

# DUNGHOLES AND DUNDERHEADS

Assorted Fantasy-Based Cliches for [Risus: The Anything RPG](#) © 1993-2001 by S. John Ross

Dungholes and Dunderheads (First Edition!) © 2002 [Guy Gregory Hoyle](#)

*Do we really need more clichés for fantasy campaigns? After all, in addition to the ones in the Risus game itself, [Jason Puckett](#)'s got some, [Brandon Blackmoor](#)'s got some, [Mark Whitley](#)'s got some, [Hollis McCray](#)'s got some, [Carl Hewitt](#)'s got some.... you get the picture.*

*But that didn't stop me. What actually stopped me, after a week or so, was the fact that the campaign I was creating these clichés for has mutated into a completely different type of campaign. Rather than consign them to electronic oblivion, I decided to inflict these upon the Risus community and the World-Wide Web. So they're a tad... unfinished.*

*I don't claim that any of them are completely original, but anything that inspired me, I tried to scrape off the serial numbers and put my own little twist on. But all the guys I mentioned above spurred me on, even if they didn't know it. Thanks, guys!*

*Permission granted to use these as you will, but if you put 'em up on your website or use 'em in a game, be a pal and gimme a [holler](#). If you publish them as your own and make a million dollars off of it, I'll be sending the Mind Flayers and Brain Moles after you.*

*Suggestions and comments are also welcome.*

**Guy Hoyle** (<mailto:ghoyle1@airmail.net>)

## FIGHTER CLICHÉS

**These guys all know how to kick ass and take names.**

### Fighter

Slay monsters, hew limbs, bash heads, clean gore off your weapons and armor

*Variations: Reluctant Warrior, Grim Humorless Veteran, Merry Swordsman, Grizzled Old Campaigner, Gullible Castle Guard, Doomed Champion, Philosophical Sargeant, Natural Leader, Sneaky Strategist*

### Ranger

Tramp stealthily through the wild, fight monsters, know nature lore, do trick arrow stunts, wear camouflage

*Variations: Guardian of the Forest, Beastmaster, Royal Falconer, Xenophobic Mountain Man, Wild Man*

### Barbarian

Glower menacingly at soft city dwellers, complain about the filthy streets, praise the virtues of living in a crude lean-to in your faraway homeland, forget to shower except when it rains, heft a mean battleaxe, perform amazing feats of martial prowess, have a *wyrd* or *geas*, leave a trail of destruction at a moment's notice, drink kegs of ale, punch out rude oxen

### Gladiator

Salute the emperor because you're about to die, fight with odd weapons and too little armor, please the crowd, flex muscles impressively, "it's just a scratch", kill opponents entertainingly, learn clever ways to "die" convincingly

*Variations: Enslaved Pit-Fighter, Famous Professional Gladiator, Overconfident Pit-Warrior*

### Outlaw

Spit in the face of authority, scoff at the law, rob wayfarers and passersby, live in unpleasant places, disguise yourself as harmless local, travel lightly, watch your back, brag about the bounty on your head

**Note: just about anybody can be an outlaw, so this is a great cliché to combine or pair with others.**

*Variations: Freedom-Loving Rebel, Fugitive from Justice, Reluctant Gangster,*

### Pugilist

Fight without weapons or armor, float like butterfly/sting like bee, get in lots of duels, register fists as deadly weapons

*Variation: Befuddled Bare-KnuckledBoxer, Romantic Kick-Boxer, Ascetic Martial Arts Monk,*

## **Pirate**

Sail the seas, attack ships, ransom wealthy prisoners, climb the rigging, say things like “Sink me fer a lubber!” and “Shiver me timbers!”, have an eyepatch or a peg leg or a hook

*Variations: Dashing Privateer, Grizzled Sea Dog, One-Eyed Buccaneer, Rum-Swilling Freebooter*

## **Sharpshooter**

Hit a fly’s eye at 100 yards, be rock-steady, be extremely protective of your equipment

*Variations: Eagle-eyed Archer, Carck Spellcaster, Trick Knife Thrower*

## **Weapon Master**

Single-minded devotion to mastering one type of weapon, not being able to master other types of weapons, being able to do cool things with the type of weapon that you can master

*Variations: World-weary Swordslinger, Eager Young Duellist, Lord of the Lash*

## **Soldier of Fortune**

Getting paid for fighting, getting tricked out of being paid by evil lord who hired you, looking to be hired by a non-evil lord, gambling and drinking and wenching your pay away

