

DUNGEON DESIGN CHECKLIST

Use this handy system neutral checklist to aid your dungeon design or to help enhance or modify an existing dungeon. This isn't a comprehensive guide to creating a dungeon from scratch. Rather, it assumes you have a basic dungeon concept and is designed to help you develop and flesh out your idea.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE DUNGEON

Players (at least skilled ones) can be annoyingly inquisitive. The GM should know the answer to these questions:

- Who built the dungeon?
- Why was the dungeon built?
- What is the dungeon's current use?
- What major events (if any) have occurred in the dungeon?
- What is the dungeon called? Why? Does it have more than one name?
- Why would the party want to explore the dungeon?
- What legends and rumours are associated with the dungeon?
- Does the dungeon have more than one entrance?
- Does the dungeon have any particularly well known features, locations or denizens?
- What secret(s) does the dungeon conceal?
- What general perils lurk in the dungeon?

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE DUNGEON'S ECOLOGY

Don't obsess about the dungeon's ecology, but unless the complex is occupied exclusively by undead or other animate guardian constructs its denizens probably require access to:

- Drinking water (the source[s] could be inside or outside the dungeon)
- Food (often food will be secured outside the dungeon, although some creatures may harvest mushrooms, fish in subterranean streams, eat their enemies etc.)
- The entrance (a dungeon's entrance is a natural choke point; most denizens need to go outside at least occasionally)
- Security (given the choice, most denizens want to live in a secure home)
- Light (many denizens can see in the dark, but those that cannot require access to torches, oil and so on)
- Somewhere to dump their waste

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THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR DUNGEON

Some things are cool to include in a dungeon. These include:

- Multiple entrances (for all but the smallest complexes)
- Secret or concealed entrances (finding a secret entrance is a great reward for skilled play)
- Notable areas with interesting or atypical terrain features (dungeon rooms should have more of note than the creatures dwelling therein)
- Wandering monsters/random encounters (denizens must move around—normally—to secure water, food and so on)
- Unoccupied areas (these areas act as buffers between the various groups of dungeon's denizens and serve as places for the PCs to hide or rest)
- Dungeon dressing (minor items and features of interest add depth and verisimilitude to the complex and can provide canny players with hints and clues about the dungeon)
- Somewhere nearby for the PCs to rest and recuperate (such as a hidden cave, village and so on)

THINGS NOT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR DUNGEON

Unless you have a spectacularly good reason, don't include the following things in your dungeon:

- Unavoidable, unkillable monsters
- Strange effects or areas whose rationale is "it's just magic"
- A linear map that limits the players' meaningful choices in large parts of the complex (some linear design is virtually impossible to avoid—prison cells, for example, often lie beyond a guard room)

THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT TIME

Most dungeons do not exist in a vacuum. Consider what happens before, during and after the PCs' explorations.

- Has anything of note just occurred in or near the dungeon?
- Is anything going to occur during the PCs' delves not directly linked to their actions?
- How do the dungeon's denizens react to the PCs' incursion(s)?
- What happens to the dungeon when the PCs finish their adventure?
- How do the PCs' actions affect the surrounding area?