How to Hexcrawl

A Practical Guide to Wilderness Adventures

for Labyrinth Lord (™)
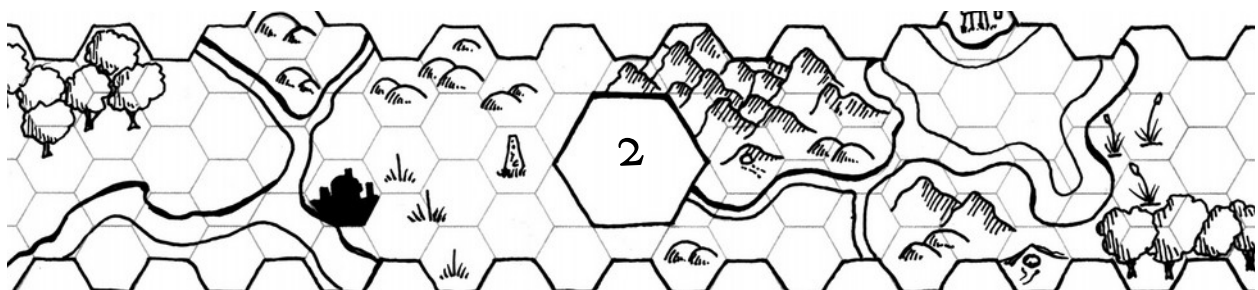
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Into the Wild!

The allure of the open air!   After countless months trudging through dank, musty caverns and underground lairs, your party craves to walk in the sun again.   An overland trip is just what the referee ordered.

Wilderness adventures are a natural extension of the dungeon crawling milieu introduced to novice Labyrinth Lord players.   The distances covered become opportunities for danger, valor and treasure.
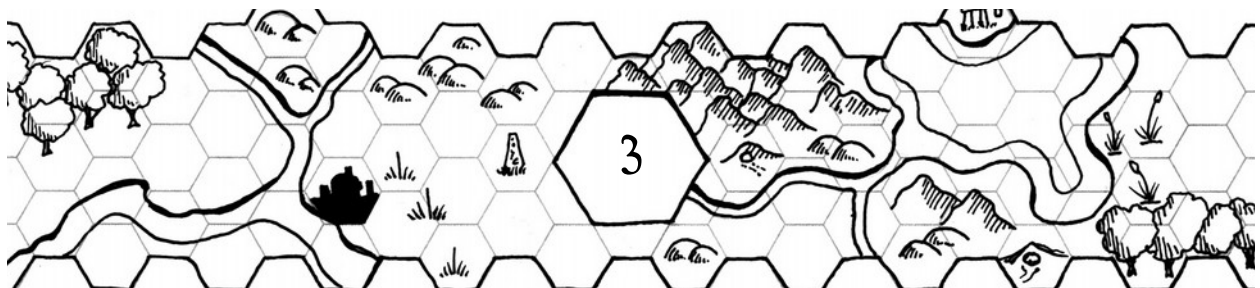
Deriving their name from the hexagonal maps commonly used for this purpose, hexcrawls mirror a lot of classic adventure fiction: Homer's *Odyssey*, Jack Vance's *Guyal of Sfere*, C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and, of course, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

The rules for wilderness adventures are laid out in the Labyrinth Lord core ruleset, but some reorganization of these will facilitate hexcrawling for novices. Although the rules presented here do not contradict the core ruleset, additional material is presented that appeared in the 1981 TSR *Dungeons and Dragons (™) Expert Rulebook*, edited by David Cook and Steve Marsh and the 1983 *Dungeons and Dragons Expert Rulebook*, edited by Frank Mentzer. As always, rules that do not enhance play at your gaming table should be jettisoned.

Hexcrawls abstract long, above-ground travel, which would be dull to play in 10' intervals, into a playable game mechanic. This document is concerned strictly with over-land travel.   There are rules for travel by water, air and even trans-dimensionally, but these are not covered here.

A good way to make long journeys meaningful and memorable to players, hexcrawls also provide the referee with opportunities to plant new story hooks, continue existing vendettas or simply try out a few ideas.

In hexcrawls, the journey is the goal and adventure happens along the way.
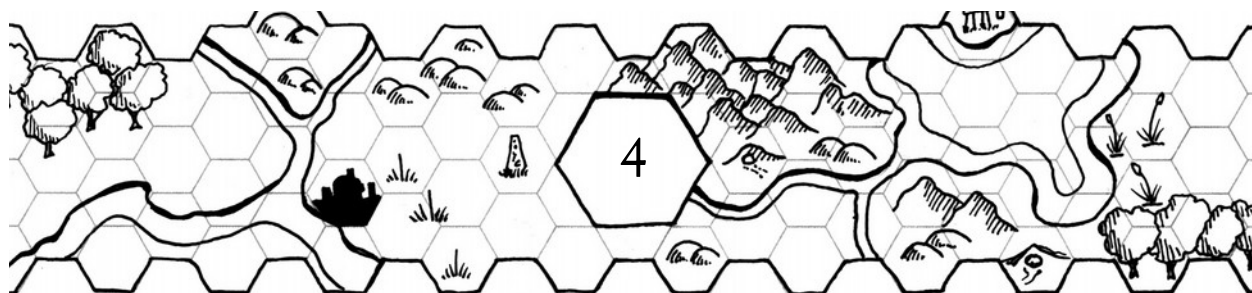
How a Referee Prepares

There are two important tasks a referee must do before her players show up for game night: build a wilderness map of the area and establish the starting point.

