ANATOMY OF A

Island

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There's treasure on every island—if you know where to look. Use the following tables to generate a rich and memorable island for your PCs to discover.

Initial Challenge

Most islands make even landing a challenge. Choose or roll a d20 on the following table to generate the initial threat that would-be-explorers face on arrival.

1. Aggressive merfolk, grindylow, or other intelligent creatures of the deep
2. Dangerous reefs, complete with dozens of shipwrecks
3. Gigantic sharks that rend both flesh and wood
4. Harsh winds blowing newcomers away from shore
5. Impassible cliffs on every side
6. Perpetual fog that obscures landing sites
7. Rolling waves and crashing surf
8. Swarms of sea birds that attack anybody who gets too close

9-15. The primary threat of the island emerges to defend its home

16-20. No initial challenge

Threat

No island is harmless. Choose or roll a d20 and a d6 to determine the threats on the island (roll multiple times for multiple threats).

1. **Aberration**
   1. Abominable invasion force of creatures from beyond the stars
   2. Corrupting presence which mutates otherwise harmless animals
   3. Home island of mimics, who hide everywhere in plain sight
   4. Ragged portal to an eldritch land
   5. Rust monsters who have fed on the natural ore deposits and are now multiplying beyond control
   6. Will-o-wisp breeding ground

2. **Animal**
   1. Piranha infested rivers and ponds
   2. Every tree and meadow is laden with monkeys and apes
   3. A fearsome wolf pack, dominated by a pseudo-intelligent alpha wolf
   4. Island of lions, tigers, and (apparently) house cats
   5. Land of the dinosaurs
   6. Venomous vipers and constrictor snakes hide in every crevice

3. **Construct**
   1. Abandoned research facility where the experiments roam free
   2. Animated ship gone horribly awry
   3. Guardians of ancient ruins
   4. Haven for runaway construct slaves
   5. Massive colossus built to guard a mysterious technological treasure
   6. Secret factory for a nearby empire, pumping out war machine prototypes

4. **Dragon**
   1. A classic draconic lair set deep within the island
   2. A dragon king ruling over indigenous people
   3. A dragon recovering from near-fatal wounds
   4. Island of the drakes; a brutal, savage place
   5. A recently orphaned brood, confused and looking for food
   6. Sea serpents and other animalistic dragons roam the seas and sky

5. **Fey**
   1. Confused and lost fey of immense power but dull intellect
   2. A Corrupted fey who torments the native creatures

3. A fey hunting ground on the mortal plane

4. An island prison of a mad fey

5. A pixie paradise, complete with an entire civilization of these creatures

6. A portal to the fey lands, heavily used by smugglers

6. **Magical Beast**

   1. Basilisk mating grounds with hundreds of human statues

   2. A blink dog tribe wary of outsiders

   3. Giant animals of all types roaming the land

   4. A wild hippogriff colony just waiting to be harnessed

   5. Manticore dens, dripping with poison

   6. A phoenix nearing his next rebirth

7. **Monstrous Humanoid**

   1. A coven of hags inflicting woe upon the world

   2. A deep one cult seeking to summon an eldritch abomination

   3. Gargoyles in high cliffs or ruins

   4. A scorpionfolk tribe with a taste for flesh

   5. A religious, proselytizing serpentfolk tribe

   6. A troglodyte tribe with no interest in outsiders

8. **Ooze**

   1. A massive, sedentary ooze which grows the more it eats

   2. Ruins overwhelmed by acid scars and green oozes

   3. A sentient ooze seeking flesh

   4. A sentient ooze seeking passage to the outside world

   5. A swarm of tiny flying oozes

   6. Thousands of constantly replicating tiny black oozes

9. **Outsider** (roll once on each table)

