

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

DUNGEON FANTASY™ 21

MEGADUNGEONS



Written by **PETER V. DELL'ORTO**

Edited by **SEAN PUNCH**

Illustrated by **TITHI LUADTHONG**

GURPS System Design ■ **STEVE JACKSON**

GURPS Line Editor ■ **SEAN PUNCH**

GURPS Project Manager ■ **STEVEN MARSH**

Production Artist ■ **NIKOLA VRTIS**

GURPS FAQ Maintainer ■

VICKY "MOLOKH" KOLENKO

Chief Executive Officer ■ **PHILIP REED**

Chief Creative Officer ■ **SAM MITSCHKE**

Chief Operating Officer ■ **SUSAN BUENO**

Director of Sales ■ **ROSS JEPSON**

Page Design ■ **PHIL REED** and **JUSTIN DE WITT**

Prepress Checker ■ **NIKOLA VRTIS**

Special Thanks: Raggi's Roughnecks (Andy Dokachev, Jack Dokachev, Mike Dokachev, Mike Hornbostel, andi jones, Marshall LaPira, Owen LaPira, Vic LaPira, Jon Lay, John Milkewicz, Sean Nealy, and Tom Pluck)

This book couldn't have been written without the influence of Gary Gygax and James Maliszewski, or the help of Douglas H. Cole, Christopher R. Rice, and Matt Riggsby.

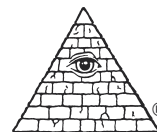
GURPS, *Pyramid*, Warehouse 23, the pyramid logo, *Dungeon Fantasy*, and the names of all products published by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated are trademarks or registered trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated, or used under license. **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 21: Megadungeons** is copyright © 2020 by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. All rights reserved. Some images used under license from Shutterstock.com.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this material via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Stock #37-0356

Version 1.0 – July 2020



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2	Stocking the Dungeon	6
Publication History	2	Monster Placement	6
About the Author	2	Restocking	6
		Monster Encounter Table	6
1. THE MEGADUNGEON	3	Treasure Placement	6
What Is a Megadungeon?	3	Treasure Value Table	6
About GURPS	3	Trap and Special Encounter Placement	7
Placement	4		
How Far to Town?	4	2. THE CAMPAIGN	8
Megadungeon Concepts and Elements	4	Play Style	8
Themes	4	Magic in the Megadungeon	8
How Much Exploitation Is Going On?	5	Spells of Concern	8
How Do You Get There?	5	Countering Magic	10
Mapping	5	But It's Not Ready Yet!	10
Gates	5	Experience Point Awards	10
		Required Loot Table	10

INTRODUCTION

Dungeons are central to dungeon fantasy, obviously! A multitude of monster- and treasure-filled mazes of twisty passages are part and parcel of the genre.

Yet the earliest RPG campaigns didn't feature multiple dungeons – all your delving took place in *one big dungeon*. Such dungeons are called *megadungeons*. The originators of **D&D** used them: Dave Arneson's Blackmoor Castle had a megadungeon below it, as did Gary Gygax's Greyhawk Castle. Early GMs made their own megadungeons, and their players created more in turn. Campaigners might spend their entire careers exploring such a dungeon. Some would delve periodically, using outside adventures to feed the next megadungeon sortie.

The megadungeon fell into disuse as the hobby and industry matured. Adventures and campaigns that focused on story-centric gaming took hold. Gamers' tastes changed, and the "logic" of a giant dungeon stocked with monsters and treasure by some powerful wizard just didn't cut it any longer.

Over the last decade, though, fans of "old school" gaming revisited the past. The megadungeon got another look . . . and many gamers liked what they saw! They built their own megadungeons and started exploring the depths.

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 21: Megadungeons looks at setting up and running a giant dungeon. It covers tweaking rules and play style to suit the "campaign dungeon" rather than the "dungeon of the week." It also includes modifications addressing magic that warps and distorts such play.

Let's descend into the megadungeon and explore . . .



PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 21: Megadungeons**. All materials are new to this work, but megadungeons were mentioned in "Super Dungeons," by David L. Pulver (*Pyramid* #3/50: *Dungeon Fantasy II*), and "Building A Long-Term *Dungeon Fantasy* Game," by Peter V. Dell'Orto (*Pyramid* #3/98: *Welcome to Dungeon Fantasy*).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter V. Dell'Orto is from New Jersey. He started roleplaying in 1981, with **Dungeons & Dragons**, and has played **GURPS** since *Man to Man*. He has been a **GURPS** playtester, editor, and author since 1996. Peter is the author of numerous **GURPS** articles for *Pyramid* magazine; author of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 12: Ninja**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Denizens: Barbarians**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 3: Born of Myth & Magic**, and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Treasures 3: Artifacts of Felldown**; and co-author of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1**, **GURPS Low-Tech**, **GURPS Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors**, **GURPS Martial Arts**, and **GURPS Martial Arts: Gladiators**. He also writes the blog *Dungeon Fantastic* at dungeonfantastic.blogspot.com, where summaries of his 100+ sessions of megadungeon play can be found. Besides gaming, his hobbies include the martial arts (he has fought amateur MMA in the SHOOTO organization in Japan, submission grappling in the U.S., and holds a *shodan* rank in kendo), fitness, Pilates, studying Japanese, and painting miniatures.

