Old School Hacks Vol.1:

Hexcrawling

Wilderness Exploration & Random Encounters

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Credits

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Introduction: How to Use Hexcrawling

This guide is built with two purposes in mind:

1. To expand **Wilderness Travel** (DMG 106-112) with a framework for freeform exploration and "open world" campaign design, as opposed to PCs always having a known destination in mind.
2. To develop more versatile rules, guidelines, and styles of **Random Encounter checks** (DMG 86) to make freeform, exploration-based travel require less prep for the Dungeon Master, and not necessarily rely on already developed campaign storylines and set encounters.

Within the context of this guide, that's what "hexcrawling" is: freeform exploration of a campaign map. For the players, this is the ultimate open-world RPG experience: if the characters have the means to travel to a spot on the map, then off they go! For the DM, this is a unique style of running a game – and either building a world or using an already-built campaign setting – that requires a little bit of up-front work, but in many ways can pretty much "run itself" as the characters come upon premade adventure sites, deal with random encounters, and interact with a campaign world that is almost certainly a mystery to them and the players themselves.
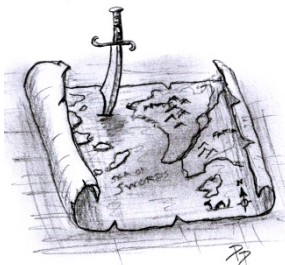
There are three sections to this guide, and they can be take on their own, or used as part of a larger whole to create a unique campaign experience that harkens back to many of the original campaigns run by the very creators of Dungeons & Dragons!

1. The Hexcrawl

This section of the book provides a step-by-step procedure for helping Dungeon Masters in building a hexcrawl style campaign, and revises the Wilderness Travel and Getting Lost sections of the Dungeon Master's Guide to make the exploration itself more versatile. What this means is that getting lost is much more problematic – though not necessarily more frequent – and encounters are triggered quite a bit more often, though that doesn't directly translate to danger, as encounters can be friendly, mysterious, and…well, it can cover anything, not just combat.

2. Random Encounters

The second section of Hexcrawling covers several theories behind the science of building random encounter tables, and why they are so important in a hexcrawl campaign. Then, it dives into the art of random encounter table design, showing how to change the odds of encounters, and develop a specific "feel" or tone to the various encounters in such a table.

3. Example Hexcrawl

Now that you have the tools to build and run a hexcrawl campaign, why not see an example that's ready to be put to the test? This section covers the gnomish town of Hardbuckler, located uncomfortably close to the Forest of Wyrms and Serpent Hills in the southeastern portion of the Sword Coast. The town is lightly described, giving players a home base from which to strike out from and explore the surrounding regions, which are quite wild and untamed by the standards of more metropolitan areas of the Sword Coast, like Baldur's Gate, Waterdeep, and Neverwinter.

4. Hexcrawls In Play

The final portion of this guide tackles hexcrawl campaigns and how they run at the table, mostly from the players' perspective. Character and player motivations, as well as the old school player roles of Caller, Mapper, Quartermaster, and so on all get discussed at length, giving players the chance to seize the initiative and really give an open world hexcrawl campaign some real juice!

Chapter 1: The Hexcrawl

A hexcrawl campaign is different in many ways to a typical D&D campaign because at the highest level, it concerns itself primarily with the players having the utmost freedom of agency to explore an area that is largely made up of unknown territory. While there may be local and regional guides, small-scale maps of or leading to specific sites, and perhaps some large-scale maps that might be purchased or recovered at some point, the larger part of the campaign will feature the player characters wandering around the wilderness in order to map it and determine what sites exist within the larger region. The conceit here is that the players don't know what to expect, and aren't beholden to some overarching storyline that leads them from one place to the next. The story is in the discovery.

Campaign Fundamentals

To properly run a hexcrawl campaign, a DM needs to have a few tools on hand, and needs to be ready to be flexible in their use to make sure their efforts are not wasted.
1. The campaign map, divided into encounter regions.
2. Fixed adventuring sites.
3. Random encounter tables.

The Campaign Map

Not just the DM's copy of the campaign map, but also some form of map for the players, which could be as simple as a blank piece of hex paper. The DM should have the map keyed as early as possible, even if many adventure sites or even entire regions aren't detailed yet: player characters can only travel so far, so it's not hard to determine the limits of their capabilities and plan only for what you need.

Players should either start with a blank sheet of hex paper or an untagged map (perhaps even a partial map). Consider the different map scales from the Dungeon Master's Guide and only provide the players what they need to get started. This may mean that the players are mapping at Province scale (1 mile hexes) while the DM maintains everything at Kingdom scale (6 mile hexes). Depending on your level of prep, DMs can start with multiple scales, or only the same scale that the players will be working with; it all depends on how much time you have to devote to preparation.

Encounter Regions

The campaign map needs to be split into thematic regions, so that you can easily narrow your focus when preparing the sites, encounters, and hazards that will appear within them. The random encounter tables will be organized by encounter region; thus the name.

Encounter regions work best at Province or Kingdom scale; the bigger the scale, the more encounters you need to have on the random encounter tables or else you risk repeating encounters over and over again. Regions should also be determined by how much time you foresee the players spending in them. If you have a large urban center that is going to be the focus of a lot of politicking, resupplying, and downtime activities, there may be a small encounter region immediately around that site. Barren and remote areas may be quite large and yet have (relatively speaking) less encounters, showing that the "population density" of potential encounters is less.

Adventuring Sites

Fixed locations that the player characters can explore are known as sites, and they often fall under the labels of settlement, ruins, wilderness location, or dungeon. These are the places that you can build using the random tables in the Dungeon Master's Guide or you can rip straight out of an existing published adventure. Of course, you can also just build it whole-cloth. However you go about it, fixed sites work best when they are the focus of rumors and lots of connections to NPCs, treasures, and encounters elsewhere: they are fixed in location, after all, so it behooves you to use these spots as a goal that the party is trying to find during their explorations.

Encounter Tables

These are specifically the random tables that present the player characters with challenges that can crop up throughout a given encounter region. They don't just have to be monsters. Some options for filling up encounter tables include:
- ❖ Monsters
- ❖ Non-combatant NPCs
- ❖ Weather
- ❖ Environmental hazards

- ❖ Mysterious circumstances like a noise or effect with no apparent source
- ❖ Sites of mystery or lore

The section on building random encounter tables gives a lot more ideas, but so long as you know you'll need them so your players have something to do when they aren't at a fixed adventuring site, and they correspond to encounter regions so you know when to employ them, that's what matters.

Hexcrawl Procedure

Aside from the big picture question of "what is a hexcrawl to your group?" the fact is that hexcrawling requires a procedure, a step-by-step sequence of determining the direction and speed of the characters' travels and whether or not they are successful in getting to wherever they are going, even if it's just "Due South" or something as easy as that. Assuming your prep work has given you the fundamentals listed above, it eventually comes down to the players setting out on their first foray. Here's how to handle that, and all subsequent travels.

The procedure is basically this:
1. Choose direction.
2. Choose pace.
3. Navigation check.
4. Results.
5. Random encounters.

Step 1: Choose Direction

The destination of the party needs to be determined, and is often self-evident based on the events of the campaign. It can be:
- ❖ Follow the tree line, river, or some other feature.
- ❖ Head due West (or some other direction).
- ❖ Locate the hidden shrine (i.e. fixed location adventuring site) in the southern part of the Dagger Hills.

Regardless, this gives you a direction that the party is headed on your hex map. Piece of cake.

Step 2: Choose Pace

The adventuring rules in D&D cover three paces: slow, normal, and fast. Between the Player's Handbook and the Dungeon Master's Guide, as well as the scale of your hex map, it shouldn't be hard to determine about how many hexes the party will travel through in a given day at any of these paces. The party chooses their pace at the start of

the day (after their breakfast, morning exercise, and whatnot), and that is assumed to be their pace throughout the day.

Step 3: Navigation Check

In order to understand how and when a party gets lost, let's start with how they can avoid getting lost:
- ❖ If the party is following a road or path, they will not get lost.
- ❖ If the party follows a guide native to — or intimately familiar with — the region, they will not get lost. A player character can be a guide, if their origins (or perhaps their Background) dictate.

There are exceptions to these rules, such as magical effects or obscuring weather, but those situations can easily be arbitrated: if the circumstances of the terrain, inclement weather, or magical effects obscure a path or render the guide ineffective, the party has a chance of becoming lost.

At this point, the party makes the navigation roll: it's rolled by the party member who is designated as the Navigator. The details of this roll — and pertinent sources of modifiers and Advantage — are described in the Dungeon Master's Guide p. 111-12.

Variant: Alternative Navigation Checks

You can replace the navigation check with an Intelligence (Nature) check at the same Difficulty Class. Alternatively, you might require a map, research at a notable library or guild house, or some other source of information as a prerequisite before allowing a character to use this skill.

Variant: Navigation Group Checks

You can mix-and-match the skills used for navigation checks per the Alternative Navigation Checks optional rule, and handle them as a Group Check. Characters performing other tasks during travel — mapping, foraging — cannot make a navigation roll, however, and thus will not partake in such a Group Check.

Step 4: Results

If the party succeeds on the navigation roll, they head in their intended direction, traveling a number of hexes dictated by their pace. If the party fails the navigation roll, there is a chance they will become lost.

Consult Table 1: Wilderness Encounter and Lost Chance by Terrain table for the Lost Chance by terrain type of the

hex and roll 1d6. Remember, you are rolling at the start of the day, so this would be the predominant terrain type of the hex the characters start the day in.

If this roll dictates that the characters are not lost, then they travel as intended.

If the result is that the party is lost, roll on the Lost Direction column associated with the terrain type to determine which direction they travel for the remainder of the day.

> *Example*: The party fails their navigation check while traveling through the forest. The DM rolls a 6 on 1d6, meaning they are now lost (lost chance for a forest is 5+). The DM now rolls on Table 2.3: Any Direction for Lost Direction, as directed for the Forest terrain type. She rolls an 8, resulting in 120-degrees right of their intended direction. That's nearly going back where they came from in the first place!

Getting Lost

It may appear odd that a failed navigation check is followed by a second roll to see if the party gets lost. This additional check is in place for several reasons. A typical campaign is often not focused on a "hexcrawl" style of play, and the ruling in the Dungeon Master's Guide that the party spends 1d6 hours to get back on course is sufficient for handling most instances, but in a hexcrawl, exploration is necessarily a bigger focus of the game. In a campaign where wilderness exploration is a major component – perhaps equating to multiple navigation rolls each session – it is extremely punishing for the players to have to deal with a long cycle of navigation rolls simply to get back on track. Furthermore, it is assumed that the player characters have enough wilderness skill to be able to pick up on subtle changes in the environment that should help with navigation (tracking the movement of the sun, moon, stars or other celestial bodies, or determining direction by the way certain plants grow).

A DM may rule that in instances where a specific destination is in mind, or a specific terrain feature is followed, a failed navigation roll (but where the Lost Chance does not determine that the party is in fact lost) simply delays the party 1d6 hours.

Alternatively, the DM can use this as an opportunity to make an additional check for a random encounter, rolling

for the appropriate time of day. Simply keep in mind the general interest level of the players at the time, and make a determination that best suits the pace of the game.

Lost Direction. Use the noted table by terrain type – 2.1, 2.2, or 2.3 – to determine the direction the party travels off-course. It uses 60-degree intervals to represent the faces of a hex.

Finding Your Way Again

Assuming the party has become lost and traveled a day in the direction rolled on the Lost Direction table, there's usually some opportunity for them to realize their mistake and correct course. Landmarks, encounters, interactions at settlements, or something as simple as the next day's navigation roll can inform the party that they are no longer headed in their intended destination. This simulates any number of in-world clues: the position of the sun or stars, natural occurrences like moss growing on the sides of rocks or trees, the flow of water, wind direction, the movements of animals, and so on.

If there are no obvious clues that the party is lost through the course of the adventure — interactions with NPCs or monsters, stumbling across obvious landmarks in a particular hex, etc. — then simply repeat Steps 1 through 4 each day. The Lost Direction becomes the "intended" direction for the day, pace is set as normal, and then the navigation roll is made.

If the navigation roll is successful at any point after a party becomes lost, they realize that they are indeed traveling in the wrong direction. Spending 1d6 hours allows them to automatically correct course and realize which way their original intended direction is (but not necessarily how far they've gone in the wrong direction!). If for some reason they cannot spend this time correcting

course, roll for Lost Chance again, using whatever hex terrain makes the most sense when they figure out they are off course; this means they could start heading in the correct direction by accident, or, if they become lost again, they may veer even more wildly off.

If the navigation rolls continue to fail and no encounter- or interaction-related events occur that clue the party in on the fact that they are lost, keep rolling for Lost Chance and Lost Direction as normal. This represents that they might simply stay on the same (incorrect) course of travel, or they might continue wandering in different directions.

If the party should ever travel through the same hex more than once while lost, this should serve as a clue that they are indeed lost, at the DM's discretion. There are times when the terrain is so consistent and uninteresting that the party may not realize their predicament, but this can be especially punishing in most campaigns, and should not be considered lightly by the DM.

At all times remember that an endless series of checks can rapidly become anything but interesting. Theoretically, there should be enough random encounter rolls and fixed adventure sites that this isn't a realistic problem: at some point, the player characters should stumble upon something! But if you haven't added many fixed settlements or your random encounter tables are a bit too sparse, noting the players are bored should be enough for you to course-correct the pace of the adventure, even if the PCs remain lost. This is precisely what random encounter tables are for, and there are plenty of tables in the Dungeon Master's Guide designed to spur ideas for off-the-cuff NPC interactions or monster encounters that might lead the players back to their original intended direction, or at the very least, the point from which they first set out on their journey.

Step 5: Random Encounters

Consult the Wilderness Encounter and Lost Chance by Terrain table (below) after rolling 1d6 for daytime encounters and 1d6 for nighttime encounters. An encounter occurs if they die comes up with the noted number (or higher, thus the + sign).

A set of modifiers is noted in the Encounter Chance Modifiers table, though these can (and should) be altered by the DM based on their campaign world.

If an encounter occurs at either or both times of day, roll on the corresponding random encounter table that you've built (or stolen from a published module) based on where the party is and have it occur at an interesting time of day or night.

Wilderness encounters necessarily leave a lot up to the DM: they are supposed to feel random, after all. A daytime encounter could happen before the party even finishes rolling up their campsite or at any point before the sun sets. There may not even be sunlight, if the weather is bad!

So long as the encounters occur at an interesting time and do what they are designed to do (as explained in the Dungeon Master's Guide p. 85), that's what truly matters. Encounter Chance Modifiers

Table 3 offers suggested modifiers for the Day and Night columns of the table above, essentially based on relative "encounter density." DMs can alter these to create a unique feel for their campaign setting. These do not take into account the disposition or type of encounters, so they should be generic enough to apply to any encounter region, though they could also vary by region, or perhaps based on how specific events occur that might drastically change population levels (mercenary armies marching through a region, the ravages of war depopulating an area, monster attacks on the rise, etc.).

> *Example*: The DM checks for encounters while the party is traveling through the White Sands Desert. He rolls a 5 for daytime and a 2 for nighttime. This means that an encounter occurs during the day (encounter chance is 5+), but not at night (encounter chance is 3+). If, however, they are in a Wild area (+1 modifier) at night, then they would face a random encounter because that would bump the roll up from 2 to 3.

Explore some options for modifying Table 3 to suit your campaign needs. If you run a long-form campaign set in the same general area (such as a single regional map), this is a great table to modify based on the circumstances of the campaign, allowing you to make use of larger encounter tables more or less often depending on how successful the party is at clearing out areas, or based on how evil organizations might encourage or bolster monstrous forces in a region if the party fails to stop them.

Table 1: Wilderness Lost Chance and Encounter Chance by Terrain

Terrain	Navigation DC	Lost Chance d6	Lost Direction	Daytime Encounters d6	Nighttime Encounters d6
Arctic	10	3+	Table 2.2	4+	4+
Coastal	5	6+	Table 2.3	3+	5+
Desert	10	3+	Table 2.1	5+	3+
Forest	15	5+	Table 2.3	3+	5+
Grassland	5	6+	Table 2.1	6+	6+
Hill	10	5+	Table 2.1	3+	5+
Mountain	15	5+	Table 2.2	2+	4+
Swamp	15	4+	Table 2.3	2+	4+
Underdark	15 20 (non-natives)	4+	Table 2.3	3+	4+
Underwater	15	6+	Table 2.3	3+	5+

Reading the Table

Terrain. This is the predominant terrain type of the hex that the characters are currently located in.

Some variations or special situations may call for some additional considerations:
- ❖ Flying over terrain might use the Coastal entry, but increase the Encounter Chance by 1 for both day and night (4+ and 6+, respectively).
- ❖ Jungles might use the Forest entry, but change the Lost Chance to 4+ and change the Nighttime Encounters chance to 4+.

Navigation DC. This is the DC for the navigation check, as explained in the Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG 111-112).

Lost Chance. If the party fails their navigation check, the DM rolls 1d6 to determine if the party actually becomes lost. They are lost if the die comes up with the noted number or higher (hence the + notation).

Lost Direction. If the party is indeed lost in the wilderness, this entry notes which table to roll on to determine which direction they veered off from their intended route.

Encounter Chance. The DM rolls 1d6 for both day and night to determine if there are random encounters. On the noted number (or higher, thus the + notation), a roll on the appropriate Random Encounter Table is triggered. This takes the place of most modules simply providing a unique frequency of encounters, such as "roll for encounters every hour of exploration, with a maximum of 3 encounters in a single 24-hour period." This is intentional, as it removes the need for populating encounter tables with entries for "No encounter."

Table 2.1: 60-degrees Left/Right

1d6	Description
1-3	The party has veered to the left of their intended direction by 60-degrees (1 hex face).
4-6	The party has veered to the right of their intended direction by 60-degrees (1 hex face).

Table 2.2: 120-degrees Left/Right

1d4	Description
1	The party has veered to the left of their intended direction by 60-degrees (1 hex face).
2	The party has veered to the right of their intended direction by 60-degrees (1 hex face).
3	The party has veered to the left of their intended direction by 120-degrees (2 hex faces).
4	The party has veered to the right of their intended direction by 120-degrees (2 hex faces).

Table 2.3: Any Direction

1d10	Description
1	The party has completely turned around; they have veered 180-degrees (3 hex faces) from their intended direction.
2-3	The party has veered to the left of their intended direction by 60-degrees (1 hex face).
4-5	The party has veered to the left of their intended direction by 120-degrees (2 hex faces).
6-7	The party has veered to the right of their intended direction by 60-degrees (1 hex face).
8-9	The party has veered to the right of their intended direction by 120-degrees (2 hex faces).
10	The party has veered only slightly off-course; add an additional 1d6 hours of travel time, but otherwise consider the party to be on-course.