   1. Creature?

      1. An agent of Chaos (from a chaotic plane)

      2. An agent of Evil (such as a demon or other evil outsider)

      3. An agent of Good (such as an angel or other good outsider)

      4. An agent of Order (from a lawful plane)

      5. Genie

      6. Rakshasa

   2. Doing What?

      1. Carrying out a mission

      2. Exiled

      3. Here intentionally and comfortably

      4. Insane

      5. Stranded or Lost

      6. Wounded

10. **Plant**

    1. Dull but aggressive mushroom people

    2. Fields of blood-draining grasses

    3. An island of leshys

    4. Sentient, flesh-hungry vines

    5. Shambling mounds of various sizes and shapes

    6. A vegepygmy colony, spawned from a single shipwrecked crate of russet mold

11. **Undead**

    1. A entire colony turned into zombies by prevailing negative energy

    2. A Frankenstein-like monster seeking freedom from the world of man

    3. Pirate ghosts—or maybe ghost pirates?

    4. A lich raising an army

    5. A trapped vampire seeking escape

    6. Wraiths that only come out at night

12. Vermin

1. Giant vermin of all types
2. Hordes of rats
3. Mosquitoes spreading disease and draining a body dry
4. Spiders dangling from every tree and crawling over every surface
5. Thousands of wasp nests, harmless until disturbed
6. Venomous caterpillars spinning silk

13. Weather

1. Almost unbearable heat during the day and freezing temperatures at night
2. A dense, slightly acidic fog
3. Frequent hail the size of a human head
4. Immense tsunamis every morning and evening
5. A never-ending thunderstorm with erratic lightning strikes
6. A powerful, predominant wind at all times

14. Ruins

1. A corrupting, evil artifact that spreads its malevolence
2. A plague dormant in hundreds of rotting corpses
3. An imprisoned god whispering the key to his release
4. Dozens of deadly traps to protect the land
5. A ruined fortress so decayed that it's dangerous to move from room to room
6. Structures which threaten to topple with the slightest breeze

15.– 20. Humanoid (roll once on each table)

1. Creature
   - 1-2. Dwarves
   - 3-4. Elves
   - 5-6. Gnomes
   - 7. Half-Elves
   - 8. Half-Orcs
   - 9-10. Halflings
   - 11-14. Humans
   - 15. Centaur
   - 16. Merfolk
   - 17. Goblins
   - 18. Orcs
   - 19. Kobolds
   - 20. Lizardfolk
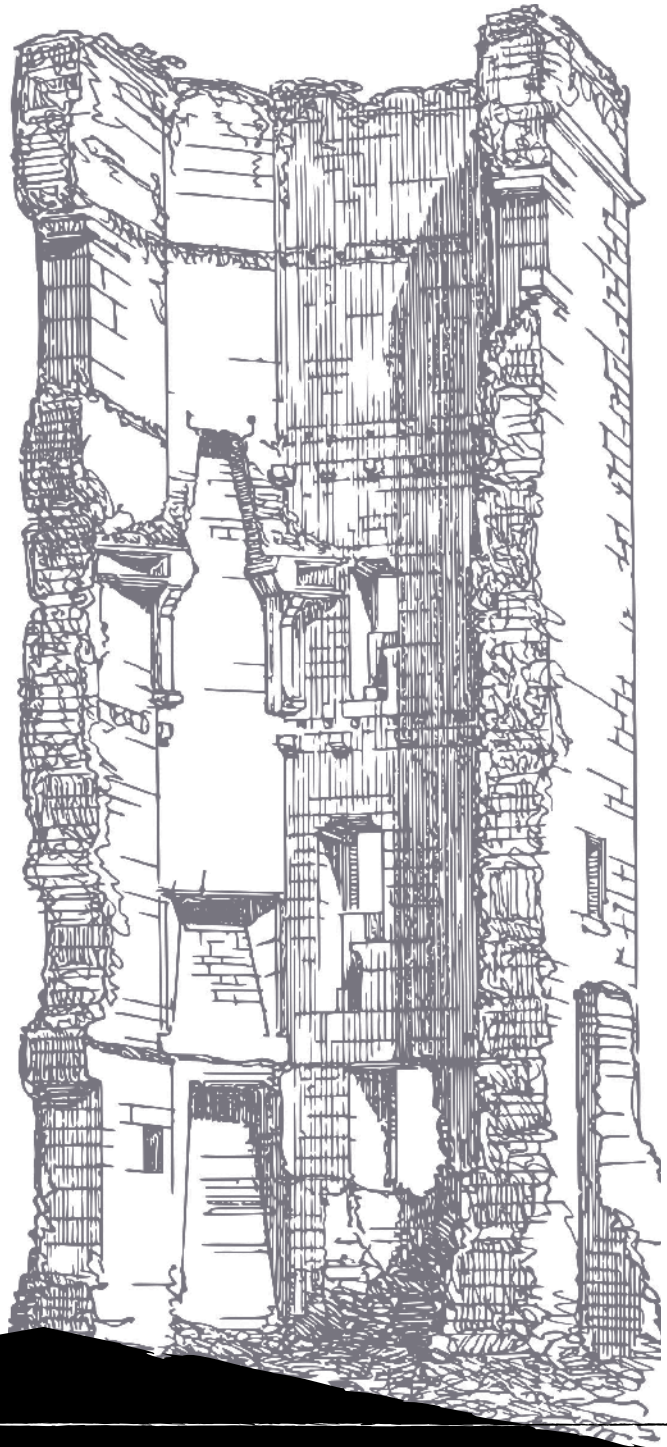
2. Doing What
   1. An aggressive native tribe
   2. Cultists summoning a terrible god
   3. New colony of a predominant empire
   4. Peaceful native tribe confused by the presence of outsiders
   5. Pirate lair, filled with rapscallions eager for gold
   6. A wizard doing research who doesn't want to be disturbed
   7. A retired adventurer and a powerful ally if they can be impressed
   8. Runaway slaves looking for a new home
   9. A shipwrecked crew desperate to escape
   10. A solitary madman, eager to meet the newly arrived

