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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Reading and playing other roleplaying games makes us better Game Masters and players because it improves our design skills. In some way, all players, including GMs, are game designers. If you have created a world, adventure, encounter, magic item, monster, feat, spell, puzzle, or trap, you're a game designer. If you've ever made up a rule because you didn't like how the official one worked, it didn't exist, or you just didn't feel like taking the time to look it up, you did a little game design, my friend. If you've proposed a new use of one of your character's skills, spells, or traits to your GM or created your own background by taking the skills from one, the tool proficiencies of a second, and the feature of a third, you are 100 percent designer. Heck, if you created your character's personality traits, ideal, bond, and flaw from scratch, then let me be the first to welcome you to the game design club. You'll love it here. We have snacks.

One person strengthening those design chops provides a richer experience for everyone at the table. Just like trying new recipes makes you a better cook, experiencing other games increases your skill and understanding of game design and makes you a better player.

When you interact with a lot of different games, you learn to design toward different goals and styles of play. For instance, the world's oldest roleplaying game is built around battling monsters, which is why a majority of a character's class features and most of a creature's stat block are dedicated to combat. If you pick up a game like [Bubblegumshoe](#), which is about teen detectives in the modern world investigating crimes, you can see the rules are centered around solving mysteries in a way that a game about battling monsters isn't. After reading just a few pages of [Dusk City Outlaws](#), you'll realize that the game is all about planning and pulling off heists, and that it gives you great tools to do so.

You can and likely will have investigations and heists in the world's oldest roleplaying game, the same way you can have combat in *Bubblegum-*

shoe and *Dusk City Outlaws*, but each system executes all of these elements with various levels of depth and satisfaction. When you read and play other games, you can introduce the concepts and mechanics from one into the other, and you gain a deeper understanding of how games work. The more games you experience, the easier it becomes to absorb new rules and parse the motivations behind them.

If time, money, and finding players is a concern, you should know that most RPGs out there don't require three core rulebooks (some are [one page](#)), many RPGs have [free or reduced-cost versions](#) or [reduced-price starter sets](#), and [a lot of people are willing to try a game as a one-shot if a friend offers to teach them](#). You can also do what I do and seek out new games at conventions (online and in-person), which always feature a GM eager to teach folks their favorite system.

Players and designers often turn to other RPGs when we want to do something in a game that the rules don't currently allow. Matt and I both wanted to see rules for level-0 characters in ARCADIA because we both enjoy low-powered play. When [Chris Bissette](#) pitched an article for level-0 rules inspired by the funnels of [Dungeon Crawl Classics](#), [MÖRK BORG](#), [Troika!](#), and [Mothership](#), I knew that we were creating something special, because those games are fantastic and Chris is one of the best designers out there. Combine that article with [Sally Tamarkin's](#) new backgrounds and collaborative setting-building guide and [Mario Ortegón's](#) flavorful and innovative subclasses, and we've got one of the best issues of this magazine yet.

I hope you enjoy this issue and get a chance to play something new soon! Thank you so much for your continued support of ARCADIA!

Ex animo,
James Introcaso
Managing Editor

LOSING OUR RELIGION

SUBCLASSES FOR FORSAKEN CLERICS AND WARLOCKS

by Mario Ortegón

THE SKY WAS SHATTERED.

BY KILLING HER EMPRESS, MISIRI HAD DISOBEYED A SACRED TENET OF HER GOD, AND NOW THE SKY WAS SHATTERED.

AHEAD OF HER, NO MATTER WHERE SHE LOOKED, THE HEAVENS WERE COLD, DARK, AND DULL. AND BEHIND HER, AT THE PERIPHERY OF HER VISION, SHE COULD FAINTLY SEE THE LIGHT JUST OUT OF REACH, AND THE WARMTH OF THE WORLD ESCAPING HER.

SHEATHING HER SWORD, SHE REALIZED THE SHATTERED SKY WAS HER DOING. BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HER LIFE, SHE WAS UNBURDENED BY REGRET.

Many tell tales about righteous paladins breaking their oaths, but what happens when clerics and warlocks come in conflict with their higher powers? This article provides four new subclasses for these characters, each centered around the concept of heroes at odds with their gods or patrons.

A character might break ties with a higher power when one of the deity's aspects or ideals clashes against the character's identity or moral code. Conversely, a higher power could disavow a character for breaking a cardinal tenet, or failing to fulfill their end of a bargain. Either of these developments sets the character on a journey of redemption—or, with a sufficiently disgruntled god or patron, marks the beginning of a powerful antagonist entering the story.

The following subclasses represent different paths clerics and warlocks might take after a quarrel with their deity or patron. They can be used as transitional points in a character's arc, changing their previous subclass to one below and using it as a stepping stone on the journey to regain their original powers, or as the foundation of a new path.

Alternatively, characters who are content with the idea of being at odds with their gods or patrons can remain as members of these subclasses to represent that stance. One may even start as a 1st-level character with one of these subclasses; perhaps having been mighty before, then stripped of power and forced to begin anew.

CLERIC OPTIONS

The Divine Domain options below are available for clerics who renounce or are shunned by their gods. The Anathema domain represents a cleric who wields the scorn of their angered deity and channels it into their own power, and the Atonement domain provides a path for those seeking divine redemption.

ANATHEMA DOMAIN

The Anathema domain isn't part of any deity's portfolio. Rather, it is the purview of those who become subjects of a deity's contempt. Clerics who turn to this domain are just as capable of weaving magical wonders as their devout peers, but rather than doing so by divine grace, their rites harness the ire of gods and channel it into bouts of transient power.

Clerics who master these anathematic rites are called the scorned. While their relationship with their deities is antagonistic and gods-fearing societies shun them, there's nothing inherently evil about the scorned's practices.



Some join their ranks voluntarily, believing it their duty to stand in opposition to gods who threaten the cosmological order. These clerics form secret orders dedicated to ensuring that those gods who lie chained, slumbering, dead, or forgotten remain that way.

ANATHEMA DOMAIN FEATURES

1st	Domain Spells, Anathematic Rites, Divine Rancor
2nd	Channel Divinity: Divine Derogation
6th	Conduit of Ruin
8th	Potent Spellcasting
17th	Scornful Condemnation

DOMAIN SPELLS

The following domain spells are available to you upon reaching the cleric levels listed in the Anathema Domain Spells table.

ANATHEMA DOMAIN SPELLS

CLERIC LEVEL	SPELLS
1st	<i>inflict wounds, protection from evil and good</i>
3rd	<i>hold person, ray of enfeeblement</i>
5th	<i>bestow curse, counterspell</i>
7th	<i>banishment, phantasmal killer</i>
9th	<i>dispel evil and good, hold monster</i>

ANATHEMATIC RITES

At 1st level, your knowledge of forbidden rituals allows you to access magic normally unreachable to other clerics. You can cast cleric spells that have the ritual tag as rituals, even if you don't have them prepared, so long as their level doesn't exceed the maximum spell level you can cast as a cleric.

However, when you cast an unprepared spell in this way, you take 1d6 psychic damage per level of the spell. This damage can't be reduced in any way.

DIVINE RANCOR

As one of the scorned, you wield your deity's rancor as a tool to hinder your foes. Starting at 1st level, you always have the *bane* spell prepared, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you can prepare.

When you cast *bane*, you can change the casting time to 1 bonus action, instead of 1 action. You can cast the spell as a bonus action a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

CHANNEL DIVINITY: DIVINE DEROGATION

At 2nd level, you learn to use your Channel Divinity to diminish the capabilities of creatures of faith. As an action, you create a 30-foot aura of discordant divinity around you that lasts for 1 minute or until you fall unconscious. When a creature in the aura magically regains hit points, or takes radiant or necrotic damage, you can roll a d6. On a 4 or higher, the amount of hit points regained or damage taken is reduced to 0.

CONDUIT OF RUIN

When you reach 6th level, you learn to focus the ire of your god to further hamper a creature suffering from it. Before a creature rolls the d4 from a *bane* spell cast by you, you can use a reaction to upgrade the d4 to a d6.

As you gain levels in this class, the malediction imposed by this feature grows even stronger. You can upgrade the die to a d8 at 11th level, and to a d10 at 17th level.

POTENT SPELLCASTING

Starting at 8th level, you add your Wisdom modifier to the damage you deal with any cleric cantrip.

SCORNFUL CONDEMNATION

When you reach 17th level, you no longer need to concentrate on the *bane* spell. When you cast it, it lasts for its full duration, until you cast the spell again, or until you fall unconscious.

Additionally, your ability to channel divine hatred is so masterful that it harms those burdened with it. The first time a creature rolls the die for a *bane* spell cast by you on its turn, it also takes psychic damage equal to the number rolled on the die.

ATONEMENT DOMAIN

While some deities are stern in their edicts and unmoved by mortal nuance, others accept those who come looking for a second chance. Gods of redemption, renewal, and suffering might be particularly inclined to accept such supplicants, so long as their pleas are genuine, and their will to atone remains resolute.

ATONEMENT DOMAIN FEATURES

1st	Domain Spells, Bonus Proficiencies, Selfless Reprieve
2nd	Channel Divinity: Shield of Martyrdom
6th	Hallowed Reprieve
8th	Divine Strike
17th	Exalted Protector

Clerics who approach these gods looking for forgiveness are granted the Atonement domain, either becoming permanent seekers of redemption or serving the god until they can intercede on the cleric's behalf with another deity.

DOMAIN SPELLS

The following domain spells are available to you upon reaching the cleric levels listed in the Atonement Domain Spells table.

ATONEMENT DOMAIN SPELLS

CLERIC LEVEL	SPELLS
1st	<i>false life</i> , <i>sanctuary</i>
3rd	<i>enthral</i> , <i>warding bond</i>
5th	<i>beacon of hope</i> , <i>remove curse</i>
7th	<i>death ward</i> , <i>private sanctum</i>
9th	<i>dispel evil and good</i> , <i>wall of force</i>

BONUS PROFICIENCIES

When you choose this domain at 1st level, you gain proficiency with heavy armor and either the Medicine or Religion skill (your choice).

SELFLESS REPRIEVE

Also at 1st level, you gain the ability to magically intercede on behalf of other creatures at the cost of your own well-being. When you make a saving throw against an effect that targets multiple creatures, you can choose to automatically fail the save and grant another creature targeted by the same effect that you can see an automatic success. You must make this choice before any rolls are made.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until the start of your next turn.



CHANNEL DIVINITY: SHIELD OF MARTYRDOM

Starting at 2nd level, you learn to employ your Channel Divinity to make a noble sacrifice. As a reaction, when a creature you can see within 30 feet of you would be reduced to 0 hit points as a result of taking damage, you can use your Channel Divinity to magically take the damage yourself, in place of the target. If this damage would reduce you to 0 hit points, it reduces you to 1 hit point instead. This redirects all the damage the creature would have taken to you, but the target is still subject to other effects as if it had taken the damage.

Your sacrifice also bestows your target with a divine ward, granting it temporary hit points equal to your cleric level.

HALLOWED REPRIEVE

At 6th level, you gain the ability to empower your selfless acts of protection with divine aid. When you use your Selfless Reprieve feature against an effect that allows you to make a saving throw to take only half damage, you take half damage from your saving throw failure, and your chosen target takes no damage from their automatic success.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses of it when you finish a long rest.

DIVINE STRIKE

Starting at 8th level, you can infuse your weapon strikes with divine energy. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a weapon attack, you can cause the attack to deal an extra 1d8 radiant damage to the target. When you reach 14th level, the extra damage increases to 2d8.

EXALTED PROTECTOR

When you reach 17th level, your Selfless Reprieve feature can grant automatic successes to two creatures making the same saving throw as you, instead of only one. In addition, each use of your Hallowed Reprieve feature can now simultaneously benefit up to two creatures as well.

WARLOCK OPTIONS

These Otherworldly Patron options provide paths for pact-breaking warlocks, but can also be used for a character with an unconventional pact. The Swindled is a powerful entity who has had its power stolen by the warlock, and the Compound represents an assembly of magical beings collectively assisting a warlock.



THE SWINDLED

Your patron is an entity that you have stolen power from. The Swindled might be a previous patron of yours, who severed ties with you after you broke your end of the bargain, or they could be an entirely new eldritch being from whom you steal secrets and siphon power. While forging this stolen pact is a remarkable rarity, it isn't necessarily a willing occurrence. Perhaps you accidentally stumbled upon an ancient artifact that stole the patron's power, and now the item wields you as its host. The patron may not even be aware of your connection to them.

Regardless of how you obtained the stolen power, you are in constant peril of being discovered, by the entity whose power you draw upon or by others who covet your powers.

SWINDLED FEATURES

1st	Expanded Spell List, Eldritch Thief, Spell Heist
6th	Magical Larceny
10th	Eldritch Gambit
14th	Plunder Spirit

EXPANDED SPELL LIST

Stolen knowledge from your patron allows you to choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

SWINDLED EXPANDED SPELLS

WARLOCK LEVEL	SPELLS
1st	<i>alarm, identify</i>
2nd	<i>knock, pass without trace</i>
3rd	<i>blink, nondetection</i>
4th	<i>arcane eye, freedom of movement</i>
5th	<i>mislead, passwall</i>

ELDRITCH THIEF

The process of stealing power from your patron has allowed you to develop more material thievery techniques. At 1st level, you gain proficiency with the Sleight of Hand skill and with thieves' tools. Additionally, you gain the following benefits.

