

# d12 Monthly

THE DUNGEON  
EXPLORATION ISSUE

Issue 37  
July, 2024

**FREE VERSION**

## UNDERGROUND FACTIONS

DROP THESE INTO YOUR  
DUNGEON

## YOUR LAST GASP!

AIR QUALITY IN DUNGEONS

DESIGNED FOR USE WITH

**OLD-SCHOOL  
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# The Dungeon

## Exploration Issue

I am always looking to improve this zine. From design, to content, to making it more like the gaming magazines of old.

The design of this zine has been more or less the same since its inception. With this issue however, I have redesigned a few parts - something you may have picked up on already.

Starting with the menu. You will now see 3-4 feature articles, plus a list of regular ones. And I have moved acknowledgements to the end of the zine to make room for this nicer looking and clearer menu.

There is more to the changes than just moving stuff around though. I have also started a few new regular articles that will appear in every issue.

These include articles on PCs & NPCs (Character Building), solo gaming (Solo Spotlight), on new monsters and new ideas for classic monsters (Creature Feature), new spells and magic items (Spellcraft), new places to adventure (Adventure Locations), and finally a close look at the various classes (Class Acts).

I hope you enjoy these changes. And, as always, happy gaming!

- Russ from YUMDM

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... for making this zine as good as it is.

**Want to join this team and support the zine?** I have a Patreon account:

<https://www.patreon.com/yumdm>

(Tiers are available to receive a physical copy).



# We All Go Down

## Dungeon Design



A well-designed dungeon can be the centrepiece of a campaign, offering not just challenges and rewards, but also storytelling and world-building opportunities.

### 1. Conceptualising the Dungeon

The first step in dungeon design is conceptualising its purpose and origin. Ask yourself these three questions:

- A. What is the dungeon's backstory?
- B. Who built it and why?
- C. What is its current state and who or what inhabits it now?

A dungeon could be an ancient dwarven mine, a forgotten crypt of a cursed king, or a wizard's lair filled with arcane traps.

Understanding the dungeon's history provides a foundation for its layout and inhabitants.

A mine is going to be laid out and look very different from an ancient crypt.

### 2. Creating a Layout

The layout of a dungeon is crucial for both gameplay and storytelling.

It should reflect its origin and purpose while providing varied environments for encounters. A good dungeon layout often includes:

**Entrance and Exits:** Build in multiple ways in and out, to add complexity and options for players.

**Rooms and Corridors:** Varying room sizes and corridor lengths create a sense of exploration. Include large chambers for significant encounters and smaller rooms for minor skirmishes or puzzles.

**Secret Passages and Hidden Rooms:** These add an element of surprise and reward thorough exploration.

**Verticality:** Incorporating different levels or floors can make the dungeon feel more dynamic. Remember that a dungeon is 3-dimensional.

### 3. Thematic Consistency

Maintaining a consistent theme helps to immerse players in the dungeon's setting.



The theme should influence the architecture, inhabitants, traps, and treasures.

For example, a necromancer's lair might have dark, foreboding hallways lined with skulls, undead guardians, necrotic traps, and cursed treasures.

Consistency in theme aids in storytelling and makes the dungeon feel cohesive.

#### 4. Encounters and Challenges

A dungeon should offer a variety of encounters and challenges, including:

**Combat Encounters:** These should vary in difficulty and scale. Include both minion fights and epic boss battles. Don't over-think balancing encounters - let you players decide what is and is not too difficult for them.

**Puzzles and Traps:** Incorporate puzzles that require critical thinking and traps that test the players' caution and perception.

Puzzles can be thematic, such as deciphering ancient runes in a forgotten temple. You can also add clues throughout the rest of the dungeon.

**Environmental Hazards:** These can include collapsing ceilings, flooding chambers, or lava flows, adding urgency and danger.

**Role-Playing Opportunities:** Not every encounter will end in combat. Use reaction rolls to determine how a monster or NPC may interact with the characters.

This could be a great time to introduce factions within a larger dungeon, letting your players choose sides.



#### 5. Loot and Rewards

Rewards are a significant part of dungeon crawling. Consider the following:

**Treasures:** Gold, gems, and art objects can provide wealth. And remember that what a monster considers wealth may not match with that of the characters.

**Magic Items:** These should be carefully chosen to ensure they don't unbalance the game. Unique or cursed items can add flavour.

**Lore:** Ancient tomes, maps, or artefacts can provide information about the dungeon's history or hints for future adventures.