Table 3: Typical Encounter Chance Modifiers

Modifier	Encounter Density
+1	*Urban*. The area surrounding a city is usually heavily patrolled, includes lots of foot and caravan traffic, and features a lot of interaction-based encounters instead of monster encounters.
-1	*Civilized*. Civilized lands include small villages, towns, farmsteads, and other areas that may be sparsely populated, but are generally fairly safe.
0	*Wilderness*. This is the typical "default" state for areas removed from cities and towns.
+1	*Wild*. This designation specifically means that the area is bereft of patrols and peacekeepers, and includes dangerous monsters or environmental hazards in abundance, or that are often active.
+1*	*Dark Lands*. These areas are tainted by evil and darkness beyond the natural world, and might be present near the lairs of powerful evil dragons, liches, necromancers, fanatic cults, or terrifying aberrations.

*On an Encounter Check of 6+ in Dark Lands regions, the encounter is automatically hostile, no matter what its normal attitude.

Chapter 2: Building Random Encounters

It's not enough to check for encounters; the DM needs to have encounters ready to spring on the characters. To that end, the DM will need several Random Encounter Tables at the ready. This is where the customization comes into play, providing a unique set of encounters that will enhance the mood and "feel" of a DM's setting and style..

The Right Table for the Job

There are two methods to approaching random encounter tables: Simple and Custom.

Simple Random Encounter Tables

Pressed for time? Several published scenarios feature random encounter tables in various types of terrain or various regions of a published campaign setting, such as the Forgotten Realms. Additionally, many books like the Monster Manual, other monster books, various indices compiling monsters by terrain type or Challenge Rating, etc. act as fantastic compilations and lists of monsters. An enterprising DM can simply take one of these as-is, or choose a handful of the most interesting monsters from one or several of these sources and tie them to a small, hand-written list.

Make sure to make the final list include a number of encounters equal to the roll of a single die (usually a d6 is fine, but if the characters will be in the general vicinity for extended stays, consider using up to a d12), with at least one of the numbers on the die signaling "no encounter" or some kind of non-combat encounter (like a natural hazard, a change in weather, etc.) to spice things up. Not everything needs to be a fight.

The rest of this article details the second option – Custom Random Encounter Tables – but various tips and tricks for those can similarly be applied when using the Simple method to creating a table, ensuring a variety of encounter types.

Custom Random Encounter Tables

A custom random encounter table is a fully customized table that the DM creates ahead of time, focusing on a single region and/or terrain type, and covering enough encounters to be varied and interesting, while representing the thematic look and feel of the region in question.

There is little science to creating thematic, regional encounter tables, but the art isn't very hard to apply in order for the "feel" to come out just right. The DM simply must consider the following information in order to build their encounter tables:

Encounter Regions. The encounter regions of your map, whether it be divided up simply by terrain type or having different terrain types grouped together by some more thematic means. for example, hexes near the Caves of Chaos could be one region, regardless of terrain type, as are hexes that include and immediately surround the Miasmal Swamps.

Frequency. Frequency of encounters based in part on the "population density" of monsters, hazards, NPCs, and other noteworthy encounter possibilities.

Encounter Types. The types of encounters that might occur, such as monsters, NPCs (friendly, neutral, or hostile), natural hazards that actually have a chance at challenging a party of adventurers (this can often be level-dependent), appropriate changes in weather that can provide interesting potential (whether as a threat like hazards are or as a simple storytelling device to set a specific mood), and minor adventure sites that can serve as fun side-treks.

Distribution. The final number of encounters and their distribution, keeping in mind whether or not time of day matters (such as some encounters not occurring during daytime or nighttime), and whether or not to allow for possible re-rolls (such as an instance of rolling an 8 on 1d8 and having that mean "roll for two encounters that occur simultaneously, ignoring any further 8's that come up on these rolls").

Building Custom Tables

Follow the process below to create evocative encounter tables tied to the hex map you've created for your hexcrawl campaign.

Step 1: Encounter Regions

The DM already has a map (remember Step 0 under Getting Lost?) depicting a region or regions, depending on the scale, terrain types present, and other factors of the campaign or adventure setting. It is a simple matter of subdividing this map up further into encounter regions, and for each one, create a short table of thematically appropriate encounters that can be rolled up at a moment's notice, as soon as a random encounter is rolled for. Determining the number and size of encounter regions is largely dependent on your campaign setting, but it should also take into account two very important time factors:

- ❖ How much prep time do you have, and
- ❖ How long the party is likely to be wandering around in each region.

The DM should only be preparing the minimum number of random encounter tables, and that means dividing the wilderness map into the least number of useful chunks. Often, this might be largely dictated by terrain type — it's very easy, after all, to place monsters by their favored terrain type — but it can just as easily determined by total area, or political and "lair" boundaries determined by fixed encounters that are already planned, such as a settlement that already appears on the map, or a dragon's lair that is a major focus of the campaign.

The length of time the party could potentially be wandering in the region should play a major part in how big the random encounter table is. If the party simply needs to pass through the 10 or so hexes that make up the Swamp of Unholy Blights to get to their destination, then chances are that they'll maybe be in there for a day or two (maybe three or four if they get really lost). There's simply no need to create a table of more than 4 or 6 encounters for this region…unless the party is going to be visiting and revisiting this area time and again throughout the campaign, in which case a couple more encounters couldn't hurt (or, after several levels, you can simply create a new, more level-appropriate table of encounters). (Note that you could bundle the Swamp of Unholy Blights in with the much bigger Forest of Darkened Mists and create a region that the party could be in for the better part

of week, and thus a table of 6 or 8 entries is more worthwhile.)

Example: I am running a campaign in the Daggerdale region of Faerun's Dalelands, a region that's relatively small, so I'm going to use 1-mile hexes for the map. Much of the campaign focuses on freedom fighters under the command of Randal Morn, the rightful leader of Daggerdale, but who has been cast out, and the urban centers taken over by Zhentarim forces.

Despite the small area, I have the combined features of "this is a very active area" and "the characters will spend almost the entire campaign adventuring within these borders." I don't mind building a handful of regions, each with tables ranging from roughly 6 to 20 encounters each. This setup will give each region a unique feel, and while it sounds like a lot of encounters to plan, there are some that can appear on multiple tables (it's such a small area, so some overlap is okay), and some of the encounters will be very simple abandoned sites or minor hazards (it's a low-level campaign, sure to reach levels 5 or 6 before we go beyond the borders of the map), and therefore the tables themselves don't require much work at all.

The encounter regions will be Daggerdale Vicinity, XXX. The regions could correspond to the exact terrain borders, or I could draw borders that overlap nearby areas a little, varying the terrain for the encounters a bit more. Keep in mind that the terrain for a hex is simply the predominant terrain, and there could be areas within a hex that differ, at my whim.

Step 2: Encounter Elements

For each potential region, develop a list of encounter ideas. At this stage, it's enough to simply write a minimum of words to brainstorm ideas, such as:

- ❖ Adult green dragon
- ❖ Animated plants
- ❖ Sealed cave, filled with zombies
- ❖ Orc war band
- ❖ Quicksand
- ❖ Fey

Keeping in mind your prep time and the projected size of the tables (and the number of tables, for considerations of varying encounters as much as possible), stick to that particular regions strengths and you should be able to

come up with several monster encounters, some NPC encounters, naturally occurring or manufactured hazards designed to sap resources from the party, weather or other events designed to provide a certain thematic feel (fog to represent dread, rain for tedium or sorrow, etc.), and so on.

A mix of likely combat and non-combat encounters helps to ensure that not every roll brings up a fight, a life-or-death occurrence, and so on. Characters with exploration- and interaction-based abilities should have plenty of time to shine, and several of your encounters should tell the players something about the world they adventure in, as opposed to simply attacking them.

Step 3: Tables & Distribution

At this stage, the DM determines which of the potential encounters sound like the most fun and fit the region best, and organize them into tables. The number of encounters for a given region determines the die size used for the table, and the projected challenge level of the encounter and/or monster rarity should help inform the distribution of those encounters on that die type. The DM should also consider the daytime/nighttime split, and whether that matters in the creation of the table.

> *Example*: a simple table might use 1d4, and have three possible encounters. One of those encounters occupies two slots, because it's very likely to occur in the context of the campaign, which happens to be about a war band of orcs invading the forest.
> - ❖ **Random Encounter Table (1d4)**: 1. Fey, 2. Quicksand, 3-4. Orc scout party.

If the orcs only moved around at night, you could make one of two types of more complicated tables: Daytime/Nighttime tables and Altered Distribution tables.

Daytime and Nighttime Tables

Turn the region into two different tables, one for daytime encounters (not including the orcs, or encountering the orcs only at their encampment) and one for nighttime (when the orcs are on the prowl and at the ready).
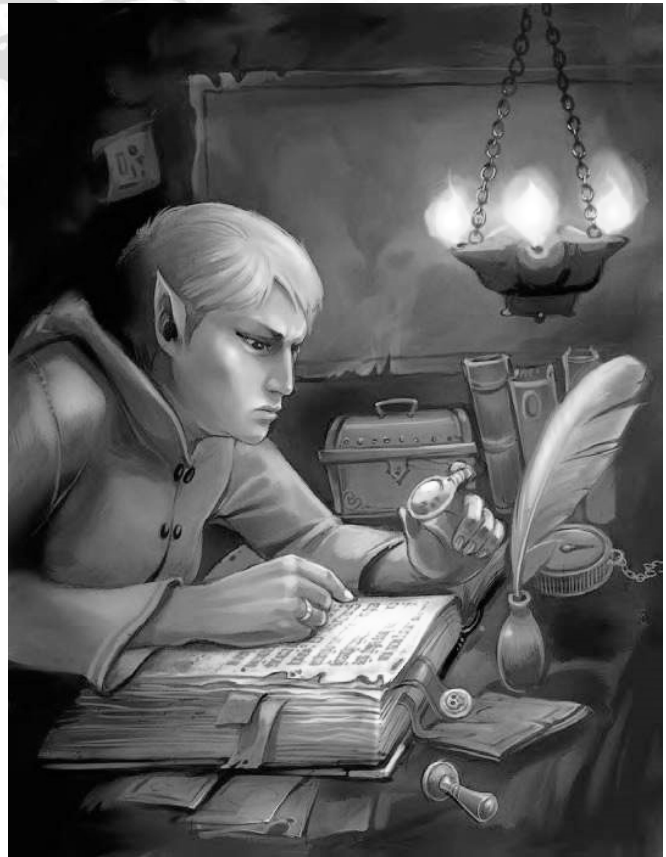
> *Example*: splitting the table into two might look like this:
> - ❖ **Forest Daytime Encounters (1d4)**: 1-2. Fey, 3. Quicksand, 4. Orc scout party currently making camp (only 1 or 2 orcs might be on watch).
> - ❖ **Forest Nighttime Encounters (1d4)**: 1. Fey, 2. Quicksand, 3-4. Orc scout party.

Altered Distribution Tables

Keep the region on a single table, but change the distribution such that nighttime encounters occur on higher numbers, and nighttime encounter rolls receive a bonus modifier. This naturally skews the results to higher numbers when an encounter is going to occur at night.

Playing with the distribution and daytime/nighttime split can really change the feel of how encounters play out, and either case allows for as much repetition as the DM wants on the tables.

Having certain slots taken up by options such as "Re-roll to get two simultaneous encounters" will also add an additional element of randomness on the DM's side of things, which can be avoided easily, or used often for DMs that don't mind the added improv and complications that could come up in combining different encounter types.

Remember to be mindful of your personal preferences (lots of prep before game night vs. lots of improv at the table) and your time (simple tables vs. more complex tables) and building encounter tables gets very easy with a minimum of practice.

Example: the DM wants the chance to encounter the orcs at camp during the day, and either camping or on the move at night, since they are pretty lazy and not really roaming the area very much. This table suggests that the Fey are only active during the day (and can't be encountered at nighttime, perhaps disappearing into a hidden lair), and the orcs are camping most of the time, but at least potentially on the move, roaming the area at night.
- ❖ **Forest Encounters (1d4; at nighttime, add +1 to the roll)**: 1. Fey 2. Quicksand 3-4. Orc scout party currently making camp (only 1 or 2 orcs might be on watch) 5. Orc scout party.

Encounter Group Tables
Some tables have little or no context, because maybe they don't really need it – especially if the DM is good at improvising! But there are also many tables in the Dungeon Master's Guide that provide encounter motivations and so on, and therefore having a decent list of fun monsters to throw together might be all you need to provide an evocative interaction or combat encounter.

Encounter groups are simply that: a collection of creatures that have a reason for being together. Notably, they may not always get along well, and that's a useful lever for the adventurers to pull from time to time: a great flaw of the forces of evil is their own infighting. But it's also a useful tool to inspire the DM to come up with some world building moments: if a hobgoblin war party has no spellcasters but does have a bunch of skeletons helping them out, how are those skeletons being controlled? Perhaps a minor magical item? Or maybe there's a spellcaster nearby, signaling an additional possible encounter, or reinforcements on later rounds if the fight is too easy for the PCs? Or maybe the players will never

know, and you'll never explain it to them...but it's a string they may pull at, and that can lead to future adventures!

Other Tables
There are other types of tables you can set up, and all sorts of different ways to distribute the monsters, NPCs, and encounter sites that appear on them. We offer a few variants shortly, and the examples that follow in the chapter showing Hardbuckler & the Trielta Hills Region as an example hexcrawl can provide great inspiration for different ways to handle your encounter tables. Use them all, stick to one...do whatever your heart desires!

Step 4: Finishing Touches
Now that you have your tables outlined, it's time to flesh out the encounters. This last piece of the puzzle can really occur throughout the process, as ideas for encounters are gathered and lists made, and need not be as complex as developing an entire set-piece encounter, with named characters, battle maps, and so on. Often, it's as simple as noting the creature, NPC, or hazard and a very general situation. That said, these can be as detailed as the DM has time to prep for, and based on their preferences with regard to running encounters. Some DMs simply need the kernel of an idea and a monster or NPC name, while others might prefer to have a battle map with positions and a general sense of the encounter's circumstances (lighting, cover, terrain).

If the encounter list doesn't appear to have a lot of variety, now is a good time to add it in. For example, if you have 5 potentially hostile monster encounters, a friendly NPC encounter, and two natural hazards, it's time now to consider how those 5 monster encounters really feel different. It may be as simple as the types of monsters featured, but you may also want to consider things like...
- ❖ Give simple goals to sentient monsters, so it opens up the possibility of negotiation, intimidation, bribing, or other social interaction, even if the monster is hostile.
- ❖ Make a normally hostile monster potentially friendly under certain circumstances.
- ❖ Have a normally friendly monster or NPC (based on alignment, perhaps) antagonistic, duplicitous, or likely to flee under certain circumstances (a wild goose chase never hurt...).
- ❖ Start off especially powerful monsters or NPCs wounded or otherwise placed in a weakened state or precarious position.
- ❖ Make some hazards unavoidable if encountered (but not ones that are overtly deadly!), forcing

the players to make a hard choice (like having to choose between losing their supplies or their mounts) if they fail a series of skill checks or even a Group check.

❖ Consider how two encounters might be tied together somehow, such as having one group hunting or fleeing another, or perhaps similar groups can be part of a simple, nearby settlement.

Some encounters might be "unique" in some form another, suggesting that they may be one-time events. That's okay, and encouraged as a way to introduce named NPCs early, events that may factor into a very specific story hook, and so on. If preparation is your thing, note that the encounter is unique, cross it off once the characters deal with the encounter (if they do), and consider either repeating another encounter on the table if the dice roll ever comes up again, or replace it with another unique encounter as needed. For DMs that don't mind a little improv, it's okay to just deal on the fly with instances of a unique encounter being rolled up again. Consider your strengths as a DM when determining how much extra preparation you want to do, and furthermore, keep in mind how often the players characters are likely to be triggering random encounters in that area. If it's not often, then there's no point in over-prepping.

Finally, it pays to run the encounter math on possible combat encounters or encounter locations that might feature rewards like hidden treasure. Calculate the challenge level or power of various rewards, and determine how to make them balanced. If they aren't balanced by challenge or reward level, that's not necessarily a red flag not to use the encounter. Instead, use it as impetus to change the circumstances of the encounter. If a region for level 3 characters features a Pit Fiend and Succubus encounter, it is very important to frame this encounter in a way that the players can engage with it while avoiding combat, immediate enslavement, or similar — likewise foregone — conclusions.

The Random Encounter Table Examples section features examples of encounter tables of multiple types with variations to show the flexibility a DM can get out of building custom encounter tables. All of the areas on the previous map are covered, giving you a low- to mid-level wilderness area for the players to explore. Simply add 2-5 fixed encounter locations – dungeons, abandoned temples, monstrous villages run by lizardfolk or

troglodytes, lairs for giants beasts – and you've got yourself several months of gaming material!

Variant Encounter Tables

Custom random encounter tables don't have to quite look like what has been posited: there are plenty of other options of lesser or greater complexity. Here are a few other options you can use in your games: try building a 1-2 tables in every style (as time permits) to get a feel for them and find the best ones for your campaign. You may find that one style works for you all the time, with only minor variations, or you may find that each type of encounter table has its uses depending on what you're running at the time.

The Wizard's Table

Official D&D adventures tend to use tables that involve a two-step process, such as those found in Curse of Strahd:

1. Roll 1d20, and on a result of X+, there is an encounter.

2. If there's an encounter, roll on a simple table.

"X+" tends to be 15+ for dangerous regions or 18+ for more "standard" regions. The encounter tables that follow from this random encounter check tend to use a d8, d10, d12, or d20, giving a fairly high range of options, but the encounters themselves tend to be pretty straightforward. Things like "1d6 **zombies**" or "merchant caravan: 1d6 merchants (treat as **commoners**) and 1d4 **guards**" with maybe a sentence or two of descriptive text explaining their disposition dominates the encounter tables.

Hazards vs. Monsters

A variation on this is that the initial 1d20 check triggers encounters on a certain set of numbers for two different tables. For example, the check could be 1-15 no encounter, 16-18 terrain hazard encounters, and 19-20 monster encounters. The terrain hazard encounters are special terrain that's usually dangerous and/or includes its own, highly selective monster encounter list (perhaps a secondary table with less than a handful of encounters, all of which are very similar thematically). Sometimes the terrain may simply be a location that can impart some sort of adventure or setting background material, or may have a single feature that might provide some kind of benefit to the party, whether it be a place to rest or a magical fountain that heals or cures certain maladies. The monster encounters are more standard, and can happen in any particular terrain. Finally, it could be a table that includes dangerous weather and atmospheric conditions, or some combination of all of the above. Examples of this sort of double encounter table exist in Out of the Abyss.

These tables are easy to build, and the checks are very simple (not usually relying on the broader terrain types like Mountain, Forest, Arctic, or anything of that nature), but it's sometimes hard to tell how often encounters will occur based on the nature and frequency of the random encounter checks. It may be tempting (or easy) to put a lot of options on a table of this sort and only end up using one or two of them. Subsequently, it's probably best for your personal tables to feature less options so you are not putting too much work into them; consider that published modules are likely adding extra options to cover aspects such as the "replayability" of their adventures.