The Map

Wilderness maps can be found easily on the Internet. Maps can also be hand-drawn by a referee or generated from a program (see the Resources section at the end of this document). Referee may want to add a few planned encounters for various hexes.

Generally, wilderness maps use hexagons to represent a discrete bit of area. While it is possible to use a cartesian grid, hexes are preferred since each hexagon has more equidistant neighbors than squares.

The diameter of a hex in a typical hex map represents 6 miles. Recall that all spell distances should be read as yards, not feet. However, the area of spell effect remains in feet.

Below is an example hex map generated by Isomage.

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Figure 1: Example Wilderness Map
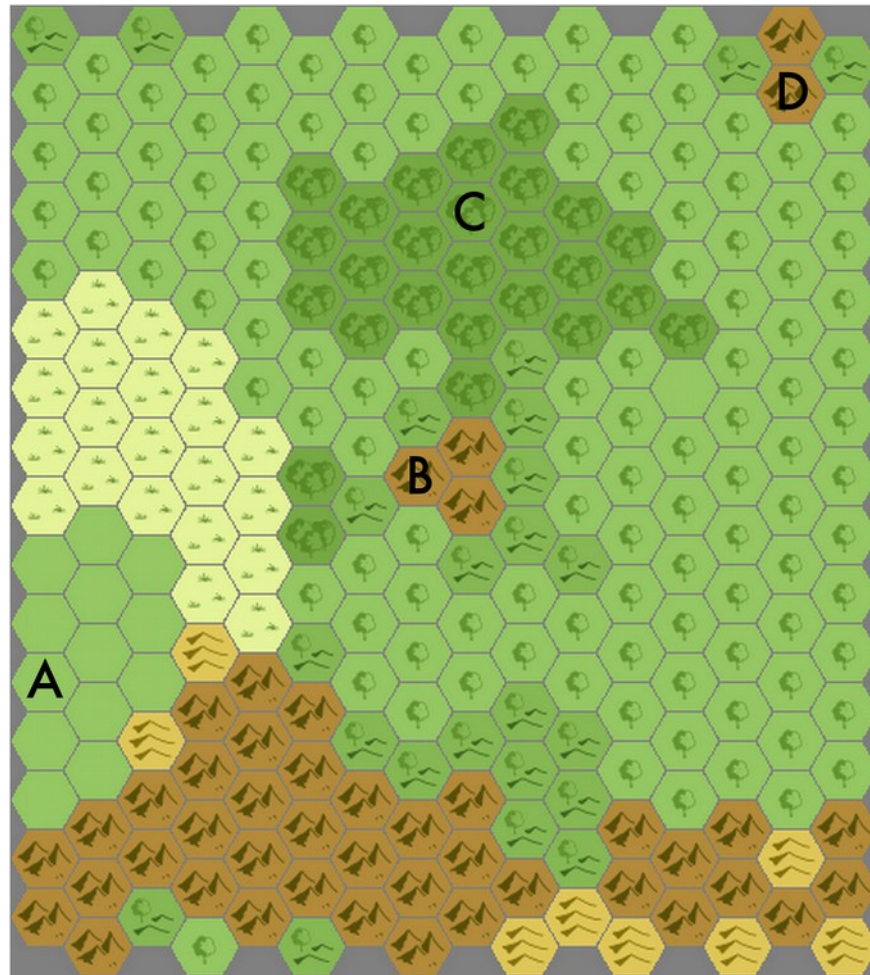
The party should map the area as it proceeds. The referee might provide a vague, poorly detailed map to the players. As the referee, you may also want your own copy of this map. The players' map allows them to mark out the path that they think they are following. The referee map tracks the path that they actually followed. Having some landmarks on the vague map can make for a nice moment in the game, for

example, when the party expects to come to the foot of mountains and the referee patiently explains there is an open sea before them instead.

The Starting Point

The typical place to begin a long journey is in a town large enough to supply the party with provisions and hirelings necessary for an extended trip.

The TSR classic Expert module **Isle of Dread** is the archetype for large swath of hexcrawls that followed it. In that adventure, the party begins in the substantial port city of Specularum with access to pretty much any kind of supplies they can afford.

However, it is no requirement that the starting location be a friendly town brimming with helpful merchants who live only for the players' convenience. Right in the Cook Expert Book is the notion that part of the hexcrawl adventure is the **hassle** of finding the desired supplies and people willing to accompany the party.

It may even be desirable for a particularly strong and over-wealthy party to start their journey in an openly hostile place where supplies and retainers come at a very dear price. The possibilities are limited only by the curious nature of imagination.