**Experience Points:** Grant experience points for overcoming challenges, solving puzzles, and defeating foes.

## 6. Narrative Integration

A dungeon should not exist in a vacuum. It should tie into the broader narrative of the campaign. Consider:

**Story Hooks:** How the players discover the dungeon and their motivations for exploring it.

**Recurring Themes:** Connect the dungeon's story to the overarching plot of the campaign. For example, clues found in the dungeon could foreshadow future events or villains.

**NPCs and Factions:** The dungeon might be linked to various factions within the game world, each with their own agendas.

## 7. Dynamic Elements

To keep players engaged, incorporate dynamic elements that change as they explore the dungeon. This can include:

**Random Encounters:** These add unpredictability and tension. And can keep characters moving and players to make decisions quickly.

**Time-Sensitive Events:** Certain events that trigger based on time, such as reinforcements arriving, or magical effects taking place.

**Player Actions:** Allow the players' choices to affect the dungeon. For instance, if they collapse a tunnel to block pursuing enemies, this changes the layout and available paths.

## 8. Atmosphere and Descriptions

Creating a vivid atmosphere through detailed descriptions can significantly enhance the dungeon's immersion. Use sensory details to bring the dungeon to life:

**Sight:** Describe the architecture, lighting, and visual details.

**Sound:** Mention echoes, distant noises, or the silence of a long-abandoned place.

**Smell:** Include scents like damp stone, mould, or burning torches.

**Touch:** Detail textures such as the roughness of stone walls or the cold air.

## 9. Playtesting and Refinement

It may be important to test and then refine your dungeon.

**Solo Game Play:** You can always use solo roleplaying to test out the dungeon before you run it for a group.

**Player Feedback:** If possible, run the dungeon with a test group to get feedback and make necessary adjustments.

## 10. Flexibility and Adaptation

Finally, be prepared to adapt the dungeon on the fly. Players often come up with unexpected solutions or take unforeseen paths. As a GM, maintaining flexibility allows you to adjust encounters and narrative elements, if needed.



# The Last Gasp

## Air Quality in Dungeons



Air quality within a dungeon is largely ignored other than the brief description of it being musty or stale.

In reality, air quality can pose a large threat to adventurers, and can even be lethal.

The rules below can be used sparingly by the GM who wants to use the dungeon itself as a potential threat.

### Air Quality

There are four levels of air quality: clean, odious, vile, and lethal.

### Clean Air

The air is entirely breathable, and while it may be stale or musty, there is no danger.

Upper levels of dungeons generally have this air quality (except for perhaps specific areas) as they usually have ventilation shafts to the surface.

**Examples:** Upper levels of dungeons.

### Odious

Some air smells foul or is dank. Again, this air, while unpleasant, causes no real concern or danger to adventurers - it's more of a way to convey mood and atmosphere within a dungeon.

**Examples:** Ancient crypts, sealed ruins.

### Vile

Vile air is either strongly odious or dangerous to air breathers.

If adventurers are exposed to vile air, they cough and splutter and will start to feel sickened. They need to make a save Vs. Poison or have a penalty of -2 to all ability checks and attack rolls and saving throws.

**Examples:** Ruins in a foetid swamp.

### Lethal

Air that is lethal is poisonous to adventurers and while in the area will need to save Vs. Poison or die.

**Examples:** Deep dungeons, dungeon areas near poisonous vegetation.

# Keep Your Friends Close

## Best Races & Classes for a Dungeon Crawl

Dungeoneering is a dangerous pursuit. And it is best to bring with you companions that you trust and can prove useful.

### Best Races

Here are the best races to take with you into the dungeon.

**Dwarves:** I am sure there is little doubt that bringing a dwarf with you along on a dungeon delve, especially an extended one, is a good idea.

From their poison resistance, to their infravision, to them knowing and understanding dungeons and their constructions, you cannot go wrong.

**Gnomes:** Almost as good as dwarves, these little gems are worth their weight in gold.

They also have an eye for constructions, a good magic defence, infravision, and can speak with burrowing animals - a boon underground.

**Halfings:** Not an obvious choice, but with their small size and traits, they are a solid contender to make the short list.

They have good ears, a missile attack bonus, resilience to magic and a CON-based saves - not too shabby.



**Half-Orcs:** Strong and capable fighters, half-orcs are a good choice.

They have infravision, plus a bonus to STR, which will help them not only fight, but also carry out more treasure.