*Variations: Avaricious Mercenary, Idealistic Sellsword, Heartbroken Footslogger*

## **Soldier**

Perform duty, esprit de corps, take orders from your superiors, give orders to your subordinates, know the regulations, complain about the food, stand watch, complain about “the brass”, maintain discipline on the battlefield, gamble and drink and wench off duty

*Variations: Grizzled Veteran, Green Young Recruit, Dashing Young Officer, Bumbling Old Campaigner, Pious Conquistador, Young Woman Disguised as a Soldier*

## **Thug**

Know every filthy street and alley on your turf, prey on the helpless, be loud and obnoxious, use violence as a negotiation tactic

*Variations: cocky bravo, belligerent mook, hired lackey, brutish lout, amoral henchman, enormous bouncer*

## **Paladin**

Smiting evil, ride big horse, being holy, being chivalrous, rebuffing undead creatures

*Variations: Defender of the Faith, Pious Templar, Compassionate Hospitaller, Disillusioned Knight Errant, Militant Priest, High-Handed Cavalier, Gallant Chevalier, Devout Crusader*

## **Samurai**

Follow code of *bushido*\*, use neat weapons, know some artsy skills, shout “kiai!” and fight impressively

*\*Obey your lord absolutely, be ready to die for your honor or your lord, avenge dishonor to your honor/lord/family, repay all debts honorably, don’t display cowardice at any time*

*Variation: Dishonored Samurai, Honorable Ronin*

## **Cattle Raider**

Sneak past patrols, quiet cattle, liberate herd, know lots of rope tricks

## **ROGUISH CLICHES**

**Thief**

Steal valuables, purloin treasure, filch a fortune, pilfer swag, cut purses, burgle shops, loot coffers, ransack vaults, slink warily, shadow victims, strike from behind, fence booty, bypass booby traps, scale obstacles

*Variations: Deft Cutpurse, Dashing Highwayman, Gentleman Jewel-Thief*

**Assassin**

Kill people for money, sneak around secret passages, wear cheesy disguises, use interesting poisons, obey the Assassin's Code\*

\*1) Get the gold up front; 2) No freebies; 3) It doesn't matter how they die, as long as you're paid for it; 4) He who stalks and runs away, lives to slay another day.

*Variation: Sly Ninja, Murderous Cutthroat, Surreptitious Strangler*

**Beggar**

Grovel convincingly, show crippling injury, flatter gullible passersby, spin tale of woe, collect juicy gossip, rummage through garbage heaps, eat stuff that would gag an orc, sleep in alleys and on doorsteps

*Variations: Vagabont, Tramp, Mendicant, Panhandler, Freeloader*

**Spy**

Sneak around, decode secret messages, eavesdrop, stay out of the way, disguise, know foreign languages, get back with information

*Variations: sleuth, informer*

**Amorous Scoundrel**

Go without sleep, run from enraged spouse, leap out window, caress passionately, endear with a look, virility under duress, be attractive and charming

**MAGIC CLICHÉS**

*Almost all magicians, unless otherwise noted, need to use material equipment, components, gestures, and incantations to cast spells; doing without these requirements raises the TN of the spell or makes a misfire more likely. Magicians traditionally shun weapons other than a dagger and staff, and usually wear no armor, since they tend to hinder a magician's spellcasting ability. However, magician/warriors are not unknown.*

*Magic-Users are generalists, not focusing on any one magical specialty; they have the widest range of magic at the cost of power and finesse. Magical specialists, such as the Abjurer or the Conjuror, are capable of very refined and subtle spells, but only in their own professions. Village crones, mediums, and hedge wizards are looked down upon by all wizards as untrained meddlers, dabbling in arts best left to the professionals.*

**Magic-User**

Tramp through dungeons and hostile wildernesses, be a magical jack-of-all-trades, cast spells with polysyllabic names and strange ingredients, have trouble casting esoteric and specialized spells

**Alchemist**

Brew useful but noxious potions, analyze somebody else's noxious potions, write recipes in a complex code, seek the philosopher's stone, find out how to turn lead into gold, blow up lab on a regular basis

**Village Crone**

Cackle menacingly, prepare corpse, tell how much better things used to be, hide valuables away, know secret

**Necromancer**

Summon spirits of the dead, reanimate corpse, command the undead, look good in black, be spooky, hang around in graveyards and ancient battlefields, exorcise ghosts, make flesh rot, make things die

**Hedge Wizard**

Find lost possessions, craft protective amulets, scare away vermin and unwelcome visitors, create sleeping potion, cure minor ills, use natural properties of plants and animals

**Sorcerer**

Make trouble, afflict with boils, poison wells, afflict cattle, cause plague, pretend not to be a sorcerer or

**Medium**

Hold seance, enter trance, contact spirit guide, contact the dead, speak in spooky voices, interpret knocks on the walls by spirits of the dear departed, speak in spooky voices

**Abjurer**

Cast spells which ward, discourage, dispel, eliminate, and hinder people, places, and things. Prevent and remove curses, protect against injury or misfortune, exorcise possessing demons, banish extraplanar creatures.

