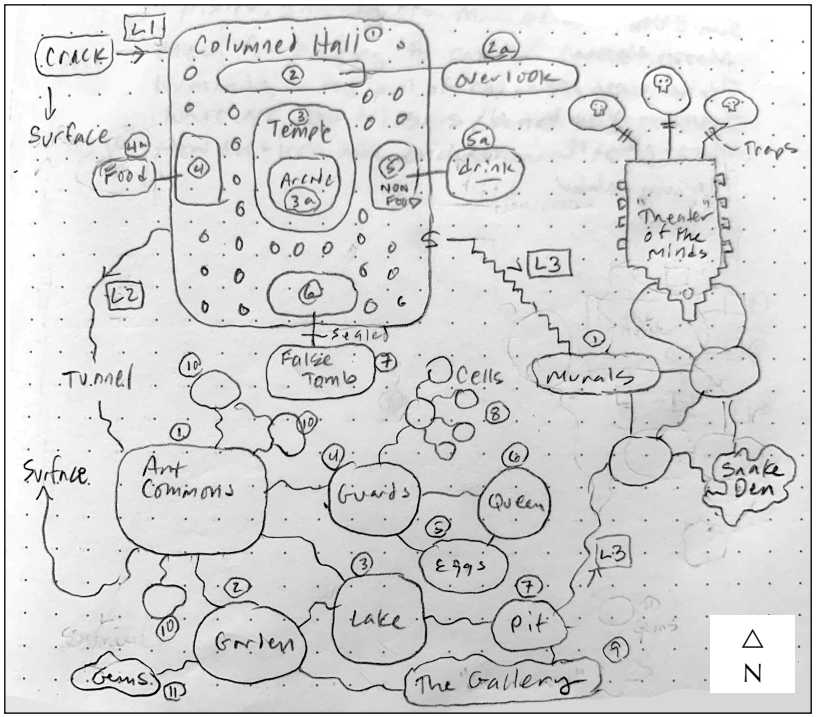
Random Encounter Table

2d6	Creature	Hook
2	Sphynx, Avatar of Order	The avatar challenges parties with logic (in riddle form) and pounces on those who cannot answer; assuming their minds are tainted by Chaos.
3	Manticore	A rabid manticore has lost its sanity. It roams the plains slaughtering anything it encounters out of spite.
4	Centaurs	A herd of d6+1 centaurs are hunting a fugitive: a human who defaced their tribe's totem pillar.
5	Patrol	A patrol of d6+2 guards from a nearby city stop and question you about a one-eyed man in crimson armor.
6	Caravan	A line of d6 wagons, each with a driver, 2 guards, and d3 occupants trundles across the plain. They are desperate to find a water source.
7	Bandits	2d6 thugs riding axebeaks give chase in hopes you have iron weapons or tools to steal. They will settle for your coin.
8	Flesh-eaters	A filthy band of d6+4 flesh-eaters approaches, wanting to trade curious relics they found in Godswall caves. They hungrily eye any sick or weak.
9	Chaos Knight	A chaos knight (covered in spiky armor) is looking to impress their god and challenges the strongest representative of law among the party to single combat.
10	Serpent Folk	A "slither" of serpent men (d6+1), moving under cover of darkness, are carrying a coded message to a cultist in Garon.
11	Harpies	A "murder" of harpies (d3 + party size) attack the camp in two waves, feinting to draw off guards then stealing any shiny objects they can get their claws on!
12	Vampire Lord	A vampire riding a flying horror of warped flesh spots you. What are the chances it will come back in the night or when you are weak?

