

The Runes of Norn: A Series of Runic Puzzles for Your Dungeon

 reddit.com/r/DnDBehindTheScreen/comments/e7ftif/the_runes_of_norn_a_series_of_runic_puzzles_for

1.0k

Puzzles/Riddles

Overview

Below are a series of challenges based on the players decoding a series of ancient runic inscriptions. They are designed as dungeon plug-ins, compatible with any cave/temple/crypt you may have designed, so feel free to add your encounters, monstrous lairs, treasure etc.

Important: the Runes of Norn may cannot be magically decrypted (e.g. through Comprehend Languages), otherwise this won't be as fun.

Each next puzzle builds on previous knowledge. However, not all of the challenges need to be completed, depending on how long it takes the players to solve and how much they are enjoying it. I tested these, my players had great fun and the whole thing takes about 2 sessions (including encounters). Enjoy!

The Antechamber

Upon entering the Antechamber, the party notices two things at its centre:

- The **Grand Runestone** ([Image 1](#))
- A skeleton (dead or undead) grasping the **Epigrapher's Manuscript**, which contains the following text:

Violence stems from chaos. Death stems from violence.
If you seek life, spurn violence. If you seek chaos, spurn peace.
Peace is greater than chaos. Wisdom is greater than might.
Use your wisdom against the mighty. Use your might against the wise.
Chaos is the opposite of peace. Order is the opposite of violence.

Upon further exploration at the back of the Antechamber, the party discovers **Three Runic Panels** ([Image 2](#), [Image 3](#), [Image 4](#))

The party's objective is now to decode the panels using the Grand Runestone and Epigrapher's Manuscript. The panels contain instructions which allow the party to open a hidden passage to the next part of the dungeon.

Solution: The party must go up to the second panel (image 3) and perform the following four actions (in any order, one for each section):

- Blast the Wolf with fire.
- Throw a rock at the Snake or smother it with dirt.
- Splash the Tree with some water.
- Blow at the Horn.

Once these four actions are completed, a hidden passage opens.

The Wells of Norn

At the entrance to this section of the dungeon, the party will find the **Runic Map** (Image 5) engraved on one of the walls. The dark chamber into which they then enter will correspond to this map; furthermore, it will contain **Six Wells of Norn**, corresponding in size and distribution to circles A-F on Image 5.

The party must figure out what these mysterious wells are and what they contain. One of these wells will guide the party, while the other five must be avoided at all cost.

Solution: Each well has a property that is activated upon drinking from it.

- A) Well of Flames: Instead of water, this well contains highly flammable liquids which ignite upon touching living matter.
- B) Well of Weakness: A failed constitution saving throw will leave the drinker with a harshly reduced strength score.
- C) Well of Violence: A failed wisdom saving throw will compell the drinker to attack its allies in a violent frenzy.
- D) Well of Chaos: The drinker must roll once on the Sorcerer's Wild Magic Surge table.
- E) Well of Wisdom: The drinker suddenly sees a glowing outline of a portal door engraved on one of the walls. It remains invisible to others. If touched, the stone is moved and the hidden passage is opened.
- F) Well of Death: Drinking from this well deals a deadly amount of necrotic damage.

The Labyrinth

At the entrance, the party will find **Two Labyrinth Stones** (Image 6, Image 7).

1. The party will then pass between the two stones and follow a long, dark and winding corridor that leads to the **Wolf Stone** ([image 8](#)). The corridor separates into two at the Wolf Stone, one on the right of the stone (werewolf side) and one to the left (wolf side).

Solution: The party must follow the werewolf and take the right corridor. Otherwise, they will end up in a chamber full of hostile animated wolf (or direwolf) statues.

2. The party will then proceed to a small chamber, where they will find an old altar. On top of the altar, there are three stone bowls: the first filled with water, the second filled with sand and the third filled with a metallic fluid. Behind the altar, there is a small empty hole in the floor.