CHAPTER ONE

THE

MEGADUNGEON

A megadungeon can be simply an enormous dungeon, visited occasionally – or even just once. But it *shines* as a campaign's *focus*: The megadungeon is the center of everything!

WHAT IS A MEGADUNGEON?

At its most basic, a dungeon is an underground complex of tunnels and rooms, filled with monsters, puzzles, traps, and treasures. What makes a dungeon a *megadungeon*?

Discrete area. A megadungeon is a single, immense, interconnected underground area – not a collection of connected dungeons, or spread out over a wide area. A wilderness region full of dungeons can make a great hub-and-spoke adventure location, but it isn't a megadungeon.

Size. A megadungeon is *big*, to support repeated play. Delvers should be able to return time after time, and find things to accomplish on each and every delve. It supports continuous play with the same players over many sessions. This usually means at least half a dozen discrete levels, plus sublevels. Each of those needs dozens of rooms; megadungeons with 100+ keyed areas per level (and multiple levels of that size!) allow for many adventures. Larger dungeons are possible, spread out over a massive area (see "Super Dungeons," *Pyramid* #3/50: *Dungeon Fantasy II*), but those are more like an underground wilderness than a megadungeon. You don't need a specific number of levels or rooms – a megadungeon can be one sprawling level with hundreds of rooms, or many small levels, each with only 10-20 rooms.

Cumulative play. Changing the environment affects future trips. Knocked-down doors, blocked-up stairs, disarmed or reset traps, slain monsters, and plundered treasure

remain that way for the next delve. Players' actions *this* session affect *subsequent* sessions. Players plan their delves like a military campaign – a series of connected steps to achieve an objective. The GM will want to restock (p. 6).

Diverse challenge levels. Difficulties are mixed within the megadungeon, on a large enough scale that challenges take repeated visits to overcome. Some areas should be too dangerous to explore right away, with easy and hard stuff mixed together to withstand repeated play.

ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of **GURPS** players. We can be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. **GURPS** continues to grow – see what's new at gurps.sjgames.com.

Warehouse 23. Our online store offers **GURPS** print items, plus PDFs of our books, supplements, adventures, play aids, and support . . . including exclusive material available only on Warehouse 23! Just head over to warehouse23.com.

Pyramid (pyramid.sjgames.com). For 10 years, our PDF magazine *Pyramid* included new rules and articles for **GURPS**, plus systemless locations, adventures, and more. The entire 122-issue library is available at Warehouse 23!

Internet. To discuss **GURPS** with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at forums.sjgames.com. You can also join us at facebook.com/sjgames or twitter.com/sjgames. Share your brief campaign teasers with #GURPShook on Twitter. Or explore that hashtag for ideas to add to your own game! The web page for **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 21: Megadungeons** can be found at gurps.sjgames.com/dungeonfantasy21.

Store Finder (storefinder.sjgames.com): Discover nearby places to buy **GURPS** items and other Steve Jackson Games products. Local shops are great places to play our games and meet fellow gamers!

Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We've added them to many **GURPS** book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for **GURPS** releases are available at sjgames.com/errata/gurps.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

A megadungeon allows new delvers – built on 250 points, or perhaps less if using *Junior Delvers* (**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen**, p. 32) – to explore even as veteran delvers risk their lives for gold elsewhere. These needn't be separate areas; there can be *danger pockets* (see below).

Endpoints, but no end. A megadungeon can't be "cleared out." It needs activities other than farming gold and grinding monsters. Examples include local boss monsters to slay, notable treasures to discover, puzzles to complete, and special locations to reach. Defeating these challenges still leaves sufficient play area that there's always more to do. There's no goal that, once reached, completes the dungeon, ending it as an adventuring environment. Level 13 of Gary Gygax's Castle Greyhawk had a wizard you could meet; if you pulled that off, the dungeon was *still* an open-play environment.

PLACEMENT

A megadungeon can be beneath a nearby lonely mountain, deep in the forbidding arctic, or under a city's cobblestones. The GM must answer three questions about its location.

How Far to Town?

If the dungeon is under or right next to town, it's possible to delve quickly and then return for supplies and healing. Its upper levels may crawl with city-type encounters, as criminals, revolutionaries, and the home-ownership-challenged (including adventurers!) make it their base of operations. Entrances may be numerous – some well known,

others hidden or legally off-limits. Truly horrific monsters dwell deeper down; what happens in the megadungeon quickly affects the city, and vice versa. Urban adventurers (thieves, innkeepers, and sages) are more useful; outdoors types (barbarians, druids, and scouts), less so. For an example, see **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Setting: Caverntown**, which places town adjacent to the dungeon.

A dungeon far from town will be "wild," with fewer civilized encounters. Outdoors types become *essential*, especially if the wilderness itself is also a dangerous adventuring zone. If the return trips are difficult but the dungeon is well known, a local "trader's town" probably provides *some* of the benefits of an actual town, although with limited resources and higher costs.