Dunshire: A Base Town Example

Given the map in Figure 1, locating the starting town in the lower western edge on a green grasslands hex would be a good choice. This location is marked A. The smallish grasslands area is surrounded by a large swamp to the North and
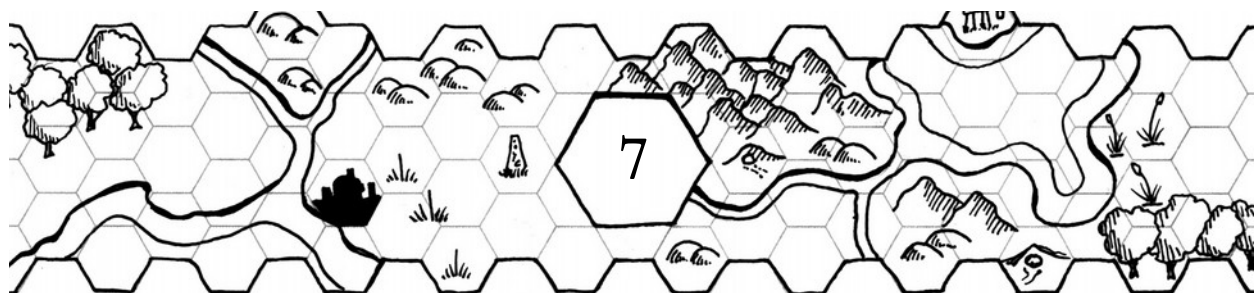
"impassable" mountains to the South. Even random maps like this can provide the seeds for adventure.

Let's imagine a town of around 2,000 people. Let's call it Dunshire. This is the primary import/export locus of the abundant agriculture produced by the many dozens of farms in the area. The polity is an independent freehold with an elected government of councilors. The average citizen is supportive of the regime.

Most traveling (non-combat) supplies can be readily obtained at fair prices. Simple arms like axes, hammers, spears, daggers, darts, slings, bows, arrows, and leather armor can be found in a few shops here. More exotic weaponry will be rarer and more expensive (50% - 100% higher prices). Plate armor will not be available here. Riding horses, draft horses and mules are abundant, but war horses and magical mounts will not be. Guides of various ability may be hired in town, but men-at-arms will be harder to find and more expensive. More specialized services, like sages, engineers, alchemists and spies, will not be available.

The above sketch is probably enough to provide a game session where players prepare for their journey. Additional details would always be welcome, but try not to go overboard. If the town isn't likely to be used for a future adventure, many world-building details may never be discovered by your stabby vagabonds, er, party.

How Players Begin

When the hexcrawl session begins, there are several steps for the players to complete.
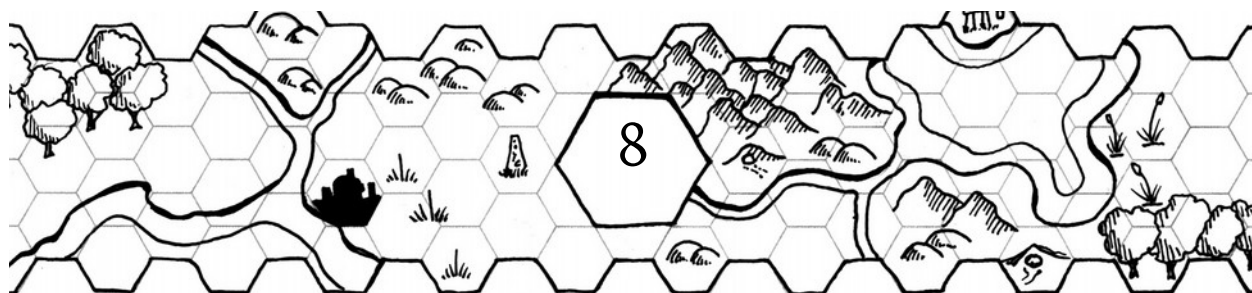
These include:

- Choosing a destination
- Obtaining specific provisions
- Establishing a marching order

Destination: The destination can be a specific hex location that is clearly labelled on the map (e.g. "we are going to Mt. Doom") or a condition (e.g. "we are going to map this entire area").   The destination may change during the trip, but the goal is to figure out which direction the party will begin travelling.

Provisions: Preparation is the key to a successful journey. The party will need at least some food and water, unless there are expert and highly confident foragers in group. Riding mounts or pack animals might be desirable as well. Finally, wealthy PCs will find the services of an experienced guide well worth his fee.   Expecting a fight? Perhaps the party would like to hire some mercenaries to bolster their numbers. Ultimately, the referee must decide what resources the starting location offers and at what price those may be obtained.

Marching Order: Perhaps the easiest decision to be made is party formation.   Who will be in the vanguard, flanks and rear?   Which PC will speak for the party when encountering an NPC?

After the provisions are obtained, the referee computes the base number of miles the party can move per day. To calculate this, take the normal dungeon movement rate of the PC and divided it by 5. This is the base number of miles a player can move in a

day over clear, trackless plains. The following table computes the movement rates for typical scenarios:

Table 2: Outdoor Movement

Description	Base	Miles/Day	6 Mile Hexes/Day
On Riding Horse	240'	48	8
On War Horse	120'	24	4
Unencumbered, healthy adult	120'	24	4
On Mule	120'	24	4
Carrying up to 60 lb.	90'	18	3
On Draft Horse	90'	18	3
Carrying up to 80 lb.	60'	12	2
Carrying up to 160 lb.	30'	6	1

If using mounts, carefully note the encumbrance rules for each, which can be found in the LL Core monster listings. The terrain of hex travelled through can add modifiers to this movement rate (q.v. the Terrain Movement Effects section below).