Ecology Tables

Including more columns tied to the monsters in any given die roll entry on an encounter table can provide the DM with many more descriptive encounters that fill in ecology details and represent the building dread of potentially encountering the monster without actually having to run a battle. This heightens the exploration pillar of gameplay, and may encourage players to incorporate more skill checks or use other abilities to determine additional lore about monsters before facing them.

How Ecology Tables Work

Basically, these sorts of encounter tables include several monsters lined up in rows, with several columns that indicate different ecological details of the creature. One die is rolled to determine the column used, and the other determines which row to reference.

1. Monster: The first column shows the die roll associated with a monster.

2. Lair: The second column is a very quick description of the creature's lair. Rolling this may mean that the party stumbles on the creature while it is in its lair, or it might be away when the party arrives.

3. Spoor: This column gives some immediately noticeable elements that suggest the creature is very nearby. The next encounter roll gets modified such that the party is virtually guaranteed to encounter the monster on the next roll, or its lair (which may include the monster, as noted above).

4. Tracks: Tracks are the evidence of the creature's recent passing through an area, and give the party an opportunity to track down the creature (lowering the next encounter roll such that the party is likely to encounter it or its lair) or they can try to avoid it, raising their next encounter roll such that they are likely to avoid the creature (but could end up coming across a different one's presence).

5. Traces: These are bits of evidence that help identify a monster, but don't necessarily denote its immediate or near presence.

For this table, roll 1d10 and divide by 2 to get a result of 1 through 5. To get an even 1d6 roll, you could add two columns of Traces since they usually include very simple sensory information, or you could just as easily double up lair, spoor, or tracks, too. You could also get rid of any of those columns to bring it down to a d4 or even d3, though you might lose some fidelity regarding the differences between certain monsters and what can be observed of their passing through the wilderness.

Advantages & Drawbacks

These tables are great for building foreboding and dread, and limit potentially rules-heavy encounters like combat or social interaction, while increasing the exploration elements of game play.

Unfortunately, they require a bit more work for each monster type encountered, which can be time consuming for DMs to consider all of the different elements. Additionally, if the party spends a significant amount of time on the exploration side and then don't end up encountering the monsters themselves, it could very well lead to the sense of foreboding turning into an anticlimactic sense of wasted time. Therefore, it pays to have these tables remain small and focused. The DM can have these tables only feature monsters that will almost certainly be encountered in the future, or have fixed encounter sites that use these monsters, so the potential for encountering them is high.

Encounter Table Examples

The following tables feature several examples of encounter tables, including small, straightforward tables, larger tables for constant use in a heavily trafficked encounter region, altered distribution tables, and more.

Warning!

These encounters are generally not intended to be "balanced" for characters of any specific level. Rather, these encounters are meant to add context and flavor to the region, and as such, may tend toward hard or even deadly; some encounters might be well beyond that range.

That said, there are some tables that list specific level or tier ranges for guidance. While these don't slavishly follow the encounter building guidelines or the number of expected encounters per day found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, they will generally require minimal work to be challenging but not outright deadly encounters, when they involve combat.

DMs should keep in mind the following options when determining how to stage and setup each randomly rolled encounter:

- ❖ For combat encounters, consider multiple win conditions. Some creatures may have low morale, and will flee back to their lair. Others may flee immediately upon failing to steal an item from the party, or take a member captive.
- ❖ Many encounters suggest – or even outright include descriptions of – lairs for groups of creatures. This suggests that the creatures listed in an encounter might be split up as scouts or patrols, and therefore they may attack in waves, or act as many separate, individual encounters.
- ❖ Intelligent creatures may seek to barter and trade for goods.
- ❖ Lore, rumors, and local news may be all that a group of intelligent creatures wants before going on their way, and they may have some of the same to provide in exchange.

Additionally, use rules for nonlethal combat such as grappling, knocking enemies unconscious, and so on: many creatures will want captives, information, resources, or other such things that preclude murdering everyone they come across.

Chapter 3: Example Hexcrawl

The following chapter reveals a starting town for the player characters to begin their adventures – Hardbuckler – and provides a map split into encounter regions, along with the random encounter tables for several of those regions. Dungeon Masters are encouraged to build additional tables for the regions not detailed, or simply use this section as a template for how to build a hexcrawl campaign:

1. Give players a starting point where they can find relative safety, additional plot hooks, store the treasures they find on their adventures, and engage in mercantile and other downtime activities.
2. Have a DM version of the hex map with encounter regions clearly denoted.
3. Create compelling, multi-faceted random encounter tables to nail the feel and tone of the campaign you want to run, ensuring that the different encounter regions speak to different terrain, weather patterns, hazards, and creature types.
4. Have a few fixed encounter sites on the map that can be part of a larger story, or take several game sessions of play to cover. Alternatively, some sites can be of a sort that constantly attract new patrons, creatures, and adventurers, so that they can be re-used with only minor changes to keep them interesting.

The following details about Hardbuckler, the Trielta Hills, Serpent Hills, High Moor, and other areas in the vicinity expand on the information about the Trielta Hills region and the gnomish town of Hardbuckler found in *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*, p. 91.
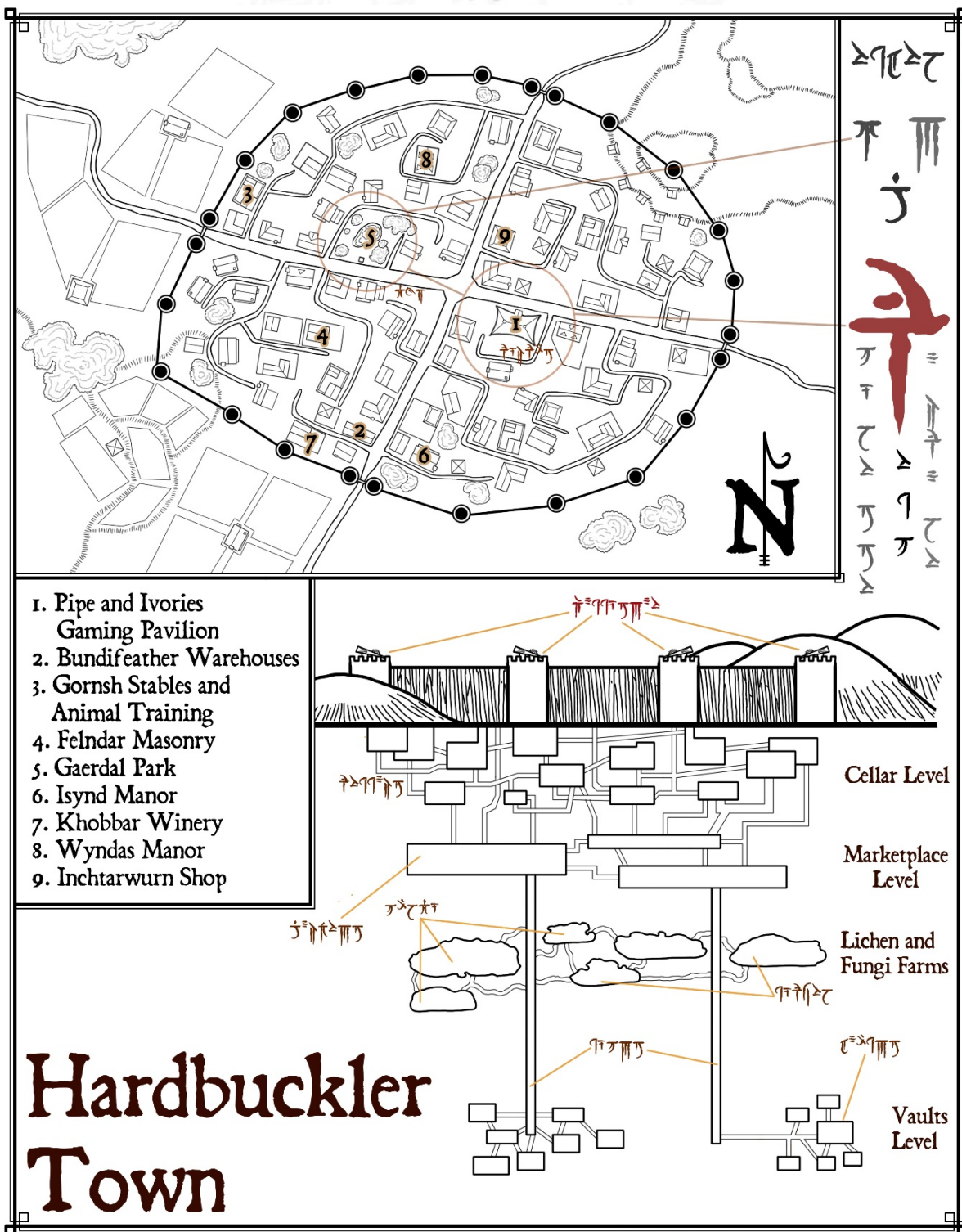
Hardbuckler

Population: 2,000, mostly gnomes with some humans, halflings, and half-elves.

Government: Hardbuckler is ruled by a council of gnome elders from the most prominent families in the region, many of whom are priests or acolytes of various gnomish deities. They are Rhyber Althryn, Tolluck Boldnose, Gelda Bundifeather, Sestiven Eyindul, Roddymol Felndar, Kolden Felold, Bragger Gornsh, Trolinda Isynd, Nencemar Khobbar, and Brunhilda Wyndas (all are described briefly below).

Defense: There are 26 cogwheel-cranked triple ballistae mounted on squat 15 foot tall towers in place along the 10 foot stockade wall that surrounds the town, sited to fire on any given point in the cleared terrain that surrounds the hill the town rests upon. A ballista requires an action to load, aim, and fire; with a standard crew of 3, each crewmember may perform one of these actions, allowing the cogwheel ballista to fire once per round. (See *Dungeon Master's Guide* p. 255.)

Commerce: Daelia Inchtarwurn (described below) operates the famous family business of warding underground storage vaults operated by many of the prominent families of Hardbuckler, providing magical protections that keep the vaults climate-controlled, alarmed, and protected by summoned monsters unless the proper ward token (created and sold exclusively by Daelia) is used to enter. The gnomes also deal in high-quality locks for all sorts of doors, chests, or purses (costing anywhere from 3 to 100 gold pieces); sturdy and secure crates and chests (costing anywhere from 1 silver piece to 25 gold pieces); and a distinctive green seam sealing wax (1 silver piece) sold in cloth rolls, used to seal envelopes, and which turns purple if it has been tampered with by mundane or magical means. It costs 1 gold piece per person to enter the town (1 silver piece per beast of burden or mount), but this entitles visitors to a night's lodging at any gnomish family's guesthouse, simple meals (spiced potatoes, onion bread, cheeses), stables with free fodder and water, and access to the gaming pavilion called The Pipe and Ivories, which serves drinks at exorbitant prices to discourage excess (10 gold pieces for a hand keg of ale and 5 gold pieces for a bottle of wine, though both are of fine quality, at least!).

Organizations: There are no large-scale organizations operating in Hardbuckler due to its relatively small size and rural location, but most of the major factions of the Sword Coast have minor representatives. These include Gelda Bundifeather (smuggler for the Zhentarim), Sestiven Eyindul (watch captain and member of the Order of the Gauntlet), Kolden Felold (druid of the Emerald Enclave), and Bragger Gornsh (monster-trainer and Harper contact). All are described below.

1. Pipe and Ivories
   Gaming Pavilion
2. Bundifeather Warehouses
3. Gornsh Stables and
   Animal Training
4. Felndar Masonry
5. Gaerdal Park
6. Isynd Manor
7. Khobbar Winery
8. Wyndas Manor
9. Inchtarwurn Shop

Hardbuckler Town

Cellar Level

Marketplace Level

Lichen and Fungi Farms

Vaults Level

Major Locations & NPCs of Hardbuckler

Location	Description	NPCs
1	**Pipe & Ivories Gaming Pavilion** This pavilion is covered by strong tarps of different hides – wyvern, owlbear, and others – but is otherwise open-air. It includes pop-up shops, temporary bars, food stands, and basically has a constant feel of revelry and friendliness. Tables host all sorts of games of chance and skill. Just inside the entrance is a shrine to Nebulun, god of invention and luck.	❖ Rhyber Althryn (LG female forest gnome **commoner**; kind, outgoing, wine-lover; Emerald Enclave) is partial owner of The Pipe and Ivories gaming pavilion, and is renowned across the Sword Coast as an amazing cook. She is the cousin of Wilf Althryn, a **druid** who lives in the nearby hin village of Veil Down, and the two maintain in constant correspondence via letters delivered by **ravens**.
2	**Bundifeather Warehouses** Immediately inside the southern gate is a series of long warehouses operated by the Bundifeather family. By day, this place is a whirlwind of business, but by night it's probably the only area of Hardbuckler that might be considered "sketchy" due to the surly types who maintain watch over the facilities. These warehouses generally are only for the temporary storage of larger goods that come in from all over the Sword Coast – kegs, barrels of foodstuffs, lumber – as opposed to the more interesting and delicate items stored in the underground vaults.	❖ Gelda Bundifeather (LE female rock gnome **bandit captain**; excitable, vain; Zhentarim) is a well-to-do business woman to most folk that meet her, but a good number of Hardbuckler's residents suspect (and in some cases know) she's a smuggler that has settled in the town, operating some of the most well-protected and secretive vaults beneath the warrens.
3	**Gornsh Stables & Animal Training** On the western edge of town is a pristine lot of land where stables and facilities for the housing of animals of all types can be found, even those types that aren't necessarily normally considered pets. Griffons, axe beaks, giant lizards, and other strange creatures aren't uncommon here.	❖ Bragger Gornsh (CG male forest gnome **scout**; stern, straight shooter) is a figure of great mystery, a tamer of monsters and trainer of exotic mounts.
4	**Felndar Masonry** Part storefront where beautifully painted renditions of the underground warrens are on display, and part storage facility for blocks of granite, marble, and other stoneworks.	❖ The Felndar family patriarch, Roddymol Felndar, (CG male rock gnome **enchanter**, VGM 213; greedy, sage-like) is a master among masons, and many of his family are the architects and maintenance folk that keep the underground warrens in excellent condition, as well as carving out new vaults and maintaining the old ones.
5	**Gaerdal Park** This idyllic park features lots of trees, flowers, a topiary garden, and a pond, and is located a short walk from the barracks. A shrine to Gaerdal Ironhand is located in the garden, on the side nearest to the barracks.	
6	**Isynd Manor** Though relatively small by comparison to other manor houses, this two-story stone and wood construction includes a bell tower and lots of interesting sculptural affectations along its outer walls and roof, a sign of the families' long interest in architectural designs. Of course, with the recent inheritance of the property by the mysterious	❖ Trolinda Isynd (NE female forest gnome **warlock of the Archfey**, VGM 219; roguish, smarmy) has long been the black sheep of her family (primarily farmers), but when she was (surprisingly) willed much of the Isynd family's wealth by the most recent matriarch who passed, she has become a powerfully rich force in the town. Her dealings with dark forces and supposedly evil magic leave many wondering what her goals are, and they

	Trolinda Isynd, many wonder if those gargoyle sculptures aren't, in fact, quite real.	would be right to fear her: she is actually a spy for the Kingdom of Najara!
		❖ 4 **gargoyles**
7	**Khobbar Winery** Khobbar Winery owns the vineyards on the southern slopes of the town, just outside the walls. The Winery itself is a beautifully formed wood building, featuring curved edges, open air porches and walkways, trees growing through the inner portions, and a generally elven air about the place.	❖ Nencemar (NG female rock gnome **noble**; calculating, haughty) and the Khobbar family at large are renowned farmers and vintners.
8	**Wyndas Manor** This manor house on the northern side of the town is currently in the midst of several rebuilding projects. The property was expanded from the brick and wood main house to include a large garden and a few small outer-houses to act as apartments for extended family members, though not all of these are completed yet.	❖ Brunhilda Wyndas (LE female rock gnome **illusionist**, VGM 214; callous) is the callous matriarch of the brutish Wyndas family, descended from bandits and thugs often in the employ of the Black Network many years ago. They've since cleaned up their ties and perform nominally more above-board business as merchants and menial laborers, but the family has elevated itself largely through their penchant for talent with illusory magic.
9	**Inchtarwurn Shop** Centrally located in the town, the building that houses Inchtarwurn Shop is somewhat nondescript, aside from the rounded thatch roof and the distinct lack of windows outside of small, colored glass one set in the stout oaken door. This pane features red, orange, and yellow tiles that make up a distinctive shape: this shape is the arcane sigil that represents the Inchtarwurn family. It is here that the most profitable business in the entire town is run, which is the storage maven and magical warden of the vaults located beneath the town, Daelia Inchtarwurn.	❖ Daelia (N female rock gnome **mage**; scatter-brained, whimsical) is the latest in a long line of Inchtarwurn family wizards that runs the business of maintaining the enchantments on the vaults, protecting newly created ones, and crafting the ward tokens that unlock them. She is prone to walking the halls and secret passages in and around the vaults, humming tunelessly (she's tone deaf) and generally ensuring there are no nasty surprises crawling up from the Underdark. She is assisted in these duties by her **violet faerie dragon** familiar named Cedrick, and 3 **apprentice wizards** (VGM 209), named Rydel (stout halfling), Valindra (deep gnome, EEPG 5), and Serastes (rock gnome).
n/a	**The Hall** This building serves as a marketplace in and of itself, but it is primarily used as an entryway to the underground market that is the lifeblood of Hardbuckler. Located inside the Hall are shrines to Flandal Steelskin (god of metalwork) and Garl Glittergold (god of trickery and gems).	
n/a	**Shrine: Segojan Earthcaller** Segojan Earthcaller, god of earth and the dead, has a shrine located in the cemetery about a half mile outside of the town.	

Around the Town

Hardbuckler is a rural farming town sitting atop rolling hills. It features a roughly circular stockade wall containing closely packed together stone cottages with slate roofs and fenced-in gardens of various sizes. Only two broad avenues criss-cross the town, dividing the circle into quarters: everywhere else is winding alleys, dead-ends, and seemingly chaotic plots of land taken up by the cottages and squat structures barely recognizable as shrines, liveries, stables, warehouses, and smithies. Indeed, the true extent of the town lies largely underground.

Large cellars are the norm in every cottage, and wide tunnels linking them together serve as streets; many of the stables have ramped entrances and the thoroughfares are large enough to accept mounted riders and ox-drawn wagons for merchants, allowing entire marketplaces to exist below ground. Warehouses delve fairly deeply, and crank-operated elevators allow access to the lowest levels of the town, which feature mushroom- and lichen-farms as well as the famous storage vaults maintained by the resident wizard, Daelia Inchtarwurn, and operated by...well, almost every resident of the town!

In most cases, these vaults store family heirlooms or trade goods from across the region, but in a few, there is a no-questions-asked policy so long as the pay is right, which is what brings travelers and nobles from across the Sword Coast to Hardbuckler: they can store whatever they want (or can afford) there with some of the most extensive security and magical protections to be found. Much of the commerce of the town outside of simple farm goods centers around these vaults, and thus the gnomes of the town do a healthy business in storage fees and the manufacture of storage devices like chests and crates as well as security measures like locks.

