

Bill Webb's Book of  
*Dirty Tricks*





# *Bill Webb's Book of Dirty Tricks*

## **Concept and Design**

Bill Webb and Matthew J. Finch

### **Author**

Bill Webb

### **Developer**

Skeeter Green and  
Matthew J. Finch

## **Editors**

Skeeter Green and  
Matthew J. Finch

## **Layout and Book Design**

Charles A. Wright

## **Interior Artists**

Artem Shukayev, Brian LeBlanc

---

## **FROG GOD GAMES IS**

### **CEO**

Bill Webb

**Creative Director: Swords & Wizardry**

Matthew J. Finch

**Creative Director: Pathfinder**

Greg A. Vaughan

### **Art Director**

Charles A. Wright

**To be The Man, you have to beat The Man**

Skeeter Green



**FROG  
GOD  
GAMES**

©2014 Bill Webb, Frog God Games. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden. Frog God Games and the Frog God Games logo is a trademark of Frog God Games. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places, items, art and text herein are copyrighted by Frog God Games, Inc. The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned. Compatibility with the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game requires the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game from Paizo Publishing, LLC. See <http://paizo.com/pathfinderRPG> for more information on the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. Paizo Publishing, LLC does not guarantee compatibility, and does not endorse this product. Pathfinder is a registered trademark of Paizo Publishing, LLC, and the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game and the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Compatibility Logo are trademarks of Paizo Publishing, LLC, and are used under the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. Compatibility License. See <http://paizo.com/pathfinderRPG/compatibility> for more information on the compatibility license.

**Designation of Product Identity:** The following items are hereby designated as Product Identity as provided in section 1(e) of the Open Game License: Any and all material or content that could be claimed as Product Identity pursuant to section 1(e), below, is hereby claimed as product identity, including but not limited to: **1.** The name “Frog God Games” as well as all logos and identifying marks of Frog God Games, LLC, including but not limited to the Frog God logo and the phrase “Adventures worth winning,” as well as the trade dress of Frog God Games products; **2.** The product name “Cyclopean Deeps,” as well as any and all Frog God Games product names referenced in the work; **3.** All artwork, illustration, graphic design, maps, and cartography, including any text contained within such artwork, illustration, maps or cartography; **4.** The proper names, personality, descriptions and/or motivations of all artifacts, characters, races, countries, geographic locations, plane or planes of existence, gods, deities, events, magic items, organizations and/or groups unique to this book, but not their stat blocks or other game mechanic descriptions (if any), and also excluding any such names when they are included in monster, spell or feat names. **5.** Any other content previously designated as Product Identity is hereby designated as Product Identity and is used with permission and/or pursuant to license.

# Table of Contents

---

Dirty Tricks .....	p. 3
Bill's Lost Lands House Rules .....	p. 9
The Players Got Too Much Treasure .....	p. 26
Situational Advantage (Environment) .....	p. 37
Time Wasters .....	p. 47
Wolf in Sheep's Clothing .....	p. 54
Sheep in Wolf's Clothing .....	p. 60
Trickery .....	p. 66
Greed is Bad!.....	p. 74
Legal Appendix .....	p. 78

# Dirty Tricks

---

Welcome to *Bill Webb's Book of Dirty Tricks*. This fun little tome is a GM utility for use during regular play when either too many good things happen to the players due to luck or just whenever the GM feels they need a little push to remind them that success is fleeting. Over the years I have seen many movies, read many books, and played a great deal of this game. While I usually don't steal tricks verbatim from these sources (I like to assume my victims have seen and read the same things I have), I do like to take them as general ideas and modify them to achieve the same effect.

Dirty tricks are intended to create great players. That is and should be the only reason a GM springs such things on them. It also has the effect of creating a great game, where even mundane tasks cannot be taken for granted, and boredom is rare.