Remember: *the party can only move as fast as the slowest member*!
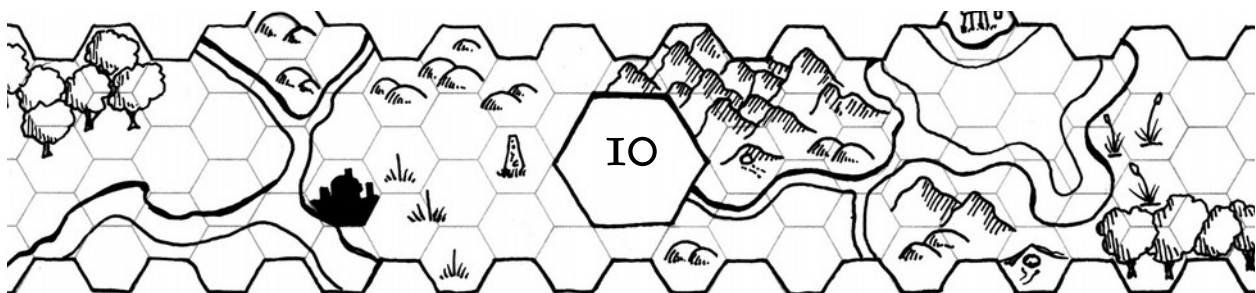
Order of Hexcrawl Play

Each game day of hexcrawl, travel follows this pattern:

- Party picks a direction of travel for that day or continues along a chosen path

- Referee checks if the party gets lost

- Party updates their map to indicate where they think they are

- Referee updates her map to indicate where the party really is

- Referee checks for random encounters, and resolves combat normally

- If the new location is a keyed area, then programmed encounter should occur

- Party rests
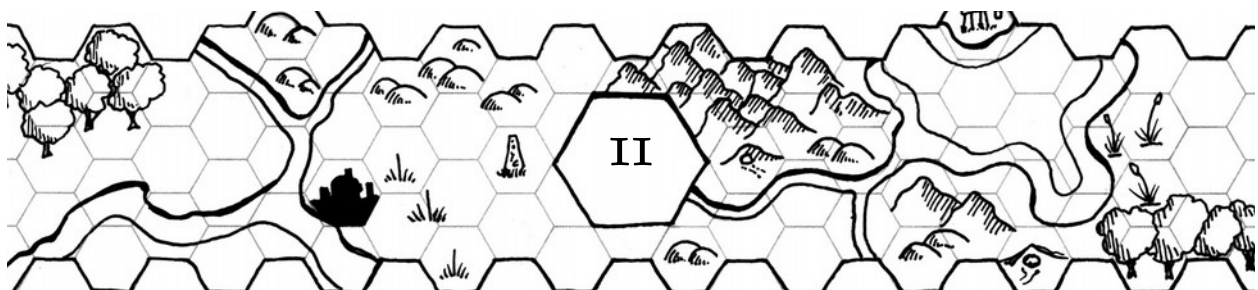
While this pattern of play may seem orderly to the point of boredom, quite of bit of variability can be added to each game day when the following rules are applied:

- Getting Lost
- Terrain Movement Effects
- Tracking Provisions

Each of these mechanics is discussed in detail below.

Getting Lost

Each game day, the referee rolls d% to see if the party actually manages to in the direction they intend (n.b. this table is reproduced from the Labyrinth Lord core rulebook, page 46):

Table 3: How Terrain Affects Getting Lost

Terrain	Chance of Misdirection
Desert	50%
Forest	32%
Jungle	50%
Mountains/Hills	32%
Plains	15%
Sea	32%
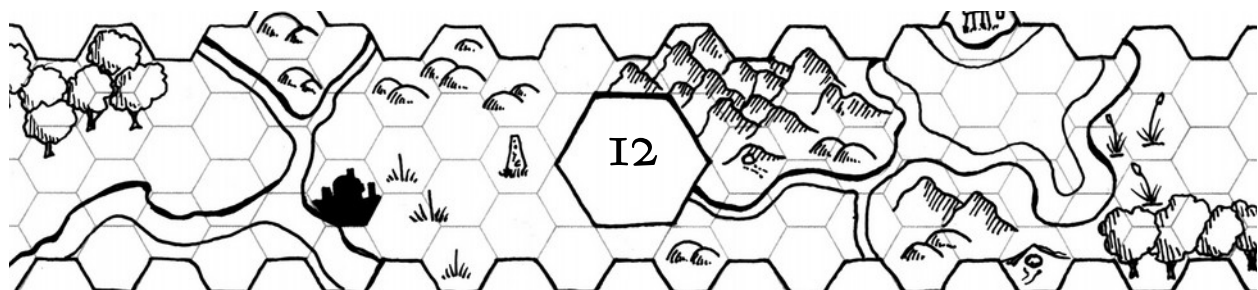
When the referee has established that the party has not gone in their intended direction, the actual direction needs to be determined. Both the LL Core and Cook Expert Rulebook suggest either rolling a die or simply picking the direction. If the PCs are near a planned encounter, a referee may wish to direct the party to it. Alternately, the referee may want to leave this in the hands of fate. If your hex map has only one North and one South hex that neighbors the current hex, use the first result column. If your map has only one neighboring East and one neighboring West hex, use the second result column.

Table 4: Random Direction For Hex Maps

Roll	New Hex Direction (N/S)	(E/W)
1	North	East
2	Northeast	Southeast
3	Southeast	Southwest
4	South	West
5	Southwest	Northwest
6	Northwest	Northeast

If you are using a square grid, use the following table. If you only are using the four cardinal points, roll a d4, otherwise roll a d8.

Table 5: Random Direction for Grid Maps

Roll	New Grid Direction
1	North
2	South
3	East
4	West
5	Northeast
6	Southeast
7	Southwest
8	Northwest

As a special case, a valid form of misdirection is the party going around in a circle in the current hex.