**Transmuter**

Turn things into other things, make things bigger/ smaller /heavier/ lighter/ etc., unlock doors (and vice versa), change sex, change stone into mud, change lead into gold

**Conjurer**

Bring forth living and non-living things, dispel conjured things, make circle of protection against the creatures you've conjured, know secret names of creatures, contact entities from other realms of existence.

**Spellbinder**

Change opinions, control minds, alter emotions, hypnotize, endow items or creatures with magical powers,

**Enchanter**

Make magical things, spend lots of time in the shop, know an appropriate crafting skill, stay at home a lot, get sought out by people on quests

**Diviner**

Cast horoscope, examine livers, read palms, interpret omens, gaze into crystal ball, examine head-bumps, read cards, read tea leaves, dowse for water, use ouija board, look in magic scrying pool, read runes, bibliomancy, interpret dreams, cast lots, psychometry

**Illusionist**

Create noises, make people think there's a monster attacking them, make things look like they're other things, make people think they've been attacked by something real, keep people from seeing things that are actually there

**Invoker**

Call upon supernatural entities for aid, shape magical forces, cast lightning bolts and fireballs, snare enemies in sticky webs, create walls of fog and mist, summon cloud of poisonous gas,

**Warlock**

Know how to use weapons and magic together, carry troops over walls, spy on enemy plans, undermine enemy defenses, detect enemy ambushes, hinder enemy's attacks

*(Yeah, I know I'm using "warlock" in the wrong sense, but I like it this way)*

**Demonologist**

Summon demons, compel or negotiate with demons, get rid of demons, smell faintly of brimstone

**PRIESTLY CLICHÉS****Cleric**

Use no edged weapons, advance the interests of your god, turn undead, read omens, beseech the gods to intercede, deliver sermons, mouth platitudes

**Village Priest**

Bless crops and cattle, perform marriages, bless newborns, perform funerals, serve the gods

**Druid**

Sacrifice prisoners (only when absolutely necessary), predict weather, answer questions with riddles, invoke the powers of nature, perform bizarre rituals

*Variations: Rebel Druid, Village Druid, Wandering Druid*

**Bloodthirsty Crone**

Appease the Earth, assure fertility, inflict curse on the wicked, lift curse from community, conduct human sacrifice (only when necessary), stop plague

**Mystic**

Seek enlightenment, meditate upon obscure philosophical dilemmas, avoid unnecessary confrontations (but not the necessary ones), use obscure quotations from dead philosophers and strange folk wisdom, feign death, leave body, levitate self, don't own more than you can carry

**Note:** Combine this with the Pugilist to get a martial arts Monk

**Houngan**

Make voodoo dolls, dance ecstatically, be possessed by *loa*

**MISCELLANEOUS CLICHES**

*I couldn't decide which category to put most of these in, so I lumped them all together.*

**Acrobat**

Juggle, walk tightrope, amuse audiences, wear funny clothes, be nimble, be sure-footed

**Amazon**

Stand up for yourself to any patronizing male, show women how to fend for themselves, show those bully-boys who's better

**Animal Master**

Talk to animals as if they understand you, listen to animals as if you can understand them, have a li'l animal buddy, spend a lot of time living with the animals, learn wisdom of the animals

**Diplomat**

Carry important messages, be an emissary, pal around with foreign courtiers, indulge in intrigue, keep your eyes and ears open, know what to kiss and when, know about what's in vogue

*Variations: envoy, ambassador*

**Explorer**

Get antsy when you're home too long, go somewhere nobody else has ever heard of, meet people you can't talk to, stumble on lost civilizations, collect exotic memorabilia, tell stories about how you got that scar, learn scandalous phrases in foreign languages

**Jester**

Wear bright colors and bells, talk in a high funny voice, make witty observations about people at the court who hopefully won't get mad and have you killed, embarrass that guy you don't like, make everybody realize just how witty you really are, take a pratfall, juggle as if your life depended on it, caper and prance