*Be aware: Lots of spoilers from the classic adventure modules are in here because I use them as examples. No discussion of tricks and traps would be complete without mentioning Gary Gygax's Tomb of Horrors<sup>1</sup>, for example. If you haven't played through Tomb of Horrors yet, put this book down, get a group together, and play through that module before you keep reading.*

This book consists of portable encounter and campaign modification ideas that can be used with, or at least tailored to, virtually any level party. There are several different angles to each set of dirty tricks depending on how the GM wants to use them. These tricks are by no means an end all to end all, nor do they represent a complete listing. This author looks forward to hearing from you with your ideas for more dirty tricks. Each category is described below:

## Bill Webb's House Rules

This is a series of house rules that have been used in the *Lost Lands* for more than 35 years. If applied, these rules significantly decrease the power level of play and make the game much more difficult. We (and the author in particular) pride ourselves on a tough but fair game. Players who survive in my adventures have bragging rights few can match. Players who survive and thrive in my campaign itself are truly men (and yes, Jillian, women) of steel.

Several optional rules have been used for years in my actual campaign. Keep in mind these rules are not for everyone, as my home game is much grittier low fantasy than many other campaigns. Likewise, these rules fit well with OD&D<sup>2</sup>, but perhaps not as well with modern game systems such as 3.5<sup>3</sup> and the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game<sup>4</sup>, in some cases. The real key here is that advancement in my campaign is slow. Characters and monsters, even high level ones, are vulnerable and can be killed. Players in my game who have

---

<sup>1</sup> Gygax, Gary. *Tomb of Horrors: An Adventure for Character Levels 10-14*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Games, 1981. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Gygax, Gary, and Dave Arneson. *Dungeons & Dragons*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Hobbies, 1974. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Cook, Monte, Jonathan Tweet, and Skip Williams. *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook: Core Rulebook / V.3.5*. Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2003. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Bulmahn, Jason, Gary Gygax, and Dave Arneson. *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: Core Rulebook*. Redmond, WA: Paizo, 2009. Print.

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

reached 6th- or 7th-level are *proud* of their accomplishment. Several areas for which I have house rules and that have been in place in my *Lost Lands* campaign for 3-1/2 decades, are:

- Experience Points
- Attributes and Bonuses
- Table Dice Rolls
- Damage Rolls and The Value of Magic Weapons
- Hit Points vs. Rolls to Hit
- Travel and Getting Lost
- Food and Water
- Surprise, Initiative and Melee Order, and Spellcasting in Combat
- Hit Points, Death and Dying
- Doing Things Rather than Rolling Dice

Each GM must assess for himself how implementing these rules could affect his campaign. They are not for everyone, but those of you who want the challenge and feel of my home campaign may wish to give these a try and see how well they fit you.

## A Note to the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game crowd

Gentle Reader,

Bill's perspective and writing style assumes an "old-school" feel, with his home mechanics based on a version of the original rules, mixed with *Swords & Wizardry*, and some 3.X or Pathfinder Roleplaying Game rules sprinkled in. This makes for a fluid, exciting and utterly hair-pulling experience for those of us trying to quantify his mechanics for game-play. Throughout this book, there are sideboxes to define the concepts presented more clearly, or for a different rules system than presented in-text. The concepts here are universal, so we're trying to give mechanics for as broad a range as possible. Enjoy!

—Skeeter Green

## The Players Got Too Much Treasure

This series of tricks is designed to "take away" some of the players' ill-gotten gains based on circumstances outside of the main game. These can be used for several reasons. First, if the players simply got a little too lucky and gathered a few too many gold pieces last adventure, the GM may need to take back some of that loot without appearing capricious. Second, the dirty tricks can be used to provide impetus for the players to "get going already." Nothing spurs a group of greedy players out the door more than financial hardship. Last, it offers a sense of realism. I mean, really, who among us has not gotten a bonus at work, just to have the car break down or that tuition payment be due all in the same week? The GM giveth, and the GM taketh away ... that is just the reality of the game. Specific tricks in this category include:

- Tax Collector
- Framed!
- Wilderness Bandits
- A Friend in Need
- Holy War!
- Disaster in Home Town
- Here is your new Castle (aka The Money Pit)!