If the base movement of the lost party is more than one hex per day, the referee may wish to roll for a new direction for each hex the party is to move. That should produce some entertaining bewilderment at the gaming table.

Becoming Unlost

As the party travels, it follows a chosen path. Perhaps this is designated in its entirety at the start of play or determined at the start of each game day. In any case, the party may become lost. If the area is wholly unknown to the characters, it may be

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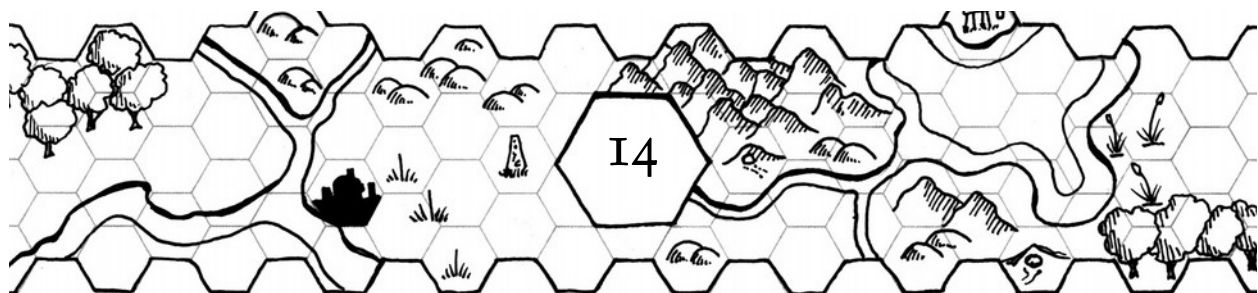
a few game days before the party realizes their error. When they do, how will they reckon their new location?

Below are some ideas that may help players and referees:

- Rest a whole day, watching the sun rise and set.
- Make for the highest visible location
- Divination spells
- Wandering guides
- Press on until an obvious landmark is found

Resting: This strategy is helpful to oriented characters to the cardinal directions of East, West, North and South. While East (or Southeast in Northern realms) can be somewhat determined at dawn, watching the arc of the sun for the whole day should remove any doubts about the direction from minds of the party. As a play mechanic, the following rule may prove useful:

Parties who wait a whole day tracking the sun will NOT become lost on the next day of travel.

Parties who fail to track the sun for a day may still become lost on the next day of travel.

Highest visible location: Another useful real-world technique of becoming unlost is take a bearing from the highest location available. A tall hill, mountain or even tree

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can provide valuable information on the surrounding area. At least the characters might recognize a place over which they already traveled.

Divination: Of course, powerful scrying magic can remove many questions from the characters' minds.

Wandering guides: As a last resort, the party may encamp at their current location, build a large fire and hope it attracts rescuers. Given that no one will be looking for the party on purpose (at least no one trying to help the party), this strategy may be ill-advised. However, the referee may wish to send a hapless party some indirect aid in the form of an NPC.

Landmarks: A lost party may continue to flail around looking for a mountain or body of water that is marked on their map. In the real world, many towns are built on rivers. Following the downstream path of them may be a good tactic for the party. If they have taken no effort to orient themselves, the chance of picking the right direction of travel should be reduced. In this case, the party should be asked each game day which direction of travel they wish to go. The referee should give them a 50% chance of successfully heading in that direction. Otherwise, a new random direction of travel should be secretly determined in the usual way.

Terrain Movement Effects

As in real life, characters find it faster to move through certain kinds of terrain than others. The following table of movement bonuses and penalties is applied to the party's base movement rate when moving through a hex of the indicated type:

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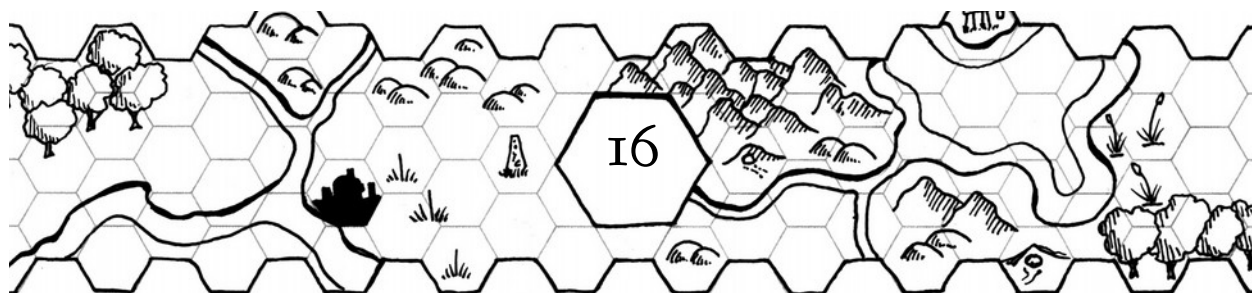
Table 6: Terrain Movement Effects

Terrain	Bonus	Penalty
Trackless, flattish land/prairies	0%	0%
Clear, packed earth trails/roads	+50%	
Thick jungle, swamps, mountains		−50%
Desert, hills, thickly wooded areas		−33%

As an example, imagine a party that has a base movement rate of 4 hexes per day. When traveling along well-maintained roads in a hex near civilization, the party can move through 6 such hexes per day.