Eldritch Thieves' Tools. As a bonus action, you can magically create a special set of thieves' tools in your hand. These tools' appearance reflects the nature of your patron. For instance, they might look fleshy and organic if your patron is an aberration, or take the form of unfathomably complex clockwork devices if your patron is a creature of cryptic order.

Regardless of their appearance, they function like normal thieves' tools, while also allowing you to use them as a spellcasting focus. While using them to disarm a trap or open a lock, you can use Charisma instead of Dexterity for the ability checks. The tools disappear if you create them again or if they're more than 5 feet away from you for 1 minute or longer.

SPELL HEIST

Also at 1st level, you learn a ritual to attempt to steal arcane knowledge from your patron. This ritual takes 8 hours; it can be performed during a long rest and sends your consciousness to your patron's realm, leaving you in a sleep-like state.

When you begin the ritual, you choose a number of spells between 1st and 5th level that you don't know from the warlock spell list. The chosen spells can have a total combined level that is equal to or less than half your warlock level (rounded up). At the end of the 8 hours, you make a Charisma check using your eldritch thieves' tools. The DC for the check equals $10 + \text{the total combined level of the spells}$. On a success, the spells are added to your list of known spells until the end of your next long rest or until you use this feature again. On a failure, you can choose one of the spells to add to your list of known spells for the same duration; however, each time you cast it, you take psychic damage equal to the spell's level, which can't be reduced in any way.

MAGICAL LARCENY

At 6th level, you learn to employ your eldritch thieves' tools to disarm and even steal magical effects.

As an action, you can choose one creature, object, or area within 5 feet of you that's affected by a spell, and make a Charisma check using your eldritch thieves' tools. If the spell was cast by a creature, the DC equals the creature's spell save DC. Otherwise, the DC equals $10 + \text{the spell's level}$. On a successful check, the spell ends.

In addition, if you successfully end a spell on a creature, you can steal its effects for yourself. After the spell ends on the creature, you can choose to have it immediately take effect on you for the remainder of its duration. This stolen spell targets only you, even if it can normally target more creatures, and if it requires concentration, you must concentrate to maintain it.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses of it when you finish a long rest.

ELDRITCH GAMBIT

At 10th level, you learn the spell *counterspell* if you don't already know it, and it doesn't count against the number of spells you know. You can cast it once without expending a spell slot, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Moreover, you can bolster yourself with the magical energy of the spells you sabotage. Whenever you successfully end a spell with your Magical Larceny feature or counter a spell with *counterspell*, you gain temporary hit points equal to $1d10 + \text{twice the spell's level}$. For example, if you end or counter a 3rd-level spell, you gain $1d10 + 6$ temporary hit points.

PLUNDER SPIRIT

Starting at 14th level, you learn to steal power from the spirits of your fallen enemies. When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points, you can use a reaction to steal a portion of its spirit and gain one of the following benefits:

- You regain a warlock spell slot.
- You become proficient in a saving throw that the creature was proficient in. This ability lasts until you finish a long rest.
- If the creature had the Innate Spellcasting or Spellcasting trait, you learn a spell that the creature knew or had prepared, provided the spell is of a level you can cast. You retain the knowledge of this spell until you finish a long rest, and it counts as a warlock spell for you during this time.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

THE COMPOUND

Instead of a single patron, you're beholden to a myriad of pacts and contracts with different magical creatures, drawing small fragments of power from each of them to form a coherent magical library. You might forge these pacts during a long journey, painstakingly searching for a number of patrons willing to work with one another, or multiple lesser entities might approach you after witnessing you fall out with your previous patron.

Living up to the demands of multiple patrons can be taxing, and you might find yourself at the center of conflicting requests from many of them. Warlocks who manage to maintain these manyfold pacts often pit their patrons against one another, using their bickering rivalries as a way to force them to keep one another in check.

COMPOUND FEATURES

WARLOCK LEVEL	FEATURE
1st	Expanded Spell List, Counsel of the Many, Motley Support
6th	Warding Convocation
10th	Eldritch Sundry
14th	Partitioned Mind

EXPANDED SPELL LIST

Your patrons allow you to choose from an expanded list of spells when you learn a warlock spell. The following spells are added to the warlock spell list for you.

COMPOUND EXPANDED SPELLS

WARLOCK LEVEL	SPELLS
1st	<i>detect evil and good, magic missile</i>
2nd	<i>aid, enhance ability</i>
3rd	<i>conjur animals, spirit guardians</i>
4th	<i>conjure minor elementals, divination</i>
5th	<i>legend lore, planar binding</i>

COUNSEL OF THE MANY

Starting at 1st level, you have a catalog that represents the purviews and knowledge of your many patrons. This catalog consists of two skills, two tools, and two weapons of your choice. Each time you gain a level in this class, you can replace up to two of the choices in your catalog for different ones.

When you gain this feature, you also gain proficiency with two of the six choices in your catalog. In addition, whenever you finish a short or long rest, you can seek the counsel of another one of your Compound patrons, replacing one of the bonus proficiencies you gain from this feature with another one of the choices in the catalog. The change lasts until you use this feature again to choose new proficiencies from your catalog.

MOTLEY SUPPORT

Also at 1st level, you are constantly surrounded by a motley crew of Tiny spectral entities that follow you around. These entities are intangible and invulnerable, and you can cause them to become visible or invisible to others at will (no action required by you). They are manifestations of your different patrons and take aspects from them. For example, if one of your patrons is a fey, it could manifest as a spectral pixie, while an undead patron could manifest as a ghost.

When a creature you can see within 30 feet of you makes an attack roll or an ability check, you can use a reaction to command one of the entities to briefly appear and aid that creature. The creature can roll a d4 and add the number rolled to the attack roll or ability check. However, if the attack roll or ability check is with a weapon, skill, or tool that is part of your Counsel of the Many catalog, the creature rolls a d6 instead.

You can use this feature a number of times equal to your proficiency bonus, and you regain all expended uses of it when you finish a long rest.

WARDING CONVOCATION

When you reach 6th level, you gain the ability to employ the spectral entities from your Motley Support feature around you in a defensive manner.

As a bonus action, you cause the entities to become semi-corporeal and surround you until the end of your next turn. While they do, you have half cover, being within 5 feet of a hostile creature doesn't impose disadvantage on your ranged attack rolls, and you make Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration with advantage.

You can use this feature once, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a short or long rest. Optionally, you can expend one use of your Motley Support feature to use this feature again before you regain it.

ELDRITCH SUNDAY

At 10th level, your patrons regale you with an arsenal of magical gifts. You can choose an additional option for your Pact Boon feature, for a total of two.

In addition, once you gain your Mystic Arcanum feature at 11th level, you choose two 6th-level spells that can be cast as that arcanum, instead of only one. You can still cast only one of them without expending a spell slot. You can similarly choose two spells for each higher-level Mystic Arcanum you get from then on.

PARTITIONED MIND

Starting at 14th level, you gain the ability to maintain concentration on two different spells at the same time, sharing the spellcasting locus of your mind with the entities that orbit you. While concentrating this way, you make concentration checks for each spell separately.

Once you use this feature to concentrate on two spells, you must finish a long rest before you can do so again.



MISIRI THE FRACTURED

Misiri was brought up in the upper echelons of a dwarven kingdom, though her clan valued asceticism over luxury and service over status. She followed in their traditions by climbing the ranks of the faith of the Sentinel, a deity of vigilance and protection, and became a revered shield-priest as soon as she came of age. After decades of duty, the prestigious Order of the Everguard recruited Misiri and charged her with the protection of Empress Nebrala II.

Years later, after two encroaching nations moved in to occupy their lands, Misiri saw war decimate her kingdom. Empress Nebrala refused to negotiate with the invaders and sought a way to defeat the invading forces. She found an ancient dwarven spell scroll that could open a rift to the Plane of Earth to raise a mountain from the ground.

During the siege of their last remaining stronghold, the empress ordered Misiri to cast the spell, but the shield-priest refused to endanger the people of the citadel. Furious at her insubordination, the empress had Misiri arrested and took the scroll to cast the spell herself. As the guards seized her, Misiri witnessed in terror as rising crags tore through the citadel, ending hundreds of lives in a matter of seconds. In an act of desperation, she broke free from the hold of the guards, took her sword, and ended her empress's life, halting the spell. Though her actions saved thousands, Misiri was branded a traitor to the kingdom and earned the contempt of her god.

Now Misiri wanders as an outcast, carrying her fractured shield at her back but never wielding it. As the subject of the Sentinel's scorn, she has learned to turn the doom of her god's ire against others, carving a new path for herself as an anathematic cleric in order to survive.

MISIRI THE FRACTURED

Medium humanoid (dwarf), neutral good

ARMOR CLASS 16 (breastplate)

HIT POINTS 67 (9d8 + 27)

SPEED 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+3)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

SAVING THROWS Wisdom +6, Charisma +4

SKILLS Insight +6, Perception +6, Religion +3

DAMAGE RESISTANCES poison

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

LANGUAGES Common, Dwarvish

CHALLENGE 5 (1,800 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +3

Dwarven Resilience. Misiri has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Potent Spellcasting. Misiri adds her Wisdom modifier to the damage she deals with any cleric cantrip.

Spellcasting. Misiri is a 9th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *guidance*, *mending*, *sacred flame*

1st level (4 slots): *bane*, *healing word*, *inflict wounds*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *spirit guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *phantasmal killer*

5th level (1 slot): *dispel evil and good*, *flame strike*

ACTIONS

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Sacred Flame (Cantrip). Flame-like radiance descends on one creature Misri can see within 60 feet of her. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 12 (2d8 + 3) radiant damage, gaining no benefit from cover.

Divine Derogation (2/Short Rest). Misiri releases a wave of discordant divinity that curses one creature she can see within 30 feet of her for 1 minute. When the cursed creature casts a spell or uses an ability that restores hit points or deals radiant or necrotic damage, it must make a Wisdom saving throw. Celestials and fiends have disadvantage on this saving throw. On a failure, the spell or effect is nullified, and then the curse ends.

REACTIONS

Conduit of Ruin. Before a creature rolls the d4 from a *bane* spell cast by Misiri, she can use her reaction to upgrade the d4 to a d6.



RUCIO SABHAR

Those who know Rucio Sabhar say death itself courted him—in part because of the half-elf’s quick-witted charm, and in part because he’s cheated his way out of death more times than anyone has a right to.

Born in a bustling city and raised in poverty, Rucio was recruited by the local thieves’ guild at a young age to serve as a messenger and spy. His first brush with death came shortly after his initiation, when he was betrayed on a heist to steal an *iron flask* from a local treasure hunter. After a literal stab in the back from his supposed allies, quick-thinking Rucio gave the traitors his canteen and kept the magic *iron flask* as they left him for dead. On the brink of death, he opened the flask and released a powerful pit fiend, who offered him a chance to live by making a warlock pact.

Bolstered by infernal power, Rucio hunted the turncoats down and moved on to become a renowned adventurer. But the more fame and fortune he found, the more his patron demanded. Rucio spent years covertly searching for a way to get ahead of his patron and regain his freedom.

Finally, after nearly a decade, Rucio found a book containing his patron’s true name. Invoking it, he summoned the pit fiend and demanded two things: that the devil forget him, and that it return to the *iron flask*. The pit fiend complied, but only after almost killing Rucio again and snatching the book away from him.

Rucio’s gambit was successful: he kept his patron’s power and freed himself from the devil’s demands. In doing so, however, he became the target of an incessant hunt from cultists, warlocks, and devils seeking to retrieve the *iron flask* with the pit fiend and powerful book of names trapped inside.

RUCIO SABHAR

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic neutral

ARMOR CLASS 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

HIT POINTS 91 (14d8 + 28)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)

SAVING THROWS Wisdom +4, Charisma +7

SKILLS Arcana +4, Deception +7, Investigation +4, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +6

SENSES darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Common, Elvish

CHALLENGE 7 (2,300 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +3

Devil’s Sight. Magical darkness doesn’t impede Rucio’s darkvision.

Fey Ancestry. Rucio has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can’t put him to sleep.

Pact Weapon. Rucio can use his Charisma modifier, instead of Strength or Dexterity, for attack and damage rolls with his rapier (included in the attack).

Spellcasting. Rucio is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He regains spell slots when he finishes a short or long rest. He knows the following warlock spells:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *eldritch blast*, *mage hand*, *minor illusion*

1st–5th level (3 5th-level slots): *alarm*, *charm person*,

darkness, *dimension door*, *dream*, *fireball*, *freedom of movement*, *hellish rebuke*, *hold monster*, *identify*, *mislead*, *misty step*, *pass without trace*, *scrying*, *shatter*

ACTIONS

Multiaction. Rucio makes three *eldritch blast* attacks, or attacks twice with his rapier.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Eldritch Blast (Cantrip). *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) force damage.

Magical Larceny (3/Long Rest). Rucio chooses one creature, object, or area within 5 feet of him that’s affected by a spell, and makes a Charisma check using eldritch thieves’ tools with a +7 bonus. If the spell was cast by a creature, the DC equals the creature’s spell save DC. Otherwise, the DC equals 10 + the spell’s level. On a successful check, the spell ends.

If Rucio ends a spell on a creature in this way, he can choose to steal its effects. After the spell ends on the creature, it immediately takes effect on Rucio for the remainder of its duration. This stolen spell targets only him, even if it can normally target more creatures, and if it requires concentration, Rucio must concentrate to maintain it.