*Variations: Sinister clown, insane trickster*

**Mariner**

Live on a ship, never get seasick, say things like “arr, matey” and “landlubber”, wear little or no armor, batten down the hatches, swab the deck, climb the rigging, man the fo’c’sl, get tattoos, wear a ring in your ear, have a girl in every port, use cutlasses and belaying pins, dance a hornpipe

**Merchant**

Buy cheap and sell dear, haggle haggle haggle!, know what things cost, keep an eye on your stuff, organize caravan, carry heavy stuff, pick up the local gossip

**Aristocrat**

Live lavishly, be superior, command respect, have a lot of influence, keep the peasants in their place, demand the best things in life, go hunting and riding, wear fancy clothing

**Peasant Done Good**

Wax nostalgic about your grubby little home, long for the days you were slopping the hogs and milking the cows, “back there people take care of each other”, spout folksy wisdom, be a hometown hero

**Rider**

Be inseparable from mount, know each other’s location and general health, know what each other want, fight while mounted, have special mount.

**Primitive**

Be primitive, hunt and forage, wear skins and paint, know about animals and plants and spirits, sleep lightly, be perplexed by foreign ways

**Savage**

Live in dangerous or unusual environment, be exotic and unusual, remark frequently on how they do things back in your tribe, be completely comfortable in climates like the one you used to live in (swamps, snow, desert, jungle, whatever)

**Scholar**

Know lots of obscure lore, write down everything, be an expert on something, act as if you know something about everything else, criticize rivals, write flattering letters to patrons

**Scout**

Live in the wild, hunt game, trap small animals, know the lay of the land, watch enemy troop movements, size up danger, be self-reliant, be uncomfortable out of your element

*Variations: Pathfinder, Frontiersman*

**Smuggler**

Fence illicit goods, feign innocence, have connections, appraise goods, obtain forged documents, conceal identity, have an escape plan

**Spy**

Cross enemy lines, infiltrate enemy territory, collect vital information, attend swanky parties, sit in smoky taverns, collect latest rumors and gossip, use cover identities, plan escape route

**Swashbuckler**

Be witty, fight with panache, swing from chandeliers, vault over railings, dive through windows, hide from outraged spouses, know the derring-dos from the derring-don’ts, revel raucously, hobnob with the hoi polloi, defend the honor of yourself/your comrades/anyone you find attractive

**Smith**

Make things out of metal, ignore burns, impressive muscles, evaluate metalwork, snarl at lazy apprentice

*Variations: blacksmith, weaponsmith*

**Farmer**

Grow food, raise livestock, kill varmints, gripe about taxes, talk about weather

**Fisherman**

Fish, build boat, repair nets, make traps, know the local waters, brag about the one that got away

**Herder**

Care for herd, train dog, butcher herd animals, run long distance, listen to endless stream of off-color jokes about herders and their beasts

**Brewer**

Brew ale or mead, keep bees, work with a hangover

**Woodcrafter**

Find decent wood, make items out of wood

**Craftsperson**

Craft, make minor Equipment, Find Necessary Supplies, Haggle; Inspired, Patient

*Variations: Silversmith, jeweller, mason, potter, weaver, cook, baker, leatherworker, laundress*

**Ruler**

Look imposing, bluster, debate, compromise, rally followers, keep followers happy, find weakness in argument, negotiate

*Variations: Tribal Chieftain, Barbarian King, Crafty Usurper, Beloved Queen, Despised Tyrant, Reluctant Dictator, Puppet Monarch*

**Advisor**

Advise ruler, cite precedent, talk for hours, speak with authority, debate minutiae, know hiatory and laws

*Variations: Scheming Kingmaker, Dedicated Public Servant, Self-Serving Bureaucrat*

**Healer**

Bind wounds, split broken bones, know herbal lore, treat illness

*Variations: Discrete Royal Physician, Crusty Old Sawbones, Rustic Herbalist, Embittered Combat Medic, Devout Faith Haler*

**Midwife**

Know signs of pregnancy, tend mother-to-be, spread old wive's tales, terminate pregnancy

**Shipwright**

Build Ship, Patch Leaks, Make Sails, Boil Pitch, Career Ship

**Berserker**

Ignore Wounds, Look Really Scary, Fight To The Death, Intimidate, Immune to Fire

**Innkeeper**

Keep a tidy inn, throw out ruffians, provide food and drink, keep valuables safe

*Variations: Nosy Landlord, Generous Taverner, King's Hosteler, Long-Suffering Bartender, Buxom Serving Wench, Burly Barmaid*