Solution: The party must pour the sand and the metal into the hole. If they move the water bowl even slightly, a water elemental shall awaken and attack. Once the sand and metal is poured, a passage to the next corridor will open.

3. The party enters a square chamber. They find four humanoid statues ([Image 9](#)), each in one corner of the room, each facing towards the middle of the room, each with a large hole where the mouth and chest should be.

Solution: Stab the warrior statue's hole with a metal weapon (top left). Squirt some water through the small statue's hole (top right). Throw a rock (or dirt) through the large statue's hole (bottom left). Squirt some blood through the weak statue's hole (bottom right).

4. As the party proceeds, they find two portal doors, one larger than the other ([Image 10](#)).

Solution: Enter the smaller Door B. Door A leads to a trap.

5. Finally, the party enter a grand round chamber with two floors, the upper floor being a balcony above the lower floor. At the centre of the lower floor, there is a medium-sized runestone ([Image 11](#)). There are four large holes surrounding the runestone. Around the balcony there are eight portal stone doors. If the party attempts to locate the cardinal directions in this chamber (e.g. using a compass), their efforts will either fail or result in inaccuracy.

Note to DM: The four holes are located to the North, South, East and West of the runestone. The doors above are distributed in eight directions (N, NE, E, SE... etc).

Solution (1/2) What happens if a player peeks into one of the wells: If a character peeks into a well, they will be attacked by an elemental-themed monster. Fighting at least two monsters allows the party to locate the correct door on the balcony.

- North: a Salamander/Fire Elemental/Fire Giant emerges and attacks. It is immune to fire damage.

- South: a Plesiosaurus/Water Elemental/Storm Giant emerges and attacks. It is immune to magic.
- East: an Earth Elemental/Bulette/Purple Worm/Stone Giant emerges and attacks. It is immune to damage taken from metal weapons.
- West: a Giant Eagle/Roc/Griffin/Wyvern/Air Elemental/Cloud Giant emerges and attacks. It is vulnerable to damage taken from stone objects and will be thrown off balance by any type of mud-slinging or dirt hurling.

Solution (2/2) The Doors on the Balcony: The correct door is located to the North East . Any other door opens to a trap. If the correct door is opened, the party find a chamber. At the back of the chamber, there is a statue guarding a large stone gate. If music is played within this chamber, the statue activates and opens the gate and the party may pass to the next section of the dungeon.

35 comments

98% Upvoted

This thread is archived

New comments cannot be posted and votes cannot be cast

Sort by



level 1

tandera

1 year ago

In the Antechamber I didn't get one thing, how is this decoding of the runes take process? May be a dumb question, but I didn't get how the solution link with the rest of the puzzle.

51



level 2

Melloman3005

1 year ago

Yeah, I too am apparently too dumb to see how these link together.

19



level 3

jckobeh

1 year ago

Same here

10



level 2

Ok yes I did not do a good job at explaining the decoding process. This whole exercise resembles a Language Aptitude Test.

So, first of all, the Epigrapher's Manuscript is a translation of the Grand Runestone (GR). So, the players must figure out the meanings of each individual rune on the GR. they must remember that runic grammar may not be identical to English/common.

For example, let's take the first sentence (top left) which means "War stems from chaos." Here, the first rune says that "[third word] stems from [second word]". The second rune means "Chaos" while the third rune means "War" so war stems from chaos. You do this by the process of elimination: look at which sentences contain which words.

I can't think of a simpler way to explain this concisely, sorry! But look up Language Aptitude Tests for context.

30



level 3

eandom

1 year ago

But how do you figure out the words and solutions requiring dirt and water and fire when those aren't mentioned in the manuscript?

27



level 4

VaultOfTheSix

1 year ago

I second this. The linkage between war/death/chaos to the elements here continues to exceed the Int checks I've been rolling.

25



level 4

You look at image 2. It shows you the runes for sky/air, fire and water. Then, you deduce from image 4 that earth is the opposite of air.