REACTIONS

Eldritch Gambit (2/Day). Rucio casts counterspell as a 3rd-level spell. If he successfully counters with this reaction, Rucio gains temporary hit points equal to 1d10 + the level of the spell that was countered.

RETAINERS

Retainers are unique NPC followers who pledge their service to player characters. Below are four stat blocks for cleric and warlock retainers who have been forsaken by their gods and patrons.

The full rules for retainers are explained in *Strongholds & Followers*.

SCORNED PRIEST

ARMOR Medium (AC 15)

PRIMARY ABILITY Wisdom

SAVES Wisdom, Charisma

SKILLS Insight, Religion

SIGNATURE ATTACK *Sacred Flame*. Flame-like radiance descends on a creature that the Scorned Priest can see within 60 feet. The target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take 4 (1d8) radiant damage. The target gains no benefit from cover for this saving throw.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

3rd-level (3/Day, Bonus Action). Divine Grudge. The scorned priest casts *bane*.

5th-level (3/Day, Reaction). Rebuke the Faithful. When a creature the scorned priest can see within 30 feet of it uses a spell or magical effect that restores hit points or that deals radiant or necrotic damage, the scorned priest can deal 11 (2d10) psychic damage to that creature. Celestials and fiends are vulnerable to this damage.

7th-level (2/Day). Beacon of Hatred. Hostile creatures that can see the scorned priest and that are within 30 feet of it must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature must immediately spend its reaction to make a melee weapon attack against a random target within its reach, including itself.

ATONING PRIEST

ARMOR Heavy (AC 18)

PRIMARY ABILITY Wisdom

SAVES Wisdom, Charisma

SKILLS Persuasion, Religion

SIGNATURE ATTACK *Warhammer. Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

3rd-level (3/Day). Shielding Vow. The atoning priest chooses a creature within 5 feet of it to protect. For 1 minute, all attacks against the atoning priest are made with advantage, and attacks against the protected creature are made with disadvantage. The effect ends early if the atoning priest and the target are separated by more than 5 feet at the end of the priest's turn.

5th-level (3/Day, Reaction). Rallying Sacrifice. When the atoning priest loses one or more health levels, it can choose a number of allies it can see within 30 feet of it equal to the number of health levels lost. Each chosen ally regains 7 (1d8 + 3) hit points.

7th-level (2/Day, Reaction). Steadfast Companion. If the atoning priest loses its final health level while at least one living ally that it can see is within 100 feet of it, it can use this feature to remain conscious until the end of its next turn.

ELDRITCH THIEF

ARMOR Light (AC 13)

PRIMARY ABILITY Charisma

SAVES Wisdom, Charisma

SKILLS Arcana, Sleight of Hand

SIGNATURE ATTACK *Eldritch Blast.* Ranged Spell Attack: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d10) force damage.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

3rd-level (3/Day). *Pilfer Cantrip.* The eldritch thief changes its signature attack to a different warlock cantrip of its choice, then casts that cantrip as part of this action. The signature attack remains changed until the eldritch thief uses this feature again or until it finishes a long rest.

5th-level (3/Day, No Action). *Spell Sneak.* When the eldritch thief damages a creature with its signature attack, it can use this feature to become invisible to that creature until the end of the eldritch thief's next turn.

7th-level (1/Day). *Steal Spell.* The eldritch thief targets a creature within 5 feet of it with the Spellcasting trait and forces it to make a saving throw against the thief's spell save DC. The target has disadvantage on this saving throw if the eldritch thief is hidden from it. On a failure, the eldritch thief can choose a spell of 3rd-level or lower that the target knows and cast it, provided the spell's casting time is 1 action or 1 bonus action. The target then becomes unable to cast that spell for 1 minute.

COMPOUND MAGE

ARMOR Light (AC 13)

PRIMARY ABILITY Charisma

SAVES Wisdom, Charisma

SKILLS Arcana, History, Nature, Religion

SIGNATURE ATTACK *Eldritch Blast.* Ranged Spell Attack: +6 to hit, range 120 ft., one creature. Hit: 5 (1d10) force damage.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

3rd-level (3/Day, Reaction). *Spontaneous Guidance.* When a creature the compound mage can see within 60 feet of it makes an ability check using the Arcana, History, Nature, or Religion skill, the compound mage can blurt out knowledge from one of the many entities that it knows. If the creature can hear the compound mage, it rolls a d6 and adds the result to its roll.

5th-level (3/Day). *Multiplicity.* The compound mage casts *mirror image* on itself. The next time the compound mage uses its signature attack, it makes one additional attack for each duplicate it has.

7th-level (1/Day, Bonus Action). *Eldritch Chatter.* The compound mage infuses its signature attack with discordant voices. The next time it hits with it, the target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the compound mage. While frightened this way, a creature takes 10 (2d6 + 3) psychic damage if it takes any action on its turn other than the Dash or the Dodge action. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.

POWER IS WHERE YOU TAKE IT

CREATING CITIES AND CHARACTERS FOR POLITICAL INTRIGUE CAMPAIGNS

by Sally Tamarkin

"[CITIES] ARE NOT LIKE SUBURBS, ONLY DENSER. THEY DIFFER FROM TOWNS AND SUBURBS IN BASIC WAYS, AND ONE OF THESE IS THAT CITIES ARE, BY DEFINITION, FULL OF STRANGERS."

—JANE JACOBS, *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES*

This quote elegantly captures why I love cities so much—and, more importantly for this article, why I think they’re the perfect setting for telling stories about political intrigue. Before I get to that, let me say this first: campaigns about political intrigue can be tricky, mainly because when it comes to getting players (and their characters) invested, such campaigns tend to lack the do-this-and-save-the-world-please quality of traditional arcs and campaigns. Those campaigns have the advantage of immediately setting the stakes sky-high, which means that players know their characters will get to be heroes or die trying—two very cool outcomes.

Stories of political intrigue tend to be smaller and are, by definition, quieter since intrigue basically means “engaging in secret schemes.” In fact, the characters might want to ensure that no one ever discovers they were involved at all! The good news is that political intrigue campaigns are all about mystery and discovery, about keeping and telling secrets, and about using your wits (and, okay, maybe your blade) to get what you want—which means that with some thoughtful design, they can be thrilling and fun.

This is where cities come in. Cities are, as the quote above says, full of strangers, which makes them the perfect place to tell stories about all kinds of NPCs and factions plotting, in secret, to take what they want—money or territory, or maybe power, influence, or control. And if you build your city around these NPCs, it will feel alive and lived-in, a place where people scheme secretly, where a thieves’ guild works with a city leader to shake down the local nobles; where the mayor is in cahoots with a local religious leader for some dark purpose; where the head of the city watch is conspiring with an artificer from the local tinkerer’s guild to make illegal magic weapons.

On a more practical level, any city—real or fictional—has the building blocks of a political intrigue campaign. First, cities are densely populated with residents of various backgrounds and livelihoods, whose lives are intertwined through work, proximity, romance, shared interest, rivalries, and so on. Second, cities have a system of governance—an entity that holds (and generally seeks to maintain) state power, which of course means there are people or groups that seek to take away that power. Finally, cities are home to various factions competing for attention, control, and influence. Sometimes this takes the form of competition for some kind of officially recognized or “legitimate” power, as with elections, labor disputes, or matters of succession. Other times, the power that is sought is informal or perhaps even criminal—maybe two thieves’ guilds fighting over territory, a religious leader seeking to influence local law using bribery, or a city leader using their station to illegally accumulate wealth.

This article includes a step-by-step guide to creating and developing a city perfect for a political intrigue campaign. It also provides backgrounds to help players create characters who are already part of a city’s political life, involved in or connected to the ongoing struggles over power and influence.

CREATING YOUR CITY

Particularly if you're using the backgrounds in this article, I recommend building your city in three phases. The first phase takes place before your session zero. In fact, session zero is the time you will present the city to your players. In this phase of design you're going to come up with some basic details about your city so that it feels like a real place to you and to your players, but is not so complete and built out that your players aren't sure where their characters would fit into it. Again, political intrigue campaigns require that the players care about the city and that their characters feel invested in what goes on there. In my experience, the best way to facilitate this is to think of character creation as part of your worldbuilding and vice versa. So, let's start building the version of our city that we want to bring to our session zero.

PART I: GETTING STARTED

We'll go through this process step by step, but these are some questions to ask as you build your city:

- How big is the city? Is it a sleepy trade town, or a major metropolis?
- What is the city's system of governance?
- What makes your city unique? What have outsiders heard about your city?
- What are the city's important geographical features? How do they affect the culture or government?

If you feel like it, you can also consider details such as the city's weather, special laws, notable exports or raw materials, and important festivals.

CITY SIZE AND DESIGN

When you're choosing how big to make your city, you just want to make sure that it's big enough to contain the factions, locations, and NPCs you need for the kind of stories you want to tell. The bigger a city is, the more flexibility you're likely to have, but keep in mind that the bigger the city, the more work it will be to build, run, and keep track of.

- Small town (population 901–2,000)
- Large town (population 2,001–5,000)
- Small city (population 5,001–12,000)
- Large city (population 12,001–25,000)

I'm going to build a small city with a population of 11,000. Although cities can be dense, sprawling, or anything in between, I want this one to be very densely populated; about a three-quarters of a mile in length and width. To support a crowded population, many buildings in the city are several stories tall, with some top floors added to older structures as the settlement grew. One of

my favorite things about cities in real life and in fiction is that when they're densely populated, people can't help but be characters in one another's lives, and that's perfect for political intrigue stories. I also really like when cities have distinct neighborhoods, so I'm going to break this one up into quadrants; the river will divide the city in two and the bridge will bisect it again. I know I'll want my city's criminal organizations to each operate out of a different district, so I'll make a note of that and return to it later. I also want there to be a district that's based around the city's key industry.

This city sits at the foot of a mountain range and is bisected by a river. I'll name my city Woodbridge, after the wooden bridge that was built by the city's founders so they didn't have to ford the river. The wide river is a huge source of employment and income for the city. Considering how important the river is, I'll call one of the four districts the Fresh Water. This will be the northwest quadrant of the city, home to fisheries, boatyards, and all the people who work with the river and its bounty. You always know you're in the Fresh Water because your boots are caked with mud and the smell of trout is in the air.

Across the bridge from the Fresh Water is a district called Bankside, an upscale residential neighborhood. If the Fresh Water is the industrial side of the bridge, Bankside is more like a luxe riverside community. Each home has a slip at the Woodbridge marina where their pleasure craft is docked, waiting to whisk its owners and their guests away on a sunset tour of the river. The only aroma on this side of the river is the sweet fragrance of the local fruit trees, which bloom every spring and draw visitors from all over town.

Continuing counterclockwise, the southeastern quadrant is Fairmarket, a lively commercial district full of shops, vendors, street performers, and stalls selling food and drink. Finally, across the bridge from Fairmarket, in the southwest quadrant, is the Spit. This area is full of dive bars, a couple of underground fight clubs, and cheap inns, as well as some disreputable shops and vendors that offer rare goods of dubious legality.

SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

When it comes to governance for Woodbridge, I'm going to choose a structure I feel familiar with: an elected mayor (though perhaps only land-owning nobles in this city are allowed to vote—instant plot seed!) and a four-person council of alders appointed by the mayor. I'm choosing a four-person city council because it goes along with my city being divided into quadrants; each alder can represent a specific district, which will neatly tie them to that area's residents, businesses, and desires.

Other possible government systems include:

- Council of nobles or lords
- Council of clergy or a religious leader

- Duke or lord appointed by a monarch
- Military leader
- Council of guild leaders
- Mage circle
- Council of learned engineers, scientists, artificers
- Secret council with a public figurehead

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Because Woodbridge is a small city, it will have many of the trappings of an urban center but will lack some of the things you'd find in a metropolis. For example, a large city might have a university, a grand library, a public works department, a system of roads and sewers, an office of the tax collector, jail, bank, hall of records, city watch, and a newspaper. Our city isn't quite that big, but it does have a city watch, jail, and courthouse. (A smaller city or large town might have a two-person city watch, while an even smaller town might have one sheriff who also serves as jailer, judge, and tax collector, and a town crier in place of a newspaper.)

BUSINESSES

Woodbridge will have various shops and businesses, including four taverns and four inns that are important to the story, one in each district. Of course there are more taverns and inns, but I just want to populate the city enough so that each district feels lived in—I don't need a ton of stuff to track before the game even starts. There are at least two smiths in town, one who specializes in making elegant showpiece weapons and armor and a more workaday smith who cranks out the basics.

The city will have other shops, businesses, and guilds, some of which I'll come up with before the campaign starts and some of which will emerge during play. Just keep in mind that the industries in your city will determine the local guilds and the kinds of merchants and shops the city can sustain.

KEY FACTIONS

Our city is big enough to sustain two competing criminal factions—an assassins' guild (*The Whispering Blade*) and a thieves' guild (*The Kate and Ken*). At this moment in citybuilding, I'm going to say that there is one religion officially represented in the city. It's called the Temple of the Prophet, and it has a temple in town and maintains the graveyard. If, during our session zero, one of my players expresses interest in that religion or another, I'll work with them to decide the extent to which it's represented in our city.

Other factions will definitely emerge through play. Because the river plays a big role in the city's industry, there will be a guild of river workers. This will include fishers, boatwrights, workers who process the fish that's been

caught, bait shop workers, and any other river-related job I can come up with.