**Underground Races:** You can also pick from a number of underground races like Svirkneblin, Duergar, and Drow - all for obvious reasons.

### Best Classes

**Barbarians:** This may seem like a strange choice, but barbarians have some great traits that would come in handy underground.

They have good climb and sneak abilities, can cure poisons, can forage and hunt, and

strike invulnerable monsters after a few levels are gained.

**Acrobats:** While this wouldn't be my first choice, an acrobat does have some skills that could help. All great at helping navigate a dungeon environment.

Some very helpful acrobatic skills, like climb, falling, hiding & sneaking, plus tightrope walking (getting across those difficult chasms and ledges). All this, as well as a very decent jumping skill.



**Fighters:** An obvious choice due to their combat prowess.

Fighters can use any armour and weapons, which can be good in a dungeon with varying sizes of chambers and passages. They can also protect magic-users and other weaker classes.

**Clerics:** The cleric makes the grade for two very powerful reasons.

Clerics have an almost unique ability to turn undead - found very often in underground settings. Plus the very helpful ability to heal magically. And not to be forgotten, some very handy spells for exploration.

**Magic-User:** A useful character to have while underground due to their spell power and selection.

Magic-Users are in this list as they have access to some very useful spells to use to overcome all manner of underground obstacles.

**Deep Ranger:** Check out the Deep Ranger class option in the Class Acts article in this issue.

Being able to hunt and forage, hide and sneak, as well as their pursuit and tracking skills make them very important to bring along.



# Be Careful Who Your Friends Are

## Underground Factions

While the Deepdark is foreign and dangerous to many surface dwellers (including adventurers), many creatures thrive in the darkness below.

And some have developed factions and alliances with other Deepdark creatures, as well as those on the surface.

Below are a number of factions, outside the usual (drow, duergar, etc) that you could place into your campaign world.

### The Deep Delvers' Guild

A guild of explorers, miners, and archaeologists dedicated to uncovering the secrets of the Deepdark.

They are experts in navigating the treacherous tunnels and often employ both magic and technology to aid their expeditions.

#### Goals

To discover lost artefacts, ancient civilizations, and valuable resources hidden deep within the Deepdark.

#### Allies/Rivals

Often allied with surface kingdoms and scholars, including the Church of Banoth\*, but rivalled by other treasure-seeking factions and the denizens of the Deepdark.

\* Banoth is the deity of knowledge and wisdom

### The Darkshroud Syndicate

A secretive network of thieves, assassins, and smugglers who operate in the shadows of the Deepdark. They control a black market in treasures from the Deepdark, and have a hand in illicit activities both above and below ground.

#### Goals

To maintain their control over illegal trade routes, gather wealth, and eliminate any threats to their operations.

#### Allies/Rivals

They have tenuous alliances with corrupt officials, and rivalries with law enforcement and other criminal organisations. Deepdark races, such as dark elves and duergar, oppose their operation.

### The Luminary Order

A faction of clerics and paladins from the Church of Lucindar\*, dedicated to bringing light to the darkness of the Deepdark.

They see it as their holy mission to combat the evil creatures that dwell below and protect innocents from harm.

\* Lucindar is the deity of rebirth, the sun, fire, and summer.

#### Goals

To cleanse the Deepdark of malevolent forces, establish safe havens^, and convert the inhabitants to their faith.

^ See *Issue 35 of d12 Monthly* on how to create safe havens.



### **Allies/Rivals**

They are often allied with surface religious institutions, and opposed by dark cults and evil-aligned factions.

### **The Agarim Collective**

A coalition of sentient mushroom creatures (Agarim) who seek to maintain the balance of nature within the Deepdark.

They are generally peaceful but will fiercely defend their territory from intruders.

### **Goals**

To preserve the natural ecosystem of the Deepdark and expand their fungal networks.

### **Allies/Rivals**

They have alliances with druidic circles\* and nature-oriented factions but are often in conflict with destructive forces and those who exploit natural resources.

\* The Agarim Collective shares a symbiotic relationship with various druidic circles, both within the Deepdark and on the surface (see the *The Circle of Fungi* below). These alliances are built on mutual respect and a common goal of maintaining the natural balance.

### **The Circle of Fungi**

The Circle of Fungi is a faction of druids deeply connected to the unique and diverse fungal life of the Deepdark.

Unlike traditional druids who may focus on broader aspects of nature, these druids have devoted themselves to understanding and harnessing the power of fungi.

Their knowledge extends to the medicinal, toxic, and magical properties of various fungi, making them both feared and revered.