shifts in the endless twilight created by ubiquitous glowing red fungus.* The fungus smells tasty, but the ants seem to ignore it. Unusual sights on this level include a beautiful garden of mushrooms*, an underground lake of black water, a small cave filled with red gems the size of figs, and a seemingly bottomless pit. The black jelly that lives in the pit seems to relish the red mold, chewing large swaths through it and leaving behind exposed trails of slightly slimy rock. (These streaks should become more evident to characters as they approach the pit.) The quiet surface of the lake belies the presence of the giant catfish below. It is always hungry and will react quickly to any disturbance, hoping a big ant has fallen in. One in every dozen or two ants is a mutant. They have been exposed to the red gems too long and are being "awakened." The gems (in actuality shriveled brains of a bizarre, long-dead race) were brought up from level 3 and hoarded by the ants. The long hall near the bottom of the map is where the mutant ants hang out. They are individualistic, lazy, and pretty-much stoned most of the time. Ants generally experience through smell, but these ants are painting on the wall with smeared fungus,* making odd clicking "music," and generally having a good time. They can be dangerously clumsy in their goofy state however, and violence occasionally erupts between them and the colony's disgruntled warriors who don't want to lose any more citizens to this unexpected madness. A tunnel 20' below the surface of the pit leads to level 3.

- **Level 3.** This level is more than a tomb, it is an archive of knowledge. Each "door" has no handle, is sealed with a waxy substance, and must be forced open. The first, rather large room is a hall of murals that depicts the life of an ancient race of serpentine humanoids. They must have lived along a fertile river. The murals oddly affect the characters' senses, seeming to emit the subtle whirring noises of insects, a puff of warm breeze, or even the smell of brackish river water. Each character experiences something different. The effect is a form of soporific confusion.* Off of the main gallery are several rooms filled with artifacts from the daily life of the snake folk. The walls of these rooms have been tunneled through in places, seemingly sometime after they were sealed. The tunnels are rough and about 3' in diameter. If a character were to crawl into them they would find immense cast off snake skins and/or encounter a giant, albino cobra. In the cobra's rough nest at the

room. In the center of the hall is an open-sided temple. Around the top of the hall is a second story overlook with rooms at the cardinal points: south is a false tomb, north is a guard station, and the east/west rooms were used for storage. The east one has been taken over by the giant ants from level 2 and is being used to store food, primarily. The empty windows of these upper rooms make characters feel watched.* The hall stalker, a statue of a blindfolded* giant with an elephant head, will lumber toward interlopers so long as the smaller many-eyed* statue at the center of the temple can



"see" them. The stalker is deadly and nearly impossible to kill, but very slow. When not in motion it is deadly quiet; characters coming out of buildings may get a surprise. Occasionally a one-eyed* mutant ant comes up from below and staggers around drunkenly.

- **Level 2.** The many rough-hewn chambers of this level serve as a home to the colony of giant ants. They are busy 24/7, working in

Week 3: The Dungeon

Draw and stock three levels of your dungeon.

"Step 3 [...] is very difficult and time consuming. Each level should have a central theme and some distinguishing feature, i.e. a level with large open areas swarming with goblins, one where the basic pattern of corridors seems to repeat endlessly, one inhabited by nothing but fire-dwelling or fire-using monsters, etc. As each level is finished the various means of getting to lower levels must be keyed and noted on the appropriate lower levels [...] A careful plan of what monsters and treasures will be found where on each level is also most necessary, and it can take as long to prepare as the level itself." – EGG

Tasks

- ☐ **Describe the entrance to the dungeon in 7-10 words.** You can tell a lot about a place by looking at its doors.
- ☐ **Create a point-to-point map.** This is a simple map with circles (rooms, caves, etc.) that are connected to each other by lines (passages, tunnels, halls, stairs, slides...). Don't worry about visuals just yet, this map will help you create a good flow for the dungeon. You can add scale and detail later.
- ☐ **You will draw three levels. For each level, include at least d6+6 rooms/areas and connect them.** Make sure they aren't connected like a string of pearls (all in a line). At least half the rooms should have more than one way in/out. Add more rooms if you need 'em!
- ☐ **Include several (say d3+1) ways up and/or down per level.** These exits may double-count, e.g. a stairs down on level 1 is also the stairs up on level 2 and/or level 3. Remember that it doesn't have to be stairs: you can use slides, shafts, elevators, rivers, etc.
- ☐ **Come up with 1 theme per level.** Try rolling d3+2 for each theme to generate a sort of budget. This will help you remember to reinforce the themes multiple times each level. (Unlike a real budget, it's okay to over-spend!) Example themes: tomb raiders, spiders, machines, fountains and pools, or fungi. As you stock the dungeon you will spend your budget to incorporate references to your themes via ornamentation, creatures, sensory details, etc. It is okay for a theme to "spill over" into the level above or below.