This is all I need to have for now. After my session zero, I can flesh this out even more, name specific factions, buildings, and locations, create key NPCs, and so on.

PART II: FACTIONS & POWER

After your session zero, continue building your city with the player characters and their backstories in mind. As you do this, think more specifically about who holds power in the city and what kind of power they have. This is when plot seeds and hooks will emerge. And of course, as you build, find places to weave the characters into the fabric of the city. Remember, a city can have multiple entities that hold power, influence, and control. Think about informal and criminal power as well as officially recognized and state power.

Here's a brief example of how to start building out the power relationships in Woodbridge based on a session zero where my players built characters using some of the backgrounds described below.

After our session zero, I knew that one of the PCs wanted to be involved in city government. They took the Politician background and we decided that they work in the office of an alder in the Fresh Water. Another player took the Public Intellectual background and wanted to be a visiting professor at the Woodbridge Institute of Liberal Arts (a college they came up with and named), lecturing on political science and local governance. The third player took the Activist Journalist background so they could be an editor at the newspaper *The Shining Light*, whose tagline is "We Tell You the Things They Don't Want You to Know." (So now we have two more factions: the university and the newspaper!)

For each faction, I'll come up with some details that will provide a basic sense of the faction's MO. I'll determine:

- Its overall mission
- Key NPC(s)
- Relationships to other factions
- Power it has
- Power it seeks (this might emerge through play; perhaps at the current moment a given faction is focused on maintaining the status quo)

Keep in mind that factions and NPCs should have well-defined goals and interests. I recommend keeping these relatively concrete and measurable. For example: more money, territory, a seat on a council, razing an area to make room for their business interest, the downfall of a political rival, or at-any-cost survival despite a looming threat.

The combination of initial citybuilding and session zero helped me get a sense of what some of this might look like

and also gave me a few plot seeds—which means I already have some ideas for how to develop these factions and how I might get the PCs involved.

For Woodbridge, based on what we built above, my next steps are fleshing out the mayor, the four-member council of alders, the two thieves' guilds, the church, the weekly newspaper, and the college. (Of course there will be other factions and NPCs to flesh out, which you can do now, discover during play, or some combo). Also, you'll notice that as you develop your important factions and NPCs you'll necessarily begin doing some broader world-building. To begin with, here's what it would look like to flesh out the mayor and the thieves' guilds.

MAYOR

When the mayor was elected, he was a member of the Temple of the Prophet (like many residents of Woodbridge), but only nominally. However, over the four years he's been in office, he's become extremely pious and brought the head cleric of the temple into his inner circle. Some say the cleric (another NPC to flesh out!) has some kind of hold over the mayor, but that's just a rumor. Either way, the mayor has been trying to work some of the strictures of his church into municipal law. The mayor's other goal is to finish his ten-year term in good stead with the nobles of Woodbridge so he will be reelected. He is currently serving the fourth year of his first term.

The mayor's power is significant, but not absolute. He can approve or reject laws proposed by the alders, adjust taxes, and declare holidays. He appoints the city judge, and the head of the city watch also answers to him. If a state of emergency is declared, the mayor can generate and pass laws; otherwise, it's the alders who write and propose legislation. The mayor is almost never seen in public without his bodyguard, a burly half-orc whom we can flesh out later.

THE WHISPERING BLADE

This assassins' guild is known as the Blade of Woodbridge. They have a protection racket in the Fresh Water, which is the area of the city that is home to fisheries, warehouses, and processing facilities for the many businesses who harvest the river's bounty. They operate out of a tavern in this neighborhood called The Floppy Trout. The Blade's goals are to protect their territory and to keep their business model viable by disposing of any threats or nosy individuals.

THE KATE AND KEN

This thieves' guild is led by a three-person team called the High Pennyweights. This guild's specialty is breaking into homes of nobles, stealing their valuables, and replacing them with well-made but worthless forgeries. To accomplish this, they have a deal with a few artisans in

town (jewelry makers, coin forgers, smiths) who get a cut of the profits from the sale of the stolen goods. The Kate and Ken operates out of the basement of a pawn shop in the Spit.

If you ever get stuck building out these factions, ask yourself these questions:

- What kind of power does this faction have?
- What is the source of its power?
- Who in your city is impacted if this faction gains or loses power?
- What people or entities would like for this faction to have less power?

PART III: PLOT SEEDS

The following plot seeds are some ideas to get you started with political intrigue in your city. I built them with Woodbridge in mind, but I also designed them to be modular, which means that you should be able to change the details and use them for your city. If they call for a faction, setting, or other feature that doesn't exist in your city, simply swap it out for something your city does have; they're meant to be open-ended so you can take the stories in whatever direction works for your table.

ASSASSINATION ESCALATION

For three months in a row, on the very first night of the new moon, a resident of the city has been murdered. It's clearly the work of a skilled assassin. The Whispering Blade denies involvement, but there are certain characteristics of each murder scene that make it clear a professional is involved, so they must know *something*. Right? This campaign arc begins the morning after the third victim was discovered, and their identity confirms the rumor that's been circulating since the second murder—all the victims were outspoken critics of the mayor. The city's newspaper, *The Shining Light*, published a special early morning edition that reports the third assassination and, controversially, suggests the mayor's silence on the murders is suspicious.

THIS SPELLS DISASTER

The mayor is away brokering a trade deal when a natural disaster strikes. The city is plunged into chaos; fisheries and boats are destroyed, livestock are killed, the river is flooding, and the city's well water is tainted. The council of alders, who've been running the city in the mayor's stead, struggles to maintain law and order, which means it's the perfect opportunity for someone to grab power. In fact, was this disaster natural after all? Or might it have been brought about intentionally using magic? Three of the city's factions (the city watch, the Temple of the Prophet, and the Whispering Blade) vie for control while the city's journalists at *The Shining Light* attempt to uncover the truth about the "natural" disaster.

SLEEP NO MORE

An insomnia epidemic is sweeping through Woodbridge with devastating consequences. Only the wealthy residents of Bankside have contracted it so far, but city officials are not sure how they got it or whether it's contagious. After a few days of being unable to sleep, victims become irritable and confused. A few days after that, they become delirious and fall into a coma. Those who can afford expensive care with rare herbs or treatments from the city's healer do find some relief, but no one has managed to find a cure. If the characters investigate, they soon discover that the only thing those who are ill have in common (besides their social class and where they live) is that they've all recently purchased home decor by a local artisan named Maguff—who is known not only for his beautiful work but also because he seems to be on collegial terms with some members of the Kate and Ken.

POLITICAL INTRIGUE BACKGROUNDS

The following backgrounds are made for characters in political intrigue campaigns, though your GM may allow you to use them in other games. Because this content deals with how people are impacted by shifts in power, some details might remind you of real life and hit closer to home than material in the core rules. So, before you fully flesh out your characters using these backgrounds, make sure everyone at your table is in agreement about the kinds of themes you'll be exploring in play and the extent to which the real world is reflected in your campaign.

Remember that when you pull from real life—especially recent events—you risk inhabiting characters reminiscent of real people who have harmed others or telling stories that are uncomfortable or even re-traumatizing for your group. Use your session zero to share your ideas and ask for input from your fellow players and GM.

Please don't use these backgrounds to tell stories about fascists, bigots, right-wing insurrectionists, or violent xenophobes. These backgrounds should be used to play with and explore the nature of power, and how power can shift between those “in charge” and those who are subject to the whims and machinations of the authorities.

SAFETY TOOLS

Before getting started, I recommend looking over the following resources, which are some of my favorites for setting boundaries and calibrating expectations for the campaign to come. Safety at the table can include using an X-card and determining lines and veils ahead of time, but it also includes discussing and agreeing on what kind of tone the game will have, what kinds of conflicts will be explored, what constitutes acceptable play, what players can expect from the GM and vice versa, and so on. The tools below guide you through those discussions and decisions as a group.

- [RPG safety tools](#): These tools include the X-Card (developed by John Stavropoulos), lines/veils, and more.
- [RPG Consent checklist](#), from the TTRPG Safety Toolkit, a resource created by [Kienna Shaw](#) and [Lauren Bryant-Monk](#)
- [CATS method \(example\)](#) by Patrick O’Leary
- [The Same Page Tool](#) from [Christopher Chinn’s](#) blog [Deeper in the Game](#)

PERSONALITY TRAITS AND MORE

As you probably know from building fifth edition characters, when you choose a background, you then roll on or choose from tables for your chosen background to determine your character’s traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws. These backgrounds are set up a little differently. What you’ll find ahead is that traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws aren’t divided by background, but are combined into four big tables that can apply to all backgrounds. I think it’s more fun, and leads to richer, more interesting characters when you’re not steered towards a set of characteristics based on your background. Make a politician who hates being the center of attention or an activist who cares more about personal glory than their cause! Mix and match these characteristics as you see fit.

CITIZEN ACTIVIST

The system is corrupt. Change will only come if the oppressed come together to resist. Your work may happen out in the open or perhaps in secret. Work with the GM to decide what form your activism takes. Maybe you lead a coalition that lobbies elected officials or nobles for a change in local law. Perhaps you organize jobs, medical care, and food for those who need it. You could lead demonstrations and engage in civil disobedience, distribute literature or tag walls in the city with graffiti that calls attention to unfair taxation, break people out of jail, or redistribute wealth.



Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Persuasion

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A seminal text that has influenced your activism, a notebook written in code with your contacts, a set of common clothes, and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: LAY OF THE LAND

As someone who spends their time opposing hegemonic power, organizing like-minded people to join your cause, and providing aid to those harmed by the system, you have an intimate knowledge of the power structures in your community, as well as how to navigate them. This includes government bodies, businesses, secret societies, religious orders, guilds, other activist groups, and any other faction that holds sway and influence.

You also know who the leaders of these various entities are, including those who operate clandestinely (at your

GM's discretion). In a new place, you can quickly figure out where to go and who to talk to in order to get this information.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Citizen activists are people who live and breathe the idea of being the change they wish to see in the world. Sure, they're everyday people who don't necessarily possess the resources of those in power or with more privilege and access, but what they have is a determination to change things for the better, a deep understanding of how the common person can affect change, and an optimism or even just a bit of hope that change is actually possible. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

ACTIVIST JOURNALIST

You work to expose the harm caused by ruling powers through journalism. Maybe a local broadsheet or town crier employs you, or maybe this is how you spend your free time. Either way, the stories you investigate and report on have an impact on your community and your role within it.

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Investigation

Languages: Two of your choice and a journalist shorthand for taking notes

Equipment: A set of common clothes, a scroll that you use to "map" important relationships between powerful figures in the city, a writing kit (small pouch with a quill, ink, folded parchment, and a penknife), and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: YOU CAN TRUST ME

You are known in your community as someone who can be trusted with valuable (potentially explosive) information. Community members—including those who hold power—may provide you with valuable information in the hopes that you'll leak the information or investigate further. Other times, people may try to keep information from you or mislead you, which is a form of gathering information itself!

If you don't protect your sources and their identities, there will be consequences (determined by the GM).

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Citizen journalists are determined to uncover the truth—wherever it's hidden and no matter how difficult or dangerous it is to get—and bring it into the open. They're dogged when they're pursuing stories and will wade into unfamiliar or threatening situations to get the information



they need. They might be the type to spend hours with their head buried in tomes and blueprints and official records, or someone who's out in the streets day in and day out, looking for leads and sources. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

POLITICIAN

You are running for office or have already been elected (or maybe appointed; talk to your GM about what makes sense for the setting). Your office is one of moderate power and influence; you might be a member of a city council or a community elder or alderperson. You can't control major political decisions in your city, but you certainly have access to, and maybe the respect of, the people who do.

Skill Proficiencies: Perception, Performance

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A set of fine clothes, a writing kit (small pouch with a quill, ink, folded parchment, and a penknife), a ceremonial ribbon-cutting blade, a brooch or other accessory with the mark of your office or political party, and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: EXPENSE ACCOUNT

Your political party (or perhaps a benefactor or other group that supports you) funds a comfortable lifestyle for you and up to eight of your traveling companions. They pay for your food, shelter, clothing, daily needs, and anything else you can reasonably justify as being part of your political career (at the GM's discretion). They do not fund armor, weapons, or magic items.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Politicians tend to be networkers, movers and shakers, and people who see themselves as just the right person to be giving speeches, representing constituents, making laws, and doing a whole lot of shaking hands and kissing babies. Your politician might be looking to make change, enjoy the social status of their position, or both!

POLITICAL STRATEGIST

You work for a candidate, elected official, guild, or other entity that seeks to maneuver local politics as strategically and deftly as possible. You advise your bosses on who to make strategic alliances with, how to outmaneuver political opponents, and where to go and what to say to build support among the city's influential citizens. Whether you're helping your boss get that power or you're their puppet master is up to you and your GM.