In between is a dungeon close enough to allow return trips without call for a trader's town, but far enough not to cause undue difficulty in town. This places equal weight on town- and outdoors-centric delvers – especially if the megadungeon contains "monster towns" and weird underground wildernesses.

Another option is *multiple* cities, allowing for varied town experiences without a "dungeon of the week" approach shifting the location of adventure. If the megadungeon lies within a single state, between allied states, or beneath a borderland near such, the cities can be friendly rivals. Along a border between hostile cities, it acts as a neutral meeting point and battleground. Delvers might meet all-too-civilized enemies from the other city, or independent delvers could play the cities off against each other regardless of their own citizenship – for profit, of course!

MEGADUNGEON CONCEPTS AND ELEMENTS

Certain terms are *especially* relevant to megadungeons. They originate from discussions between "old school" gamers who've revived and revised this play style.

danger pocket: Localized area of greater danger than the areas around it.

faction: Group of beings cooperating for some purpose.

keyed area: Area on the map containing one or more encounters.

level: Horizontal expanse of rooms and tunnels. A **sub-level** is minimally connected to major levels – often a cul-de-sac or dead end above, below, or next to such a level.

mythic underworld: The idea that the dungeon is a place of myth and magic *different* from the world above. It functions according to different rules – traps, magic, monsters, and treasure might simply appear there. The gods themselves may be responsible for this!

Themes

Megadungeons often feature "themed" areas, each with a common motif. The possibilities are endless, but here are some examples:

Barracks: An area housing militant low-powered monsters in disciplined units. A pack of orcs might pose little

danger to 250-point delvers – but an organized *regiment* is another story!

Crypts and Catacombs: A burial ground. Usually filled with undead, horrible traps to maim and kill tomb robbers, and defenders who protect the crypts from marauding delvers.

"Forest" of Bizarre Flora: Underground "woods" of mushrooms, or light-hating trees, or alien shrubbery fed by magical light sources.

Laboratories: Places to perform strange experiments in alchemy, magic, or monster-creation. These might be abandoned, and full of "treasure" that can be dangerous to the unwary – or still in use, and protected by the experimenters.

Labyrinth: A monster- and trap-filled maze, with some special treasure or location at its heart. Famously containing minotaurs, other Greek-themed monsters, or knife-wielding psychopaths.

Ultra-Tech Zone: In the early days of gaming, the line between science fiction and fantasy wasn't so bright and clear. A level of high-tech dangers – "golems" (androids), "wizards" (blaster-toting scientists), and "gnomish clockwork" (electronic or mechanical traps) – offers a real change of pace. **GURPS Ultra-Tech** is a useful guide to such monsters and treasures.

How Much Exploitation Is Going On?

Are the PCs the brave few, exploring a lost place of ancient mystery and all-too-real danger? Or does a stream of delvers – PCs and NPCs alike – visit regularly and return laden with treasure? Perhaps the situation is something in between?

The GM should place the dungeon appropriately. It's hard to explain a dungeon with easy access and lots of NPCs wandering around if it's under a solitary mountain, floating a mile in the air, or surrounded on all sides by a mana-blasted desert wasteland. Equally unbelievable is the treasure-filled castle on the hill, ignored by everyone but the PCs. Unless the city nearby has regular dragon-back flights to the floating megadungeon, or the castle on the hill is jam-packed with ghosts and Elder Things.

These are guidelines, not rules ... but think it through!

How Do You Get There?

Can you walk or ride to the megadungeon? Does getting there require owning or hiring a ship, an airship, or something stranger? Do the heroes need particular skills? Make sure the players know this and the PCs have access to suitable gear and abilities. If the delvers can't reach the megadungeon, the campaign is foiled before it begins!

MAPPING

Before it is possible to conduct a campaign of adventures in the mazy dungeons, it is necessary for the referee to sit down with pencil in hand and draw these labyrinths on graph paper.

– Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax,

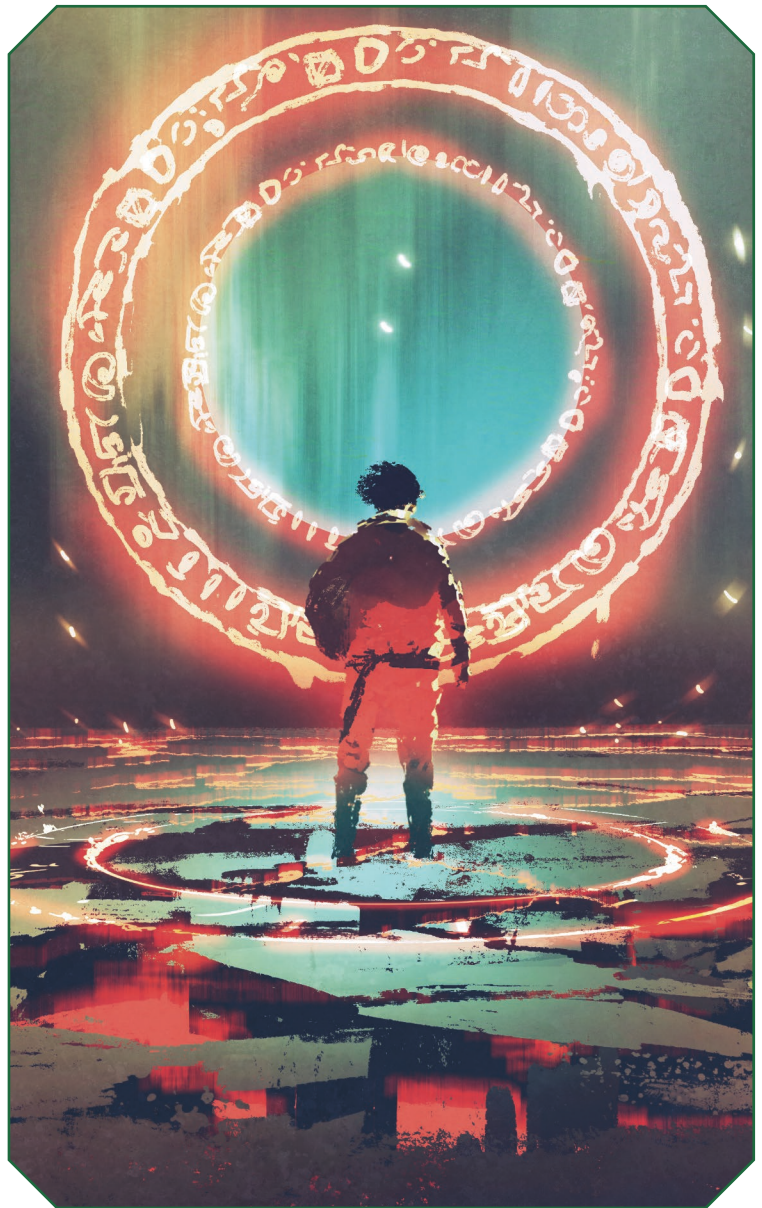
Dungeons & Dragons: The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures

Mapping comes before everything else, defining the megadungeon's scope and rough dimensions. Start with a *side* view, showing the levels' relative position. This establishes size and provides the order for mapping levels. Generally, a megadungeon consists of a large number of levels stacked one more-or-less above the other. Very big levels work, too – as well as or instead of this. If the GM preps a huge area from Day One, a *single, vast level* is another option.

A level can consist of anything from one enormous room, like a cavern, to *hundreds* of keyed areas. Smaller levels are more easily explored – and more easily kept clear of dangerous monsters. Huge levels make the dungeon feel more “mega,” with sprawling adventure in all directions!

Connections to other levels are critical. When mapping each level, mark connections from above and below, plus any “side” connections to sublevels. Provide easy access to lower levels, or future delves will spend excessive time in low-threat (and low-reward) areas.

Include central means of access – large stairs, shafts, elevators, etc. – extending down to deeper levels. Making these dangerous or difficult to reach restricts use to powerful delvers.



They may tempt weaker delvers to risk too much – *once*. Old-school thinking is that this is a feature, not a bug!

Gates

Supernatural “gates” or “portals” are an excellent way to connect the megadungeon to still more adventure areas – and to explain where its denizens come from. Gates might be open or closed (or even *there* or *not there*) based on chance, a pattern, or GM fiat, and expand an “explored” area while open. They may be two-way, but one-way gates prevent dipping a toe into a new area with easy return. “In” and “out” could be different gates!

There are two main kinds of gates:

Teleportation portals allow travel to and/or from other locations in the same world. Some link areas within the megadungeon. Others connect to external locations, as either side jaunts or primary arteries. Ambitious GMs may tie together multiple megadungeons!

Interdimensional portals connect with other worlds or dimensions, such as a parallel “mundane” world, the modern-day world, the realm of the Olympian gods, or – always a classic – Hell itself. Visit a fictional locale, drop into a book or movie, or explore a different time, genre, or space by throwing down a convenient shimmering hole in reality.

STOCKING THE DUNGEON

A megadungeon functions best with open areas to explore. Not every room needs a monster, treasure, trap, or puzzle. As a guideline, 1/3 of the space should be empty; the rest should have interactive encounters. Those needn’t all be monsters! Puzzles, clues (such as “random” graffiti, blood trails, and cryptic signs), red herrings, and geological or architectural oddities all work. But the *heart* of a dungeon is monsters and treasure.

Optionally, determine what’s in a given room by rolling 1d:

- 1-2 – *Empty*.
- 3 – *Special*. A hidden treasure, a weird pool, an altar with magical benefits to those who touch it, or something else of note – which may or may not be obvious.
- 4 – *Trap*.
- 5-6 – *Monster*.

Monster Placement

A megadungeon without monsters is just a maze. Encounters should become more dangerous as the heroes descend into its depths. Include *danger pockets* (p. 4) to reward careful play and discourage attacking everything encountered.

Wandering Monsters (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 20) serve as a prod to keep delvers moving, a punishment for those who don’t, and a threat to those intent

on frequent rests. Remember that monsters don’t normally wander around carrying surplus loot!

The GM can place other monsters by fiat, using the *Monster Encounter Table* (below), or with a combination of both.

Monster Encounter Table

This table is based on the *Reaction Table* (pp. B560-561) – the lower the result, the worse for the PCs! Roll 3d.

