

#DUNGEON₂₃ Helper

By Hexed Press
Version 2.2

Why I Wrote This

Awhile back I put out a [video on mega-dungeons](#). In that video, I explain that a mega-dungeon is more than a supersized dungeon. With the #dungeon23 taking off, I put this together as an aid to help folks on their mega-dungeon creation journeys. ‡

Anatomy of a Mega-Dungeon

A mega-dungeon consists of a number of **Complexes**— these might be vertical levels in a traditional dungeon design or other discrete locales within which are Clusters of Spaces— placed rooms, corridors, and other locations (for example, the individual barrows in *Barrowmaze*).

The main challenge, in creating a mega-dungeon, is to maintain interest in the dungeon as it is played through without sacrificing too much of the sense of a single place to cause the dungeon to lose coherence. We need variety. We need unity. How can we get there? ‡

The Prompts

Use these prompts to focus and refocus your mega-dungeon creation efforts. As with all things, use these only as long as they are useful to you. Good luck! ‡

Where is the Dungeon Located?

† What is the terrain around the Dungeon?
† How does the Dungeon fit in (or not)?
† What is the nearest settlement to the Dungeon? † How do the settlement and Dungeon coexist? † What keeps the denizens of the Dungeon contained? ‡

What is the Dungeon?

† What was the dungeon originally? † Was it a (super)natural phenomenon? † A constructed creation? † A combination of both? What is it now? † How many phases of occupation and construction have their been? † What did each occupier add, remove, and adapt? ‡

Who Runs the Dungeon?

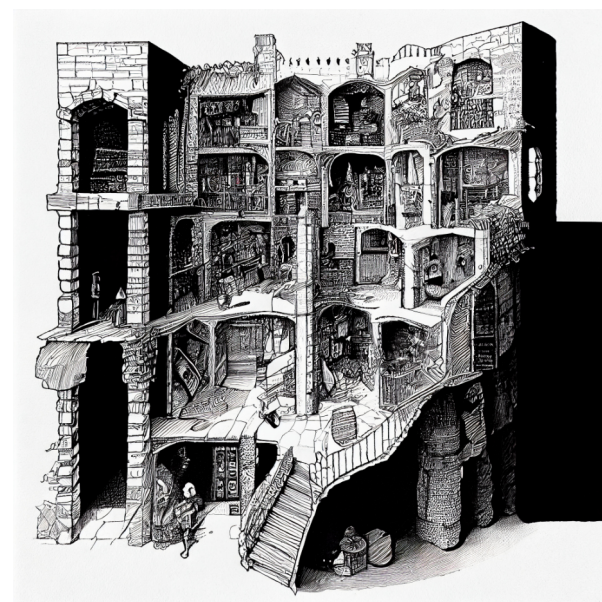
† What factions control the dungeon? † What unites them? † What divides them? † What do they want? † What obstacles prevent them from fulfilling their want? ‡

Who Opposes the Dungeon?

† What factions are in opposition to the dungeon? † Why do they oppose it? † To what ends? † What are the obstacles to their opposition? ‡

Break Down the Dungeon

1. Divide the dungeon into distinct Complexes— a Complex can consist of any number of Spaces.
2. For each Complex, use the prompts on the next page to rough out the overall concepts that will define the Complex and the Clusters and Spaces within the Complex.
3. As you create Spaces for the #dungeon23 challenge, place them in the Clusters and Complexes that you've established and use those concepts to shape those Spaces and the things they contain.
4. Have fun! ‡



#DUNGEON₂₃ Helper: Complexes

What is this Complex?

† What is this Complex? † What was it used for, originally? † What is it used for now? ‡

Themes

Establishing a theme for the Complex provides a palette of elements to draw from that will both be distinct from other Complexes with different themes and provide a unifying language for all the Complex's contents. Anything at all can be a theme. Here is a selection of very broad themes for inspiration:

† Life † Death † Magic † Faith † Memory
† Power † Industry † Science ‡

Materials

† What is it made of? How do these materials relate to the Complex's theme? † Is it in good repair, aging, or ruined? † Has it been patched, updated, or repaired? ‡

Sensations

† What is the Complex's style of construction? † What does it look like? † Is there light? † If so, what sources? † What does it smell like? † Any sounds? Are they natural? † Where do they come from? † Is the air fresh? If not, is it dangerous? How does the air taste? † Is there any water? If so, is it potable? ‡

Entrances & Exits?