NPCs of Hardbuckler

Most of the inhabitants of the gnomish town are **commoners**, with the occasional **noble**, and at least one **priest** and a handful of **acolytes** at each of the shrines of the gnomish deities venerated in Hardbuckler (see *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide* page 24):

❖ Flandal Steelskin, god of metalwork, has a shrine located in The Hall, a building that holds the entrance to the underground market.
❖ Gaerdal Ironhand, god of protection, has a shrine in a garden outside of the barracks.
❖ Garl Glittergold, god of trickery and gems, has a shrine in The Hall as well.

❖ Nebulun, god of invention and luck, has a shrine just inside the entrance of The Pipe and Ivories.
❖ Segojan Earthcaller, god of earth and the dead, has a shrine located in the cemetery about a half mile outside of the town.

Ward Tokens

Ward tokens are minor magical items created by Daelia Inchtarwurn's family to act as keys to the vaults beneath Hardbuckler. Each ward token is tied directly to a specific vault, and thus they are all unique: you must use the correct ward token to enter the correct vault.

The vaults are protected with ritual magic that has the following effects:

❖ The temperature remains consistent (usually slightly cool, but some storage vaults are used for specific items or goods that require hotter or colder temperatures, and this is decided at the time that the proper wards are laid upon the vault).
❖ Moisture cannot pass through the cavern walls of a vault.
❖ When an incorrect ward token is used in an attempt to open a vault, or the vault door is tampered with by magic or force, the correct ward token emits an alarm.
❖ If entry to a vault is attempted using incorrect ward tokens (the same or multiple) more than three times within a minute, guardian creatures are summoned.

Most ward tokens feature gnomish runes that tie to the specific vaults for visual reference, but such visual aids are not necessary in their creation or use.

The guardian creatures summoned to protect vaults that are breached (or have attempts to breach them) vary based on the needs and investment of the given vault and its creator, but obviously more powerful summoning magic is considerably more costly. At a minimum, 1d4+4 **crawling claws** are summoned, but more often it will be minor creatures like 1d4 **giant crabs**, 1d4 **giant weasels**, 2d4 **stirges**, or 1d6 **twig blights**. The most heavily protected vaults might have effects that trigger spells such as *spirit guardians*, *conjure elemental*, *conjure woodland beings*, or *conjure animals* protecting them.

A typical patrol of gnomish guards includes 1d4+2 **guards** and 1 **scout**. Elite patrols will have an additional 2 **guards** and 1 **scout**, and also include a **knight** or **veteran**. Though there are few of them, 1d4 **priests** or **illusionists** (VGM 214) are usually actively on-duty in the city at any given time of day, though they may not be nearby. If they are called to the scene of a disturbance, they are usually accompanied by an additional retinue of 2 **veterans** and 4 **scouts**. Mounts they make use of include **ponies** and **mastiffs**. The walls are patrolled by units consisting of 5 **guards** (3 of whom often act as siege weapon engineers using the ballistae mounted throughout), 2 **scouts**, and an **archer** (VGM 210) who leads them. The **priests** and **acolytes** of the shrines will help out if nearby.

Major Personalities

Aside from the NPCs described in the individual locations, the following characters also hold important positions in the social goings on of Hardbuckler.

Tolluck (LN male rock gnome **noble**; intrusive, litigious), through his extensive family, operates the largest farms in the Hardbuckler region, raising prodigious amounts of livestock and reaping large harvests in the bountiful vale. He enjoys his wealth and station, and is a bit too nosy in the affairs of others.

Watch Captain Sestiven Eyindul (NG rock gnome **knight**; loyal, valorous; Order of the Gauntlet) is a well-regarded member of the Order of the Gauntlet and follower of Helm, god of guardians and protectors. Accompanying him outside of the political arena is his trusty steed, the **griffon** named Stander.

Kolden Felold (N male forest gnome **druid**; doddering, long-winded; Emerald Enclave) is a wizened old fixture of Hardbuckler, an emissary of the Emerald Enclave who has grown too old to continue adventuring around and doing that faction's bidding.

Job Board

An easy way to inspire the players to be motivated to traverse a hexcrawl campaign map is to give them lots of potential goals: the job board that might be posted in the local tavern is a useful tool for giving them just that! In Hardbuckler, The Pipe & Ivories Paviion and The Hall might both have such a posting, and it may include any of the following:

Job	Contact & Reward
Clean out the rats infesting the vaults.	Delia Inchtarwurn, 2 gp per giant rat head.
Clear out the Abandoned Mine of its kobold inhabitants.	Watch Captain, 50 gp per party member upon proof of the deed.
Track down the half-ogre bandit, Larg.	Watch Captain, 10 gp dead or 20gp per party member if brought back alive.
Serge Driftridge has gone missing near the Forest of Wyrms; please find him!	The Driftridge halfling family, 150 gp brought back alive, or for proof of his unfortunate demise.

Rumors & Legends

Rumors and legends about a local area can provide the adventurers with information about the setting, clues about potential encounters they face in certain areas, and DMs with a means to seed some fun campaign lore into the proceedings. These can be handled easily by a table of random things the party might here, and you can note True or False, but the players won't know that!

Here are some for the Hardbuckler area. They directly reference some of the NPC lore, as well as the encounter tables you'll find later on.

1d10	Rumor/Legend
1	The Wyndas and Bundifeather families are considering a truce to create a bigger criminal empire. (False; they hate each other too much.)
2	Delia is a master summoner…but she holds secret demon-taint due to a botched fiend summoning she performed as an apprentice. (Up to you, DM!)
3	One of the vaults below Hardbuckler includes a *teleportation circle* and acts as a hideout for members of the Cult of the Dragon. (You're call!)
4	Kobolds have recently joined up with a young, arrogant dragon, but they have mobilized in surprisingly large numbers, and are currently conquering other humanoid lairs, pushing more monsters into civilized lands. (True.)
5	The Trielta Hills area has been largely tamed of evil creatures, and holds far more interesting sites, ruins, and hazards than

	monsters. But the regions beyond are much, much more wild. (True.)
6	A powerful vampire wanders the Forest of Wyrms, in control of a pack of werewolves and other beasts. (True; see the Dire Wolf Pack encounter in the Forest of Wyrms encounter tables, below.)
7	A powerful silver dragon that has been turned evil by the corruptive influence of an illithid elder brain living beneath its lair is one of the most powerful enemies of civilization in the Forest of Wyrms. (False…and awfully elaborate!)
8	A pair of rival red dragons once laired in the Forest of Wyrms, waging a sort of low-level war on the green dragons that populate the Forest in large numbers. (Partially true; the red dragons were there and killed a few green dragons every now and again, but they didn't actively seek out such prey.)
9	A haunted dungeon made up of steel corridors exists in the mountains of the High Moor that border the Serpent Hills, and it seems to attract elemental creatures. (Partially true; see the adventure *Modrons, Mephits & Mayhem* available on DMsGuild.com.)
10	There are few riches to be found in the surrounding region, as the gnomes of Hardbuckler and humans of Elturel have picked most ancient tombs clean. (Not even remotely true. The ancient ruins of Netherese spellcasters are rife with amazing artifacts, and this rumor was spread by the Cult of the Shattered Peak, who seek to obtain all Netherese objects of power.)

Random Encounters

Random encounters in town are a great way to make treks to the local shops or temples interesting, and give DMs a chance to really play up what's different about a given settlement. Here are a few ideas for Hardbuckler.

1d6	Encounter
1	A minor crime increases patrols in the immediate vicinity. The party comes across at least two involved in the manhunt.
2	The PCs bear witness to a theft! Unfortunately, the culprit is a tiefling

commoner who can innately cast *dimension door* twice per day.

3	A local VIP (choose one of the named NPCs in the above text about Hardbuckler) was given a potion that was trapped: use the Potion Miscibility table (DMG, Chapter 7) to inspire what goes wrong when they drink it in the midst of a heated, drunken argument with some traveling merchant (a **noble**).
4	A fire breaks out at a nearby home or building! After helping to save a trapped commoner or pet dog, the party learns it may have been arson…
5	A VIP of the Realms – Elminster, Drizzt Do'Urden, King Bruenor Battlehammer or Lord Zelraun Roaringhorn (OOTA, Chapter 8) – arrives in town to meet with the leaders. One night, they entertain an audience at The Hall (treat it like an "Ask Me Anything" thread on Reddit!).
6	A doppelganger takes the place of an NPC known to the party; they can tell something's wrong with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Random Generators

The following random generators can be used to create smaller settlements and their folk throughout the vicinity of the Trielta Hills.

Random NPCs

The following table can be used to quickly generate NPC names. If you have multiple NPCs in need of a name, throw a couple d12s and cherry pick names from the three columns on the table.

Random Names

1d12	Gnomes	Halflings	Humans
1	Aldiber	Aretina	Alma
2	Fantalas	Arngrim	Cordelia
3	Hammish	Bernus	Declan
4	Ivaryn	Charis	Duncan
5	Lolenryl	Jahandar	Everan
6	Marevyn	Korima	Finn
7	Mellisara	Lander	Fiona
8	Ollinor	Ortensia	Orinn
9	Orival	Peregrine	Raelyn
10	Radebur	Rona	Rowena
11	Rathewyn	Tibalt	Tristam
12	Selinas	Zosima	Vanora

The following table can be used to generate a stat block for NPCs when it is needed. Roll 2d8 to generate a stat block for the NPC, and make sure to account for any racial features and modifiers. If you have access to *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, roll 2d10 instead.

Common NPC Archetypes

2d8/2d10	Stat Block
2	**Acolyte**
3	**Bandit**
4	**Commoner**
5	**Commoner** – merchant
6	**Cultist**
7	**Guard**
8	**Noble**
9	**Noble** – merchant
10	**Priest**
11	**Scout**
12	**Thug**
13	**Veteran**
14	**Doppelganger!**
15	**Wererat!**
16	DM's choice, or re-roll
17	*Archer (VGM)*
18	*Bard (VGM)*
19	*Illusionist (VGM)*
20	*Shapeshifted couatl!*

Random Villages

Use the following tables to generate the name, trade goods, notable traits, and problems that a village or farmstead might have in this region. On the random village table, feel free to roll two dice so you don't always end up with, "Copper Rift, the village of apple orchards."

Random Village

1d12	Name	Primary Trade Good
1	Copper Rift	Apples
2	Downswallow Mine	Berries
3	Highland Perch	Copper
4	Hillsdown	Grapes
5	Millstone	Hemp
6	Ridgeside	Marble
7	Rockthorn	Pumpkins
8	Rolling Bridge	Quarry rock
9	Rumbleton	Silver
10	Thornbridge	Strawberries
11	Wavy Knoll	Wheat
12	Wheatslope	Wine

Defining Trait or Special Characteristics

1d12	Trait / Characteristic
1	Peaceful busybodies.
2	Boisterous; constant celebrations.
3	Disciplined.
4	Druid circle.
5	Hot springs.
6	Influential shrine to a specific deity.
7	Windmill.
8	Waterwheel.
9	Underground construction.
10	High wall.
11	Natural tree cover; treehouses.
12	Retired adventurers come here in droves.

Village Problem

1d12	Trouble
1	Nearby monstrous lair.
2	Encampment of displaced monsters.
3	Brigand camp nearby.
4	Secretly controlled by doppelgangers.
5	Powerful monster hibernates nearby.
6	Evil cult operates illicit trade network.
7	Targeted for Zhentarim takeover.
8	Enemies of nearby druids or elves.
9	Magical plague is beginning to spread.
10	Leaders have been magically cursed.
11	Recent assassination leads to unrest.
12	Natural resources depleted.

Encounter Regions & Tables

The following tables can be used to handle random encounters in the Trielta Hills vicinity, an area around the gnomish town of Hardbuckler. Each hex represents an area of about 24 miles, which is somewhere between the 6-mile kingdom scale hex and the 60-mile continent scale hex; it's the typical amount a party can travel in a single day at a normal pace, assuming the terrain isn't difficult. This makes it easy to say that certain locations are "a couple days' travel away" if they are 2 hexes away, for instance.
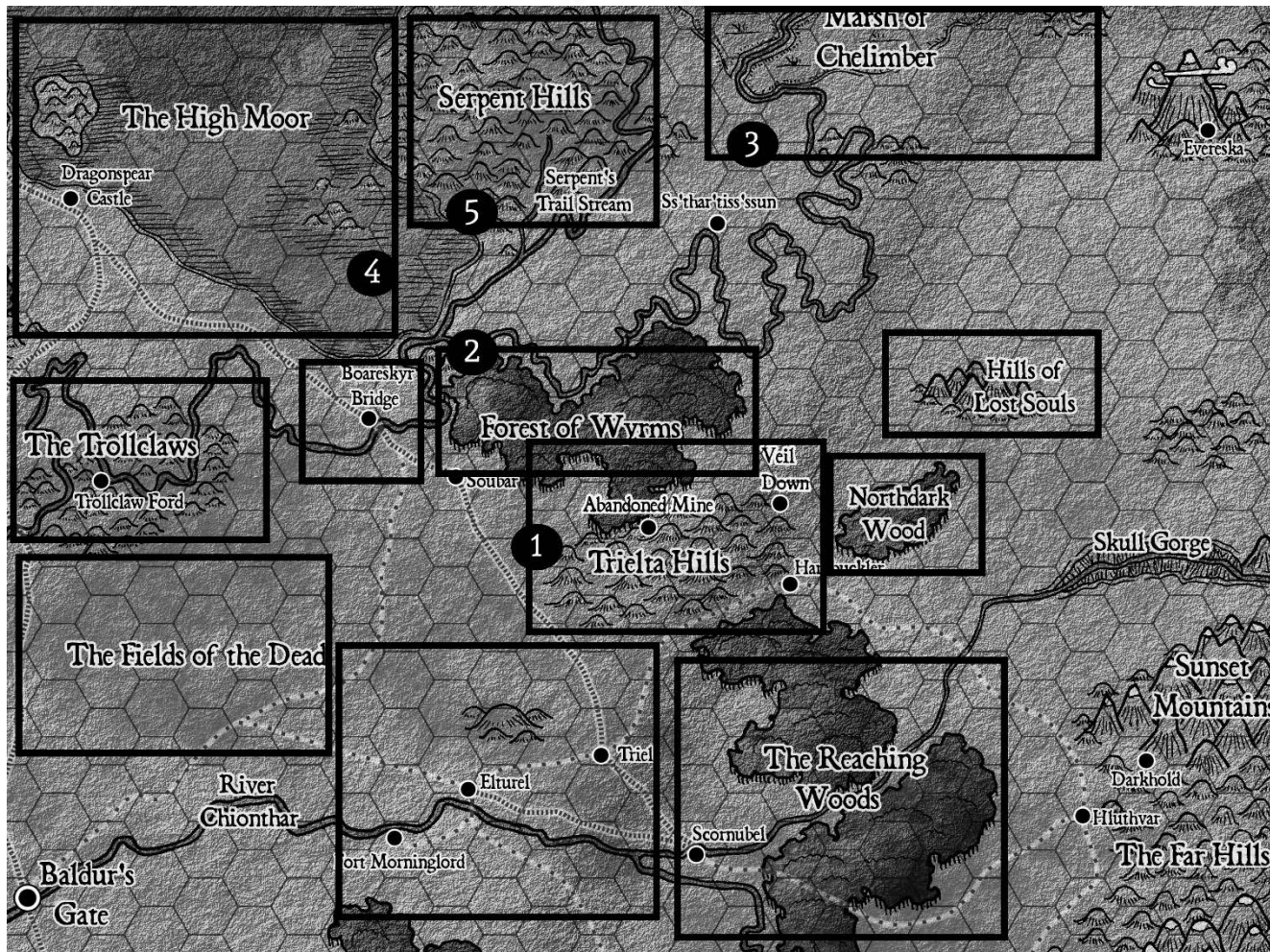
In this map, the squares roughly translate to different encounter regions. An alternative would be to designate exact borders that align with the hexes; whatever works for you. While there are several regions denoted on this map, we've numbered five of them, and will include those five in the following sections as examples of different types of encounter tables. The five encounter regions are:

1. Trielta Hills Vicinity
2. Forest of Wyrms
3. Marsh of Chelimber
4. The High Moor
5. Serpent Hills

Trielta Hills Vicinity

#1. Trielta Hills Vicinity Random Encounters

1d12	Sites	Hazards	Creatures
1	Abandoned silver mine	Kobold trap	Wolves
2	Abandoned gemstone mine	Bad weather: storm	Orc raiding party
3	Ruined farmstead	Bad weather: fog	Bugbears & goblins
4	Merchant caravan camp	Poison marsh	Hobgoblin war party
5	Abandoned camp	Overflowing river	Trolls
6	Monstrous camp	Ancient graveyard	Kobold skirmishers
7	Occupied farmstead	Rift to the Underdark	Adventurers
8	Protected glade	Bad weather: heat wave	Lizardfolk
9	Traveler's shrine	Spider webs	Smallfolk patrol
10	Hermit	Gargantuan tracks	Yuan-ti
11	Ruined temple foundation	Hunter's trap	Nagas
12	Malfunctioning teleportation circle	Enervating shrine	Ogres

This table exemplifies a way to create a myriad of possible encounter types in a relatively small region. It assumes the adventurers will spend a fair amount of time traveling throughout this area: they may be residents of Hardbuckler, and have multiple adventures that involve them exploring abandoned mines in the hills, saving small villages like Veil Down from monstrous incursions, or clearing monsters out of the surrounding terrain to establish their own territory, fit for them to build a keep, temple, or stronghold.

Directions. Roll 1d20 once during the day and once during the night to determine what type of encounter occurs. Then, roll 1d12 on the table, referencing the appropriate category to determine which encounter occurs.

Daytime Encounters

1d20	Encounter
1-8	No encounter
9-12	Site
13-15	Hazard
16-18	Creature
19	Site plus creature (roll 1d12 for each and combine)
20	Hazard plus creature (roll 1d12 for each and combine)

Nighttime Encounters

1d20	Encounter
1-8	No encounter
9-10	Site
12-15	Hazard
16-19	Creature
20	Two creature encounters (roll 1d12 twice and combine)

Sites

Each of these encounters represents a special site that the party stumbles across. While each presents opportunities for various ability checks and provide some world building details, DMs should feel free to add campaign-specific information and lore for added variety, especially if an encounter is rolled up more than once by the same adventuring party.

Abandoned silver mine

A hillside, escarpment, or perhaps simply a hole in the ground (originally used as a vent or as a tunnel to a flume) leads into the tunnels of a played out silver mine carved out by local gnomes or an ancient band of dwarves.

Abandoned gemstone mine

The winding tunnels and mine works found here lead to a deposit of gemstones that remains largely untouched. A curse permeates the area, such that the removal of the gems immediately calls for a hostile monster to wander in. A successful **DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check** or the

detect magic spell might clue the party in on this curse's presence. What isn't apparent without thorough study is that taking a **long rest** in these caves always restores a character's full Hit Dice.