### **Goals**

To maintain the natural balance of the Deepdark, protect and cultivate fungal growth, and use their unique abilities to heal and defend their allies, particularly the Agarim Collective.

### **Allies/Rivals**

Allies include The Agarim Collective, and other druidic circles, nature spirits, and creatures who respect the balance of the natural world.

Rivals include factions that exploit or destroy natural resources, such as certain drow houses or duergar clans, as well as cults and necromancers who seek to pervert or corrupt natural life are natural enemies of the Circle.

### **Activities**

The druids provide healing services and support to allied factions, using their knowledge of fungal remedies.

They also patrol the Underdark, using their abilities to defend against threats and restore areas affected by unnatural forces.

Additionally, The Circle conducts ongoing research into fungal magic and ecology, striving to unlock new secrets and enhance their abilities.



# Character Building

## New Secondary Skills

Expanding on the secondary skills from *Issue 32 of d12 Monthly*, below are a number of additional secondary skills a character can take, and that would help with dungeon exploration.

Skill	Abilities
Cook	Can prepare meals. Can also put together rations
Engineer	Can construct and repair mechanisms, traps, and other complex devices
Explorer	Someone who has experience in travelling and can navigate well*
Mycologist	Has a keen eye for identifying different types of fungi. Can pick out edible types*
Sage	An expert on a particular subject - choose a subject when taking this skill. Knows specific information about their chosen topic*
Smelter	One who breaks down mined materials into their raw constituent parts
Speleologist	A person who explores caves. Will be able to navigate their way in underground settings. Can detect depth and direction*

\* Requires an ability check to succeed.



## Useful Secondary Skills for Dungeon Exploration

List below are secondary skills listed in the OSE Advanced Player's Guide or *Issue 32 of d12 Monthly* that will prove useful for dungeon exploration.

Animal Trainer  
 Apothecary  
 Armourer  
 Blacksmith  
 Bowyer/Fletcher  
 Brewer  
 Butcher  
 Carpenter  
 Embalmer  
 Fisher  
 Furrier  
 Huntsman  
 Mapmaker  
 Miner  
 Roper  
 Weaponsmith



# Solo Spotlight

## Dungeon Dressing

Dress up your dungeons with these two tables. You can simply add these as sub-tables into your existing dungeon generation table to add flavour to your rooms. One table is for structural features, the other for content features.

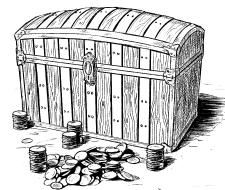
**Table: Structural Features**

D20	Result
1	Alcove
2	Chasm
3	Collapsed Wall
4	Fallen stones
5	Firepit or Lava Pool
6	Fountain
7	Hole or Pit
8	Mound of rubble, or Cave-in (dead end)
9	Ledge
10	Pillars
11	Runes
12	Pool or River
13	Shaft
14	Well
15	Cracks or Scatters Stones
16	Dripping Water
17	Engravings
18	Slime, Fungus, or Mould
19	Mud or Water Puddle
20	Stairs

**Table: Content Features**

D20	Result
1	Altar or Shrine
2	Barrels
3	Bedding
4	Cage
5	Caldron
6	Mushrooms
7	Symbol
8	Skull or Teeth
9	Tree Roots or Boulder
10	Statue or Idol
11	Trash or Dung Heap
12	Wood or Ash
13	Bloodstain
14	Bones
15	Claw marks
16	Cobwebs
17	Corpse
18	Old Weapons
19	Insects
20	Small Nest

These features are there for mostly aesthetic purposes and aren't dangerous by themselves, but they could certainly be used by dungeon denizens in creative ways.



## Creature Feature

### Goblin Variants



Goblins are a much used favourite in the game, and with good reason - they are a great low-level enemy.

In my own campaign world, goblins tend to take on attributes and even abilities of those who rule over them - usually a powerful matriarch.

Below is a list of goblin variants based on their matriarch.

#### Green Hag Goblins

Goblins ruled over by a powerful hag are the same as regular goblins with the following changes:

**Physical Traits:** These goblins are even more repulsive than normal, having wicked-looking moles and warts dotting their sickly-green bodies, while their mouths are filled with blackened teeth.

**Abilities:** They have abnormally high (for goblins) STR, usually 14 or better.

They can also cast one of the following spells per day: *audible glamour*, *dancing lights*, *invisibility*, *pass without trace*, *change self*, *speak with monsters*, or *water breathing*.