Modifiers (cumulative): +2 for civilized rural areas, +1 for cleared or civilized wilderness, 0 for ordinary wilderness or above-ground ruins, or -1 per “challenge level” of the dungeon (typically, -1 per level below ground); -1 for proximity to a monster supply (otherworldly gate, etc.) or source of wealth, or -3 for Hell, dragon breeding grounds, monster hives, etc.

Roll	Monster Strength	Notes
-6 or less	Boss	Tough and Many
-3 to -5	Boss	Tough or Many
0 to -2	Boss	Tough
1 to 3	Boss or Worthy	If Worthy, add Tough and Many
4 to 6	Worthy	Tough or Many
7 to 9	Worthy	
10 to 12	Fodder	Tough or Many
13 to 15	Fodder	
16 to 18	Fodder	Few
19 or better	Nuisance	

“Fodder,” “Worthy,” and “Boss” refer to the categories from *Dungeons*, pp. 27-28. “Nuisance” means food animals, annoying friendlies, etc. – not necessarily monsters.

“Tough” typically means one or more monster prefixes (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Monsters 1*, pp. 36-38), or an increase in statistics like ST, HP, and DR. Alternatively, it might indicate stronger creatures weakened by either reduced stats (injured, young, or old) or low numbers; thus, tough fodder could be weak worthies, and a tough worthy could be a weak boss.

“Many” means a large number of monsters.

“Few” means *one* rat, a small spider, etc.

This roll determines the encounter’s *overall* strength. Encounters can – and should – include mixed monster types. A large dragon (a tough boss) may have a horde of lizard-man worshippers (many fodder). GM judgment is required!

Treasure Placement

Treasure is why the PCs are in the dungeon in the first place. *How much* depends on its guardians! The GM can place treasure by hand, by rolling on the *Treasure Value Table* (below), or using a combination of both.

Treasure Value Table

This table sets the total monetary value of the treasure found. The GM can divide it up between magical and mundane loot as they see fit, or roll using *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables* until roughly that value has been generated.