Treasure

Choose or roll a d20 one or more times on the following table to determine the treasures on the island.

1. Ancient gold coins from an unknown civilization
2. A benevolent sage or oracle
3. Blueprints or arcane secrets
4. A buried chest of pirate gold, with an indication of its rightful owner
5. Fertile soil, promising mine, or other resource probably useless to adventurers but highly valuable to colonists
6. The gratitude of a wealthy or powerful patron (possibly after rescuing them from the threat)
7. Ley line confluence, enchanted forge, or other enhanced crafting area
8. A magic weapon or armor with a rich backstory
9. Map or clue leading to a massive cache on a nearby island
10. A powerful artifact
11. Single immense diamond

12. Small store of magical items
13. Store of coins
14. Store of gold and silver bars
15. Store of magic scrolls or wands
16. Store of pearls and opals
17. Store of rubies and emeralds
18. A unique tome or sculpture valuable to historians or collectors
19. Valuable monster parts
20. Vital, plot-relevant clues

Choose or roll a d20 once on the following table for each treasure to determine its location.

1. Atop the mountain's highest peak
2. Buried where only a map or prior knowledge can be of any help to locate it
3. Sealed inside a ruined temple
4. Shipwrecked above or below water
5. Inside the deepest cave or lake in the island
6–10. Scattered inside some ancient ruins
11–20. Within the lair or stronghold of the island's primary threat

Terrain

To generate the topography of your island, take 6d6. For more mountainous or volcanic regions, replace some number of dice with d12s or d20s. Next (gently) roll the dice on a flat surface (preferable one you can write on).

The physical distribution of the dice as they fell contours the topography of the island. The number on the dice represent that section's relative height above sea level. Sketch around the dice to draw the outline of the island, marking the numbers as you go.

Next, choose or roll a d20 on the following table to determine the biome. Choose or roll at least once, though you may do it multiple times to break the island into more sections.

1-2. Jagged rocks or lava flow

3-4. Sand, gravel, tundra or desert

5-6. Swamp

7-8. Grassy

9-12. Lightly forested or savannah

13-16. Forested

17-19. Densely forested or jungle

20. Mushroom forest

Notable Location

Regardless of all other factors on an island, a few locations define it. One or more threats may reside in or around this location. Choose or roll a d20 at least once on the following table to generate a notable location.

1. An abandoned lighthouse

2. An active volcano that spews ash and lava

3. Ancient city ruins, now completely covered by nature

4. A dwelling carved on a cliff

5. A dangerous, maze-like reef

6. A fast-flowing, muddy river

7. Geysers which burst scalding water

8. A golden beach which sparkles with pyrite

9. A huge cinder cone which gives off smoke

10. An incredible waterfall glittering with light

11. Limestone caverns

12. A black sand beach teeming with tide pools and blowholes

13. A massive carving of a forgotten god

14. A natural grove of unknown fruit

15. A perpetual rainbow over the island's highest point

16. A ruined fortress, devastated by some attack long ago

17. A sacred druidic circle

18. Square boulders and columns of rock that dot the landscape

19. An underground tunnel that sprawls the length of the island

20. A strange ship shipwrecked