Ruined farmstead

The party comes across a farmstead that has been razed by marauding humanoid monsters. Roll 1d4 for the former inhabitants:

1. Gnomes
2. Halflings
3. Humans
4. Elves or DM's choice

If the party searches for tracks in the vicinity, roll for a monster encounter and those are the tracks they find, though the creatures have been gone from this area for 1d4 days.

Treasure. Searching the wreckage for a few hours reveals some treasure that was not taken (either by the former inhabitants or the monsters that destroyed it). Roll on the random treasure tables in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, once on the **Individual Treasure: Challenge 0-4 table**, twice on **Magic Item Table A** and 50% chance of rolling once on **Magic Item Table B**. If this encounter happens multiple times, consider only rewarding 1d6x10 gp in coin and gems, 1d4 trinkets, and 1d4 mundane weapons or armor (such as arrows, leather armor, or the like).

Merchant caravan

A caravan of merchants is currently camping. There are 1d4 wagons, each drawn by 2 **oxen** (VGM 208), and each with 2 drovers (**commoners**). 1d4+2 **guards** accompany the wagons. If encountered at night, 1 guard is on watch at a time while the rest of the group eats, sleeps, or drinks around a fire.

During the daytime, encamped caravans are dealing with some sort of problem. Roll 1d4:

1. Broken wagon wheel.
2. Attacked by a band of 6 **goblins** that they just finished defeating.
3. One of their members wandered off mysteriously.
4. They are lost (if the way is obvious, change this to currently involved in an encounter with a randomly rolled hostile monster).

Abandoned camp

A long-range patrol from Elturgard recently made camp here. Among their numbers was a single **griffon** and griffonrider (a **scout**) to act as messengers or advanced scouts, but they are long gone.

Abandoned monstrous camp

Cast aside scraps of game, refuse, and other litter makes it clear that monstrous humanoids camped in this area within the past 1d4 days. They travel by night, and have been displaced by the kobolds or other humanoids ravaging the countryside. Roll 1d6 to determine what sorts of monsters:

1. 2 **goblins**, 1 **hobgoblin** and 1 **bugbear**
2. 1d6 **orcs**
3. 1d4 **gnolls**
4. 1d8 **kenku**
5. 2 **ogres**
6. 1 **troll**

Tracking the monsters (DC 12) will allow the party to catch up to the monstrous band within 2 days.

Occupied farmstead

This farmstead is the home to a family eking out a living from the land. Recent raids and monstrous activity keeps them on high alert, and they do have the resources to protect themselves (up to a point). Roll 1d4 for the inhabitants:

1. Gnomes
2. Halflings
3. Humans
4. Mixed group (DM's choice or re-roll twice and combine, ignoring additional 4s)

The inhabitants include:

❖ A single **priest**, **druid**, **veteran**, or **illusionist** (VGM 214)
❖ An **apprentice wizard** (VGM 209), or 1d4 **acolytes**
❖ A single **spy** or **scout**
❖ 2d4+2 **guards**
❖ 1d6+4 **commoners**
❖ 2d4+4 herd or riding animals

Treasure. If the PCs require aid or attempt to engage the farmers in business of any kind, you can roll up a single **Challenge 0-4 treasure hoard** (DMG 137) to determine their resources; they will charge steep prices, however.

Protected glade

The party comes across some natural feature that has become the domain of a troupe of fey creatures. This might be a copse of trees, a clearing in the woods, a pond or small lake, a ring of stone menhirs, a lone tree, an immense boulder, or the like.

Roll 1d4 or choose the best option for the given terrain the party is currently traveling through:

1. A **dryad**, 1d4 **blink dogs**
2. 2d4 **sprites** and 1d6+2 **pixies**
3. A wild elf **druid**, a **blink dog**, and 1d4 wild elf **acolytes**; a **unicorn** resides nearby
4. A **green hag**

Treasure. Regardless of which group is used, the first time this encounter comes up, the creatures have a randomly rolled treasure hoard from the **Challenge 5-10 treasure hoard table** (DMG 137). They can buy, sell, and trade with these resources, or might gift them to friendly parties in exchange for completing a task such as defeating another randomly rolled antagonist that threatens the immediate vicinity.

Fey Magic. Regardless of the nature of the monsters encountered, the area maintains a powerful natural link to inherent powers within the Weave. Taking a long rest under the protection of the inhabitants in this area conveys some sort of magical effect (see the blessings and charms described on DMG 227-228); roll 1d4 to determine an appropriate benefit from the list below:

1. *Charm of restoration*
2. *Charm of vitality*
3. *Charm of heroism*
4. *Blessing of Protection* (consider this result very carefully before allowing it in your game)

In the case of antagonistic fey such as the green hag or even the wild elves (perhaps they are xenophobes like the Eldreth Veluuthra that actively hunt non-elves and keep them out of the natural places of the world), there might be a curse that befalls the party that takes a long rest in the area. For example, the party might drink from a pond that heals them as per a *healing potion*, but at the end of their long rest, they face the effects of the curse described below.

Petrifying Curse. A creature that drinks the water from the pond must make a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw** upon finishing their next long rest. On a failed save, the creature magically begins to turn to stone and is restrained. It must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a success, the effect ends. On a failure, the creature is petrified until freed by the *greater restoration* spell or similar magic. (Treat this curse as a 6th level spell if needed for determining what magic can cure it.)

Traveler's shrine

Whether it's beside an obvious foot trail or standing among weeds and tall grass in a place rarely trekked anymore, an 8 foot tall stone shrine stands as an ancient monolith looking over the vale. It is, in fact, a very small building, barely more than 6 feet deep, and it once allowed travelers to stow goods for those who might wander by and be in need, whether it be walking sticks, dried foodstuffs, a waterskin, or the like. The weather-worn symbols engraved upon the shrine suggest the form of a man with a wild beard and long cloak blowing in the wind; this is the symbol of Shaundakul, the Rider of the Winds, an ancient deity of travel, caravans, and now portals. This shrine was built in the times of ancient Netheril, and also bears more recent dedications to the gnomish deity Baervan Wildwanderer, also a patron of travel, nature, and forests. These symbols feature the countenance of a raccoon painted or carved into nearby stone cairns (only a couple feet tall) or in trees.

The DM may choose or roll on the Creatures column of the random encounter table to determine if there is a single NPC or monster present at the shrine. Ignore results of 1-5, treating these as if there were no one present at the shrine. Any encounters here will be with a single creature suffering 1d4 levels of **exhaustion**. In all cases, it will be **indifferent** or **friendly**, not aligned to any aggressive factions or groups, and likely a lonely, good or neutral-aligned member of its race. (If this result comes up again, DMs should feel free to vary the encounter, with an eye toward presenting NPC merchants, local miners, any randomly chosen humanoid NPC from the *Monster Manual* appendix, or other non-violent encounters.)

Hermit

The party comes across a hermit that travels the area on its own business, whether that be tending to livestock, hunting game, or simply watching the comings and goings of other creatures in this land. This hermit is initially **hostile** but not combative toward anyone it meets. Using social ability checks (see Social Interaction, DMG 244), may be willing to provide some form of aid, as described below.

Choose one of the hermits below, utilizing them to stage a unique roleplay encounter opportunity, or as a template for some encounter you devise using an existing NPC.

Feora (CG female sun elf **warlock of the archfey**; VGM 219) patrols the region with a **displacer beast** (Maera) she has trained since its birth to act as her ally. Feora is a member of the Olin Gisir, a loose faction of elves and half-elves that operate to keep bound demons and elven artifacts of power hidden from evildoers. She tends to a number of subterranean portals in the region that were supposedly a part of a magical route called the Trail of Mists, though she does not reveal this to anyone. Rather, she gloats and sometimes even shares knowledge from faraway lands and ancient times, information she gathered using these portals. If the party is able to make Feora **friendly**, she can inform them of some of the safest routes through the region; for the next ten days, treat all random encounter rolls on the Creatures table as if they are no encounter.

Raelia (CN female tiefling **conjurer**; VGM 212) is a former member of the Cult of the Dragon, once operating near the Dungeon of Swords in the southern Serpent Hills. Brought by rumors of wyrms, treasure, and portals that previous cultists used, she and her cadre were soundly defeated by nagas, and Raelia retired to a life of herding cattle and sheep, spreading false rumors while trading with local villages, and generally being a mysterious nuisance. If she becomes **friendly** towards the party, she will provide them with 1d4 *healing potions* and wish them well on their adventures.

Ruined temple foundation

Once there stood on this ground a temple to Amaunator, the Light of the Law. Worshipped by the Netherese, the temple and its works were largely abandoned when Netheril fell, for it said that Amaunator did not lift a finger to help his people. All that remains today is the carved out foundation of the temple, with a few low walls inside that demarcate different rooms: a reliquary, a storage room, and a barracks-style dormitory. In the reliquary is an interesting item that cannot be removed by mortal means: upon a marble pedestal is five foot tall sculpture of an angel holding aloft a blazing star. The sculpture is made of yellow-white light, and is immaterial, though it does give off a pleasant warmth if touched.

Malfunctioning teleportation circle

A *teleportation circle* is found, inscribed in heavy stone bricks or upon a single, massive slab of marble that is sunken into the earth. Overgrown weeds, vines, and other creepers hide the circle from immediate notice, but close inspection reveals its obvious nature. The insignia that make up the circle's commands are mostly worn away or damaged by broken stones and the like, rendering the circle useless. DMs familiar with other portions of the Forgotten Realms should consider providing hints about where this circle's destination might have been.

Hazards

The following encounters represent natural phenomena, deadly terrain, or placed traps that are either dangerous on their own, have the potential to trigger encounters by alerting creatures of passersby, or both.

Kobold trap

A hidden **pit trap** (DMG 122) that is 10 feet deep impedes the party's progress, and if it is triggered, a connected alarm bell goes off in a nearby den of kobolds, who send out a hunting party: 1d6 **kobolds** and 1d8 **giant weasels**.

Bad weather: storm

A storm rolls in quite suddenly, leading to **heavy precipitation** (see DMG 110) for 2d6 hours.

Bad weather: dense fog

A dense fog rolls in, usually reaching its peak obscurement during the morning hours. Everything becomes dim light at best, and at the DM's discretion, darkvision may be rendered useless beyond a few feet, as well.

Poison marsh

The party's route forward requires that they head through knee-deep marsh water, or look for a way around. Finding a route around requires no rolls, but sets back their travel 4 hours. Cutting through the marsh turns up a very deadly surprise, as the marsh water acts as **frigid water** (DMG 110), even though it is not especially cold to the touch. This is a nonmagical effect caused by slow acting poison that has leached into this marsh for centuries, possibly from a source native to Najara.

Overflowing river

While the party is traveling near a river or stream, the water rapidly begins to overflow the banks and send debris into the surrounding countryside: a dam (natural or otherwise) broke upriver! Aside from potentially drowning anyone in the water -- navigating it by swimming would almost certainly be a death sentence, requiring a successful **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check** just to keep

from being submerged -- areas along the banks could easily become like **quicksand** (DMG 110) as water pools in certain muddy areas or sucks away at the earth just below the ground. Vicious DMs can use this as a way to spoil rations, waterlog camping supplies, or even carry off pack animals, though the players should have a shot at saving their goods and gear, perhaps using appropriate abilities in **group checks**.

Ancient graveyard

An ancient graveyard stands atop a hill rise, or is shrouded against the sun's light in a low valley or depression in the earth between some hills and escarpments. It might be an ancient burial ground used by barbarians during the days of ancient Netheril, or it is the resting place of gnomes or dwarves that once tried to ply their trade here before succumbing to the attacks of serpentfolk from the nearby hills. If the party investigates or lingers too long, they may be in for a surprise, as the entire area is considered **desecrated ground** (DMG 110): after an hour, 1d4 **shadows** attack!

Crevasse into Underdark

A sinkhole opens up underneath the characters! Treat this as a **hidden pit trap** (DMG 122) that is 20 feet deep. In the ensuing collapse of the earth, ancient fungal spores are released into the air for several minutes, and there's a chance they may cause some nasty effects.

Roll 1d6 for the effects of the cave in:

1. No effect.
2. The party's rations are compromised. One third of all their foodstuffs spoil.
3. The party's rations are compromised. Half of all their foodstuffs spoil.
4. The fungal spores trigger intense allergies in anyone that isn't immune to poison or disease. Such characters make a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw**. If they fail, they suffer one level of **exhaustion**. If they roll a natural 1 on their saving throw, they suffer two levels of **exhaustion**.
5. One character (randomly chosen) is sprayed with several spores directly in the face, taking **4 (1d8) poison damage** and if they fail a **DC 12 Constitution saving throw**, they suffer one level of **exhaustion**. At the end of each long rest, they must make the save again, and if they fail, they suffer another level of exhaustion and must continue making such saving throws for 1d4 days (until they succeed or the duration ends). If

they succeed, their exhaustion is reduced by one level and they no longer need to make saving throws for this effect.
6. No effect.

Bad weather: heat wave

A heat wave blankets the region for 1d4 days, and any travel conducted during the daytime hours subjects the party to the effects of **extreme heat** (DMG 110).

Spider webs

The party's travels through a lightly wooded area leads them into the domain of a spider nest. If they fail to make a **DC 14 group Wisdom (Perception) check**, one of the party members walks into an area that is filled with **webs** (DMG 105) and within one round, a bunch of spiders respond: 1 **giant wolf spider** and 1d4 **giant spiders**.

Gargantuan tracks

The stupendously large tracks of some gigantic monstrosity break up the terrain, but they are many days old, and after a time, all sign of the creature is lost due to harder terrain. The monster was a (roll 1d4):

1. **Tarrasque**
2. **Brontosaurus** (AKA Thunderstep Behemoth, VGM 139)
3. **Purple worm**
4. **Ancient red dragon**

Hunter's trap

The party comes across several traps throughout a lightly wooded area, all of them nonlethal (and most aren't harmful, either): things like small cages that swing shut when entered, boxes that drop if bait is taken, and so on. These traps are used by gnomes to capture smaller animals and either train them or speak with them (using magic, of course) to find out the nature of monsters that might have traveled through the region.

The party might be subject to a **falling net trap** (DMG 122) if they investigate too closely. If they wait at the traps for a while to see what happens, pick a mundane, tiny or small animal from the *Monster Manual* to get trapped. Within 20 minutes of a trap triggering, 1d4 forest gnome **guards** and a forest gnome **scout** arrive.

Enervating shrine
Tucked between some rolling hills is an idyllic grove of trees and berry bushes that stands seemingly untouched. It makes a great place to catch a long rest…

Or so the illusion makes it seem! In actuality, this is an enchanted grove of dead trees among a thicket of pricker bushes and gnarly vines. If one doesn't see through the illusion -- using a *detect magic* spell or succeeding at a **DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check** or **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals what's wrong here -- they can clear out a place to sleep, but after the long rest, the illusion dissipates and they find their exposed flesh cut up and their clothing filled with prickers, and any attempt to rest actually ends without any beneficial effects. In fact, it ends by them gaining a level of **exhaustion**!

An enterprising DM may substitute the effect (and the narrative of how the effect is achieved) for any other sort of resting spot the party makes, rather than a blighted grove of trees. So, the party could come upon a ruined farmhouse, the basement of a ruined temple, or any other sort of appropriate location that the party may use for cover and have the same effect haunt them.

Creatures
The following encounters all involve creatures. Although many of them are likely to be **hostile** at first, consider their motivations and general morale when determining whether or not such an encounter should start with or lead to combat. These creatures may be ambushers, or they may simply be out hunting or scrounging. They may even be willing to barter information or minor goods like ammunition, pelts, or the like.

Wolves
A pack of wolves harries the group, attempting to catch someone that falls behind or scouts ahead, or waiting until the party makes camp and goes to sleep. There are 2d4 **wolves**. There is a 25% chance that these wolves act on behalf of an irredeemably evil **druid** hermit that resides in a hovel nearby with his mad offspring (1d4 **tribal warriors**).

Orc raiding party
Orcs ravage the countryside all the time: there are 1d4+2 **orcs** astride either **giant lizards** or **hadrosauruses** (VGM 140), roaming the countryside looking for easy prey. The mounts are trained to fight if their rider is slain or separated from them.

Bugbears & goblins
Barbaric goblinoids ambush easy prey: a gang of 1d4+1 **bugbears** and their 1d8 **goblin** "brethren" (read: cannon fodder).

Hobgoblin war party
Hobgoblins are highly organized and often work out of small encampments, usually raided farmhouses or the ruins of some long lost structure like a defiled shrine. They lead other goblinoids and sometimes other monsters on guerilla raids for supplies and booty, and trade somewhat freely with the Zhentarim and the serpentfolk of Najara.

The party consists of a **hobgoblin captain** on a **worg**, 2 **hobgoblins** also on **worgs**, and 1d4 **goblins** mounted on **wolves**.

Trolls
1d4 **trolls** prowl the countryside for food (elf flesh is best!) and shiny things.

Kobold skirmishers
Kobolds prowl the countryside for supplies and loot to bring back to Syranthaxius, a wyrmling who resides in the vicinity. You can use these forces to bolster those of any kobold lair, if needed.

Roll 1d4 for the kobold gang's makeup:
1. *Patrol*. 1 **kobold dragonshield** (VGM 165) leads 1d4 **kobolds** and 2 **giant weasels** on patrol.
2. *Elite Patrol*. 1d4+2 **kobolds**, 1 **winged kobold**, and either 1 **giant weasel** or 1 **guard drake** (VGM 158).
3. *Raiding Band*. 2 **kobold dragonshields** (VGM 165), 1 **kobold inventor** (VGM 166), and 2d4+4 **kobolds**. They may split up into smaller teams, and attempt to use stealth to steal from a settlement, or from a camped party of adventures.
4. *Aerial Patrol*. 1d4+2 **winged kobolds** might (25% chance) be accompanied by a ground patrol of 1d4 **kobolds** and 1 **giant weasel**.

Adventurers
A band of plucky adventurers roams the wilderness, either looking for adventure or after having unsuccessfully started one and having since fled from whatever danger was presented to them. These parties can be made up of whatever race combinations you choose, though in most

cases, they should primarily be human unless otherwise noted.

Roll 1d4 for the makeup of the adventuring party:
1. **Patrol**. These good-aligned adventurers are soldiers of companies from Elturgard or Boareskyr Bridge. They include a **knight** astride a **griffon**, two **scouts**, and 1d4+1 **guards**.
2. **Cultists**. A **cult fanatic** -- or alternatively, a **warlock of the Archfey** (VGM 219) or evil-aligned **priest** -- leads a band of 2 **thugs** and 1d4 **cultists**. They may be members of the Cult of the Dragon or a similar evil group active along the Sword Coast.
3. **Tomb Robbers**. A **berserker**, a **spy** (perhaps acting as a guide), and 1d4+2 **tribal warriors** seek out treasures for their barbarian clansmen.
4. **Bandits**. A **bandit captain** and his **cult fanatic** ally lead a group of 1d8+1 **bandits** on some mission to find treasure. They are part of a larger band of 2d4+4 **bandits** and their 1d4 **mastiffs** that camp somewhere nearby, and they will come running if the captain blows his warhorn in alarm.