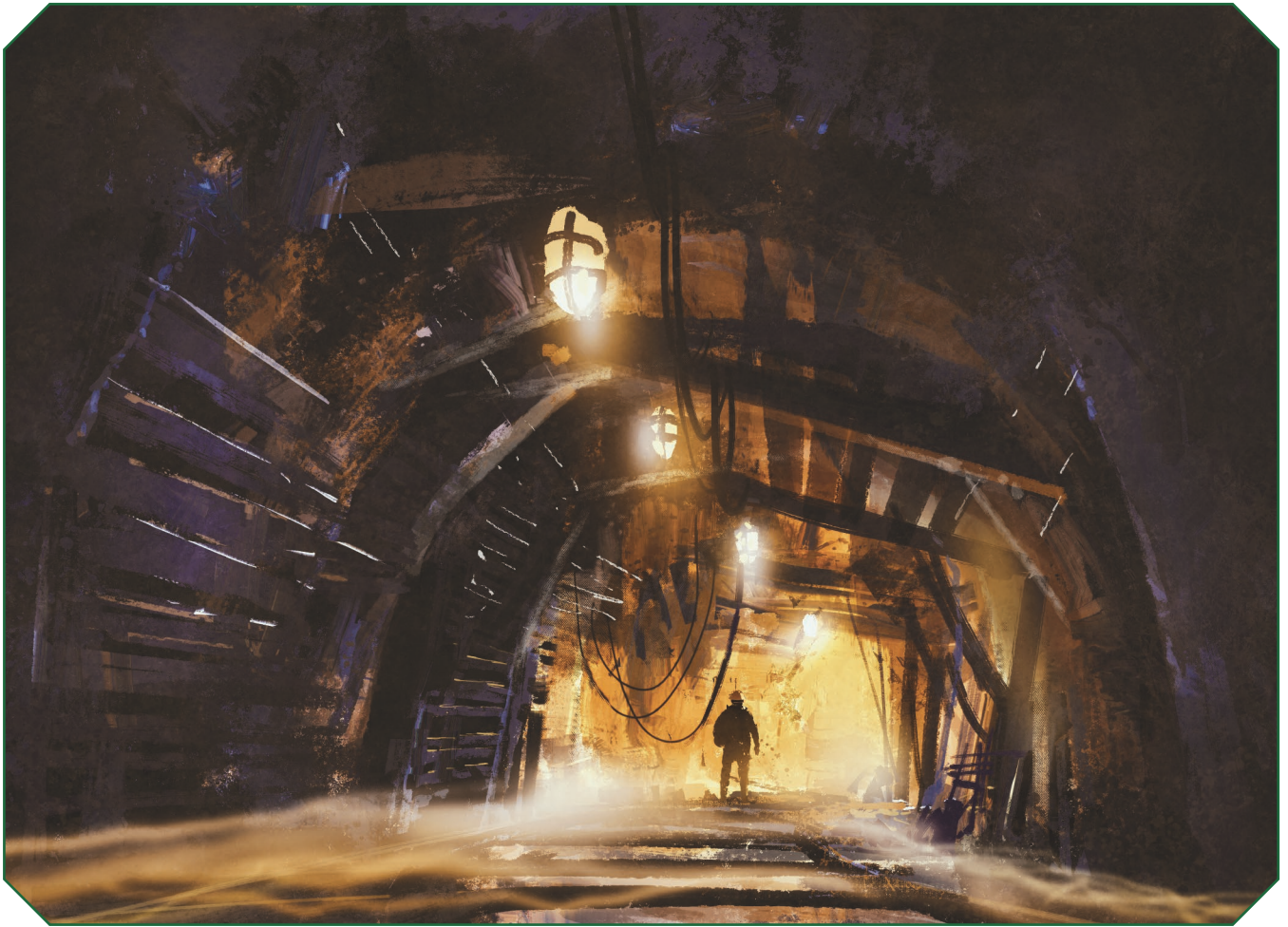
RESTOCKING

Restocking is putting new encounters (and loot!) into already-explored areas. They may be reinforcements, replacements, or recent arrivals. Video games just “respawn” or “repopulate” – previously cleared monsters, treasures, and traps reappear as though they were never removed – but megadungeons don’t benefit from this. It dampens enthusiasm for long-term adventure planning, and restricts how far a group can explore.

To restock, use the tables and methods in *Stocking the Dungeon* (above). Reroll when sufficient in-game time has passed to justify new monsters moving in or reinforcements showing up. Nature abhors a vacuum – also restock after a level has been cleared.

Groups of monsters with access to replacements might replace casualties but not treasure. A strong group with weakened neighbors could suddenly come into *more* wealth. High-traffic areas are likely places for new traps, but less likely for monsters or treasures.

Encounters needn’t stay static. Monsters may move after nearby incursions by delvers, or change how they hide their treasure after examining how other troves were ransacked. Traps can appear where none existed before. Monsters sometimes team up – or simply *leave*, taking their loot with them. Adventurers don’t have unlimited time to deal with encounters; opportunities passed by on one delve might not be around on the next.



Non-cash loot should be set at the list price – not at the 40% most delvers will get for it. Roll 3d.

Modifiers (cumulative): -6 for unintelligent monsters, +0 for unguarded or trap-only treasure, *or* +1 for intelligent monsters; -3 for wandering monsters (*no* roll, if they aren't normally treasure collectors!); -3 for fodder monsters, 0 for worthy monsters, *or* +3 for boss monsters; +1 for tough *or* many monsters (+2 for both); -1 for cleared or civilized wilderness, 0 for ordinary wilderness or above-ground ruins, *or* +1 per "challenge level" of the dungeon (typically, +1 per level below ground); +1 for proximity to source of treasure, wealth, or trade goods (otherworldly gate, mine, etc.), *or* +3 for an especially rich source (gold or gemstone mine, treasure room, King Midas' throne room, etc.).

Roll	Treasure Level	Value
0 or less	Dead Broke	No treasure!
1 to 3	Poor	\$200
4 to 6	Struggling	\$500
7 to 9	Average	\$1,000
10 to 12	Comfortable	\$2,000
13 to 15	Wealthy	\$5,000
16 to 18	Very Wealthy	\$20,000
19 to 21	Filthy Rich	\$100,000
22 to 24	Filthy Rich x2	\$200,000
Each additional +3	+1 to Filthy Rich multiple	+\$100,000

Trap and Special Encounter Placement

When rolling randomly, 1 in 6 rooms will contain a trap and another 1 in 6 will have a "special" encounter. Choose these carefully. Make good use of clues; hidden or trapped treasures in otherwise "empty" rooms; traps ("It's a Trap!", in *Pyramid* #3/60: *Dungeon Fantasy III*, is a tremendous help here); strange pools, shrines, and statues; and other imaginative aspects of dungeon play. While a megadungeon *can* be a carefully crafted ecosystem, one that's a "funhouse" or full of weird anomalies can feel very "old school" indeed!

Frodo caught glimpses of stairs and arches, and of other passages and tunnels, sloping up, or running steeply down, or opening blankly dark on either side. It was bewildering beyond hope of remembering.

– J.R.R. Tolkien,
The Fellowship of the Ring

CHAPTER TWO

THE CAMPAIGN

Now that you have a megadungeon, here are some guidelines for starting and sustaining a campaign.

Halls, corridors, and caves. Burial sites, treasure chambers, and magical rooms . . .
– Alexey Pehov, *Shadow Prowler*

PLAY STYLE

Megadungeons lend themselves well to two styles of play:

Megadungeon-only campaign. This approach concerns itself only with town and the megadungeon. Town serves up pre-delve rolls to buy goods, sell off loot, and procure services and information. All worthwhile adventure is tied to the megadungeon. Delves may *all* start and end at the dungeon's main entrance. If so, either outdoors types should have plenty to do *inside*, or players should stick to dungeon-centric templates.

Hub-and-spoke gaming. This style treats the megadungeon and its town as the center of a “bounded sandbox” (see “Building A Long-Term *Dungeon Fantasy* Game” in *Pyramid* #3/98: *Welcome to Dungeon Fantasy*). Heroes can adventure in the wilderness surrounding the megadungeon and go on side trips to other locations . . . all of which should be tied to the megadungeon in some way: a physical connection, a thematic one, or even a gate (p. 5). Areas outside hold clues and knowledge needed to explore the megadungeon, and vice versa. Adjacent locations make good “starter areas” while you're getting your megadungeon ready (see *But It's Not Ready Yet!*, p. 10).