Forced march: If speed is of the essence, the party may opt to make a forced march. This tactic will increase the distance traveled that day by 50%. However, the party must rest for a full 24 hours the following day. Although there is no official rule about what happens should the party choose not to rest, one can imagine that the second day of forced marching results in merely a 25% gain in distance and triggers all retainers to make a morale check. Should the party continue to force march, no additional distance will be gained and retainer morale checks will be made with a cumulative +1 penalty per day of continuous forced marching after the second day.

Fatigue: A party can travel at its base rate for six days continuously but it must take the seventh day off. Here again, the official rules are silent on the consequence continued travel. Based on the effects of prolonged dungeon travel given on Labyrinth Lord core rulebook page 44, a useful rule might be that failure to do so results in -1 on "to hit" and damage rolls until a full day of rest is had.

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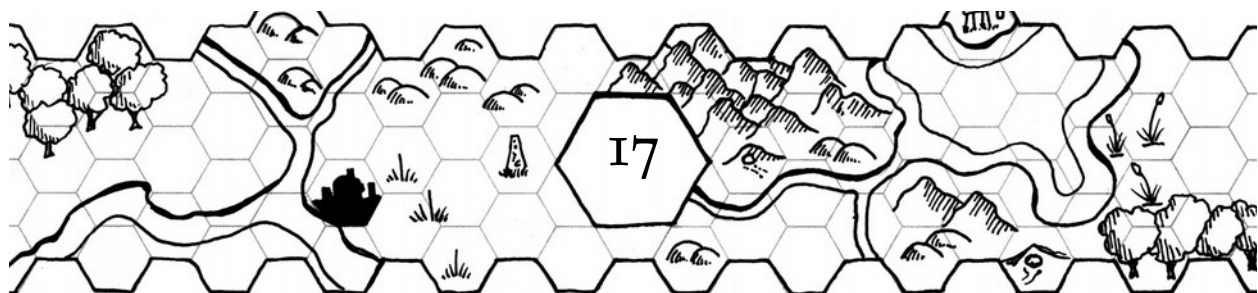
Tracking supplies

Starvation: The each member of the party must eat every day. Here again the rules are silent on how starvation affects the characters. An optional rule might be that PCs lose 1 point of Strength each day they go without eating. When a character has but 3 points of Strength left, she dies.

Aside from the luxury of bringing enough provisions along for the journey, the party may also forage for food when traveling through hospitable terrain, such as grasslands, plains, forests, hills, mountains, etc. Common sense should be a good enough guide here.

Scavenging: Scavenging food involves collecting edible plant products (e.g. low-hanging fruit, berries, nuts, drupes, edible flowers, roots, etc.) while passing through an area. While this activity does not hinder travel, enough food to feed 1 human-sized being will only be obtained 1 in 6 times (1 on 1d6). The rules are ambiguous here, so there are two options for the referee to choose from:

- Make only one roll once per day for scavenging success
- Roll for each character's scavenging success per day of effort

The first option streamlines play, while the second invites more nuanced intra-party negotiations.

Hunting: Taking a more active approach to food gathering, hunting requires an entire day's effort of tracking, stalking and dressing the kill. No traveling progress can be made. However, the chance of success is twice that of scavenging: 33% (or 1-2 on
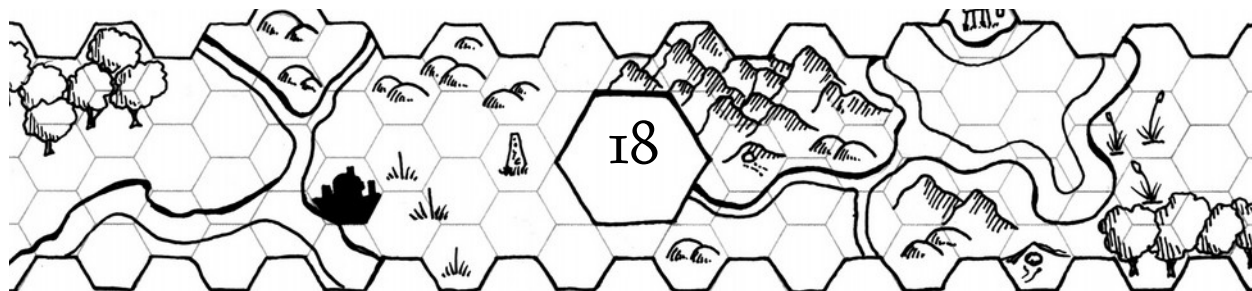
1d6). The rules are similarly mute on whether success is rolled collectively for the party or individually. The referee should decide this before play begins.
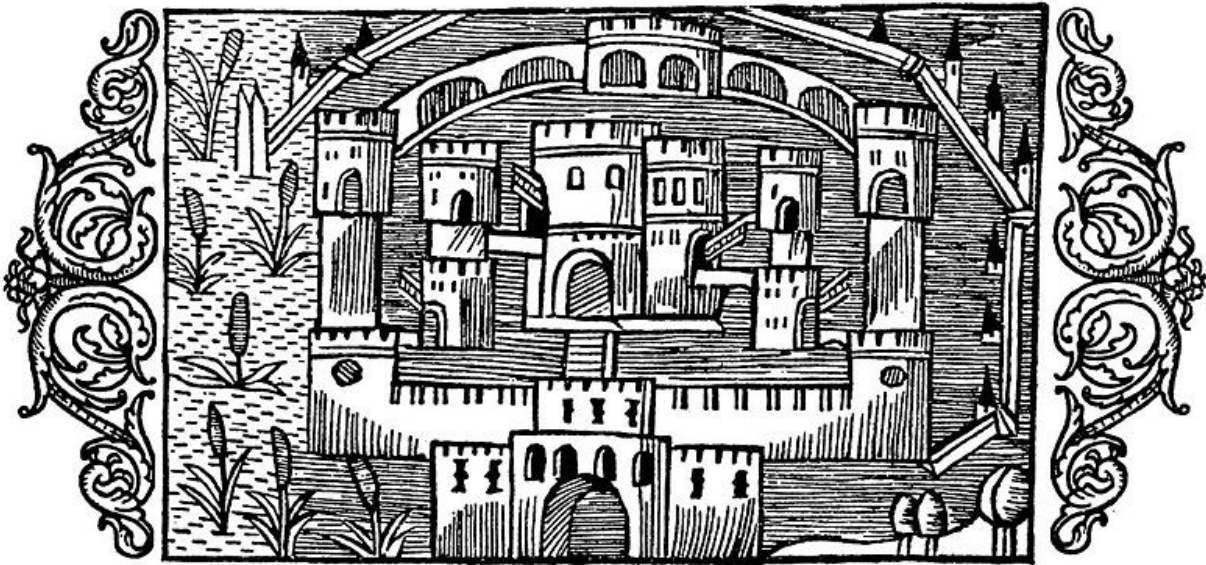
Encounters