Skill Proficiencies: Your choice of two of the following: Deception, Insight, or Investigation

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A notebook with contact information (and relevant details) for your boss and their political allies, a broadsheet clipping from a story you helped place in a publication, a set of fine clothes, a writing kit (small pouch with a quill, ink, folded parchment, and a penknife), and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: TRUSTED ADVISER

You work for someone who holds power in the city—a city council member, the head of a guild, the archmage of a mystic circle, the dean of a university, a lieutenant of the city watch, etc. You are this person's confidante and trusted counselor. They always hear what you have to say and seriously consider your advice and perspective. On relatively small matters, they're likely to agree with you on the spot (at the GM's discretion). They can supply you with favors and nonmagical equipment.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

To a political strategist, the world is a chess board and people are pieces to be moved around strategically. A political strategist loves nothing more than thinking analytically and creatively about how to achieve goals. Their speciality is building and consolidating power. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

You're known for speaking out against—or in favor of—a regime, political organization, religious body, or other entity that holds state power. Perhaps you're a dissident or even an exile (work with the GM to figure out what fits best in your campaign). Your mastery of political science, ethics, and philosophy allows you to express complex ideas about governance, political systems, and history with ease. Perhaps you wrote and distributed tracts and pamphlets urging people to recognize a particular injustice. You might be a clergy member who gives weekly sermons about this or that law, policy, or ruler. Maybe you're a creator whose art contains subtle (or not-so-subtle) critiques of those in power. Work with your GM to determine what kind of reputation you have.

Skill Proficiencies: Your choice of two of the following:
History, Performance, or Religion

Languages: One of your choice

Tool Proficiencies: Your choice of one set of artisan's tools or a disguise kit

Equipment: A set of traveler's clothes, a set of artisan's tools or a disguise kit, one tool of your craft (such as a writing kit, a religious item, an instrument, or a costume), and a pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU

People are familiar with your work and recognize you on sight. Some are eager to show their respect, while others consider you a nuisance or even a threat. This minor celebrity allows you access to places and people that might not otherwise be afforded to you, such as a noble court; the chambers of elected officials, community leaders, or clergy members; an elite social club; or a secret hideout.

MEDIUM

Your medium determines how you get your message to your audience. Roll or choose from the table below, or work with your GM to come up with an idea that isn't on the table.

d6	MEDIUM
1	Art (novels, plays, poetry, or visual art)
2	Performance (acting, dance, or music)
3	Scholarly writing
4	Public speaking
5	Sermons
6	Community leadership

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Public intellectuals spend their time thinking critically and deeply, reflecting, and analyzing. They generally have an area of expertise and spend their time generating writing or art to share their analyses and opinions. They can be fiery and intense or quiet and reflective. They might be stubbornly opinionated or open-minded and curious. Either way, they're passionate about ideas and analysis. See the tables in the Personal Characteristics section below for more ideas.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The following tables present personality traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws appropriate for any character in a political intrigue campaign. You can use these with the backgrounds in this article, or swap them with any of the personal characteristics listed in a background from another source.

PERSONALITY TRAITS (CHOOSE TWO)

d20	PERSONALITY TRAIT
1	All I need is what I can carry. Possessions are a distraction.
2	I really can't tolerate "roughing it." I'll do anything I can to avoid having to eat, sleep, or spend time in a place I deem beneath me.
3	I'm a sore loser (and sometimes a sore winner).
4	I idolize a leader or activist from many generations ago. Their work guides me; I think and talk about them a lot.
5	I love winning arguments so much that I sometimes start them.
6	I feel most confident, powerful, and at ease when I'm given the floor and am addressing a group about my beliefs.
7	I've read every single book I can find about political science and social movements.
8	I have a hard time with idleness; I can't sit still.
9	If I see that someone needs help, I step in.
10	I love solving puzzles; the harder the better. Societal problems are just big puzzles.
11	I would give someone the shirt off my back if they said they needed it. Or even if they said they liked it.
12	I love being in charge. Few are as cut out to lead, manage, and direct as I am.
13	I was put on this earth to stick it to the System, and that's what I'll do.
14	There's basically nothing I don't have an opinion on.
15	As far as I am concerned, strangers are just friends you haven't met yet.
16	I cry easily.
17	I've never met a paradigm I didn't want to subvert.
18	I love getting attention for my work and achievements.
19	I am drawn to rebels and iconoclasts even if their beliefs differ from mine.
20	I hate being the center of attention. I crave anonymity.

IDEALS

d20	IDEAL
1	Equity. Everyone deserves economic, social, and political rights.
2	Collective Power. When we come together, we're more powerful than any noble, royal, or elected official.
3	Collective Responsibility. When people are suffering, it's everyone's job to help to alleviate that suffering.
4	Change. Society and its systems of power must evolve to meet changing needs. Complacency leads to harm.
5	Order. Social stability is everything. Chaos will reign unless we keep it in check.
6	Intellect. There is no one who understands political science, strategy, and philosophy like I do, and I'm always striving to learn and know more.
7	Strategy. The world is a chess board; knowing how to move the pieces ensures victory.
8	Pacifism. Violence doesn't permanently solve problems. I strive for a world free from war.
9	Power. If I can attain enough power, no one can harm my community or me.
10	Performance. I like people to notice me and know my work.
11	Hope. No matter how bad things get, we must never give up.
12	Work. There's nothing more stimulating than the minutiae of bureaucracy and politics.
13	Status. Being in this position comes with an undeniable rise in rank and respect. I like that.
14	Destiny. This work is my calling and nothing can pull me away from it.
15	Influence. I want to be known by name and reputation and better yet, followed for my beliefs.
16	Retribution. Someone or an entity in power harmed me, and I'm going to make sure they pay.
17	Redemption. At some point in my past I was part of the problem, and I'll only feel absolved if I solve those problems.
18	Faith. My religion teaches that civic involvement is part of my duty as an adherent.
19	Free Thinking. Curiosity and discovery are what allow progress to be made and what prevent complacency and stagnation.
20	A Life Well Lived. I want to die knowing that I did everything I can to help.

BONDS

d20	BOND
1	My parent or guardian used to take me to meetings at their guild hall. I would listen to speeches and rallies and that's what radicalized me. To this day I consider the local guild hall a second home.
2	I'll never forget what it was like to see the people I love suffer at the hands of injustice.
3	My mentor taught me everything I know and I'm carrying on their work.
4	This manifesto changed my life and worldview. I refer to it a lot and carry a copy with me everywhere.
5	Nothing is more important than impressing my family.
6	Someone important to me had their livelihood ruined by a political entity, and I'm determined to make sure it never happens to anyone else.
7	I learned about politics from a traveling theatre troupe that came through town and did political satire. I've been a volunteer at (or donor to) the local theatre ever since.
8	My most treasured possession is a piece of paper with the following written on it: "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either."
9	Someone stood up for me once and it saved me. In turn, I will always stand up for others.
10	My nation (or city) and its people are all that matter to me.
11	My allies are the only people I trust.
12	I know the city's sewers (or other hiding places) like the back of my hand.
13	I love someone who doesn't share my worldview.
14	I've spent most of my life in the local tavern. Everyone knows me there and I know everyone.
15	My family escaped persecution and I was raised on their stories.
16	I've been writing in my journal every night ever since I could remember. It comes with me everywhere and contains all my thoughts and ideas.
17	I'm obsessed with embarrassing my political rival.
18	I'm writing what I believe will be the political manifesto of its time.
19	I have to protect my fortune from the undeserving people who want to take it from me.
20	The local library is a sacred place to me; it's where I think, read, write, and plan.

FLAWS

d20	FLAW
1	When things seem overwhelming I become nihilistic or melancholic.
2	I tend to drastically overestimate my own influence and power.
3	Once I get a little bit of authority I get really bossy.
4	I tend to think in black and white, right and wrong; the gray is harder for me to see.
5	I put my causes first—and second and third, often to the detriment of my health and happiness.
6	There are times when it would be safer (and maybe smarter) to back down, but I never do that.
7	I get bogged down in details and can be slow to act.
8	I believe I know what's best for everyone.
9	I always speak my mind, even when propriety (or danger) says I should shut my mouth.
10	I would risk the lives of strangers to bring about my goals.
11	My political work feels like a burden. I wish I could be free of it.
12	As much as I care about the common people, I don't really know what their lives are really like.
13	I act before considering the consequences; I'll deal with them later.
14	I would do anything to hide my failures.
15	I got into all this political stuff because I like when people do what I want.
16	I secretly worry that my work is worthless and I'll never make a difference.
17	I care more about my personal glory than any cause.
18	I've sacrificed love and companionship for my cause.
19	I have no use for those who question my political analysis.
20	People either get it or they don't—and if they don't, I can't be bothered with them.

WOODBRIDGE

Ridge Run

EXPLANATION

1. The Floppy Trout
2. Mayor's mansion
3. Temple of the Prophet
4. City hall & court
5. City watch & jail
6. The Shining Light
7. Quality Collateral
8. The Wood Bridge

FRESH WATER

BANKSIDE

THE SPIT

FAIRMARKET

FILTHY PEASANTS!

LEVEL 0 CHARACTERS AND THE FUNNEL

by Chris Bissette

CREATING A LEVEL-0 CHARACTER

The term *funnel adventure* comes from [Dungeon Crawl Classics](#)¹ and refers to an adventure where players control multiple level-0 characters: generally commoners, who are called to protect their home and find themselves in way over their heads. Think of an angry mob grabbing pitchforks and marching into the forest to face a horrible ogre. Most of them die, and the survivors return marked and changed forever.

As well as being a fun meatgrinder adventure that allows GMs to cut loose with a high-lethality dungeon without worrying about killing characters players are invested in, funnels serve as a process of character creation through play.

Funnels are popular in many other games (such as *MÖRK BORG*, *Troika!*, and *Mothership*²). Here we present a system for creating level-0 characters in fifth edition, a sample funnel adventure to run your peasants through, and rules for turning the survivors into full 1st-level characters who can go on to star in your epic campaign.

1 Editor note: A great game that you should check out!

2 Editor note: These too!

Level-0 characters aren't heroes—yet. They've accepted the call to adventure and taken their first tentative steps, but they don't know what it means to stand face to face with the horrors of the world.

The following process will guide you through creating your 0-level characters. This should take about 30 minutes or so.

ROLL ABILITY SCORES

To generate your ability scores, roll 4d6 and record the total of the highest three dice. Do this in order for each of your ability scores. You may be tempted to reorder your results to suit a character concept you have in mind, and there's nothing to prevent you doing that, but we encourage you to use at least a couple of the characters exactly as they're rolled and see what happens! Some playtesters reported that they had more fun with the characters they didn't alter at all.

Once you've rolled your ability scores, record the relevant ability modifiers as normal.

RECORD OTHER BITS

Level-0 characters are more mechanically simple than standard 1st-level characters (as well as weaker). At level-0:

- Your proficiency bonus is +2.
- Your Armor Class is $9 + \text{your Dexterity modifier}$.

- Your hit point maximum is 1d4 + your Constitution modifier. Yes. Roll. (If the result is less than 1, your character unfortunately didn't survive long enough to become an adventurer! Make a new character and hope this one gets luckier.)
- You have one Hit Die you can use during short rests. It is a d4.
- You aren't trained in any skills. (But you will be eventually.)

DETERMINE OCCUPATION

Level-0 characters don't have a class. Before adventure called, their life was simple. Maybe they toiled in a field, apprenticed to a tradesperson, or were waiting to inherit a title. Your character's occupation gives you a sense of their station in life before they left it all behind.

Roll on the Occupations table to pick an occupation and starting equipment at random, or choose an option you like if you already have a sense of who this character will be. Your character is proficient with the weapons and armor they start with.

In addition to the equipment gained from your starting occupation, all characters begin play with a torch and a day's rations.

TRINKETS

Select an appropriate starting trinket, or roll on or roll on the Trinkets table. Answer any questions posed by your trinket.

SKILLS AND SAVING THROWS

At 1st level, characters are granted skills by their class and background. Level-0 characters have no training. Whenever you succeed on an ability check that uses a skill during the adventure, decide whether you want your character to be proficient in this skill. If so, mark it on your character sheet. You can do this for up to four skills. Once you've marked a skill in this way, you're considered proficient in it and get to add your proficiency bonus to future checks of that skill.

Example: One of Lydia's characters is Jenice, a former cutpurse with a high Dexterity score. Lydia decides that if Jenice survives, she will become a rogue. During the adventure, Jenice sneaks ahead of the group to scout out the area. She rolls a Dexterity (Stealth) check and fails, alerting enemies to her presence. Later in the adventure, Jenice tries again, sneaking up on a foe who has their back turned. She rolls a Dexterity (Stealth) check and this time succeeds! Lydia fills in the Stealth box on Jenice's character sheet. Jenice is now proficient in Stealth.

This is also the case for saving throws. At 1st level, characters have two saving throws they are proficient in, granted by their class. When one of your level-0 characters succeeds on a saving throw, you can choose to mark it on your sheet, and that character adds their proficiency bonus to future saving throws with that ability. You can mark up to two saving throws this way.

If you don't select four skills and two saving throws for your character by the end of the adventure, you can select your skills and saving throw proficiencies when you advance to 1st level. The saving throw and skill proficiencies you select replace those granted by your class and background at 1st level. See "Assign Skills and Saving Throws" at the end of the adventure for more information.

OPTIONAL:

SELECT ANCESTRIES

The original version of *Filthy Peasants!* aimed to create quick characters and get you into play without having to look anything up in the core rules. One part of this meant ignoring the ancestries available in the game and assuming that all characters in play were human (or, if they weren't human, assuming that the only differences were cosmetic and that the abilities granted by ancestries wouldn't kick in until your character reached level 1).

Playtesters universally hated this, and so we've revised this process to let you include ancestries! This makes character creation a little slower, and the ancestry abilities make your level-0 characters a little more powerful than the adventure expects, but it also gives you a more varied party of characters.

To select your ancestry, roll or choose on the Ancestries table and make a note of the extra traits your character gains. You can look up the details of these abilities in the core rules. If your character survives and reaches 1st level, make note of any additional traits (like ability score adjustments) you gain from your ancestry. If your character survives, they gain those other traits at 1st level. Unless otherwise noted, your walking speed is 30 feet and your size is Medium.