☐ **Make a list of about a dozen iconic monsters and place them in rooms/areas.** You can put them in rooms or passages, and on any level. Generally, the more dangerous the creature the lower it will be found. If any of the monsters help sell one of your themes, remember to reduce the budget accordingly. Your monsters could also be arranged in a 2d6 wandering monster table. Put the ones most likely to roam around in the middle of the table.

☐ **Spread d6 major features throughout the dungeon.** Features should be interactive: traps, puzzles, talking doors, magic fountains… If any of them reinforce a theme, reduce its budget. These are features that are unique or notable. Fill in around these features with general "dungeon dressing" as needed. If you roll a small number, make each feature really impactful!

☐ **For each room/area, note any treasure.** Roll a d6 for each are. If it contains a creature or feature, there is treasure on a 1-4. Otherwise, there is treasure only on a 1. If you have random treasure tables, you can go ahead and roll up each of these piles of treasure now to save time later.

☐ **Name three wondrous items and locate them in the dungeon.** Pull them from your source material or make them up. Again, if they reinforce a theme, you can reduce that theme's budget. These are probably in addition to any magic items that get rolled up as part of placed treasure, unless you rolled some really good ones.

☐ **Spend any remaining theme budget adding detail.** Note unusual smells, weird lighting, odd stonework, statues or other decorative elements, disturbing noises, messages written on the wall, corpses of previous adventurers…

Extra Credit

☐ **Map out all three levels on graph paper.** Gygax would say this is an imperative, but in "theater of the mind" style games it may not be necessary. The old school scale for maps is 1:10′ (ten foot squares), which will allow you to fit a lot more dungeon on a page, but you can go 1:5′ if you like or if you plan on running a more tactical game. If you don't map it out on graph paper, make some notes on your bubbles and lines about ceiling height, lengths of corridors, sizes and shapes of rooms, etc. Enough for a good description.

Example

The Lost Temple of the Ancients

- Entrance**:** A fissure in a massive boulder emits a fetid breeze.
- Rooms (exits) by level: 9 (4), 12 (2), 8 (2).
- Themes (budget): Eyes (4), Fungus (5), Forgotten (3).
- Monsters: harpies guard the entrance. A living statue stalks the first level. The second level is a colony of giant ants. Some have been mutated and have a single all-too-human eye in their foreheads. A specter inhabits the false tomb. Carnivorous gnats (stirges) infest the fungus garden. A massive catfish lives in the lake. Foot-long scorpions hide in cracks and under detritus. A black jelly makes its nest in the ants' pit. A massive albino cobra lives in the third level, hunting giant hissing cockroaches.
- 4 Features: a winged statue in the temple at the center of level 1 triggers/directs the stalker. Copious red fungus on level 2 smells delicious and tastes even better; too bad it makes your sweat attract stirges. A confusion spell on level 3 makes interlopers forget why they came and how to get out. A "theater" on level 3 that can be made to display the knowledge of the ancients.
- 3 Wondrous Items: a hooked scepter of snake commanding is in the false tomb. A magic mirror/portal rests in a cave beneath the surface of the lake. Red memory gems are hoarded by the ants.

The Dungeon Map

The image below is my in-progress dungeon map. I decided to leave some blanks in level 3 to react to things characters do in earlier sessions. (That's what I told myself after not getting all my tasks for the week finished.) The following are rough notes for each level. They should give you an idea of the general layout and feel of the dungeon. Asterisks indicate when theme budgets are being spent, i.e. "mushroom garden*" means I spent 1 point on the Fungus theme.

- **Level 1.** This hypostyle hall is carved from living rock. A crack in the northwest corner leads up to the surface. A secret, one-way door in the east wall opens onto a narrow stair leading down to level 3. Giant ants have tunneled up from level 2 near the west