† How is this Complex reached? † Is it accessible from outside the dungeon? † What other Complexes of the dungeon can be reached from here? ‡

Denizens?

† Who lives here? † Are they members of one of the dungeon factions? If so, are they in good standing? † If not, what is the nature of their conflict? † How can that conflict be resolved? † If not members of a faction, are they aligned with one? If not, how do they maintain independence? What do they want? What is the obstacle to that want? ‡

Motifs

Motifs are specific symbols that recur through an Complex. They should relate to the Complex's **theme**. Establish motifs to define relationships between forms and functions. Create three to four motifs in the form of: *[type of symbol] indicates [element]*.

Examples: † **statues with right arms raised** indicate the presence nearby of **secret doors**. † **a checkerboard pattern of tile flooring** indicates a **trap**. † **Doors showing eye symbols** are **magically warded**.

Once established, expectations of motif meanings can be defied to great effect! (But do this sparingly!) ‡

Differentia

Think about a single, unique feature that distinguishes this Complex from every other Complex in the dungeon, even ones that share the same theme. This feature is the locus of the Complex's structure and activity.

† What is it? † Who created it? Does it have meaning? † Does it have meaning for the Denizens? Are those meanings the same? Is it functional? † If so, does it work? † If so, how does it work? † If it works, what does it require to function? † Do the Denizens know the function? † Do the Denizens know how it works? Do the Denizens know how to use it? If so, do the Denizens use it (or not) and why? ‡

About Me

My name is Todd. I talk about and make stuff under the imprint, **Hexed Press**. You can find me on [YouTube](#) and elsewhere on Social Media. To the extent that I'm known at all, it's mostly for talking about hexcrawls, wilderness adventures, and other general TTRPG topics. If you feel like supporting me, I've got a [Patreon](#). ‡



#DUNGEON₂₃ Helper: The Outside World

When designing a dungeon, there's a tendency to focus only on the dungeon and ignore the outside world. However, thinking about the outside world a bit might not only add some worthwhile context to the dungeon but produce some inspiration as well! ‡

Comings & Goings

† Are the factions in the dungeon self-sufficient? † if not, from where are they supplied? † Do they deliver anything in return? † Is there commerce with the outside world? † If so, with whom? † If there is trade, what do they trade and why? ‡

The Settlement

There's almost always a settlement of some sort in fairly close proximity to the dungeon. There are obvious reasons for this: the players need somewhere to gather, rest, supply, and get news and rumor of the nearby dungeon; but you can do more with this place!

† Each of the factions has an agent in the settlement— who are they, what are their goals, and how do they communicate with their factions? † A handful of residents have their own independent, vested interests in the dungeon or its destruction— who are they, what are their goals, and what are the obstacles to those goals? ‡

The World

I like to think of places of power, which dungeons surely are, as things which exert gravity on the world around them: the more powerful the thing, the stronger the gravity. Power attracts power, after all.

Think about how the dungeon has warped the space around it, pulled entities knowingly or unknowingly towards it, and marked the world in which it exists.

† What is the effect of the dungeon on the local landscape? † On the flora, fauna? † On natural, supernatural, and alien monsters? † Does it affect magic of any sort? † If so, in what way? † Do the gods and other divine and infernal forces have any stakes in the dungeon? † If so, what are they and do they communicate them to any of their followers? ‡

Resources

† Does the dungeon contain any valuable resources? † If so, what are they and what use are they? † To whom are they valuable? † How are they extracted? † What is required to extract them? † How much are they worth? † Is there any special requirement needed to extract them? Which faction, if any, controls the resource? ‡

The Doom

While there is nothing inherently wrong with the dungeon as a static location waiting patiently to be delved by heroes, much can be gained in terms of tension and excitement by introducing a **doom**: a dire consequence of allowing the dungeon to fester for too long.

† What doom will happen if the dungeon is left to its own devices? † How long until this impending doom is unleashed? † Which factions are working towards this doom? † Who is working against it and why? † How can it be prevented? † What is needed to prevent it? † Is the doom aligned to a specific moment in time (i.e. celestial event, season, moon phase, etc.)? If so, which moment and why? † Who benefits from this doom? † What do they gain? ‡



#DUNGEON23 Helper: Tone

Choose a Tone

Before you get to writing, there's a subject that is very important that hasn't been discussed yet and that is **tone**.