## Situational Advantage (Environment)

These tricks can be used to make what would otherwise be a simple encounter deadly. By creating a difficult environmental factor, the GM can give his monsters a significantly better chance to win in combat vs. the big bad player characters. After all, one must protect his low-level monsters from those nasty players! Alternatively, these tricks can be used to make the players use their other abilities to overcome a challenge. Be careful with this though: Falling off the slippery bridge into the chasm is a lousy way to lose a character. Players need to be able to tell stories of epic character death to appreciate play. Now, if you caused a player character to fall off the rope and into a pool of gray ooze because a goblin was hurling beehives at him from the cave entrance above, or if the evil wizard tossed a vial of *oil of slipperiness* onto the castle wall, causing the players to plummet into the 500 foot chasm below — that is worthy of a story. Specific tricks in this category include:

- Slippery Conditions
- Bad Air
- Stinky the Skunk
- Slow Movement (mud and rubble)
- Death from Above!

### SG Note:

*Oil of slipperiness* is *salve of slipperiness* in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.

## Time Wasters

This series of tricks should be used sparingly. However, they are incredibly useful in those circumstances when the players are geared to automatically succeed at something, or in those cases when you as a GM have become too predictable. They also provide an opportunity to use those random encounter tables that all GMs love. Specific situations where this GM has used some of these include the “all-elf party” where secret door detection became laughable (also known as “the reason Bill hates elves”), as well as one instance where I found that my players started casting defensive spells every time my flavor text got heavy. Specific tricks in the category include:

- Fake Secret Door
- False Adventure Lead
- Magic Key (does nothing)
- Unobtainium
- Extra Heavy Flavor Text
- Monkeys Typing Shakespeare
- Buttons and Levers

### SG Note:

In the *Swords & Wizardry* ruleset, elves has a passive 1 in 6 chance to notice a secret door, and a 4 in 6 chance when actively searching. This equates, roughly to a +3 or +4 bonus on a passive DC 20 Perception check, and up to a +16 bonus on an active check. Yes, this is why Bill hates elves.

## Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

These tricks are used to remove the predictability of what seems a safe or easy situation. Just because it's a goblin does not mean it has fewer than 8 hp and that your fighters get multiple attacks against it. Certainly we all have used those cursed items out of the rulebooks as well, although they always seemed a little unfair (you put it on and die, no save). Everyone has used the "hot chick is a vampire" version of this, and there are many, many more. I will give you a few examples of situational wolves that you may or may not have seen before. Specific tricks included here are:

- Cursed Items
- Kobolds with Toys
- Super Bunny
- Symbiotic Monsters
- The Unkillable Monster
- Beauty is Only Skin Deep

### SG Note:

In the *Swords & Wizardry* ruleset, fighters gain additional attacks when facing opponents of less than 1 hit die.

Also, in *Swords & Wizardry*, the "save or die" rule is real. The Pathfinder Roleplaying Game largely removed this, to shift survivability rates greatly to the players.

## Sheep in Wolf's Clothing

More fun for the GM and less dangerous for the players are the sheep that appear to be wolves. It always brings back memories of *The Wizard of Oz*<sup>5</sup> for me. It's a blast to have the players waste spells and magic items to completely obliterate that 1 hp bad guy. Sometimes it's dangerous to do so (remember your first gas spore?), but most of the time it's just paranoia followed by massive overkill. These tricks are particularly effective when used deep in a dungeon, right after a **Wolf in Sheep's Clothing** encounter, or in another way where the players are expecting the worst. It's quite entertaining to see if you can get the 10th-level party to negotiate a truce with the 1 HD goblin because he "scares the hell out of them."

- Kobold with a Glowing Stick (aka the "Wiz")
- Stuffed Dragon
- Scary Looking Things
- Illusions

## Trickery

These tricks are just that ... tricks. They are good ways to hide treasure and to create general chaos for adventurers. Sprinkled in occasionally, these types of tricks are good for keeping player characters on their toes, and also good for making them approach different things more carefully.

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Wizard of Oz*. MGM, 1939.

## DIRTY TRICKS

- Hidden Compartment within a Hidden Compartment
- Trap on a Trap
- Time Limited Magic Item
- The Melting Lock
- Tesseract and Teleportals
- I Can Get In and You Can't!
- I Got It, Now What?