#### Medusa Goblins

Goblins ruled over by a powerful medusa are the same as regular goblins with the following changes:

**Physical Traits:** These goblins have pale-skin and blood-shot eyes. They tend to drape themselves with poisonous snakes (of which they are immune to any poison).

**Abilities:** These goblins are able to see into the Ethereal plain.

They are also completely immune to snake venom, or any poisons derived from them.

#### Shade Goblins

Goblins ruled over by a powerful shade are the same as regular goblins with the following changes:

**Physical Traits:** Goblins who follow shades tend to have greyish or nearly black, dusky skin and veiled eyes.

**Abilities:** These goblins can blend in with any shadows, effectively making themselves invisible. They surprise others 5 in D6 if these conditions are met.

They can also regenerate at a rate of 1 HP per round while in the shadows.

# Spellcraft

## Dungeon-Creation Spells

Creating a dungeon can be a long and arduous process. Even a small one could take weeks and months to construct safely.

Magic can speed up this process and help maintain a healthy workforce. Below are a number of spells which would aid in dungeon construction.

### Excavation and Shaping

**Move Earth (6th Level):** This powerful spell allows for large-scale manipulation of earth, perfect for carving out caverns and tunnels.

**Flesh to Stone (6th Level):** This spell combo lets you temporarily turn rock into flesh and vice versa. You can use it to easily shape stone for doorways, arches, or even furniture.

### Construction and Reinforcement

**Continual Light (2nd Level):** Provides permanent illumination in specific areas, helpful for work crews and preventing unwanted creatures from taking shelter in dark corners.

**Levitate (2nd Level):** Allows for effortless transport of heavy building materials like stone blocks or statues.

**Mending (1st Level):** A quick fix for minor cracks or imperfections in the stonework.

**Wall of Stone (5th Level):** This spell can instantly create sturdy walls to define rooms, corridors, or even create hidden chambers.

### Security and Traps

**Alarm (1st Level):** Sets off an audible or visual alert when a specific area is breached.

**Glyph of Warding (3rd Level):** This spell can be inscribed on walls or objects to trigger magical effects when a specific condition is met, perfect for creating magical traps.

**Silence (1st Level):** Creates a zone of silence, muffling sounds and potentially hindering spellcasters who rely on verbal components.

**Wizard Lock (2nd Level):** Magically locks doors or chests, requiring a dispel magic spell to bypass.

### Decoration and Ambiance

**Continual Light & Continual Darkness (2nd Level):** These spells can be used to create areas of permanent light or darkness, adding to the atmosphere of the dungeon.

**Prestidigitation (Cantrip):** This versatile cantrip can be used for a variety of minor magical effects, like creating illusions, cleaning surfaces, or playing eerie music.



# Adventure Location

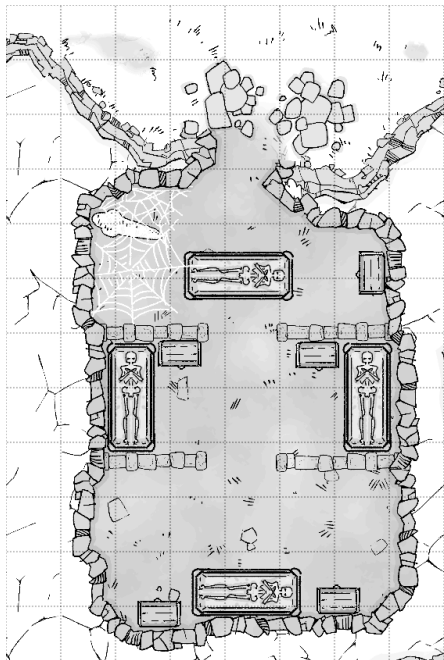
## The Silentstone Sepulchre

This crypt is home to the Silentstone family - the Father, Bethol; Mother, Kelda; daughter, Adeline; and their servant and protector, Gunther.

They were buried here, along with their fortune, some 200 years ago. Recent tremors have re-opened the tomb, allowing any who stumble across it, access.

### Atmosphere

The sepulchre is cold and damp, with an eerie silence punctuated only by the occasional drip of water from the ceiling.



Most of the mustiness of the sepulchre has been eliminated due to the fresh air.

### 1. Entrance

A pile of boulders and rubble mark the recently opened entrance to the tomb.

### 2. Giant Phase Spider

A Phase Spider has recently made its home here. It has already claimed one inquisitive victim, who is strung up, hanging in the spider's strong webbing.