Additionally, you may roll 1d6 for their general disposition:
1. **Friendly but aloof**. This party will gladly provide historical info or recent lore they might know on the surrounding area, but otherwise don't wish to help the party.
2. **Friendly rivalry**. The adventurers will look at the player characters as potential rivals, and will be happy to compare notes on future adventures should they ever run into each other at town.
3. **Underhanded**. These adventurers will act friendly, attempting to glean information about the party's current quest, and then try to steal their glory.
4. **Antagonistic**. These adventurers see the party as rivals, and while not aggressive, they maintain a **hostile** attitude unless persuaded otherwise.
5. **Thieves**. These adventurers act haughty and aloof, but return when the party's camping to try and stealthily steal something from the party that catches their eye.
6. **Attack**! These adventurers see the party as prey, and attack. They may try to parley from a distance first, and then setup an ambush of some sort.

Lizardfolk
Lizardfolk have come down from the marshes and wooded areas to the north on raids, or to verify rumors they've been hearing about the wyrmling dragon Syranthaxius' activities with the kobolds. A **lizardfolk shaman** and 4 **lizardfolk** are scouting the area for settlements to raid. They aren't initially aggressive, and they won't share their motives, but if they feel intimidated they will attack.

Smallfolk patrol
Local militia members patrol the many small settlements throughout the Trielta Hills region, and are generally the first line of news about the comings and goings of monsters. They use specially trained ravens to deliver messages throughout the area.

Roll 1d4 for the group's composition:
1. **Gnomes**. Led by a **veteran** armed with a pike, this group includes 2 **archers** (VGM 210) armed with heavy crossbows and 2d4 **guards**. One of the archers is trained to use a **raven** to deliver messages. There's a 25% chance they'll have 2 **axe beaks** acting as trained pets.
2. **Halflings**. Usually led by either a **priest** or a **spy**, halfling patrols contain 1d4+1 **scouts** and 2d4+2 **guards**. The leader will be trained in the use of **ravens** to deliver messages to nearby settlements. There's a 25% chance they will have a **blink dog** accompanying them.
3. **Mixed Group**. Bound by their communities, this mixed group of halflings and gnomes are led by a gnome **illusionist** (VGM 214) or halfling **priest**, and include members of both races as decided by the DM. The unit consists of 1 **archer** (VGM 210), and 1d6+2 **guards**, half of whom carry a heavy crossbow in addition to their other weapons.
4. **Elite Patrol**. An elite patrol is usually mixed in terms of gnomes and halflings as well. There will be a **druid** or **knight** acting as the leader (mounted on a **pony**), and a unit consisting of 2 **archers** (VGM 210), 2 **scouts**, and 3d6 **guards**, half of whom are armed with pikes and the other half armed with heavy crossbows in addition to their standard equipment. There's a 25% chance that they'll be accompanied by an **illusionist** (VGM 214) and a **blink dog**.

Yuan-ti

Yuan-ti come to these lands rarely, and only with some great purpose.

Choose their motivations and party makeup:
- ❖ *Hunting down slaves*. A band of slaves have escaped their yuan-ti captors! The yuan-ti hunting party consists of a **yuan-ti malison** (choose or roll randomly for type), 4 **yuan-ti purebloods**, and a **giant constrictor snake**. The party of slaves consists of a **gladiator** and 1d4+1 **guards**, all of whom are unarmed and suffering from 3 levels of exhaustion.
- ❖ *Spies*. 1d6 yuan-ti purebloods travel with 1 **cult fanatic** and 1d4 **cultists**, acting as merchants. They claim to be outcasts of Najara if questioned. They answer to active yuan-ti in the area.

DMs armed with *Volo's Guide to Monsters* should consider using the physical variations tables, unusual abilities, personality trait tables, and names on pages 97-99 of that book to flesh out these encounters. Yuan-ti are cunning enemies with ulterior motives, and therefore are likely to engage in social interaction or become recurring enemies of the party. Their forces can be bolstered by the noted minions and allies in that book or the DM can use them for inspiration in creating parties of escaped slaves or the slavers that sell captured people to the serpentfolk.

Nagas

Nagas are the nominal ruling class of Najara, and therefore they rarely travel abroad, instead prefering to send yuan-ti or other serpentfolk underlings to manage their spy networks, tend to mercantile duties, and otherwise present what limited face time the Kingdom of Snakes feels it must in order to expand its place in the world. As such, there are relatively few reasons for nagas to be encountered in the Trielta Hills region. A **spirit naga inquisitor** leads a group of 1d4 **lizardfolk** on a hunt for an escaped **yuan-ti malison** traitor.

Ogres

Plenty of ogres have lost their homes to the kobold incursions, or were wanderers and nomads to begin with.

Roll 1d4 for the makeup of the ogre encounter:
1. Rosh is an **ogre** that wants revenge on the kobolds! He has organized a posse consisting of a **lizardfolk shaman**, 1d8 **goblins**, and a **goblin boss** to harry kobold patrols and raiding parties in the region.
2. Plen is an **ogre** hermit living in a shack nearby with his 2 **axebeak** pets.
3. Gren is an **ogre** mercenary has joined up with 2 **doppelgangers** and their (usually hidden) pet **displacer beast** for nefarious jobs.
4. Droz the neutral good **ogre** with a pet **weasel** named Flak just wants to settle down among the urban townsfolk or cityfolk somewhere and take up a job as a bouncer at a tavern. He'd even join a party if they promise such a future for him; if such a job is offered to him, he'll leave the party immediately.

Forest of Wyrms

#2. Forest of Wyrms Random Encounters

1d12*	Encounter
1-6	No encounter
7	Hazard
8	Dragon slayers
9	Secret camp
10	Hill giant
11	Bugbears
12	Green dragon
Nighttime Only Encounters	
13	Enervating mist
14	Giant spider ambush
15	Serpent spies
16	Dire wolf pack
17	Scavengers
18	Yuan-ti slaving party
19	The abandoned dragon's lair
20	Thlohtzin, the slaver's stronghold

*At night, roll 1d12+2d4 to determine the encounter instead.

This table is an example of an altered distribution table: it uses a single table to generate results, but there is a modifier to the roll at night, which in turn means that the chances of no encounter at all become less likely, while new, more dangerous ones (the highest ones) might potentially pop up. These woods are infested with monsters, after all, so the chances of the party getting ambushed or running across bad things are very, very high.

Directions. Roll once for an encounter during the day, and once at night. During the daytime, roll 1d12. At nighttime, roll 1d12+2d4.

Encounters

The following encounters feature a number of hooks and options, to increase the versatility of this encounter table. A simpler encounter table might feature only a single, fixed or small variable number of creatures or hazards in each of the entries below; doing any more than 3 or 4 might create so many options that it can be more easily handled by having a larger initial table to roll on, rather than a half dozen or more options in each entry.

Hazard

The party faces a natural hazard that can be circumnavigated by adding 1d4 hours to their travel time, or must be traversed via appropriate ability checks (group checks, if the DM feels that would be most appropriate). Roll 1d4 or choose:

1. A violent, possibly natural event (earthquake, windstorm) or a gargantuan creature uprooted the massive redwood trees, creating a maze of precariously fallen branches, trunks, and thorny hedges. Each individual party member must succeed at a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or increase their exhaustion by one level. Characters that roll a natural 1 instead increase their exhaustion by two levels.

2. A maze of helmthorn patches stretch before the party. They can navigate these by continuing to move at a slow pace for the day, or by navigating around the hedges (as mentioned above). If they move at a slow pace, one character may forage for berries: if they succeed at a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) or DC 16 Intelligence (Nature) check, they may harvest 1d4 days' worth of food in berries. Going through the hedges at a normal or fast pace requires them to succeed at a DC 15

group Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, or they each suffer one level of exhaustion. Either way, they get out of the hedge maze within 2 hours (1 if they move at a fast pace). They cannot rest while among the helmthorns.

3. A heavy mist lingers in the air all day. For the entirety of that day, the party suffers as if everywhere they go is lightly obscured.

4. The general dampness of the forest causes 1d4 pounds of rations to spoil over the course of the day.

Dragon slayers

A party of adventurers is looking to slay themselves a dragon! Roll 1d4+1 times on the Common NPC Archetypes table (see the Hardbuckler section, earlier) to get stat blocks for these characters. Then roll 1d4 for their current status:

1. They are badly wounded: halve their hit points, and they suffer from two levels of exhaustion.

2. They are low on food and water, and suffer from one level of exhaustion.

3. They just lost the trail of some monster. Choose a monster at random, but it's long gone.

4. They are hale and hardy, but have no leads on any monsters.

Secret camp

A hidden camp – permanent or temporary – of intelligent creatures hides in the heights of the tall redwood trees. It can only be spotted with a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check. Roll 1d4 to determine the nature of the inhabitants:

1. Wild elf hunters: 2d4 **guards**, 1d4 **scouts**, and a **blink dog**. They are hostile to non-elves, as they are members of the Eldreth Veluuthara, a group of xenophobic elves.

2. Drow looking for some lost artifact: 1d4 **drow**, 2 **drow elite warriors**, and 1 **drow mage**. During the day, they are sleeping with one of the elite warriors keeping watch.

3. Wererats: 1d4+2 **wererats**.

4. Bandits wanted by the law, on the run from Elturel and they took a really, really wrong turn: 1d6+1 bandits, 1 thug, and an outlaw **cult fanatic**.

Hill giant

Dullog the **hill giant** prowls the wood, in search of sentient food. If the party has already faced Dullog, roll 1d4 for his replacement.

1. Skur the **hill giant** and his pet **chimera**.

2. An **ettin**.

3. A band of 1d4 **ogres**.

4. An **ogre** and his 4d4 **goblin** servants.

Bugbears

Bugbears lair in the woods in one of several small, semi-nomadic camps or in various shallow caves where they store the trophies of their hunts. They have a chaotic structure of battling tribes, but their rivalries are more for sport than blood. A typical hunting party consists of 1d4 **bugbears**, 1d4+2 **goblins**, and 1d6-1 **wolves**. A lair usually has 2d6 **bugbears**, 2d4 **goblins**, 1d8 **wolves**, and there's a 25% chance of there being a special creature, such as 1d4 **worgs**, a **barghest** (VGM), or a more intelligent manipulating evil of your choice, such as a **mindflayer**.

Green dragon

The party encounters a green dragon that lairs somewhere in the forest. Roll 1d4:

1. **Green dragon wyrmling**

2. **Young green dragon**

3. **Adult green dragon**

4. **Ancient green dragon**

If the encounter is appropriate for the party's level, consider making this a combat encounter, but the dragon will use the nature of the terrain to its distinct advantage: tall trees provide cover as it flies about, helmthorns can act as cover and obstacles, waterways may provide it with places to hide, ambush the party, or get around them stealthily, and so on. This is a hunt on the dragon's turf!

If the encounter is deadly or worse for the party, consider using this as an opportunity to roleplay an especially powerful creature that wants to know more about the goings on of potential enemies: civilized areas like Soubar or Hardbuckler, yuan-ti encampments, or even other dragons. A mighty, treacherous green dragon will drive a hard bargain, but it will negotiate…to the disfavor of the party, in the end!

If the dragon is not enough to challenge the party, consider having it operate under the unwilling control of a powerful **archmage** working with the Cult of the Dragon, or in control of hordes of fanatical followers such as

kobolds (and **winged kobolds**), **tribal warriors**, or **cultists** and **cult fanatics**.

Under no circumstances will a green dragon give up the location of its lair, unless it knows it would be leading the party into a trap where they are outnumbered by minions and traps setup in such a place. Green dragons lair in caves, dead redwoods, and underground chambers that feature deep waterways, since they are amphibious.

Enervating mist

A mist blankets an area of 1d6 miles for 1d4 hours. Most animals flee the area, lending an unnatural silence to the region. Everything within is considered lightly obscured, but even worse, the mist seems to magically sap the strength of creatures inside it! Every hour the party remains within the mist, they must each make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw. Failure means they take 1d4 poison damage, and are poisoned for 1d4 hours. Failure by 5 or more causes them to take 1d4 poison damage and they increase their exhaustion by one level, instead.

Consider crossing this encounter off of the table once it happens the first time, and simply treating it as "No encounter" going forward.

Variants. If you want to change up the enervating mist, you can mix and match damage types and exhaustion levels; perhaps it only increases exhaustion, or it negates the effects of taking a rest, or deals acid damage. It might also simply create a region of heavily obscured terrain, instead of lightly obscured. Much more punishing effects might include petrification, paralysis, or dumping folks into Barovia ala the Mists of Ravenloft.

Giant spider ambush

The party wanders into a region that has been taken over by giant spiders. They will face hazards that slowly draw them into the reach of the spiders, and then the creatures will attack! Roll 1d4 or choose:

1. The party comes across a 20-foot deep **pit trap**, at the bottom of which are **webs**. Whether or not they trigger the trap, 1d6 **giant wolf spiders** and 1d4 **giant spiders** are already waiting to attack.
2. This stretch of woods are blanketed in **webs**, and skirting the area causes 2d4+2 **giant wolf spiders** to harry them. They will try to knock out a party member and drag them off to a nearby nest, where 1d8 more **giant wolf spiders** can be found, lairing among a dense network of **webs**.

3. A pack of 1d4+2 giant wolf spiders and 2 **giant spiders** attack from above. The 2 giant spiders wield web-like creations as **nets**.
4. The party is harried by 1d6 **giant wolf spiders**, who will flee if even a single one of their own is dropped. Tracking them leads to a nest of 2d8+2 more **giant wolf spiders**, as well as a band of 1d4+4 mutant, multi-armed goblins and a **goblin boss** with bulbous, spider-like eyes. Their entire camp is built among the trees, in **web**-like structures. (The goblins all have the web sense and web walker abilities of giant spiders, but not spider climb.)

Serpent spies

Several factions of ophidian-type creatures make their home in the Forest of Wyrms, just as they do in Najara, the kingdom beneath the Serpent Hills. They are rarely well-disposed toward one another, never mind how they feel about other races like humans and elves! Roll 1d4 or choose, but in all cases, pick a number and makeup of the groups that will challenge the party, erring towards hard or even deadly encounters. These creatures control the region for a reason, after all!

1. Yuan-ti who have gone rogue and live like bandits: **yuan-ti purebloods**, **broodguards**, and perhaps a **malison** or two.
2. Nagas seeking an escaped slave, ancient artifact, or potential minions to recruit for some pet project. **Bone** or **spirit nagas** are the most likely choices.
3. Lizardfolk loyal to either a green dragon or a group of nagas. Likely made up of **lizardfolk**, a **lizardfolk shaman**, and **giant lizard** mounts.
4. A band of yuan-ti with a slaad that has been bound in service to them: use any combination of **yuan-ti** and **slaadi** that might challenge the party.

Dire wolf pack

A pack of wolves – perhaps led by something even more fierce – harry the party. The pack makeup is based on the party's tier:

❖ Tier 1: 1d4 **wolves**, led by a mated pair of **worgs**.
❖ Tier 2: 1d6+2 **wolves**, a **dire wolf**, and a **winter wolf**.
❖ Tier 3: 1d6 **worgs**, 1d4 **winter wolves**, and 2 **werewolves**. They are a patrol from a nearby cave lair of ravaging lycanthropes that contains

12 **worgs**, 2d6 **goblins**, a **goblin boss**, and a pack of 3d4 **werewolves**.

❖ Tier 4: The party stumbles upon a small farmstead, the inhabitants of which seem welcoming enough, but in fact are a band of roving monsters: 3d4 **werewolves**, 2d6+6 **wererats**, 2d4 **winter wolves**, an **owlbear**, 1d6 **vampire spawn**, and a **vampire spellcaster**. This is a unique encounter, and once it has been used, cross it off and treat as "No encounter."

Scavengers

Fools who have either escaped the Serpent Kingdom, or the law of Elturel, are found trying to eke out some sort of existence in the eaves of the forest. Roll 1d4 or choose:

1. A **bandit captain**, a **mage**, and 2d4+4 **bandits** have a nearby camp; they are out looking to ambush someone and steal some stuff.
2. A **berserker**, 1d4+4 **tribal warriors**, and an **acolyte** riding **axe beaks**.
3. An **orc war chief**, an **orc Eye of Gruumsh**, and 1d6+2 **orcs**.
4. 2d4 **thugs**, 1d8 **bandits**, a **gladiator**, and 1d12 **commoners**.

Yuan-ti slaving party

These slavers are part of a larger operation (perhaps Thlohtzin, below, or a settlement in the Serpent Hills), and vary by tier:

❖ Tier 1: A **yuan-ti malison** leads 1d4+2 **yuan-ti purebloods** and their pet **cockatrice**.

❖ Tier 2: A **yuan-ti nightmare speaker** (VGM), 2d4+2 **yuan-ti purebloods**, and 2d4 **flying snakes** are walking patrol. There's a 25% chance that

nearby, 1d4 **yuan-ti broodguards** (VGM) watch over 2d4 **commoner** slaves.

❖ Tier 3: A **yuant-ti mind whisperer** (VGM) controls a **behir**, and leads a group of 1 **yuant-ti pit master** (VGM) and 2d4 **yuant-ti purebloods**.

❖ Tier 4: A **yuan-ti abomination** in control of **behir** mount leads a terrifying band consisting of 1 **yuan-ti malison** and 2d6+2 **yuan-ti purebloods** on the hunt for a powerful slave who has escaped. This can be a **mage**, or it could be an NPC appropriate to your campaign.

The abandoned dragon's lair

The skeletons of two green dragons lay in overgrown hedges alongside a cave mouth that leads into a series of chambers within a relatively small inactive volcano. Clearly, this was once the lair of a dragon – likely a red dragon – but no sign of it or its hoard remain.

Thlohtzin, the Slaver's Stronghold

A series of ancient, ruined buildings stand overgrown by vines and creepers. Seminomadic gangs of slavers make their camps at such sites, which always feature trapdoors, caves, or other secret passageways into the Underdark. These slaver strongholds are actually numerous, and none yet know which one was the legendary lich stronghold that eventually was taken over by the serpentfolk races.

This site is the sort of thing an enterprising DM will have to create on their own, tailoring the enemies and terrain – likely filled with traps, obstacles, cover, and secret underground passageways – to challenge the adventurers.

Marsh of Chelimber

#3. Marsh of Chelimber Random Encounters

1d12+1d8	Encounter
2	Weather gets worse!
3	Hailstorm!
4	Awakened evil
5	Harpies
6	Nature's avengers
7	Stench of death
8	Kobold slavers
9	Ribbit!
10	Ambush!
11	Swamp thing
12	Carrion
13	Lost!
14	Lost mercenaries
15	Aerial patrol
16	Lizardfolk reavers
17	Killer croc
18	Umbral portal
19	Setback!
20	Lost treasure

This table exemplifies the Wizards' Table style, basically the same as what you'll find in most official D&D campaigns. It is primarily geared towards low-level play, probably Tier 2 in most cases.