Tone can mean many different things but, in this context, we're going to confine its meaning to the stylistic qualities of the dungeon. This may seem like a trivial consideration but it is vital. Here is a sample list of some tones:

† Comic † grimdark † faerie † gonzo † gritty † whimsical † fantastical † low magic † steampunk ‡

This is by no means a complete list and each one of these can be combined with others to form a practically endless variety. You have a buffet of choices but, ultimately, you must choose one, or some combination of several, to be the tone for your dungeon.

Deciding on a specific tone and knowing that tone before you begin writing will help keep your style consistent throughout the writing process.

As you delve down into the process of writing out rooms and other dungeon features, periodically check against the tone that you've decided on. If you feel your style waver, refocus. A consistent tone contributes as much as any other factor to creating a coherent whole. Given the length of the #Dungeon23 challenge, this is no small thing. ‡

Complex Tones Within Dungeon Tones

The tones of Complexes within the dungeon can vary one another and from the tone of the dungeon overall. However, this variance should be in small degrees.

It's fine for the *Twilight Forest* to have a faerie vibe and the *Laboratory of the Mad Alchemist* to have a steampunk vibe but these should both fit within the overall tone context of the dungeon, whatever it may be. Play with the notes but keep it within the movement of the song, so to speak. ‡

Assemble Your Appendix N

Like your voice, your tone should be your own. That doesn't mean that nothing can be gleaned from the work that has come before yours. Gather inspirational materials, be they story media or game media, to help you hone that voice and tone and let them inspire you.

Mood boards can also be powerful tools to collect visual materials for referencing during the writing process. There are an abundance of digital tools available, such as Google Jamboard, which you can populate with all manner of things found online. Clip and save images, text, or anything else you run across that seems of interest. You never know when it will be just the thing you need to help you vault over a hurdle. ‡

Don't Let Perfect Be the Enemy of the Good

It's very easy to get so wrapped up in creating that you resemble an ancient mummy ready for burial in a lightless vault beneath the earth. Heck, if you've made it this far, you've read through a goodly number of prompts designed to provoke creativity. So what am I saying?

Everything in moderation. Whether it is the prompts in this document or tools, methods, and wisdom from other places—everything is useful until it's not. When something crosses the threshold from a thing that moves your process forward to a thing that is holding you back, it's time to let that thing go.

Beginning things is easy. Finishing things is brutally difficult. The scope of #Dungeon23 only increases the challenge rating for this exercise. We all want to make the best thing we can but an imperfect completed project is infinitely better than a perfect project that is never finished.

When you sense your wheels spinning in place and the choice arises between completing another room or going back to fix something already written, answer a niggling question, amend, append, or arrange work already done, choose completion! Make a note, and schedule an editing pass after you finish, but finish!

Good luck! ‡

#DUNGEON₂₃ Helper: The Hexed Press Alternative Schedule

The original #Dungeon₂₃ schedule is awfully ambitious and I fear it may be the undoing of many a hopeful participant. I've seen an alternative schedule posted online which I think is good but could use some tweaking and adjusting to fit the prompts and workflow that I am proposing here. With that in mind, I present **The Hexed Press Alternative Dungeon₂₃ Schedule!** † ‡

Glossary

Space

A discrete room, corridor, or other singular location. † Example: a burial chamber. ‡

Cluster

A collection of Spaces within a Complex that share a common purpose and/or nature. † Example: a chapel. ‡

Complex

A discrete locale consisting of any number of connected Clusters that share a purpose and/or nature. † Example: a temple. ‡

Overview

The schedule that follows adds a layer of structure that is missing from the original #dungeon₂₃ challenge. Some may find that this goes against the spirit of the challenge. My hope is that those who do not want or need any structure can simply ignore this but that it may have value for those of us who might find it useful. As with all things, use it only as long as it is helpful to your process! ‡

Complexes, Clusters, and Spaces

To make the process of writing out a mega-dungeon less daunting, I've broken it down into some component parts,

At the atomic level is the **Space**, which refers to any physical area such as a hallway, corridor, room, chamber or any other singular location.

A collection of connected Spaces related by nature, function, or both, is called a **Cluster**. A Cluster can contain any number of Spaces arranged in any way.