11

level 5

[deleted]

1 year ago

I see you've never met my players

35

level 6

PrimeParzival

1 year ago

My players would just keep trying to randomly get through by touching everything.

4

level 3

PlasticLobotomy

1 year ago

I got that far, but I don't understand how to solve the wells, other than guessing. There only appear to be five hints, and I'm not sure how they apply to the six wells.

7

level 3

Eric VA

1 year ago · edited 1 year ago

Ok there is a problem with this one. It's the art. It gives the impression these rune sentences are written in columns when they are not. You need the Players to draw a connection (a fairly complex connection) between the F rune in the first and second lines. Problem is you separated them.

Also, you probably would make it easier if the F rune was the last not the first. That way people can have their first instinct yield some result, adding engagement because they will read the first word of the translated text which is "War" and then look at the first rune and believe it is also "War". I understand this language writes CAUSALITY EFFECT CAUSE. But I wouldn't guess this if I was playing. Maybe dumb it down or give intuition a bit of a slack. Rearranging the sentences into columns or lines is a need.

I wonder what happens if the PCs fail intelligence checks to get clues like "it's a translation" and "the syntax is different from English". I have some intelligent players, with college degrees and Masters in science and I tell you by my experience giving them puzzles: they would slog through this. I imagine the wizard casting comprehend languages in frustration and staring at the DM waiting for a spreadsheet.

I have not tried the whole decoding process, but I imagine the second runestone will say something like use fire on the violent, use earth on the chaotic or something. These nouns are represented in the dragon image. Where is the earth rune? Didn't find it there?

10

level 1

Sterlings97

1 year ago

This is very neat! But, I agree with some others, the process of decoding is unclear. Could you shed some light on that?

16

level 2

TheEverling

1 year ago · edited 1 year ago

The decoding process of the Grand Runestone was already completed for the players with the manuscript. Line for line, left to right. Assuming the text doesn't follow English sentence structure takes a bit of thought, but once you figure out what each of the runes on the Grand Runestone means, you kinda just plug and place meanings into the other tablets and get the information needed.

For instance, the first line translated directly would be "Stem Chaos Violence" and "Stem Violence Death". From there, it's up to the players to fill in the gaps between runes and realise the sentence structure.

Honestly, best route is just to write down each rune and its meaning to reference for later tablets.

1

level 1

FoxMikeLima

1 year ago

I appreciate the work but my players would not have the patience to work through these.

They like puzzles that teach you rules through experimentation, thinking like Breath of the Wild puzzles where they can interact with the environment and try things without frustrating punishments like the pool chamber.

Just sitting down for an hour and translating runes would cause them to disengage from the session, and I feel like I'd be asking them for intelligence checks to expost some of the answers to them, rather than them working through the answers and the session dragging.

13

level 1

Jimsocks499

1 year ago

Oof. Even with the explanations these are way too difficult for me. The original manuscript they find, I get the translation of that. I can see SOME of the ideas within the three carvings in that first room- but with the water rune turned sideways and the third carving introducing all new runes which aren't exactly consistent across carvings it is too much.

And I have the explanations in front of me.

I would give up as a player and go make some nachos.

9

level 1

ChrisTheGuy

1 year ago

These puzzles are very compelling, and the art is fantastic! It might be because I'm hopped up on cold medicine, but how are these riddles decoded?

The first one I feel like I'm missing something obvious, but then the one with the statues and the holes I feel like that would just be a guess on their part. Does it all hinge on getting the first rune stone decoded?

Thank you again for coming up with this, I think it'd fit in a cave system I've just made :)

7

level 2

TheBuggernaught2

1 year ago

Thanks! Yeah the first puzzle is needed to solve the second and the second is needed to solve the third. Hope you enjoy it!

2

level 3

ChrisTheGuy

1 year ago

Oh duh, you said that right in the post xP looking forward to seeing how my players work this out!