Directions. Roll 1d20 once during the day and twice during the evening. An encounter occurs on a roll of 18 or higher. Then, roll 1d12+1d8 on the table above to determine the encounter that occurs.

Encounters

These encounters have been kept very straightforward. While many of them can be re-used multiple times, there are some that might seem like a one-off thing, so you can feel free to cross them off as they are used and treat them as "No encounter" going forward.

Weather Gets Worse!

The weather and terrain seems to turn against the adventurers, forcing them to take certain precautions or else suffer an increase in their exhaustion by at least one level. Roll 1d4 or choose:

1. Downpour (they must take cover)
2. Extremely hot and humid (they must move at a slow pace)
3. Parching dry heat (they must consume double the normal amount of water)
4. Quicksand (they must make a DC 12 group Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check or a random PC steps into quicksand)

You may use this as an excuse for the party to make some higher-than-normal DC checks in order to navigate, forage for food, or notice danger along their path.

Hailstorm!

Hail begins to fall at a precipitous rate! Choose one:

- ❖ It deals 1d6 bludgeoning damage per minute. The party can find cover within 1d6 minutes by making a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check.
- ❖ It deals 1d4 bludgeoning damage per round. The party can find cover within 1d10 rounds by making a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) check.

- The party can stop and take cover immediately, or continue traveling, but they suffer one level of exhaustion per hour traveled.

Awakened Evil
An **awakened tree**, 1d20 twig blights, and 1d6 **needle blights** can all be found in close proximity (all are chaotic evil). They blend in with the natural vegetation in this tainted area, and are virtually guaranteed to gain surprise.

Harpies
Two **harpies** prowl the skies above. They are not immediately hostile unless they gain some type of advantage (such as attacking while the party camps), and can be easily intimidated or bought off. If they are not dissuaded, they will return in 1d4 days to ambush the party with another 1d4+1 harpies in tow, or a **chimera** (DM's choice).

Nature's Avengers
1d4 **centaurs** prowl the countryside with their trained 1d4 **blood hawks**, seeking monsters to harry. Their ultimate goal is to restore serenity to these troubled swamps. You may add a few **pixies** or a **satyr** to this encounter, or change it to elven **scouts** and **guards**.

Stench of Death
1d4 **ghouls** lurk in the darkness. In 1d4+1 rounds, 1d4 **zombies** appear on the scene, with an additional 1d6 zombies arriving every two rounds (until a total of 20 zombies have arrived).

Kobold Slavers
4d6 **kobolds** are searching for a new lair. They are accompanied by 2 **giant lizards** carrying their wares, and a single **gnoll** slave in manacles and barely alive (1 hp, currently). You may add a **winged kobold** or two to this encounter, or change the slave to a **goblin boss**, human **berserker**, or human **tribal warriors** (with only 1 hp apiece, in any case).

Ribbit!
Three **giant frogs** are out for blood, enraged by years of feeding on the tainted waters of this marsh.

Ambush!
2d4 **goblin** raiders of the Fat Belly tribe, led by a **bugbear**. They employ 2 or 3 boulder traps as part of their surprise round (or first round of combat, if possible).

Boulder Trap. The boulders travel in a straight line for 50 feet, and take up a 5 foot by 5 foot area. Anyone in their path must make a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or suffer 2d10 bludgeoning damage.

Swamp Thing
A **shambling mound** rises from the muck to attack!

Treasure. Nearby, the party can find a lair of sorts — really a nest — containing some valuables collected from the bodies of the shambling mound's previous meals. Amongst the debris are 20 ep, 200 sp, 200 gp, and a single *potion of healing*.

Carrion
The slain body of some poor treasure-hunter. Her remains clearly tell the tale of a person ripped apart by humanoid monsters.

Treasure. Searching the area uncovers the following: a tiger eye gemstone worth 10 gp and a *spell scroll* of your choice.

Lost!
Regardless of the party's ability to navigate the wilderness, the trees and hills seem to twist and turn in their path, causing them to become lost for 1d6 hours. They won't wander in the wrong direction long enough to affect their trajectory for the day's travel.

Lost Mercenaries
A few mercenaries that were attempting to plunder the lair of some lizardfolk survived an assault of kobolds and awakened foliage (barely) and are now wandering aimlessly in search of respite. Tired, half-starved, and scared nearly witless, they might still prove somewhat useful to the party. They include 1d4 **guards** or **bandits** (your choice), and one spokesperson (choose which one):
- The black-haired, tattooed shieldmaiden Rix (a **berserker**).
- The failed magic-user's apprentice, Phamath (a **cultist**).
- Torstin Dunkletongue, a halfling **scout**.

Aerial Patrol
Two **winged kobolds** flit from tree to tree as four non-winged **kobolds** stalk the swamps, hunting for mutated fish; a kobold lair needs to eat, too! (And it might be nearby; feel free to develop a short, three- to five-cave dungeon.)

Lizardfolk Reavers

2d6 lizardfolk and 2d4 kobolds are on patrol. 1d4 **winged kobolds** will arrive within 1d4 rounds if combat breaks out and an alarm is sounded.

Killer Croc

A **lizardfolk shaman**, his pet **giant crocodile**, and 1d4 **lizardfolk** are gathering supplies for bizarre swamp god rituals.

Umbral Portal

The party stumbled upon a short, round stone altar protruding from the swampy waters. Upon it is inscribed a *teleportation circle*, which the party can use if they can crack the sigil code.

Place 1d4+1 additional *teleportation circles* on the hex map at random; if the PCs enter the hex, they notice them with if they have a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 16 or higher. These portals are designed to connect to one another, providing those that traverse them the ability to instantly teleport to any other portal. (You may decide if this is automatic or requires the casting of appropriate teleportation spells.)

Setback!

The party suffers some setback due to the corrosive nature of the swamp water. Roll 1d6 or choose:

1. One quarter of the party's remaining rations go bad.
2. Disgusting bacteria spoils half of the party's water supplies.
3. 1d4 pieces of non-magical ammunition become brittle, and must be discarded.
4. A single non-magical weapon or shield from a randomly chosen player character becomes brittle and is rendered useless.
5. A single, randomly chosen suit of armor becomes brittle; reduce its AC modifier by 1 until it is repaired (a process that takes 1d4 days of downtime and costs half the price of the armor).
6. Grasping vines, thorny brush, and sucking puddles of mud cause the party to have to move at slow pace, or else they will suffer one level of exhaustion.

Lost Treasure

A single magical item can be found in a surprisingly obvious place, so long as the party has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 14 or higher. Roll 1d4 to determine which magic item table in the Dungeon Master's Guide to roll on, and then roll percentile dice on that table to determine the item:

1. Magic Item Table B
2. Magic Item Table C
3. Magic Item Table F
4. Magic Item Table H

(Feel free to change which tables appear on that list to better suit your campaign. These are somewhat generous, but it should be noted that this encounter won't crop up very often!)

The High Moor

#4. The High Moor Random Encounters

Encounter	Marsh	Fire Marsh	Rocky Terrain
Abandoned site	1	1-2	1
Bullywugs	2		
Carrion crawlers			2
Crocodiles	3		
Insect swarm	4	3	3
Druid	5	4	4
Ettin		5	5
Fire elemental		6	
Goblinoids	6		6
Harpies	7		7
Hazard	8	7-8	8
Human tribesfolk			9
Lizardfolk	9		
Magmin		9	
Orcs	10		10
Undead		10	

This table is inspired by a much larger one – and the accompanying information – found within *The High Moor* by Alex Clippinger (available on DMsGuild.com).

The encounter table separates different terrain and environment types, and then has a percentile chance of offering up an encounter appropriate to that terrain; a similar type of random encounter table can be found in Storm King's Thunder, as well. The idea is that such tables provide for a huge variety of encounters, and separate the encounters within by appropriate environments, which be the dominate type for a given hex the party travels through. This may require some forethought on the DM's part regarding when a party enters or leaves a hex at a given point during the day or night. Generally, such decisions are fairly arbitrary, but the different environments provide DMs with lots of descriptive juice, and will also develop a unique "feel" or tone to the types of encounters that occur there, should the party travel through such regions often.

Directions. Roll 1d20 three times per day and three times per night. On a 16 or higher, an encounter occurs. Find the appropriate environment type, and roll 1d10 to determine the encounter.

Encounters

The encounters from the table are presented here in alphabetical order.

Abandoned Site

This site is currently abandoned, but offers clues to other types of creatures that can be encountered in this region, or some bit of lore that is appropriate to the campaign. Roll 1d6 or choose the type of site:

1. An abandoned camp
2. The foundation of some building
3. A ruined temple
4. A small, 3-chamber vault
5. A series of semi-permanent tents that have been partially burned
6. A dancing hut whose master has left it idle (and is unlikely to ever return)

Bullywugs

There are 3 **bullywugs** with an additional 1d3 bullywugs for every character level above 2nd.

Carrion Crawlers

There is one **carrion crawler**, plus an additional crawler for every two character levels above 2nd.

Crocodiles

There is one **crocodile** per character level up to 5th. At 5th level, there is instead one **giant crocodile** and one crocodile, with one additional crocodile for every character level above 5th.

Druid

A solitary **druid** wanders the land, communicating with the animals and protecting the wild. She is likely to know considerable lore pertinent to the region, but is in the midst of some task such as consecrating ground haunted by undead, attempting to calm or train some normally hostile creature (an **owlbear** or **chimera**, perhaps), or performing some other task that the party might be able to help with.

Ettin

An **ettin** stalks the land, but is not immediately hostile unless attacked. There's a 25% chance it has a pet **axe beak** traveling with it.

Fire Elemental

A **fire elemental** of decidedly ambivalent disposition roams its territory. You may change this to 1d4+1 **fire snakes** if you wish.

Goblinoids

There is a 25% chance the goblins are a hunting or raiding party, comprised of 2d4 **goblins** and a **goblin** boss, all mounted on **wolves**. Otherwise, there are 2d6 **goblins** and a **goblin boss** on foot. They may be interested in trade, and therefore are not immediately hostile.

Harpies

2d4 **harpies** nest in an outcropping nearby; there's a 75% chance they are singing to lure in victims. If attacked, there's a 25% chance they are actually the minions of a **green hag** that lives nearby.

Hazard

Choose a hazard that the party faces all of a sudden: quicksand, extreme heat that lasts for 1d4 hours, a series of 1d4 traps placed in close proximity to one another.

Human Tribefolk

A band of 2d4 **tribal warriors** and 1d4 **scouts** herd **goats**, **ponies**, or **oxen** (VGM).

Insect Swarm

1d4 **swarms of flying insects** become attracted to the party.

Lizardfolk

1d4 **lizardfolk** are on patrol. If the party is 5th level or above, an additional 1d6 lizardfolk and a **lizardfolk shaman** mounted on **giant lizards** are only 1d6 rounds away in case an alarm is raised.

Magmin

2d4 **magmin** are playing, which looks a lot like attacking things with fire.

Orcs

Orcs patrol this region, likely signaling that there is a lair nearby that doubles the noted numbers of orcs here. If the weather is clear, there are approximately 2d4 **orcs** hunting, foraging, herding, or some similar domestic activity. If it is foggy or raining, there are 1d4+2 orcs for a party below 5th level. For a party of 5th level or above, there are four orcs and one **orc war chief**, with an additional orc for each party level above 5th.

Undead

2d6 **zombies** roam about aimlessly. If they are attacked, a **will-o-wisp** appears nearby, and attempts to lead the party into an ambush sprung by 1d4 **ghouls**.

Serpent Hills

#5. Serpent Hills Random Encounters

1d12	Encounter Group
1	1d4 **yuan-ti purebloods**, 1d4 **cultists**, 1 **cult fanatic**
2	1 **shadow mastiff alpha**, 1d4+1 **shadow mastiffs**
3	1 **bone naga**, 1d4 **shadows**
4	1d6+1 **yuant-ti purebloods**, 1 **yuan-ti broodguard**, 1 **fire snake**
5	1 **medusa**, 1d4 **acolytes**, 2 **gargoyles**
6	1 **firenewt warlock of Imix**, 1d6+2 **firenewt warriors**; 50% chance of having 1d4 **commoner** slaves in tow
7	1d2 **harpies**, 1d4 **gnolls**, and 1 **giant hyena**; 50% chance of a **gnoll pack lord**
8	1 **guardian naga**, 1 **basilisk**
9	1 **yuan-ti abomination**, 1 **medusa**, 4 **yuan-ti purebloods**
10	1 **mummy** and 6d6 **skeletons**
11	1 **hobgoblin captain**, 1d4+2 **hobgoblins**, 2d4 **skeletons**
12	2 **spirit nagas**, 1 **yuan-ti anathema**

This table exemplifies a manner of simply building set encounter groups of creatures, without any real context as to their disposition or activities; the fluff is left up to the DM, as it were. Because these groups have a great deal of variety, they can spawn endless types of encounters, with the DM simply determining what their attitude, motivations, and destinations might be…so we've provided some tables to help with that!

As a note, this encounter table is very challenging, especially for Tier 1 and Tier 2 characters. Because most of the Serpent Kingdoms' folk are slavers, spies, and infiltrators, these encounters should rarely lead to combat right off the bat for characters of those levels.

Directions. Roll 1d20 three times per day (morning, afternoon, and night). An encounter occurs on a 16 or higher. Roll on the table to determine the encounter group, and use any appropriate tables below to develop some context for the encounters, or simply choose what works best for you.

Encounter Traits

Use the following tables to inspire you when determining what the creatures in an encounter group are doing. Remember that the serpentfolk races of the Serpent Hills value trade, diplomacy, negotiation, resources, and slaves, and therefore they are not immediately hostile in action, even if they might be in terms of general attitude towards outsiders.

Attitude

1d6	Starting Attitude
1	Friendly
2-4	Indifferent
5-6	Hostile

Goals & Motivations

| 1d6	Objective
1	On patrol for a nearby lair. (If you need or wish to build the lair, find a dungeon map with 3-8 chambers, double or triple the encounter group's numbers, and spread them out within that dungeon complex, adding a special monster or two to increase the variety of encounters.)
2	Looking to enslave weaker parties, or avoid stronger ones.
3	Transporting and selling slaves.
4	Merchants with trade goods: food, beverages, low price gems and artwork.
5	Hunters foraging for food.
6	Escaped slaves of some other tribe or group of serpentfolk.

Encounter Conditions

1d8	Encounter Conditions
1	Add a trap to the encounter that the enemies will use if necessary.
2	Lots of cover.
3	Damaging terrain, such as thorn hedges, steaming geysers, or a landslide.
4	An earthquake causes the terrain to break up, transforming the battlefield on the 3rd round of battle.
5	Obscuring fog, exceptional darkness, or changing lighting effects that may cause disadvantage on ranged attacks.
6	Strong winds or torrential rains that effect vision, ranged combat, and create difficult terrain in spots.
7	Quicksand, sinkholes, landslides, or natural (hidden) drop-offs that force ability checks to avoid or create a more vertically oriented battlefield.
8	1d4 additional creatures of the DM's choice show up on round 3 or 4 and harry both sides of the fight (a rampaging owlbear, starving ghouls, etc.).

Intended Destination

1d8	Destination
1	Ss'thar'tiss'ssun
2	Thlohtzin
3	A slave camp that is nearby
4	A slave camp that is far away
5	Anywhere but here!
6	An enemy's campsite
7	An enemy's lair
8	Searching for a new lair

The Sword Coast
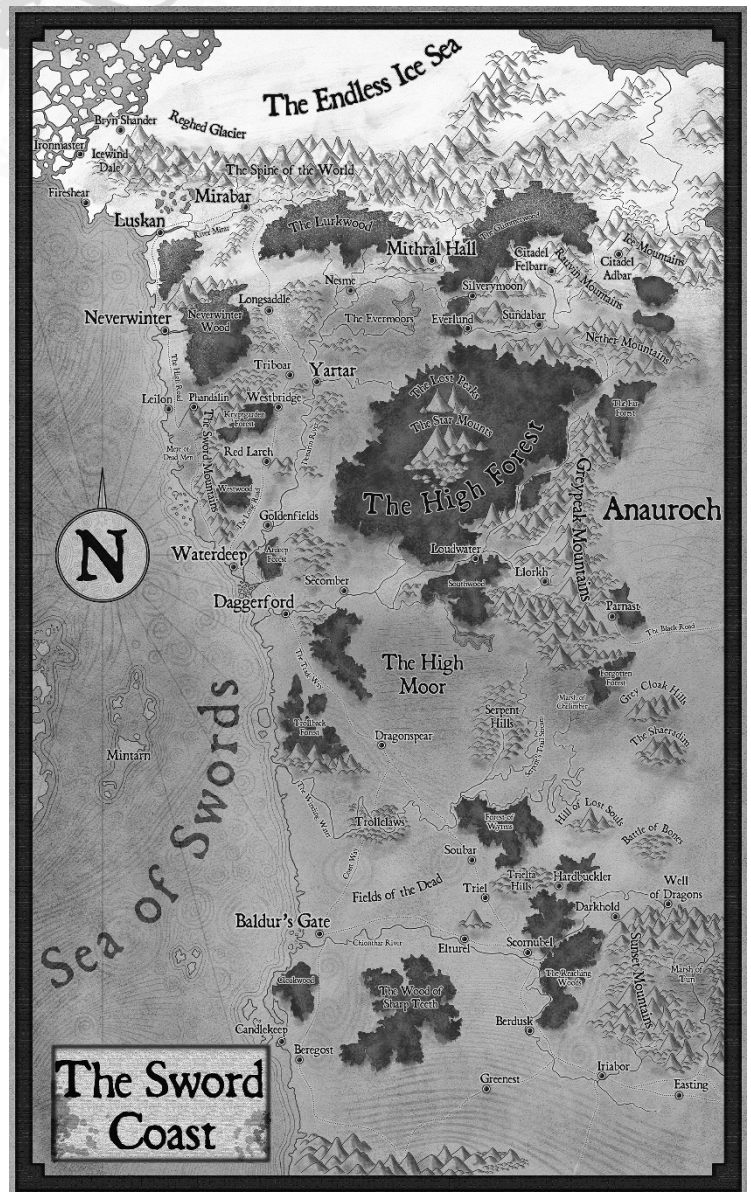
Fixed Adventuring Sites

Several "fixed" location adventuring sites are important to creating a good hexcrawl, because they will invariably act as goals, character hooks, and provide context for encounters and campaign lore. Several such sites can be found on the hex map provided earlier, while others do not appear on the map: these can be found on some versions of various Sword Coast or Faerun maps, but their exact hex position has been left in the hands of enterprising Dungeon Masters who seek to surprise their players: once they arrive in a hex, they may come upon one of these sites! General location ideas are given for such sites below (i.e. "in the western eaves of the Forest of Wyrms) so that DM's can be sure the lore of their Forgotten Realms campaign generally matches with that of the various campaign setting books and novels. Of course, more experimental DMs can look to the general terrain types, but otherwise place these adventuring sites wherever they please.