Finally, a **Complex** is a collection of connected and related Clusters. A conventional dungeon is an example of a Complex. A **mega-dungeon** is a collection of connected and related Complexes. ‡

A Complex a Month

The schedule outlines the creation of a single Complex over the course of a single month. Each subsequent month, you can create an additional Complex and thus, over a year, create a mega-dungeon of twelve Complexes, assuming that you create one for every month.

This schedule will work as a standalone month of prompts if you only want to create a single Complex. Hopefully, you'll find this useful outside the context of #dungeon₂₃. ‡

Final Notes

Follow as much or as little of the daily prompts as works for you. One thing that you might notice is that writing is emphasized for the daily prompts and, only at the end of the month, do I mention mapping.

There are two reasons: first, my prompts are somewhat complex—requiring time and effort that might otherwise be split between writing and mapping; secondly, I think mapping is easier when all the Spaces being mapped are already thought out—this way, we get all the Spaces first and then fit them together. ‡

Jaquaysing Your Clusters

† Embrace all three dimensions. † Consider unconventional entrances and exits. ‡

#DUNGEON₂₃ Helper:

The Hexed Press Alternative

Schedule

Complex Set Up

† What is the Complex called? † Where is it located? † Who or what built or created it? † Who or what controls it? † What **doom** will happen if the Complex is left to itself or, alternatively, if it is sufficiently disturbed? ‡

Example: *Field of a Thousand Banners*— a necropolis dedicated to the dead warriors of an ancient battle; a small priestly cult serve as caretakers of the site; the dead interred here are at rest but not at peace— they await the provocation to once again march to war... ‡

Complex Basics (Week 1)

Day 1: Function & Theme— † What is the purpose? † What is the theme? † How does the theme interact with the function? ‡

Day 2: Motifs — † List three Motifs and what they signify. ‡

Day 3: Features & Challenges — Describe one unique Feature, Obstacle, and Challenge. ‡

Day 4: Clusters — † Briefly describe three Clusters of Spaces within the Complex. ‡

Day 5: Denizens — † Who lives here? † What do they want? † What is an obstacle to them? † How do they survive here? ‡

Day 6: Factions — † Who is in control? † What is their goal? † What is the obstacle to their goal? † Who or what stands against them? ‡

Day 7: Entrances & Exits — † Where can you go from here? † How? ‡

Example: *Field of a Thousand Banners*— † necropolis (*function*) † death, war, remembrance (*themes*) † *motifs*— snakes — protective traps or wards, owls — interred remains, spiders or webs — false features or traps † megalithic stone dome (*feature*), disorientation (*obstacle*), wandering undead (*challenge*) † *clusters*— Bannerfold, Bone Garden, Hall of Champions † *denizens*— ravens, ghosts, caretakers † Gravekeepers (*faction*) guard the site from outsiders and keep the dead pacified (*doom*) † *entrances/exits*— across the River, through the Wood, or following the Old Battle Road. ‡

Complex Clusters (Week 2-4)

Describe the three Clusters, and the Spaces they contain, that comprise this complex, spending one week per Cluster.

Day 1: Description — † What is it's nature or function? † What does it look like, smell like, sound like, taste like? ‡

Day 2-7: Spaces — † What is it's nature or purpose? † Is there an Obstacle, Challenge, Treasure here? † If so, does it relate to a Motif? What other Spaces, Clusters, or external Complexes does it connect to? ‡

Example: *Bannerfold*— † *description*— wide grassy expanse capped with small hillocks, each height punctuated with a planted iron banner pole; it is perpetually buffeted by cold winds, regardless of the season; no birds will perch or rest here other than crows † *spaces*— Houseguard Barrow, a ceremonial tomb for the houseguards of a forgotten lord, curse (*obstacle, magical, snake motif*), Ancient Wight (*challenge, undead*) ‡

End of the Month

Create a wandering creature list † draw a map of all the Clusters and Spaces that comprise the Complex. ‡

#DUNGEON23 Helper: Adapting for #City23 & Hex23

#Dungeon23 has spawned a couple of related splinter challenges: #City23 and #Hex23. The idea for these related challenges is the same, just applied to different context.

While the tools and schedule outlined on previous pages were thought up with #Dungeon23 in mind, a little bit of tweaking and reimagining can make them useful for these other challenges.

#City23

A **Complex** can become a clear analog for a **Settlement** or, in a mega-city scenario, one of several large Settlement divisions (something akin to the five Burroughs of New York City). **Clusters** translate to **Districts** and **Spaces** become **Blocks**.