**Tactics:** The creature will attack any who enter the sepulchre. One of its tricks is to phase in and shove someone within 5-ft of the web, back into it, causing them to be trapped. It will then attack any others as normal.

**Treasure:** The web-wrapped victim was an adventurer who carries a magical Shield +1, +2 Vs. Natural Attacks. There are also a total of 36 gold pieces in various coins scattered on the floor or stuck in the webbing.

### Sarcophagi

Each sarcophagus is crafted from dark granite, showing signs of age, with some carvings weathered by time. Moss and lichen grow in the crevices. Chests can contain any random treasure you wish.

### 3. Gunther's Sarcophagus

Gunther guards the family, like he did when they were alive.

**Appearance:** As above, etched into the lid of his sarcophagus is a simple wooden carving of a wolf, and a warning in



Common not to disturb this tomb or a curse will be put upon all those who defile it.

You can decide yourself if a curse does indeed exist. Or whether it was just a way of scaring off would-be thieves.

**Contents:** The skeletal remains of Gunther, dressed in a simple servant's garb. His skeletal hands are empty, but the sarcophagus is lined with basic straw and rough fabric.

A small pouch containing a few copper coins, a rusted key\*, and a crude wooden carving of a wolf (see Area 6).

\* This can be the key to the family's estate or some other place you want to develop to expand this adventure.

#### 4. Bethol's Sarcophagus

This is the Father's resting place.

**Contents:** The skeletal remains of Bethol Silentstone, adorned in a faded and tattered noble's tunic. In his bony hands, he clutches a rusted longsword. The interior of the sarcophagus is lined with what used to be fine velvet, now reduced to dust and tatters.

A signet ring with the Silentstone family crest (valued at 25GP), an ancient map of the family estate\*, and a tarnished silver locket containing a faded portrait of his wife, Kelda (valued at 15GP).

\* Link this to the rusted key in Gunther's sarcophagus, or create another adventure location that characters can visit.

#### 5. Kelda's Sarcophagus

This is the Mother's resting place.

**Contents:** The skeletal remains of Kelda Silentstone, dressed in a decayed, once-elegant gown. She holds a withered bouquet of dried flowers. The sarcophagus is lined with remnants of silk and lace, hinting at her refined status.

A small vial of dried rose petals, a golden hairpin set with a ruby (valued at 200GP), and a diary with entries written in a delicate hand, detailing her life and family\*.

\* This could tie in with one of the character's current missions, or even be the purpose of their visit.

#### 6. Adeline's Sarcophagus

This is the resting place of their 8-year old daughter.

**Contents:** The skeletal remains of Adeline Silentstone, encased in what was once a simple yet elegant dress.

A string of pearls (valued at 100GP) is strung around her neck, while a fine music box, and a child's doll with glass eyes (spooky-looking), sits on her chest.

If the music box is played, Gunther rises from his sarcophagus and the wolf carving turns into a large dire wolf at his command.

Treat Gunther as a skeleton with 3HD. If you don't have stats for a Dire Wolf, then use the Winter Wolf without their frost-related powers.

## Class Acts

### Deep Ranger

The Deep Ranger is an expert in exploring and surviving in underground locations.

This version of the Ranger relies on my rules for skills in *Issue 13 of d12 Monthly*. I have outlined the ranger from that issue in the box below.

#### Ranger

A ranger's skill at foraging and hunting are brought into their other thief-like skills (hide in shadows and move silently) and are improved as they go up in levels. All skills start at 1 in 6 at first level, and the ranger receives points to increase them.

**Points:** They receive 3 points at 1st level and 1 point per level after this.

#### Skills

A Ranger has the following skills:

Foraging, Hunting, Hide in Shadows, and Move Silently.

Players can choose from these skills which they increase with each level via the point system above.



#### Pursuit

This skill only works in underground locations (as opposed to wilderness for a regular ranger).

#### Divine Magic

Deep rangers receive the same magical abilities, but focus on spells that are useful in underground environments.

#### Tracking

Tracking remains the same.

#### Limited Possessions

This largely remains the same, but a Deep Ranger usually needs more equipment to survive the Deepdark.



## Need More?

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## Next Month

For August, we are back in the wilderness, learning how to survive in its unforgiving environments. Can you make it back to civilization alive and well? Only time will tell.



A new class (the Scout), random encounters, new kits, plus our regular columns - all to help you survive.

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