In either mode, decide whether play simply pauses between sessions, wherever the delvers might be – in the dungeon, in town, in the midst of battle – or if sessions always begin and end in town. Both have their upsides. Ending midstream puts no special structure on the session, permitting long explorations until the need for town resources or loot disposal drives the adventurers to the surface. Starting and ending in town allows for a rotating cast: You can run sessions with just the characters of the players who show up, and change out characters as needed.

MAGIC IN THE MEGADUNGEON

Spells that permanently alter a dungeon aren't *that* big a deal in a dungeon-of-the-week campaign. But a megadungeon suffers if play degenerates into mining through walls, creating new passages, and going straight for magically detected

treasures. One caster with Shape Earth – or with Earthquake and a large power item – can irrevocably render the dungeon unfit for long-term gaming.

Spellcasters *should* use magic to shape the world and defeat obstacles! On the other hand, the game isn't about finding the right spell, calculating costs, and then rolling and resting until obstacles go away. Magic should enhance, not short-circuit, the experience.

Spells of Concern

Certain spells run the risks above in a megadungeon. The GM may wish to limit their effects; see below for suggestions. If they're *still* being abused, ban them!

Acid Jet: Causes 1d-1 corrosion damage per second *for free* at skill 15+, becoming a slower-but-cheaper form of **Earth to Air**, **Disintegrate**, or **Shatter**. A caster can corrode through walls, doors, and grates; destroy corpses; and wipe out magical defenses by obliterating the items anchoring the spell. Consider reducing damage to 1 point per energy point against inanimate objects. Other jet spells pose a much lesser threat!

Create Food: Creating or extending food simplifies long-range exploration, enabling megadungeon delves. Great! But Create Food turns *anything* into food – including walls, doors, and other obstacles. These are easily eaten, removed, or eliminated using **Decay**. To control this, have the spell make *food* but not change underlying DR or HP; a rock may become nourishing but be neither chewable nor soft, while a wall becomes edible without being easier to break. **Essential Food** has a similar issue, so since one casting makes one meal, and meals weigh 1/6 of a pound, rule that it affects 1/6 of a pound of material – literally chewing through doors takes an extremely long time!

Create Object: Allows delvers to create any mundane equipment they need. They'll never want for lockpicks, rope, picks, shovels . . . *anything*. Counting *each object* as a spell “on” helps curb abuse.

Create Servant and **Create Animal:** Mitigate the risk of exploration. Servants take point, set off traps, act as rear-guards (stopping missiles launched from behind the party), and more. Stupid (IQ 9) servants make poor scouts (Per 9) . . . and excellent landmine detectors. Eliminating these spells forces delvers to take risks themselves.

Earthquake: Can destroy whole sections of the dungeon. The GM may wish to limit it to above-ground use, or ban it.

Pathfinder: Short-circuits exploration by locating stairs down, treasure rooms, etc. with cleverly worded castings. Apply -5 to find a place known to exist but not personally visited (e.g., stairs shown on a found map) – or -10 for places whose very existence is uncertain. Consider treating it as medium-range magic (p. 10) underground.

Seek Gate: Makes detecting gates (and thus traveling to and using them) trivial – and obviously ruins the surprise of finding one! Can also be used to triangulate and map by orienting on a gate. Fix this by allowing it to seek only a *specific, known* gate.

Seek spells: Require knowing your *entire dungeon's* contents in three dimensions relative to the delvers' current location in order to give the players the “direction and approximate distance” to detected subjects. Limit these spells with general restrictions on long-range magic underground; see *Countering Magic* (p. 10).

Seeker: Requires *specific* knowledge of a *particular* treasure, NPC, or monster. Have it always provide a vision instead of leading the caster to the subject – and visions don't show traps, whether an NPC is alone or guarded, etc.

Shape Earth: Allows constantly reshaping the environment to remove obstructions, create access points, and wreak other mischief. At a minimum, forbid use on *worked* stone. Consider reducing duration to one *second*, limiting the amount of material moved and increasing the cost to bypass

obstacles. **Shape Metal** does the same for metal barriers; a one-second duration limits how much shaping gets done.

Volcano: A dungeon-destroyer. Ban it!

Wizard Eye: Fundamentally changes the nature of mega-dungeon exploration, as it scouts locations, spots traps, and gains intelligence on monsters, and greatly reduces the risk of detection and surprise encounters. Coupled with **Dark Vision** (removing the need for light), **Keen Vision** (boosting Perception), and **See Secrets**, it makes investigation a solo game for the wizard. **Invisible Wizard Eye** is an even larger problem, as only foes with appropriate Detect or See Invisible advantages can perceive it. Banning the invisible version and limiting the regular version helps. Don't allow vision-enhancing spells on the *wizard* to affect the *eye*, or permit the eye to receive such spells; raise the cost to maintain to 4 (requiring skill 30 to maintain for free); or both. **Beast Possession** and **Rider Within** are the druid's equivalents, given access to vermin or flying insects. Natural predators might be unusually attracted to such scouts – or the GM can apply steeper “nature's strength” penalties when using these spells underground.