A final note: these sites are only very briefly described; DMs can research these sites in any number of campaign setting guides, adventures, and even novels set in the Forgotten Realms. The idea is that these sites are the types of things that your players will want to revisit time and time again, or assault in some epic, climactic fashion, or…you get the picture. These are the types of places that aren't dealt with in an hour or two, or even likely a session or two. They can be, if that's what you want, but there's enough hooks for you to do a lot more with them, while enough is left as a blank canvas for you to tailor it to your gaming group's whims.

Here's a bunch of them appropriate for the region depicted on the hex map.

Veil Down

This halfling village features only a handful of homes (halfling burrows built into an escarpment wall), a single druid gnomes' house and garden built upon a hill, and a small, pondside tavern and stables for the few visitors they get. Local legend says the pond is guarded by pixies.

Abandoned Mine

This abandoned silver mine has become the lair of kobolds who have pledged their allegiance to a wyrmling dragon.

Ss'thar'tiss'ssun

Ss'thar'tiss'ssun, or the City of Fountains, was once the capital city of the ancient serpent empire known as Najara; inhabited by nagas, ophidians, etc.

Lyran's Hold

Located on the western edge of the Forest of Wyrms, not far from Boareskyr Bridge, this tower was once a warded haven for a lich, before it was defeated by several adventurers. They supposedly took the place over as their own keep for a time, but some suggest they turned evil, or that bandits have since overrun the place.

The Haunted Metal Halls

Located somewhere between the High Moor and the Serpent Hills are a handful of mountains, one of which reaches incredible heights. A winding path often said to be traversed by rampaging elementals leads to a strange, metal dungeon that legend holds might have been created by modrons, or perhaps intruders from the Far Realm. (This site is XK-247, the facility features in *Modrons, Mephits & Mayhem*, available on DMsGuild.com.)

Margrim Abbey

Hidden away at the edge of the High Moor, not far from to the west of the Serpent Hills, is a small, idyllic vale that is home to Margrim Abbey, a githzerai temple constructed to bring them closer to the teachings of Zerthimon. (This site is also featured in *Modrons, Mephits & Mayhem*.)

Orzogoth

At the eastern edge of the High Moor, near where it descends into the northern reaches of the Serpent Hills, is the site of Orzogoth, the legendary home of Netherese wizards that has long ago been taken over by a dracolich called Calathanorgoth. (See *The High Moor* by Alex Clippinger, available on DMsGuild.com.)

Court of Meiriona

This icy ruin of a palace stands at the southern edge of the Moor, supposedly inhabited by a cursed Eladrin named Meiriona. (See *The High Moor* supplement for this site as well.

Chapter 4: Hexcrawls In Play

Campaign preparation for a hexcrawl falls almost squarely on the shoulders of the Dungeon Master, even when there is input from the players as to what setting or material to use: the DM must get the map (that the players likely don't have access to), populate it with fixed adventure sites, cut it up into encounter regions, and then create the random encounter tables for those regions. During play, hexcrawl campaigns shine when the players take the initiative to stir things up and find new and interesting goals to keep them exploring. In fact, it's absolutely necessary that the players buy into the concepts of a hexcrawl campaign, or else they could find themselves wandering aimlessly, focused on the "busy work" of record keeping, and emotionally disconnected from the plots and perils their characters face.

The Player's Side

From the players' side of the screen, a hexcrawl is simply an opportunity to explore a world, learning about its dangers and past, and perhaps carve out some section of it as uniquely theirs. In order to work as a campaign, players need to be invested in driving the plot forward, creating characters interested in the exploration and interaction that comes with adventuring in the world and uncovering its secrets. These are characters that necessarily need a little bit of greed, perhaps, tempered by just enough loss of self-preservation that they are willing to delve into a dungeon for lore or treasure.

DMs should present the players with…
- ❖ Just enough knowledge to make characters, but little more. This encourages them to head out into the world and explore it for knowledge.
- ❖ Barely enough resources to begin their adventuring career, and just enough loot to keep stringing them along. This gives them a reason to seek out loot, in the hopes of upgrading their gear and being able to face more powerful threats in order to gain more power themselves.
- ❖ Rewards that spur them forward. This could be as simple as awarding XP for loot gained, or for lore uncovered, or having NPCs that will buy journals, maps, or historical texts from the party.
- ❖ Enough options for new and different adventures that the players control the types of things they want to do in the campaign, but also that

presents conflicting timelines or in some cases the illusion of choice. Too many options may cause option paralysis, but the right mix of options makes pursuing some goals a strategic choice, and makes the world feel alive when some adventures "close up" if the party doesn't get to them, or creates conflicting loyalties during other adventuring opportunities.

Players should…
- ❖ Create characters with motivations that spur them to adventure, whether it's to seek power, knowledge, loot, glory, all of the above. Short-term, obtainable goals should come from the character's backstory, but their ultimate motives should continuously urge them to find new adventures.
- ❖ Create bonds with the other characters that promote cohesion when determining new adventures and goals to take on.
- ❖ Be open to the tasks and realities of an exploration-focused campaign, understanding that it's about more than just fighting monsters. Interacting with NPCs, monsters, strange items, and the world itself may reveal new avenues of adventure, but there's also strategy in managing supplies and simply staying alive (and not getting lost!).

There are two specific avenues by which players can provide immense help in fashioning a hexcrawl campaign that lasts, and tells their characters' uniquely fun story: **goals** and **roles**.

Player Goals

Players and their characters should have goals that essentially match-up: they want to explore the world that the DM has crafted for the hexcrawl, and engage with it constantly, even at times when it might seem like "nothing's going on." A hexcrawl is simply a framework for the DM to improvise a lot of things, so it's up to the players to provide the "story." It's not like an adventure path that has a storyline consisting of a beginning, middle and end, but rather a playground of options, each one it's own story waiting for the player characters to happen to it, or make of it what they wish.

Character Goals

The long-term goals of the characters should be relatively simple and straightforward, and encourage them to never stop adventuring. While DMs can use the goals from the Dungeon Master's Guide tables for adventure creation – Dungeon Goals, Wilderness Goals, Other Goals (p. 73-74) and Event- Based Goals (p. 76) – these same tables can provide players with short-term goals and the kernels for long-term goals for their characters. The character's Ideals and Bonds are also an excellent source for this.

Perhaps one of the greatest pieces of advice – and one that can easily be ignored if it doesn't suit your campaign or your style – is to limit character backstory to only informing short-term goals like these. Players that like to put a lot of work and depth into their character's history often find that it matters little in terms of a DM's scripted adventure path or already-prepped hexcrawl, or faces alteration because lore gleaned about the world during adventuring might change some deeply rooted facet of the player's story. Remember that the DM is likely keeping significant information about the campaign setting secret for now, using it later as a reveal during the exploration of certain locations, and therefore it's impossible for a player to know whether their character's detailed backstory is going to jive with that information.

Players must always remember that a hexcrawl campaign is one in which the story happens during the playing of the game, the exploring of the world. The most important part of a character's life should be the moments experienced at the table, not during character creation. This is primarily why character goals should be mutable, changing based on the events of any given session, but strong enough to push the character forward towards more adventure.

Tools of the Trade

Quest Cards. Aside from obvious goals based on the events and sites in the hexcrawl campaign, as well as the possibility of referring to the aforementioned tables in the Dungeon Master's Guide, it behooves both DMs and players alike to keep their goals straight. DMs can turn certain encounter tables or adventure sites into Quest Cards, a 3x5 index card noting what the characters hear about a certain location or faction, what rewards might be for the taking, and perhaps a clue or two as to the difficulty of the challenge.

Prioritization. Players can organize these goals by priority, and consider how each one might jive with their characters' Ideals, Bonds, and backstory. This sort of thing can be an excellent way to focus on a task when it's not your turn in the spotlight, as well as a source for potential downtime activities like uncovering additional lore, building renown with Factions, and so on.

Player Map. Having a player version of the campaign map – perhaps more than one! – allows players to jot down notes directly on a map, or establish their own key regarding fixed locations and encounters. This helps to not only remember the various options and tasks before the players, but associate it with a place and visual cues.

Player Roles

Dungeon Masters shouldn't be the only ones putting in work, and a player's work doesn't necessarily end with creating and updating their character sheet. Hexcrawl campaigns – and really any campaign – can benefit from dispersing the workload among multiple people. While some may see this as "extra work," the truth is that this is another level with which players can engage in gameplay. For some players, this may be a means of offloading work that complements their skillset, and for others, it may be a way of keeping them off of their cellphones during the session.

In all cases, there's advice on "Tools of the Trade," which includes notes on supplements, supplies, and useful tools for making the job easier. Ultimately, if any player feels like they have to do busy work or extra homework, their interest in the campaign is going to dwindle, so make sure to experiment with changing up roles for certain players and finding the tools that work for your group.

Check out the release *Old School Hacks Vol. 2: Player Roles* for much more in-depth coverage of all of these roles, useful forms, handouts, and organizational tools, and several variations.

Caller

The caller is a spokesperson for the players, acting as both a motivator ("Come on guys, let's make a decision!") and a go-between so that the DM understands the big picture of the entire party's actions. A caller doesn't necessarily speak for the group all the time, and can't override an individual's choices, but should be seen as more of an organizing tool for getting things sorted out and presented to the DM. This might include collating

shopping lists or selling lists in town, setting the final list of marching order, and noting things like "Standard Operating Procedure" for the party when they come to a new site or settlement.

Tools of the Trade. Callers can make use of any tool to organize the thoughts of the party, their actions, and lists. 3x5 index cards always work, and so do minis for establishing marching order.

Co-DM

Particularly savvy players or folks experienced in DMing their own campaigns or adventures can always pick up the role of Co-DM, but it's one that is very hard to balance properly and perform well. The ur-DM is the one with all the lore and everything, so the Co-DM's place may be hard to figure out the boundaries for.

A good use of a Co-DM is running minor and unintelligent monsters during battles so there's no chance of "plot spoilage," and handling hirelings and henchmen for the party. If you use battle maps and terrain, a Co-DM can prep new maps or minis for future encounters.

Mapper

The mapper creates and maintains any maps for the party, from the player-version of the campaign hex map to the individual dungeon maps of any given session. Mappers should consider having additional hex and grid paper on hand, and maintaining a "final" version of important maps (especially the larger campaign hex map) that isn't drawn on until after a session ends, or at some other larger break, thus ensuring that mistakes aren't frequent, or can be run past the DM for additional clarification.

Tools of the Trade. Graph and hex paper are a must, and even then a ruler and similar tools (such as a compass) can be extremely useful for getting particular details down. During a session, the mapper can even use index cards or post-it notes (such as the smaller bookmark-style ones) to fashion quick notes and place them in a logical layout, transferring this information to the final map at the end of the session (or even between sessions).

Quartermaster

The Quartermaster is the player that manages the survival-horror aspect of hexcrawling: gear and encumbrance. Often times, players are expected (and

expecting) to manage only their own character sheet, but it pays to have someone on deck to record loot (not just what, but where it was gained and/or sold) or even keep a current calculation of encumbrance for all of the characters. Folks that are good at math or extremely organized can be great in this role, though it is time-consuming. If players do track their own characters' gear and encumbrance, they could simply submit their final encumbrance or weight to the Quartermaster, and/or the Quartermaster simply keeps track of party-only, shared resources, which could be property, loans, debts (of money or honor), or "consumables" like rations, water, and healing potions. This role often requires a lot of discussion before being implemented, but can reduce the workload of all other players (and the worries of the DM) when handled properly.

Tools of the Trade. Graph paper for easily organizing lists of items and numbers in columns is super-helpful. If the Quartermaster is only in charge of consumables, ammo, or small categories of information (final encumbrance scores of each party member, maybe), a 3x5 index card may be enough, or a few piles of differently colored tokens to represent things like rations and water.

Timekeeper

The Timekeeper tracks both the short-term and long-term passage of time in the game universe. This might be as advanced as recording historical lore uncovered, maintaining a calendar of big events or a journal of every event, or simply ticking off rounds, minutes, hours, and days on a piece of scratch paper. Either way, when someone asks "what time of day is it?" the Timekeeper should have the answer. Additionally, they should be asking the question, "how long does that take?" so the DM stays honest.

Tools of the Trade. Work with whatever covers the period(s) of time tracked, from 3x5 index cards to track encounter rounds or days of travel, to a campaign calendar that shows an entire month at a glance. A real-world calendar works fine in most cases, but campaign world-specific ones exist (there's a Calendar of Harptos available for the Forgotten Realms setting on Dungeon Masters Guild written by yours truly!). Graph paper might also be useful for ticking down the rounds or hours in a session.

Initiative Tracker

The Timekeeper or another player can track initiative as well, releasing the DM from this burden. This is an excellent and easy way for a player to get more involved in combat encounters even when it's not their turn, and helps them to learn some of the intricacies of combat rules as a result.

Look for combat pads or magnetic whiteboards (and magnets with names or images on them) as an excellent visual reference for tracking turn sequence during combat. Graph paper or individual index cards work, too, the latter of which can serve as an excellent randomizing tool outside of combat.

Campaign Scribe/Record Keeper

The Timekeeper or another player may take on a more involved role as the party's scribe, recording not just the time and perhaps a quick reference of major events, but actually taking down the minutes of a game session, or writing in-character journals between game sessions on a blog or forum for your adventures.

This tool syncs up extremely well in a campaign where exploring the world is important to the NPCs as well as the players. Journal entries of some sort, or even an index card of just a short re-telling of events with maybe a thematic title could represent in-game documents that can be bought and sold, providing the characters with a source of income, glory, and renown for undertaking the adventures that the hexcrawl campaign offers them.
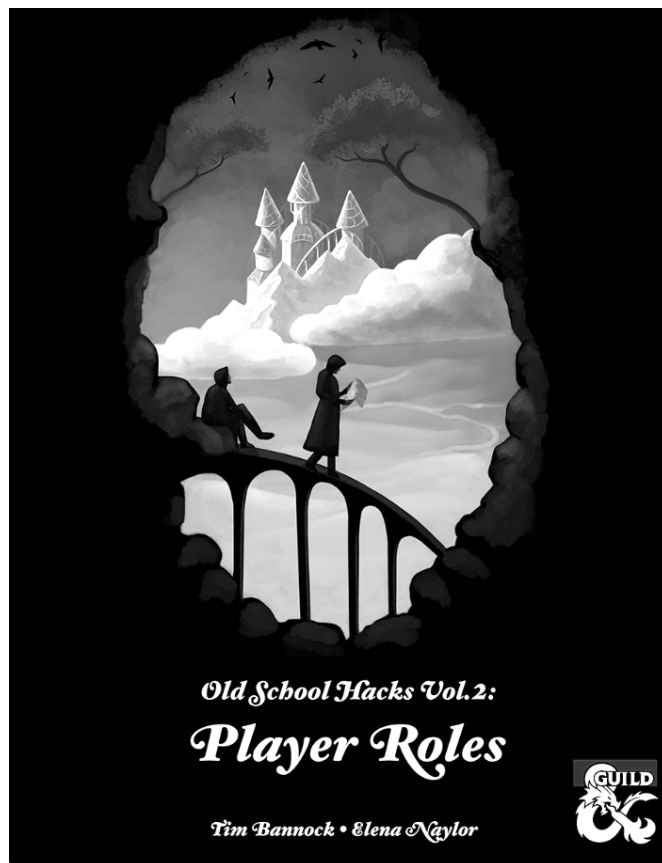
Rules Coordinator

The "Rules Lawyer" is a dreaded term for a player (or some types of DMs) that knows the game system backwards and forwards, calling out errors or inconsistencies. The truly worst case scenario is the person that thinks they know the rules, but in truth reinterprets them to take advantage of them, or simply has an honest brain-fart and forgets some corollary or conflicting exceptions. But this is an extreme interpretation of a certain type of person, and the fact is that games do have rules for a reason, so why not have someone on hand whose job it is to reference them (physically or from memory)?

The Rules Coordinator might be the only player at the table allowed to delve into the books to find a ruling (that's a strict DM's table!), or more likely, is just the person who has a good memory for game mechanics. While the DM maintains final authority to make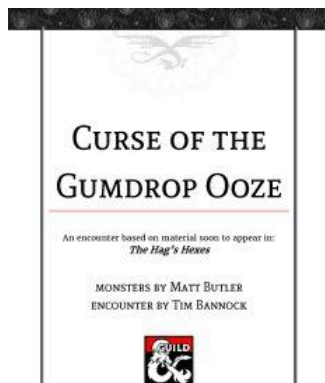 a call and move things along,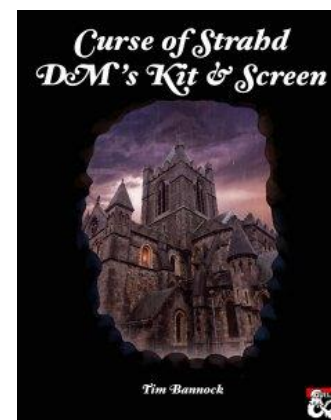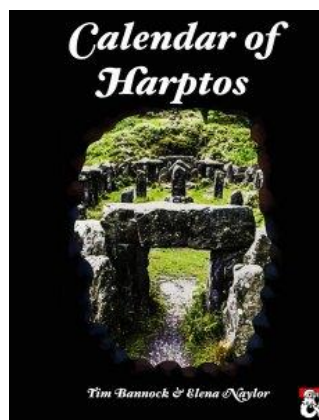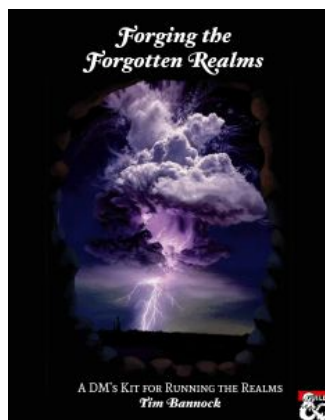 the Rules Coordinator is there to reference rule specifics at the drop of a hat, and to possibly begin the (hopefully democratic) process of ensuring rules calls are made fairly.

Tools of the Trade. If it was just as easy as cracking open the book to the right page, then the tools would seem pretty obvious for a Rules Coordinator, but that's just not the case. Some books don't have a comprehensive table of contents or index, so it behooves the Rules Coordinator to seek out, photocopy, or create cheat sheets, customized indexes, combined indexes from multiple books, and other means of making rules-referencing as fast and accurate as possible. A quick search online calls up lots of especially comprehensive indexes for the D&D Player's Handbook and Dungeon Master's Guide, as well as indexes on Dungeon Masters Guild specific to Variant Rules and Random Tables (I made that!). Similarly, player-centric cheat sheets and Dungeon Master Screens can prove to be useful aids in providing rules references in a clearly laid out fashion, and/or page references to more detailed discussion of the particulars of certain rules.

For more player-facing info, check out *Old School Hacks Vol. 2: Player Roles*!

Old School Hacks Vol.2:
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