Along the journey, the party may encounter a variety of things including:

- Monsters
- Specials: Weather & Injury

Some of these encounters will be preplanned by the referee. These include any dungeons, forts, nomadic encampments, hermetic enclosures and the like that the referee deems fit to play.

Other encounters are the less formal, random encounters. The most typical of these are monsters. The Labyrinth Lord core rulebook includes pre-built tables of level-

appropriate wilderness encounters on page 105. The referee may choose to create her own.
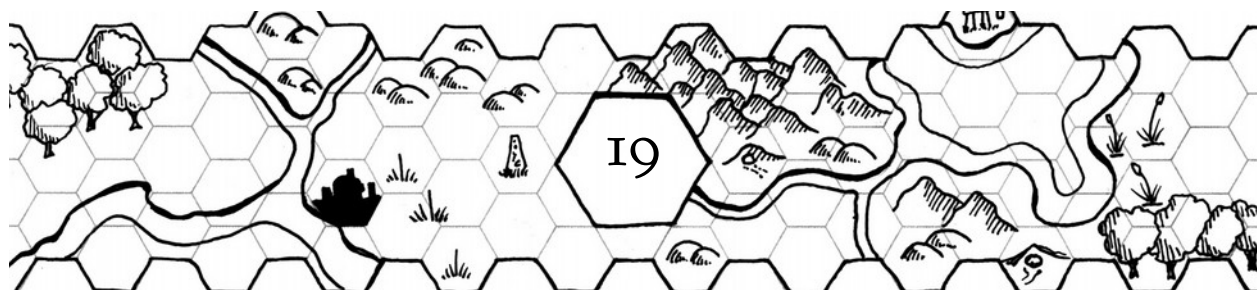
To determine if a random encounter occurs, the referee rolls a d6. The terrain that the party passes through affects the likelihood of encounter. The following table can be found on page 126 of the Labyrinth Lord core rulebook.

Table 7: Encounters by Terrain

Terrain	Encounter occurs on
Plains, Settled area	1
Desert, Forest, Hills	1-2
Mountains, Swamps, Jungle	1-3

Unfortunately, Labyrinth Lord and the Dungeon and Dragons rulebooks appear to have a contradiction concerning how often to check for random encounters. The order of play is clear that random encounters are rolled once per day. However, the party may travel through a variety of hex terrains. Which terrain should determine the probability of an encounter? The 1981 rulebook on page X57 suggests that "no more that 3 or 4 encounter checks should be made per day." How should a modern referee resolve this muddle? There are at least three options:

- Make the check based on the terrain of the starting hex
- Make the check based on the terrain of the last hex entered that day
- Make a check when a new type of terrain is entered
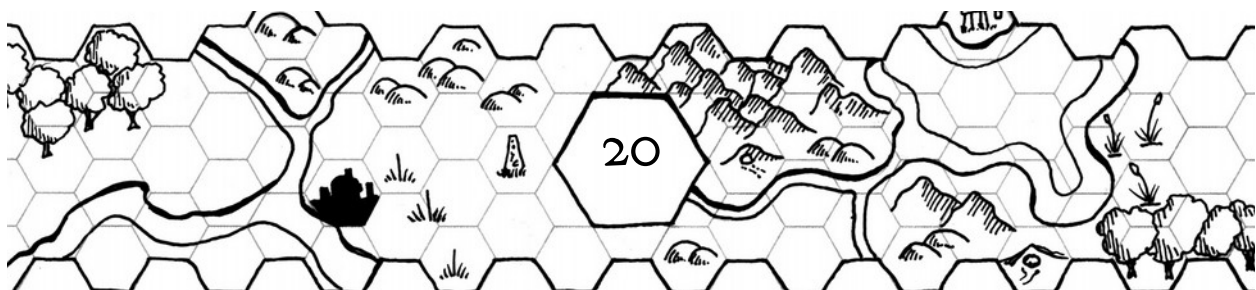
The first two options attempt to hew to the order of play rules. This has the advantage of simplicity and consistency. The last rule seems a higher fidelity simulation of what one would encounter moving into different biomes.