THAT'S IT!

If you're familiar with fifth edition character creation, you may be surprised by how fast this process was. Surely there's more to it? Rest assured that you haven't missed anything—this is everything you need to do to create a level-0 character. If you're already familiar with the game, you might start thinking about the ancestry of your characters and how it affects them cosmetically, but the characters' ancestry traits don't have a mechanical effect in the game until after the funnel is complete and your characters advance to 1st level (unless you're using the optional ancestry rules presented above).

OCCUPATIONS

d100	OCCUPATION	EQUIPMENT
1–2	Actor	Longsword, disguise kit, set of assorted wigs
3–4	Alchemist's apprentice	1d6 vials explosive liquid (as alchemist's fire), spell component pouch
5–6	Astrologer	Quarterstaff, pocket telescope
7–8	Big-game hunter	Longbow, quiver with 20 arrows, pelt of an unusual creature
9–10	Blacksmith	Hammer (as club), smith's tools
11–12	Brewer	Huge metal spoon (as mace), cask of ale
13–14	Burglar	Crowbar (as mace), 50 feet of hempen rope
15–16	Busker	Shortsword, lute or other musical instrument
17–18	Butcher	Cleaver (as handaxe), assorted bones
19–20	Candle lighter	Club, flint and steel
21–22	Church usher	Cudgel (as club), fine robes
23–24	Circus performer	Quarterstaff, 100 feet of hempen rope
25–26	Confidence artist	Dagger, set of cups and balls
27–28	Cooper	Crowbar (as club), empty barrel
29–30	Court jester	Sling and 10 bullets, set of heavy juggling balls
31–32	Farmer	Pitchfork (as trident), riding horse or woodworker's tools
33–34	Field hand	Sickle, bag of grain
35–36	Gravedigger	Shovel (as quarterstaff), large sack
37–38	Grocer	Knife (as dagger), small set of brass scales
39–40	Healer	Scepter (as mace), holy water
41–42	Herbalist	Sling and 10 bullets, pouch of herbs
43–44	Jeweler	Small rock pick (as handaxe), assorted gemstones worth 20 sp
45–46	Lighthouse keeper	Spear, hooded lantern, flask of oil
47–48	Locksmith	Crowbar (as mace), set of lockpicks
49–50	Lumberjack	Handaxe, 10-foot pole
51–52	Mage's apprentice	Quarterstaff, leather-bound grimoire or spell scroll with a cantrip from the wizard spell list (chosen by the GM)

d100	OCCUPATION	EQUIPMENT
53–54	Man-at-arms	Longsword, chain shirt (AC 13 + Dex modifier (max 2))
55–56	Mercenary	Shortbow, quiver with 20 arrows, leather armor (AC 11 + Dex modifier)
57–58	Militia officer	Longsword, buckler shield (+2 AC)
59–60	Navigator	Shortsword, scroll case containing nautical charts
61–62	Net maker	Knife (as dagger), net
63–64	Noble	Longsword, gold amulet worth 10 gp
65–66	Pickpocket	Dagger, disguise kit
67–68	Pie maker	Cleaver (as handaxe), two bags of flour
69–70	Pit-fighting champion	Club, 10 feet of chain
71–72	Priest	Mace, spell scroll with a cantrip from the cleric spell list (chosen by the GM)
73–74	Scribe	Quill knife (as dagger), 10 sheets of parchment
75–76	Sculptor	Chisel (as dagger), bag filled with clay
77–78	Snitch	Club, ragged cloak
79–80	Soldier	Spear, hide armor (AC 12 + Dex modifier (max 2))
81–82	Soothsayer	Hand-carved bone club, divination items
83–84	Squire	Shortsword, fine clothes
85–86	Statue polisher	Chisel (as dagger), portable ladder
87–88	Tavern bouncer	Cudgel (as club), padded armor (AC 11 + Dex modifier)
89–90	Tax collector	Shortsword, 50 cp
91–92	Town guard	Morningstar, shield (+2 AC)
93–94	Urchin	Crude shank (as dagger), begging bowl
95–96	Vagabond	Big branch (as quarterstaff), winter blanket
97–98	Wandering mystic	Scroll case stuffed with notes, quarterstaff or spell scroll with a cantrip from the wizard spell list (chosen by the GM)
99–100	Whaler	Boarding knife (as spear), scrimshaw octopus

TRINKETS

d20	EQUIPMENT
1	A glass jar wrapped in strips of black leather. It contains a pair of large, lazy bees.
2	An age-worn silver pipe, carved with the name of a long-dead relative
3	A poppet carved from wood and bound with dried vines. Did you make it yourself, or did you acquire it somehow?
4	A stuffed bear with a delightfully plump tummy. He smells vaguely of chocolate.
5	A pocket-size book coated in thick wax. What mysteries does it contain?
6	A piece of natural glass dug up from a beach. It is shaped like a horn and whistles when you blow into it.
7	A copper knife, the blade broken into two pieces and bound together with hide. What do the strange sigils in the metal mean?
8	A heavy padlock only you know the combination to
9	A red velvet mask, twisted in an unsettling manner. Who gifted it to you?
10	A fingerless glove made of the finest chain attached to sturdy black rings. Why is it always cold?
11	A green glass pendant in the shape of a rare and unusual leaf
12	A wooden statuette charred by fire. What tiny and forgotten god does it depict? Are you sure?
13	A small music box with a delicate paper figurine that spins on the spot. Why is the music it plays special to you?
14	A worn leather dice pouch embroidered with your initials
15	A set of glass powder pots, each containing a few pinches of different pigments. What will you do when they run out?
16	An old scroll case carved from yew and finished to a fine luster. What did it once contain?
17	A leathery goblin head, shrunken and suspended from a chain. Is it real?
18	A cheap metal tin filled with wax, containing a mold for half a key. Its partner is missing, and you don't know what the key would open if you had it.
19	A glass figurine filled with roiling gray smoke
20	A fine walking stick, banded with black iron and carved with strange runes

ANCESTRIES

3d6	ANCESTRY	TRAITS
3	Dragonborn	Breath Weapon, Draconic Ancestry
4–5	Gnome	Darkvision, Gnome Cunning, Small size, walking speed of 25 feet
6–7	Half-orc	Darkvision, Relentless Endurance
8–9	Dwarf	Darkvision, Dwarven Resilience, walking speed of 25 feet
10–11	Human	No changes. You're playing on hard mode!
12–13	Elf	Darkvision, Fey Ancestry
14–15	Half-elf	Darkvision, Fey Ancestry
16–17	Halfling	Lucky, Halfling Nimbleness, Small size, walking speed of 25 feet
18	Tiefling	Darkvision, Hellish Resistance

*Unless otherwise noted, your walking speed is 30 feet and your size is Medium.

USING SCROLLS

Using scrolls usually depends on whether the spell appears on your class's spell list, but at this stage of their careers, none of the adventurers has a class yet! Rather than simply saying that they can't use scrolls, it's much more fun if they can...but that it's very dangerous.

To use a spell scroll, characters must succeed on a DC 14 ability check using a spellcasting ability of their choice: Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom. Characters proficient in Arcana can add their proficiency bonus to the check. On a success, the spell is cast successfully. On a failure, the spell backfires, and they must roll on the Spell Mishaps table to determine what happens. Unless otherwise noted, the spell fails and has no effect other than the mishap.

SPELL MISHAPS

d12	MISHAP
1	A blast of psychic energy deals 1d4 damage to the caster and all creatures within 10 feet of the caster.
2	The spell is successful, but targets another random creature within range.
3	The spell takes effect as normal, but the caster must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be immediately teleported to a random plane of existence (chosen by the GM). The caster must find their own way back if they so desire.
4	All containers carried by the caster begin pouring out sand at a rate of 14 pounds per minute per container. The sand stops after 1d10 hours.
5	All water the caster touches for the next 1d4 hours turns instantly to blood.
6	For the rest of their life, the caster is plagued by visitations from shadowy figures who only they can perceive, each bearing ill tidings. The visitors come at random, with no pattern to their arrival or departure.
7	The caster is permanently turned into a black bear . All of their statistics are replaced by those in the bear's stat block.
8	The caster begins to have memories from someone else's life.
9	The spell works perfectly, but also affects an additional random target (chosen by the GM).
10	The caster misidentified the scroll. It is actually a scroll of <i>conjure minor elementals</i> , cast at 4th level. The summoned elementals are not under the caster's control and are hostile towards them.
11	The caster explodes in chunks of hot meat. All creatures within 10 feet of the caster must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 1d4 bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.
12	Roll twice and combine results.

WHAT IS A FUNNEL?

The funnel adventure is explicitly designed for level-0 characters, with each player controlling multiple characters at once. It assumes there will be around fourteen characters in play at the beginning of the adventure, and expects that most of those characters will die during the adventure. Use the following guide to determine how many characters each player should control (but feel free to give your players more if you think they can handle it):

- Four characters per player for four players
- Three characters per player for five players
- Two characters per player for six players

When untrained peasants delve into a dangerous dungeon, a high level of mortality is normal! By the end of the adventure, the few survivors go on to become 1st-level characters.

PLAYER TIPS

Share the following tips with your players before beginning the adventure. Encourage them to play hard and embrace risk. They have plenty of characters to play with, and they can always create (or find) more if things go wrong.

1. DRIVE IT LIKE YOU STOLE IT

Just because you might have explored a lot of dungeons in games doesn't mean your character has! Embrace the fun that comes from making deliberately poor decisions and seeing what happens. Your characters are expendable, and the others learn from the mistakes of those who perish.

2. MANAGING THE CHAOS

If you're used to managing one character at a time, it can be strange to have to look after four people at once. All of your characters explore the dungeon simultaneously, and you should inhabit their personalities as and when you see fit. It can feel a little chaotic, but you'll soon start to discover each character's identity. You'll figure out who takes risks, who is likely to have insightful thoughts about the location they're in, etc. Trust your gut and go with it.

3. BE FANS OF YOUR CHARACTERS

Embody your characters with care and love for who they are and who they have the potential to be. Root for them to survive and succeed. Then put them in no-win situations, see what happens, and enjoy the outcome—even if they die.

4. YOUR CHARACTERS DON'T HAVE TO BE FANS OF EACH OTHER

This adventure is designed to introduce a play style you may not have encountered much in your fifth edition games. Players won't create a shared backstory, and character conflict is recommended. In a normal game, inter-character conflict and betrayal often aren't desirable. In the funnel, you are encouraged to have your level-0 characters mess with and betray each other. It's fun to take these characters and put them at odds with one another. Can you tell that there's a horrible trap just behind that door? Maybe one of your characters shoves another to see what happens. Create memorable moments by having your own characters interact with one another in ways that might not occur in normal play.

It creates a different dynamic between the characters who live through the funnel. The experiences your characters have at level 0 define them forever and forge a bond between the group of survivors that's hard to replicate by writing a shared backstory.

5. ENGAGE IN CREATIVE PLAY

Your characters are incredibly weak, and they don't have special abilities or powerful items to help them in their adventure. They're forced to rely on their wits and creativity—and that often means *your* wits and creativity.

Assume that everything in the dungeon hates your characters and wants them to die. Often, the obvious solution to a problem—charging into combat, wading into deep water, etc.—is the wrong solution and ends in tragedy.

As a player, try to come up with creative solutions to challenges. Ask questions about the surroundings, make use of things you find, and think around the problem. Don't look to your character sheet for all the answers. Think about your fictional positioning and use it to get some kind of advantage in a situation (mechanical or otherwise). Get creative with your equipment and trinket!

GM TIPS

GMs, keep the following tips in mind while running the funnel. Feel free to share these guidelines with your players so that they know exactly what to expect.

I. EMBRACE LETHALITY

Funnels are violent and brutal, which can be at odds with your experiences with fifth edition. Start your funnel with a conversation about the content and tone of the game. For content, discuss the high lethality with your players, any content that people might not want to see at the table, and things that people *do* want to see. There are endless resources for safety tools and procedures available online—you probably already use some of them, and you're encouraged to use them here.

For tone, do you want high-energy cartoon violence, with people making jokes as horrific deaths occur, or do you want a more thoughtful, horror-style session where characters engage with the gruesome reality of their situation? Once you've had these conversations, try not to deviate from what you agree on.

2. ENGAGE WITH BACKSTORY

The characters don't have much of a backstory yet, but you can encourage players to come up with it during play to forge bonds between the characters. Ask questions about their lives before the dungeon when it's appropriate. How do these characters know each other? Why did one of your characters push your other character into that trap? What do funeral rites look like in the village you all came from, and are you doing anything to remember the fallen as the dungeon takes them?

3. MITIGATING A TPK

A funnel might be the most violent, high-lethality adventure you ever run. Characters are flimsy, level-0 play doesn't care about "game balance," and you often whittle away the characters until nobody is left.

If you're playing a one-shot, a total party kill (TPK) can be a fun end to the session, but it isn't ideal if you're using the funnel as a springboard for a longer game. There are two easy ways to mitigate this.

The first is letting players create a new set of peasants. Assume that this group came into the dungeon with those who have just perished. They've been here all along, hanging back while the vanguard dealt with the threats. Now the front ranks are dead, and it's time for them to step up.

The second is making use of the NPCs in the adventure. The hostages in the caves are built as level-0 characters, and once they're freed, they can easily join the party and continue the adventure as player characters.