1

level 1

realpudding

1 year ago

this took some time to decode, but I think it was worth it. I WILL use this in an upcoming dungeon, thx :)

3

level 2

Lazunko

1 year ago

I am having trouble Decoding images 7,8, and 11. Any chance you can share your key? or at least help with some of the runes i feel like ive missed something.

1

level 3

realpudding

1 year ago

To fully decode the runes, you need information from the room descriptions. Image 7 was also hard for me to decode, because it contains information/clues for multiple rooms. I used spoiler tags just in case someone doesn't want to see this.

Image 7 (top):

(top left)

- >!(stems from, wolf, violence) Violence stems from Wolf
- >!(stems from, wolf, element/creature, peace) Peace stems from Werewolf

(top right)

- >!(water/flowing, well, earth) pour earth into well
- >!(stems from, water/flowing, well, chaos) chaos stems from pouring water into the well
- >!(water/flowing, well, metal) pour the metallic fluid into the well

(left side)

- >!(opposite, greater than, smaller than) <new symbol> is opposite of greater than. <new symbol> means "small" or "smaller than"
- >!(opposite, violence, statue, weakness, statue) the weak statue stand opposite of the violent statue.
- >!(use against, violence, statue, metal) use metal against the violent statue

- >!(use against, greater than, statue, earth) use earth on the tall statue
- >!(use against, weakness, statue, blood) use blood on the weak statue
- >!(use against, smaller than, statue, water) use water on the small statue

(bottom right)

- >!(stems from, greater than, door/portal, chaos) chaos stems from the big door
- >!(stems from, smaller than, door, peace) peace comes from the small door.

Image 7 (bottom):

(left column)

- >!the new symbol means "don't use against"
- >!don't use metal against earth creature
- >!don't use magic against water creature
- >!use earth against air creature
- >!don't use fire against fire creature

(right column)

- >!fire creature is in location of north well
- >!earth creature is in location of east well
- >!air creature is in location of west well
- >!water creature is in location of south well
- >!door statue is in location of north-east door
- >!use music against door statue

Image 11:

- >!violence attack
- >!music attack
- >!magic statue/person
- >!Y Symbol means North

5

level 4

Lazunko

1 year ago

Hey man thanks so much I could not for the life of me put that together! Just want to have a key in case my players do get stuck. Thanks again!

2

level 5

realpudding

1 year ago

no problem. in case they get stuck, you can tell them to observe their surroundings and maybe again describe the room(s) they are in. it is not possible to decipher the runes on their own.

1

level 1

joshij

1 year ago

This is a great series of puzzles! I will definitely be adapting these or something similar into a dungeon I have coming up.

I had trouble solving the second part, with the wells. I'm not certain what "opposite" means in the context of unsorted wells randomly distributed in an irregular chamber. How is it supposed to be solved?

I personally enjoyed there being runes unsolvable until further chambers. Besides earth being solved by context, and being opposite of air, running into unfamiliar runes that would be solvable later on was very cool. I'm worried a party would take a long time to find a solution though.

2

level 1

vaz de firenze

10 months ago

I ran just the first of these puzzles for my party last night; it took them most of the session and a *lot* of hints to decode. Various dead ends that they attempted included: trying to relate the wolf/snake/tree/horn to the concepts of order, chaos, violence etc.; interpreting the symbols for air, fire and water as above, centre and below respectively, due to their position on the second panel; recognising that the eyes of the snake, dragon and wolf kind of lined up and then trying to overlay them on top of one another; realising that the "wolf" symbol and

the "chaos" symbol are inversions on one another, attaching great significance to that and then spending half-an-hour discussing what it meant; counting the occurrences of all of the symbols and words and then engaging in a lot of complicated and futile mathematics... by the time they figured it out, they were pretty much ready to murder me. Thus, by my metric, it's a great puzzle!