## Greed is Bad!

Often, players get greedy. They simply are not satisfied with some random boon or thing that they have found, and seek to exploit it. I am often reminded of the Once-ler from Dr. Seuss' "*The Lorax*"<sup>6</sup> when I am motivated to use tricks like these. Having found a "good thing," the players may try to get "too much of a good thing." This, of course, must be punished.

- Collapsing Treasure Room
- The Apple Tree
- Magic Pools and Potions (is one enough and two too many?)
- Hiding in Plain Sight

## Build the Story, Don't Screw the Players

A note on the use of this book: Adding dirty tricks to the game needs to be part of the overarching storyline. If the players are constantly being confounded with trick after trick, they will grow tired of it and you will have unhappy players. If, on the other hand, you intersperse these tricks (or others of your own) into the main plots and stories of your campaign, the players gain a sense of accomplishment each time, and they will be very happy. The goal is to get that "remember that time when we ..." feeling going.

A note or two on my home campaign: I use very few monster encounters outside of actual dungeons. Weird artifacts, animals, bandits and other what one would term "easy" encounters are what populate my game world. After all, too many easy experience points can be gained by defeating slow-moving monsters when the characters have mounted bowmen. Also, if big, scary monsters roamed the world at will, humans would be extinct. And finally, after all, I find it a true test of any GM to create challenges out of things that don't just roll initiative. My old friend Steve Bishop never used a monster in any encounter I ever played with him. We fought humans, orcs and such, and we had to puzzle our way through tricks and traps constantly. It was one of the most rewarding games I ever had the pleasure to play in. Combat tests character skill; tricks and roleplaying test player skill.

I am not an advocate of monster-less play. God knows after 15 years of publishing and 4 *The Tome of Horrors* books — I love my monsters. If you enter the places where monsters are supposed to be, you will find them. Occasionally in the *Lost Lands*, they find you. Most likely, your outdoor travels encounter animals, men and other seemingly minor encounters. A few tricks that make them deadly, too. That is what this book is about.

One final note: I am a firm believer in building player skill. Anyone who has met my

---

<sup>6</sup> Seuss. *The Lorax*. New York: Random House, 1971. Print.

## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

children knows that even at 11 years old, they are formidable players. Heck, Dennis Sustare sat out a game at a convention because my daughter was not playing and it worried him that the other (adult) players would get him killed. My most memorable experience with my kids playing was, after having two evil priests throw *sticks to snakes* spells at a party, hearing my daughter say "Daddy, I cast *snake charm*."

### SG Note:

I should not have to note this, but for players who are not into the history of the game, Dr. Dennis Sustare created the druid class for 1st edition, and the spell *chariot of Sustare* was named for him.

Most of my house rules, as well as most of the tricks below have been designed and used to make good players great. In my game, and the *Lost Lands* in general, high stats and character optimization are not the keys to success. Thoughtful play and using your head are what make great players. Creative use of items and spells rather than brute force is a key to success when playing in my games.

# Bill's Lost Lands

## House Rules

---

### Experience Points

In old-school games, few experience points (XP) were given for defeating monsters. The real haul was obtaining gold. Certainly to get this gold, monsters had to be defeated, or at least tricked and stolen from. But it was gold, Gentle Reader, which got the players what they wanted, both materially and in terms of power growth. Bilbo certainly got more experience as a burglar from stealing Smaug's cup than he did from killing anything. This method of XP distributions sets up for a slow level-gain campaign. I take pride in building player skill, not character skill, in my game. Slow advancement means players learn new tricks. Life is precious, and players take a higher level of care than they do if advancement is fast. Again, this method is not for everyone, but I do find it works well for me and my players.

A great example of this for all you grognards out there relates to a piece I wrote in *Crusader Journal* a few years back. Advancement in 3.X is so rapid that it made me think about the differences in player skill at mid to high levels. In the old days, it took years to advance to say, 10th-level. It took hundreds of hours of play and lots of wits to survive that long. In later versions of the game, one could advance a level in 2 to 3 gaming sessions.

Putting this in context is a module like *Tomb of Horrors*<sup>7</sup>. Imagine a player who has 500 hours invested in learning to play his character; he knows his skills and abilities inside and out. He values and holds dear the life of his character as if it were his own. Now take a player who has maybe 50 hours of play with the same power. Now put them both in Gary's *Tomb*. The second guy is in for a short adventure.