Other spells aren't *problems* but do change adventures. **Swim** or **Breathe Water** can convert vast underground lakes and mysterious rivers from obstacles to places to explore. Ground barriers are no barrier at all with **Flight**. **Silence** lets parties bash holes in things instead of picking locks. **Continual Light** and **Dark Vision** remove the need for torches, lanterns, and glow vials except in no-mana zones (and even there, with enough sanctity for a holy caster). Be ready for the expanded adventure options these spells provide!

Countering Magic

Another way to deal with megadungeon-warping magic is to use countermeasures:

Medium-Range Magic: Long-range magic serves to make a megadungeon feel small. Changing spells that normally use *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241) to use the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) within the megadungeon can solve this problem. Perhaps distance penalties are distorted by the megadungeon's composition, cosmic or godly influence, or the dark magic of the wizard dwelling at the bottom.

Magic Resistance: Increases the difficulty of magic. Options include stone that's naturally magic-resistant (-5 to -10 is good), special enamels and paints that apply -5 to -10 to spells (cumulative with magic-resistant stone!), and enchanting doors, walls, floors, stairs, etc. with the **Magic Resistance** spell. Casting *through* such materials (for example, *Seek* spells, or *Sense Life*) still suffers these penalties.

Magic Immunity: An extreme solution! Areas without mana or sanctity, locks with meteoric iron components (thin

coatings on tumblers and hinges stop magic without making the lock worth more than the loot), and magic-immune forms of stone can keep magic from overshadowing thieving skills and old-fashioned exploration.

EXPERIENCE POINT AWARDS

There are several ways to award bonus character points – but the system in **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level** is *not* recommended for a megadungeon. There are just too many monster encounters to base rewards on conquest. In true old-school style, the goal is to *get their stuff*. Monsters are the *obstacle* to gaining loot and experience!

In **GURPS**, where combat can take a long time and is inherently deadly to boot, loot-based experience is particularly apt. It encourages more exploration and looting at a lesser risk of death.

The following method awards *around* 5 points per typical *successful* session. Adjust rewards to taste.

Loot: Loot makes a delver's world go 'round! Bringing home sufficient cash – or items *sold for cash* – to meet the base threshold for your character on the *Required Loot Table* (below) is worth 4 bonus character points. Less than 20% of this threshold gives 0 points. Between 20% and 100% yields 2 points.

Exploration: Exploration is part of a successful delve. No significant exploration means 0 points. Exploring at least one new, clearly significant area – or *many* general areas – gives 1 point. Exploring 10+ significant areas earns 2 points.

Roleplaying: Making your disadvantages and quirks matter in an especially disadvantageous and/or entertaining way gives between 1 and 3 points. If your disadvantages *help* you, you don't get bonus points for them that session – getting an advantage from a disadvantage is bonus enough! *Not* playing your disadvantages costs -1 to -3 points.

Special Bonuses: Gain 1 point for especially awesome play – either on a per-character basis or handed out to the entire party.

Required Loot Table

Delver Point Value	Required Loot
249 or fewer points	\$100 each
250-299 points	\$200 each
300-349 points	\$400 each
350-399 points	\$1,000 each
400-449 points	\$4,000 each
450-549 points	\$20,000 each
Every additional 50 points	×10

BUT IT'S NOT READY YET!

Creating a megadungeon is an *enormous* task. Attempting to complete one before play starts can doom a campaign. So consider doing what the original megadungeon creators did: Start playing right away!

Map just enough to handle a few delves, limit access to a small number of entrances, and get started. Keep mapping and stocking the dungeon as the delvers explore. Temporarily block "off-limits" areas with walls, magical barriers, or indestructible doors that need special information (or traits) to pass. Throw down monsters beyond the adventurers' current power.

Write *just enough*, then start play. It's a megadungeon tradition!

It is well known that the labyrinthine dungeon, catacombs, and maze of subterranean passages beneath the ancient castle once held a conglomerate of monsters and a plethora of treasure – all there at the whim of the lord archmage who ruled within.

– Gary Gygax, "In the Heart of Darkness"

STUCK FOR AN ADVENTURE? NO PROBLEM.

**Warehouse 23 sells high-quality
game adventures and supplements
in print and PDF formats.**

- Free downloadable adventures for **GURPS** and *In Nomine*!
- Fun gaming accessories – shot glasses, shirts, specialty six-siders, and more!
- PDFs from Atlas Games, Amarillo Design Bureau, Goodman Games, and many others – plus gems from the up-and-comers.
- Original material for *Transhuman Space* and new **GURPS** supplements from Kenneth Hite, Phil Masters, David Pulver, Sean Punch, and William Stoddard!
- Fully searchable files of **GURPS Fourth Edition** supplements.
- Digital editions of out-of-print classics, from *Orcslayer* and the complete run of *ADQ* to **GURPS China** and **GURPS Ice Age**.
- Buy board games and roleplaying PDFs in the same order! Download digital purchases again whenever you need to.



STEVE JACKSON GAMES
warehouse23.com