4. MANAGING THE CHAOS

You may have 16 to 20 characters running around, especially at the beginning of the adventure. This can be a lot to handle.

The only time you need to worry about the characters' exact positioning is during combat, and for small skirmishes, the simplicity of "theater of the mind" combat is easier than using a map and miniatures. If you have to roll initiative, have each player roll once (using the modifier of the character with the highest bonus to initiative rolls) and take all of their characters' turns at once.

By the time you get to the final battle with the troll, most of the peasants probably died nasty deaths anyway, so you won't need to worry about this for too long! Embrace the chaos and have fun with it.

FUNNEL ADVENTURE: THE PRICE OF PASSAGE

The road into Steyside crosses a bridge over a slow-moving river that's more like a thick, muddy ditch than an actual waterway. A narrow crack in the riverbank opens into caves that local children explore from time to time. Recently, travelers have complained of a foul smell wafting up from the opening and strange tracks in the mud. Now a merchant caravan has vanished, and one word sits heavy on the lips of the townsfolk—*trolls*.

The villagers drew lots, and your motley crew has been selected to head into the caves and save anybody they can. It's time to do what all good villagers do in a crisis—grab pitchforks, form a mob, and put the monsters to the blade.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

While the characters explore the caves, use the following rules and advice:

- Roll for random encounters any time the group takes a short rest, whenever there's a lull, or when indicated by the text.
- If the characters turn back to leave the dungeon or take a long rest inside it before encountering the troll in area 10, a **troll pup** enters the caves from the bridge. Use the creature to apply downward pressure and force the characters deeper.
- It's dark inside the caves. Familiarize yourself with the rules for different light levels and how these impact characters, and have the players track their light sources.
- The ceilings in the caves are 7 to 10 feet high. Unless otherwise stated, characters of average heights have plenty of room to move around and swing weapons.
- Play hard and make characters face the consequences of their actions, but be fair and reward creative play. (e.g. If characters take measures to circumvent a trap, allow them to succeed.)
- Some elements of the dungeon have no explanation. They exist to provide hooks for future adventures. Invent details if you need them.

CREATIVE PLAY FOR GMs

As the GM, it's your job to reward creativity and assist the players in improvising. Just as players are advised not to look for answers on their character sheets, you're advised to go off-script where it makes sense. The adventure text can't account for all eventualities, and it doesn't try to. The first encounter may not explicitly state that there are broken chunks of a ruined merchant wagon lying around. But they could be there if the players ask about materials they can use to build a makeshift walkway across the mud!

The Rule of Cool is key, and you should feel empowered to say an emphatic YES to players coming up with fun and exciting solutions to problems. Reward good ideas with advantage, and reward truly *great* ideas by allowing characters to succeed without needing to roll at all. There are plenty of ways for characters to die in this adventure; the GM shutting down good ideas shouldn't be one of them.

This is particularly important during the final troll encounter, as the characters are faced with a creature that can only be killed by fire or acid. They have to find a way to deal that kind of damage! If they do, reward it.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Whenever the adventure calls for a random encounter, or when the party stops to rest inside the caves or lingers in one spot for an extended period of time, roll a d10 or choose one of the encounters below:

1. A crude painting covers the walls—a tentacled creature tearing the sun from the sky. Characters who inspect it must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d6 psychic damage as they are gripped with visions of a dying world.
2. The air is filled with a low buzzing that echoes around the characters, with no discernible source.
3. The ground is coated in thick, hot feces.
4. A low rumble shakes the caves and chunks of rock fall on the characters. Each character must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 bludgeoning damage.
5. The sticky, stinking substance in the entrance passage (area 2) that touched the characters' skin begins glowing softly. All characters still coated in it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for the next 10 minutes.

6. The characters encounter three stirges, each hungry and hunting for blood.
7. Symbols daubed on the ceiling enthrall the characters. A character of the GM's choice must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or become overwhelmed with the desire to plunge deeper into the caves, including the boarded-up tunnel in the troll room (area 10), and...to take someone with them.
8. The characters encounter a patch of mushrooms (roll on the Mushroom table in area 3).
9. The characters are charged by a pair of escaped goats (from area 8), both frenzied and desperate to escape the caves.
10. The area is strewn with the torn limbs of a dead merchant.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

Once everyone has their level-0 characters, the adventure begins. Start play as the mob descends the riverbank beside the bridge, just outside the cave entrance.

I. UNDER THE BRIDGE

The day turns dim and cool as the arching bridge blocks out the blazing sun. The river moves at a slow crawl, the waters thick with mud you have to wade into to reach the cave entrance. Rotting pieces of driftwood bob in the mud. An enormous stone blocks the opening. Muddy stains coat the side of the rock, higher than your heads.

TRaversing the River

The mud is thick and treacherous, strewn with rotting pieces of driftwood and a huge old branch that somehow made its way downriver (which clever characters might use to fashion a safe way across the mud). Wading through the mud unaided takes a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to prevent slipping beneath the surface and becoming restrained and prone. Once a creature succeeds on this saving throw, they don't need to make it again. Submerged creatures can't breathe and are incapacitated. At the end of every round that they aren't rescued, a submerged creature must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or drop to 0 hit points and begin dying as their lungs fill with mud. A dying character can't regain hit points until they can breathe again.

Rescuing a fallen character from beneath the mud requires a character to make a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. A further successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check frees the clogged airways of a rescued character and allows them to breathe again, stabilizing them if they are dying.



THE BLOCK

Moving the block requires a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. On a success, the block falls safely to the side. On a failure, it falls on anyone attempting to move it. They must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. After the block falls, the entrance can be accessed.

Examining the block reveals deep gouges made by claws in the stone beneath the muddy stains.

2. THE THROAT

The narrow passage weaves down into the bank of the river and you're forced to move in single file. The walls are coated with mud and something that stinks and makes you gag and retch as it coats your skin and clothing. The ankle-deep muck around your feet flows slowly onwards, inviting you in.

Roll for a random encounter as the characters move down the throat. Note any characters who don't spend time

cleaning the troll stink off once they exit this area, as that is relevant to a random encounter.

The throat is filled with the tracks of the two trolls who live here. Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check find signs that one troll left the caves and hasn't returned.

3. ENTRANCE CHAMBER

This round chamber features a stream of water running across the floor from the throat to the exit corridor that leads to area 4.

A dead human merchant lies next to the entrance, her arm torn off and missing. Her longsword and hide armor can be looted from her remains.

A small patch of 1d12 mushrooms grows from the east wall. A character can pick a mushroom and save it for later. Roll on the Mushroom table to determine a mushroom's appearance. A character can eat a mushroom as an action. Characters who inspect the mushrooms and succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check can determine whether the outcome of eating a particular mushroom is positive or negative. If the check succeeds by 3 or more, they also determine the specific effect of the mushroom.

TROLL STINK

Trolls are weird and gross. Their strange regenerative powers mean that their bodies are constantly rejuvenating, creating mucus and muck that oozes out of every pore and orifice. Anywhere trolls stay for too long becomes coated in the stuff—and it smells *bad*.

As the characters move through the dungeon, they encounter plenty of troll stink. It has no mechanical effect aside from one random encounter, but you should lean into your descriptions and enjoy making your players cringe as they imagine their characters coated in the disgusting slime. A character who makes a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check knows that animals often react violently to the stench of trolls.

Here are some descriptors you might use to convey the disgusting essence of troll stink:

- Old milk left out under a hot sun
- The sharp tang of rotting flesh, sensed more on the tongue than in the nose
- The warm, cloying scent of overripe fruit beginning to soften and decay
- A latrine pit, unemptied for many days

MUSHROOMS

d6	APPEARANCE	TRAITS
1	Large black bowl with purple tendrils	You must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour. If you boil the mushrooms for 1 hour into a stew and then eat the stew, you gain resistance to poison damage and can't be poisoned for 1d6 hours.
2	Small, dark red, grows in clusters of five	You enter a frenzy that mimics the barbarian's Rage feature, except that it lasts for a number of minutes equal to $1d4 + \text{your Constitution modifier}$. You must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw at the end of the frenzy or gain a level of exhaustion.
3	Wide, flat bowl that resembles a jellyfish	For 1d6 days, immediately after you take damage, there is a 50 percent chance you disappear to the Astral Plane and reappear at the start of your turn 1d6 rounds later.
4	Round with orange balls	For the next 1d6 hours, you can use an action to breathe fire in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area takes 1d6 fire damage, and you must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take half the damage rolled.
5	Black ovals with a yellow stripe	You gain darkvision out to a range of 60 feet, permanently.
6	Tiny black clusters, like caviar	You must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or die.

4. THE FALLS

The narrow passage is flooded with ankle-deep water, but opens into a wide chamber with a flooded murky pool. A large rock jutting up in the center of the room is carved into the likeness of a twisted, screaming creature with an abundance of tentacles. More mushrooms grow around the base of the statue.

Beneath the murky water, a 10-foot-deep and 5-foot-wide natural ditch bisects the chamber between the entrance and the statue. Filled with jagged rocks, the trench

is obscured by the murky water but can be spotted by a character who succeeds on a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check. Characters who don't see the ditch must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or fall in. Characters who know it is there can take appropriate actions to cross it safely, including but not limited to simply swimming across. A creature that falls into the ditch takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and 2d6 piercing damage from the rocks, and is fully submerged in water.

A worn old scroll case made of bone can be found at the bottom of the ditch, though it can't be seen from the surface. A character who specifically searches the ditch can

find it with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Characters who fall into the ditch notice it with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. It contains a *spell scroll* with a random cantrip from the wizard spell list (chosen by the GM).

The water on the other side of the ditch is 2 feet deep and difficult terrain. A pair of aggressive gray oozes call the north side of this chamber home. The oozes don't cross the ditch—they lie in wait for characters to cross it before attacking.

If you need to know what the mushrooms are, make use of the Mushroom table in area 3.

There's no right or wrong answer to the inevitable question of "What is the statue?" Players may want to roll to find out, and you're welcome to allow it. An Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Religion) check could be relevant here, but adjudicate as you see fit with the creatures in your setting. This is a completely alien creature that the characters likely have no knowledge of and, at this stage in their careers, no way of finding out about, but you are free to invent something weird and wonderful to reward good rolls or smart investigative play. The intent of this encounter is to introduce future adventure hooks for you to pull on, and to show the players that there are things in the world their characters don't know anything about!

The floor at the northwest side of the chamber slopes up.

5. THE SLIDE

The passage descends sharply, jagged rock coated in a gleaming film of water and slime. The rocks on either side are stained with old blood and clumps of fur.

The passage out of area 4 descends sharply and is slick with water and troll stink. Traversing the slide requires a successful DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to avoid slipping and sliding to the bottom of the passage. On a failure, a character slides onto jagged rocks and takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check can identify the fur as goat fur.

6. THE JUNCTION

The floor is strewn with debris from a ruined cart. A bloodied human merchant lies against the rocks at the bottom of the passageway, breathing shallowly.

There are three paths out of this chamber:

- **North.** Clumps of mushrooms sprout from the walls of this winding passage that leads to area 7.

- **East.** Bleating and the scuff of hooves on stone echo down this natural staircase that leads down to area 8.
- **South.** Stinking sludge coats the walls of this narrow path that leads to area 9.

The injured merchant is Yismel. Terrified and in shock, she talks about the trolls attacking the caravan and warns the characters about a second troll not present in the complex (if it hasn't already returned). She doesn't know what happened to the other members of the caravan. She can be persuaded to join the group or become a player character. Yismel's stat block is at the end of the adventure.

Searching the debris uncovers 100 sp, a set of leather armor, a shortsword, two light crossbows, ten crossbow bolts, and two sacks of apples.

7. THE FUNGUS GROVE

Eerie light emanates from thick clumps of purple fungus covering the walls and floor. The mushrooms sway in a breeze you can't feel. A pair of booted feet protrude from the thick forest of fungus.

The feet belong to a dead merchant who escaped the trolls. A violet **fungus** has sprouted from his body. Another waits amongst the mushrooms. They attack if the characters disturb the mushrooms or the corpse.

The corpse carries a pouch containing 10 sp, a shortbow, a mace, and a scroll case containing a random 1st-level *spell scroll* from the Spell Scroll table.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers a severed arm among the mushrooms. Its hand wears a *ring of animal influence*. A character who succeeds on a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check can identify the ring without having to do so during a short rest.

SPELL SCROLLS

d6	SCROLL OF...
1	<i>bane</i>
2	<i>burning hands</i>
3	<i>chromatic orb</i>
4	<i>cure wounds</i>
5	<i>entangle</i>
6	<i>grease</i>
7	<i>magic missile</i>
8	<i>ray of sickness</i>
9	<i>sleep</i>
10	<i>thunderwave</i>



8. THE GOAT PEN

As the passage opens up into a low chamber, the air suddenly thickens with the must and funk of live animals, hot blood, old feces, and rotting meat. Faint snorting and snuffling rise into a cacophony of bleats and maas as the goats at the back of the chamber become aware of your presence.

This wide, low cave contains six goats. Blood and chunks of other long-dead goats coat the walls and floor. The smell of rotting flesh is overpowering. Characters who start their turn in the area must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1d6 hours. A character who succeeds on the saving throw can't be poisoned by this effect for the next 24 hours. A poisoned character can repeat the saving throw at the end of every hour, ending the condition on a success.