I'd like to run the second puzzle for them, but even knowing the answer, I can't see how it's meant to be solvable. From the runes, it's clear that you have "spurn [all the things] if you seek wisdom", but I can't see how you're meant to figure out the positions of the wells. Position-wise, "chaos is opposite of violence, violence is greater than chaos, wisdom is opposite violence, wisdom is opposite death". However, these clues don't seem to be sufficient to work out the locations on the map. The wells of chaos, death and wisdom are all in the same section, but the can't really be said to be "opposite" each other in any meaningful way, and violence is way off in a different part of the map. The only size clue is that "Violence is greater than chaos", which is only useful if you can establish that chaos is not the smallest well (wisdom), and there's no way to do that since the "opposite" instructions don't provide enough usable positional data. Tasting the wells is therefore the only way to solve the puzzle, and given the detrimental effects that they have, it's a potential killer.

I still like the idea, but given how difficult the first and easiest puzzle (which has a straight up translation!) was for my guys, and in light of the apparent insolubility of the second, I don't think the rest of these will be making an appearance in my game. A great shame, since both the concept and the artwork are superb.

2

level 1

PlasticLobotomy

1 year ago

Okay, so I've gone through it all, and all in all, I love this, and I will almost certainly use some version of it, but there are a few sticking points.

There is no way I could find for the players to determine the meaning of the weakness rune without experimenting with the wells. These are obviously very dangerous, and I don't think it is clear enough which well is the one they don't know anything about, in order to test it.

On image 7, there is a version of the weakness rune which for some reason is split in two. This looks like a new rune, but I believe it is still just "weakness"

Also on image 7, in the bottom half, the section on the right, I was unable to find a way to decipher the exact meaning of the balloon-shaped rune that is repeated five times. It is still possible to figure everything out, but that rune's meaning is unclear.

Curious as to what everyone else thinks of these insights.

2

level 2

Ok so for the weakness rune:

1. My players learned through experience, which was brutal. I let the effect disappear after a long rest. Fortunately, you do not need to know it's meaning to complete the puzzle, you just need to recognise it.
2. Oh yes bugger, the split rune on image 7 is a minor typo, yep I'll try and find the time to correct that, sorry. That's the only one I think, just proofread it. Thanks for pointing that out.
3. Balloon shaped rune indicates location, so it says which elemental is in which well.

Hope this helps!

3

level 2

TheEverling

1 year ago

Honestly, I can hardly figure out most of the runes in general. I think the concept is nice, but needs a bit more fine tuning. Doubt I'll ever get to play with it, since my players would probably spend an hour bashing their heads against the wall before giving up and wanting to move on somewhere else.

3

level 1

Socrates-Johnson

1 year ago

Thank you for posting! This is really fun and I will definitely be taking my party through the first half of the puzzle. Whether it's because of puzzle fatigue or otherwise, however, I find that the puzzle becomes a slog at around images 6/7. Too many new runes and a lot of uncertainty - especially given that image 7 seems to correspond with the solution to multiple rooms (this will be unclear to the party who might try to solve everything immediately and be frustrated). I'm also unclear on how the solution to the four statues is clear. I think this would benefit from the clues on the labyrinth stones being separated into further images.

1

level 1

MechanicalYeti

1 year ago

Hey OP, I think this is a really cool idea you've come up with. I love puzzles, so I thought I'd sit down and try to figure these out myself. I got the first room without having to look at the answer, and I thought it was a nice little puzzle you put together there. I'm not sure if it would fit in during a play session, but if your players enjoyed it that's what matters.

On the second one, I cannot for the life of me figure out the answer. I can't see any way to relate the runes to the particular wells, even after looking at the solution. I can see the hints that only one of the wells is safe, but no way to tell which is which. How are we intended to figure that out?

1

level 1

GoldenNat20

1 year ago

Me likey! Take that upvote!

1

level 1

rockology_adam

1 year ago

I'm looking for some pizzles to throw at some gamers. These seem like good candidates.

1