However the likelihood of encounters is resolved, when a monster is encountered the referee will roll 4d6 and multiply the result by 10 to get the number of yards distant the monsters appear. Table 5 could be reused to determine the monster's direction from the party.

Should the need arise, the party may attempt to flee from the encountered monsters. The rules covering such chases in the wilderness can be found on page 52 of the Labyrinth Lord core rulebook.

What could be considered a subset of random encounters includes weather, famine, injury. Any real-life adventure can be thwarted by severe weather. Below is a table of severe weather and how it affects the party. Note some of the following types occur only in certain kinds of terrain.

Table 8: Weather

Type	Effect
Violent Thunderstorm	Party's base travel rate shortened by %50 that day
Tornado	Party's base travel rate shortened by %25 that day
Hurricane	Party cannot move out of current hex that day
Blizzard	Party cannot move out of current hex that day
Forest Fire	Party must avoid forest hexes or retreat
Sand Storm	Party is automatically considered lost that day

Injury: Every dedicated hiker has had an injury to some degree. As a random encounter, when the party passes through a hex will hills or mountains, all party members must save vs. petrify or take 1d4 points of damage.

Your Turn

By now, the reader should have a clear idea of what to expect from a hexcrawl, how to play one and how to create one. One could even use the map in Figure 1 along with the description of Dunshire to have an evening's fun of fantasy adventure in the great mythic outdoors.

Happy trekking.
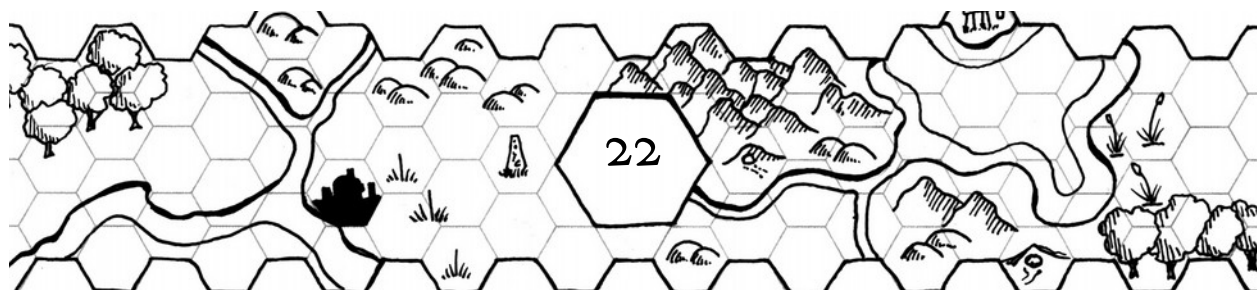
Resources

There is a wealth of information, tools and pre-built adventures out there to help get your next hexcrawl going. Here are some online resources that supplement the ample content already available in the Labyrinth Lord core rules.

Existing Hex Maps

- 387 Free Maps
- Bad Myrmidon
- The Evil of Witches Fen

Hex Map Generators

- http://axiscity.hexamon.net/users/isomage/wildgen/
- http://www.hexographer.com/
- http://donjon.bin.sh/fantasy/world/
- http://www.apolitical.info/map/

Informational Web Sites

- Medieval Demographics Made Easy
- Hex-based Campaign Design (Part 1)
- Bat in the Attic
- Game Structures – Part 6: Hexcrawls
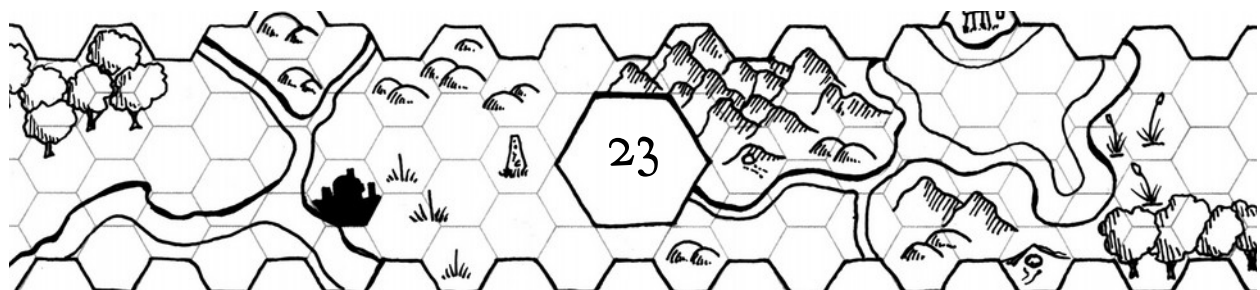
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Suggestions, corrections, encouragement: Adam Muszkiewicz, Larry Hamilton (Follow Me, And Die!), Warren Henderson, Cecil Howe, Dyson Logos, MoonSylver, Paul Wolfe, Shane Ward, Mark Zeller III, Alexander Withers

Dedication: This work is dedicated to two entities. The first is the informal **Google+ Old School Roleplaying community** whose enthusiasm and creativity directly caused this thing to be, as if by magic. The second entity is **Bruce Heard**, who shows how fascinating and engaging atlases of imaginary places can to be. Bruce, you made my summer of 1987.

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