Prompts: † Settlements— what is it known for? † What reputation does it have? † What is it's foundational myth? † Districts— how wealthy is it? † Does it have a dominant building style? † If so, what is it? † How is it traversed: roadways, waterways, or something exotic? † What style are they: warrens of alleys, narrow lanes, wide boulevards? † Blocks— is it a singular construction or an amalgam of different constructions? ‡

#Hex23

In the context of a hexmap, a **Complex** becomes a **Region**, a large contiguous geographical area. Within a Region, **Clusters** turn into **Ranges**, contiguous areas that share some common terrain or environmental traits. **Spaces** transform into individual **Hexes**.

Prompts: † Regions— what is it called? † what is the climate? † Are there any interesting or unique weather patterns here? † What are the main cultures and populations that exist here? † Ranges— what do the Spaces within this area have in common? † Are there any unique features or effects? † If so, are they natural, magical, extra-planar? † What is one unique feature? Is a creature, a landscape feature, atmospheric? † Is it natural, magical, extra-planar? † Spaces— is this Space settled? † If so, who lives here and how do they live? † If not, what is one interesting thing (a lair, a landmark, a magic pool, etc.) in this Space? † What does it do and how does it work? Is it related to any environmental phenomena such as the seasons, the phases of the moon, or a cosmic event? ‡

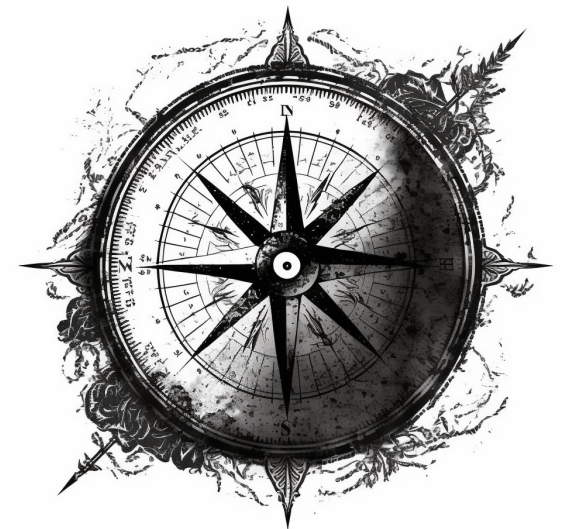
Summary

#City23

- † **Complex** becomes **Settlement**;
- † **Clusters** become **Districts**, and;
- † **Spaces** become **Blocks**.

#Hex23

- † **Complex** becomes **Region**;
- † **Clusters** become **Ranges**, and;
- † **Spaces** become **Hexes**.



#DUNGEON₂₃ Helper: The Hexed Press #World₂₃

#World₂₃

Wait, I can hear you say, what!?! That's right #World₂₃ is a thing and, no, I didn't just invent it now. I read about it on this [blog post](#).

If this sounds like something you'd like to give a go, you're in luck because the preceding helpers will work like a charm with a worldbuilding challenge.

For #World₂₃, we're going to reuse the alternative schedule, each time tweaked, as noted on the preceding page, for the different elements that make up a world. Here's my recommended schedule:

Month 1 Create Your Region

† Create the Regions, Ranges, and Hexes that will comprise the world, or section thereof, that you'll be building. ‡

Month 2-4 Create Your Main Settlements

† Create a Settlement that will function as the party's initial base of operations and then create two more and place them on your hexmap where appropriate. ‡

Month 4-6 Create Some Locations to Explore

† Create three Complexes of different types, themes, and in different locations on your hexmap for players to potentially investigate and explore. ‡

Month 7-9 Factions & Political Geography

† Create the major factions of your world—where do they live? † Have they always lived there? † If not, where did they come from and how did they get here? † Who are their allies and enemies? † What parts of the world do they control? † What are their goals, their myths, their pride, and their secret shame? What will they do to accomplish their goals? † Who or what are obstacles to their goals? ‡

Months 10+ Connections & Wrap-Up

† Connect everything together—Hexes, Settlements, Complexes, Factions. †. If anything doesn't make sense, tweak it to fit the world. † Turn Faction goals into plots, schemes, and actions. † Turn those into potential adventures. † Write up a couple of plot hooks for each of these adventures. ‡