**Entertainer**

Juggle things, sing funny songs, tell lame jokes, do funny voices, imitate local celebrities

*Variations: Wacky Juggler, Lame Comedian, Sonorous Soliloquist, Nimble Prestidigitator, Exotic Dancer*

## Natural Philosopher

Be curious, know lots of obscure facts, carry around bundles of esoteric equipment, collect thousands of specimens, know when eclipses are going to happen

## Demigod

Be the child of a god, have gods meddling in your life, be unusually strong/good looking/tough to kill/nimble fingered/fleet footed/able to fly/etc (your choice, check with Referee), win lots of glory, die an unusual or horrible death (have your flesh eaten away by corrosive poison unknowingly administered on a robe by your wife, get torn apart by maenads, get hit by a lightning bolt, etc.)

## Pacifist

Resist passively, don't fight (even to defend yourself or others), tell others not to fight, resolve conflicts peaceably, don't wear armor, get beaten up a lot, get killed (usually only once)

## Shapeshifter

Change your shape, basically

*Variations: werewolf, wereboar, werebear, wererat, wereplatypus*

## CREATURE CLICHÉS

*Some of these would make good player characters; some would not. That's between you and the Referee.*

## Wood Elves

Live forever, wear earth tones, caper and frolic, shoot intruders, protect the forest, arrange flowers, sneak around the woods, harrass dwarves, hate orcs, be vulnerable to iron

## High Elves

Look ethereal, be wise, brew delicate herbal teas, lament for the days of yore, be understood even if the other guy doesn't understand Elvish, weave armor out of silk, be vulnerable to iron

## Dark Elves

Be evil, like sorcery, like spiders, hate daylight, dress in dark colors, be vulnerable to iron

## Half-Elves

Less frolicsome than elves, more pointy-eared than humans, never really get along with either one, don't be vulnerable to iron

## Half-Orcs

Be smarter than most orcs, be more apt to bite off a hunk of somebody than a human

## Lizard Man

Dwell in swamp, dream of the days when your ancestors ate humans for lunch

## Half-Giant

Have trouble finding a bed that's long enough, bang your head on doorjambs, crash through dilapidated floors, smash doors, crush puny humans

## Orc

Be strong, be brutish, be ugly, sharpen your fangs at dinner, eat anything remotely edible, break things, fight on any pretext, win by cheating, bully those weaker than you

*Variations: big strong orc, snivelling little orc*

## Gnoll



Be lazy, be vicious, be ill-tempered, be self-centered, be greedy, lay ambushes, track prey by scent, have a fondness for carrion

### **Halfling**

Walk upright under tables, look eagerly forward to your fifth meal of the day, avoid 'bigguns', seem innocent, pilfer casually,

### **Hill Dwarf**

Carry large axes, abhor orcs, make fun of elves, wear lederhosen, build quality cuckoo clocks, drink foaming tankards of ale, yodel

### **Mountain Dwarf**

Be short and stocky, fight fiercely when provoked, live in palatial caverns, never get lost underground, have a fondness for mining and intricate devices, dislike orcs, detest elves

### **Merman**

live underwater, make pets of fish, fall in love with land-dwellers, never use fire, know where all the cool wrecked ships are

### **Goblin**

Live in or near human households, be small, be ugly, be mischievous, become invisible, play malicious pranks, pinch naughty children, be obsessively neat

### **Kobold**

Be small, hang around in mines, make knocking noises, lead miners astray, move tools when they're not looking, fill in diggings overnight

### **Fairy**

Be tiny and winged, change people into other things, cast mischievous spells, become invisible, frolic in wooden glades and meadows, drink nectar from little flowery cups, love dance and music

### **Swan Maiden**

Change into swan when wearing the Swan Coat, take Swan Coat off and leave it unguarded when you bathe, marry the man who steals the Swan Coat, leave him and take (or murder) your children when you get the Swan Coat back

### **Nymph**

Be beautiful, live in river or forest or mountain or ocean, be friends with all the animals that live with you, seduce young handsome mortals, never get old or ugly

*Variations: Water Nymph, Wood Nymph, Oread, Oceanid, Dryad*

### **Crawling Claws**

Be a disembodied hand, crawl around, stick your fingers in their eyes and noses and ears

### **Manscorpion**

Sting people, claw people, discuss how people want to be stung and clawed

*Variation: Womanscorpion*