If a character coated in the troll stink enter the chamber, the goats become frenzied and attack immediately. They can be calmed by a character who succeeds on a DC 14 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check, made with disadvantage if the stink-covered character is still in the chamber.

The walls are painted with eldritch symbols and runes that glow faintly when not exposed to light, and the back wall is carved with a likeness of the statue in area 4.

9. PRISON CHAMBER

The cave stinks to high heaven. Feces coat the walls, and the air is filled with a low buzzing and sucking. A rusted iron cage stands against the west wall, the survivors of the merchant caravan packed into it. Three creatures that look like oversize mosquitos poke them through the bars with long, needle-like proboscises that suck up their blood. They turn as you enter the room, swarming you.

The three flying creatures are stirges. Each time the characters make noise that might carry to area 10, have the troll pup there make a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check. If any character is coated in troll stink, it makes this check with advantage. If it passes, it comes to investigate, appearing in area 9 in 1d4 rounds and joining the fight.

The captive merchants are Foustus, Darcel, Gaetana, and Lorin. If freed, they can be convinced to join the fight by a character who makes a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If players need new characters (either because theirs have died, or simply because they want to play someone new), these NPCs can easily become player characters. Their gear, which is listed in their stat blocks at the end of the adventure, can be found on the opposite side of the room to the cage. Alternatively, a player can quickly generate a new character to take the place of one of these NPCs.

The cage is sealed with an iron bar bent in place by the troll. It requires a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check made as an action to force open. Other reasonable solutions can open the cage if the characters can't roll high enough to force it.

10. TROLL ROOM

The room is filled with a smell not unlike cooked pork. It's almost appetizing until you locate the source: a fire against the east wall, a long-dead merchant tied to a spit above it. A breeze flows through the room towards a wide, dark opening in the back wall. It is crudely blocked up with rocks and splintered boards, and you get the impression of a gaping mouth taking a long, inward breath.

If the troll pup wasn't summoned by the fight with the stirges, it is here, its back to the entrance as it feasts on the cooked merchant. Characters can approach unnoticed with a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check (made with disadvantage if a character is coated in troll stench). On a failure, the troll is alerted to their presence.

A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check finds evidence that the troll stays away from the blocked opening: bones on the floor have been picked clean, but bones that rolled toward the opening still have meat on them, there are no tracks on the floor near the opening, etc.

A heavy chest sits in a corner of the room next to a worn leather bag that contains two *potions of healing*. There is a 1-in-6 chance that one of the merchants has the key. The lock can be picked with a successful DC 14 Dexterity check, provided the character attempting the check has a pin or similar tool. The chest contains 100 sp, two sets of fine clothes, 100 feet silk rope, bundles of fine fabric worth 10 gp, and a pouch containing 1d6 gems worth 25 gp each.

TELEGRAPHING REGENERATION

Experienced players know that trolls can only be killed with fire and acid. That's fine. Metagaming is part of the game, and there's no reason to force players to separate what they know from what their characters know! You can chalk the knowledge up to folklore or ask the player to decide how their character knows this information as a fun character-building detail.

If you're playing with new players, or if none of them has ever faced a troll, telegraph both the regeneration and the weakness (especially to fire, which is typically available to characters). The troll could make a point of staying away from the fire in the room during combat, and you can describe its skin knitting together after it takes damage to indicate the regeneration. You can also put this knowledge behind a DC 12 ability check, simply telling characters who succeed on the check that trolls are weak against fire and acid. Suitable skills include Intelligence (Nature), Wisdom (Survival), or even Intelligence (Arcana)!

ADDING DRAMA

The troll pup is the climactic battle in the adventure, what everything has been leading to. If your group is doing well (most of them are alive and healthy, they're prepared with fire, and they're ready for a fight), you may be worried that the fight will be too easy.

There are two ways to deal with this. The first is to just let it be easy. They've done well, and they should be rewarded for smart, safe play!

The second is to fudge things a little. The troll pup already has a Multiattack action, but you could add an additional club attack to that. You could increase its hit points (I recommend adding 15 to 20 hit points) or give it a couple of mastiffs as pets. The mastiffs acting on their own initiative, harrying the characters, and defending the troll could turn a relatively straightforward combat into something really tough.

Use your best judgment and balance on the fly as you see fit.

THE AFTERMATH

What lies beyond the cave opening—and the reason the trolls kept their distance—is for you to decide. If the characters didn't encounter the second troll, it is up to you how the troll reacts when it returns to the cave. Whatever happens, the surviving characters advance to 1st level and return to town as heroes!

If more than one of your characters survived the adventure, you decide what happens to them all. You might have grown attached to one of them in particular, in which case the others simply return to their lives in the village while your chosen character sets out on an adventure. The other characters might appear in future adventures as NPCs and provide your adventurers with preexisting links to the world. If another player lost all of their characters in the dungeon, you might instead consider giving them one of your survivors to play.

Here's how you turn surviving level-0 peasants into 1st-level characters ready to seek fame and fortune.

INCREASE ABILITY SCORES

There are two options for increasing ability scores:

1. Increase one ability score by 2 and one by 1, to a maximum of 20.
2. If you didn't use the optional ancestry rules, pick a race from the core rules and adjust the scores as indicated. Note down traits the race gives you. Think about why these traits didn't come up in the adven-

ture and feed this into the emerging backstory of your character (for example, the time spent underground with poor lighting in a magically charged environment permanently altered your eyes, so your elf now has darkvision they didn't have before). If you used the optional rules, note down additional features gained from the race you chose.

CHOOSE A BACKGROUND FEATURE

Pick a background that matches your occupation and record any background features you gain. (For example, if your character is a candle lighter, you might choose the acolyte background and gain the Shelter of the Faithful feature.) Ignore the other benefits of the background.

CHOOSE A CLASS

What role did your character play during the adventure? Where are their skills most suited? Pick the class that best fits them. Note the special abilities they gain at 1st level, their weapon and armor proficiencies, and their new hit point maximum. If you didn't earn saving throws during the funnel, take the ones indicated by your class.

ASSIGN SKILLS AND SAVING THROWS

You may have already assigned four skills and two saving throw during play. If you haven't, choose them now (your class and race will give you ideas for what to pick). You may find as you read your chosen class, background, and race that you start 1st level with more than four skills. If so, go ahead and pick your additional skills as well!

CHOOSE ADDITIONAL PROFICIENCIES

As is standard, backgrounds grant additional tool proficiencies or languages. Select one of the following options for your character:

- Two tool proficiencies
- Two languages
- One tool proficiency and one language

WHO ARE YOU?

Now you've played a session with this character, you should be able to fill out your bond, ideal, personality traits, and flaw with ease. If you're unsure, you can look to the options from your background for help.

And that's it! You've had an adventure, you know who your character is, and now they're ready to face the world. Congratulations!

APPENDIX: CREATURES

The following creatures appear in this adventure.

YISMEL

Level 0 Mercenary

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

ARMOR CLASS 14

HIT POINTS 5

WEAPON Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

EQUIPMENT Chain shirt, shield, lucky rabbit's foot on a leather strap

FOUSTUS

Level 0 Merchant

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	15 (+2)

ARMOR CLASS 12

HIT POINTS 4

WEAPON Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

EQUIPMENT Padded armor, backpack, parchment flyer advertising a farmer's market a week from now

DARCEL

Level 0 Priest

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

ARMOR CLASS 11

HIT POINTS 3

WEAPON Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

EQUIPMENT Hide armor, holy symbol, book of prayers

GAETANA

Level 0 Mercenary

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

ARMOR CLASS 16

HIT POINTS 4

WEAPON Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage, or 6 (1d10 + 1) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

EQUIPMENT Leather armor, buckler shield, letter from a loved one

LORIN

Level 0 Mage's Apprentice

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

ARMOR CLASS 9

HIT POINTS 3

WEAPON Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 – 1) bludgeoning damage, or 3 (1d8 – 1) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands.

A Random Cantrip. Of the GM's choice.

EQUIPMENT Spell component pouch, spellbook

ENEMIES

Use stats for goats, gray oozes, stirges, and violet fungus from the core rules.

The stat block for the troll pup is below. You're free to use the standard fifth edition troll stats if you want, but bear in mind that a troll is a CR 5 monster and will probably kill all the remaining characters.

TROLL PUP

Just shy of six feet tall, with slimy green skin marred with boils, scars, and scabs, a troll pup is younger and smaller than your average troll, but no less fearsome. The only good thing about a troll pup is that killing it means it doesn't grow into an adult troll, with all the horrors they bring.

TROLL PUP

Medium giant, chaotic evil

ARMOR CLASS 13 (natural armor)

HIT POINTS 42 (5d8 + 20)

SPEED 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	9 (-1)	7 (-2)

SKILLS Perception +1

SENSES darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

LANGUAGES Giant

CHALLENGE 1 (200 XP)

PROFICIENCY BONUS +2

Keen Smell. The troll has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

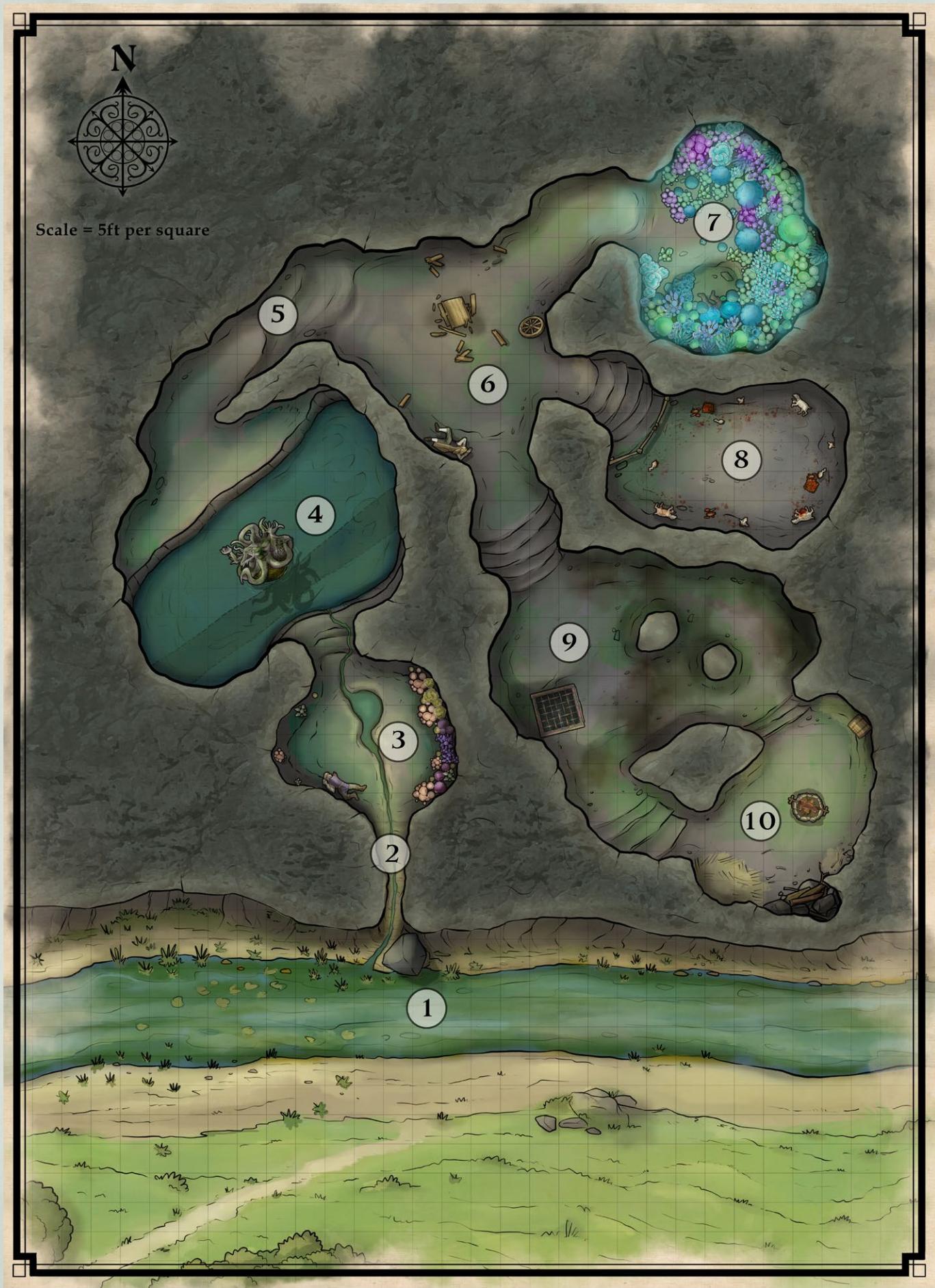
Regeneration. The troll regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the troll's next turn. The troll dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The troll makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its bone club.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Bone Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.



RESOURCES

POWER IS WHERE YOU TAKE IT

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FILTHY PEASANTS!

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MARIO ORTEGÓN is a writer and TTRPG designer from Monterrey, Mexico who grew up being fascinated by epic fantasy and the folk tales his abuelo shared with him, and has been merging both in his storytelling ever since. He first gained notoriety as the GM of one of the first live play shows in Latin America, creating a world that merged traditional Mexican folklore with high fantasy. This eventually became [Ixalba](#), his debut project and one he continues to develop as a passion. He has worked with multiple game companies since then, including Wizards of the Coast, Paradox Interactive, Guildhall Studios, and Harebrained Schemes. You can find him on [Twitter](#) and [Twitch](#) as @elwarius.



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