In most old-school games, gold pieces are worth 1 XP each when taken from monsters or gained in treasure from the completion of some quest or objective. It is simple: one gold, one experience point. Monsters gain some points for the players for sure, but the ancient red dragon is worth 7700 XP and his treasure is worth 40,000 XP.

I do things a little differently. I only give experience points for gold *spent* on things that each character class would, if living in a Howard-esque world, spend it on. Gold gained can be used for any purpose, but experience is only gained from:

- For fighters and dwarves, I call it "wine, women and song." This effectively means gold that is wasted shamelessly by our heroes passing out in their soup after looting Thulsa Doom's tower; it means gambling, buying rounds for the house, and other wasteful indulgences that a war-weary brute of a fighter would spend his gold on after a hard month in the wilds.

- For clerics and druids, as well as monks, paladins and rangers, I give experience for gold donated to charity or the church, tithes as well as random acts of kindness that serve the character's mission in life. This does not include gold spent purchasing healing and *raise dead* spells for party members, but could include such if spent on NPCs.

---

<sup>7</sup> Gygax, *Tomb of Horrors*

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

- For wizard-types, gold experience is gained from spending it on magical research. Learning new spells or doing whatever freaky things these guys do. This could include purchasing rare tomes, alchemical equipment, or consultation with sages.

- For what I term “antique collectors” (thieves), gold experience is netted for everything they actually steal, plus the same “wine, women and song” that begets fighters their XP. In any case, these guys need a level or two boost to stay up with the other players in terms of power levels.

For monster experience, I typically award 1 XP per monster hit point, times the “level” of the monster. By “level,” I mean the number given under the monster listing in the *Swords & Wizardry* (or other) rulebook. For example, an ogre (a 4th-level monster) with 20 hp is worth 80 XP. A 7-HD vampire with 20 hp (a 9th-level monster) would be worth 180 XP. Seems low, but all the XP is really in the treasure — not the monsters. Watch your players start trying to avoid random encounters and try out new tactics to fool rather than kill monsters so they can steal the treasure!

## SG Note:

A similar rule of thumb for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game system would be to award 1 XP per monster hit point x its CR rating. Or use the slow advancement track for XPs. To truly replicate Bill's home flavor, *double* the slow track!

I never give XP for magic items.

I also give experience points for accomplishing objectives. For example, completing a quest is usually worth 100 XP (for quests that take 1 to 2 adventures) to 10,000 XP (for quests that take many sessions over long periods of time), depending on the length of time and complexity of the quest. This bonus XP is completely a judgment call on the part of the GM, and should be used sparingly. Another place characters can net XP is by establishing their stronghold.

Last, XP accrue immediately whenever characters return to a civilized area, and I do not require any training events or costs.

## Attributes and Bonuses

I keep this very simple. A score of 13 or higher gives a +1 to any roll involving that statistic. A score of 8 or less nets a -1 on similar rolls. Thus, character attributes are not really game-changers. The lucky dice roller who gets an 18 strength does not have a huge advantage over the poor schmuck who has all his stats under 12. It once again gets back to character skill, not luck. Keep in mind that *all* my games use 3d6 in order for character generation. To truly experience the *Lost Lands* as a campaign, this should be done.

I also implement the experience point bonuses (no minus is taken for a low score) as a 5% per attribute (prime, wisdom and charisma) above 13, just like in the main *Swords & Wizardry* rules. Even players using the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game could try this approach. It would take some getting used to, but I encourage you to give it a try and see how the players adapt. Try the 3d6 method, too. Players used to all high scores may complain at first, but after a while they get used to it and start using their heads instead of their stats to make characters legendary. The single highest level player character ever to play in my *Lost Lands* campaign (Flail the Great) had a 17 wisdom and nothing else above 9.





## Table Dice Rolls

One simple rule — no cheating. To easily enforce this without incident, I require all, including myself, to roll dice only when it is their turn (or when asked), and to roll all dice that do not require secrecy (things that players cannot know the success or failure of, like disarming a trap or finding a secret door) on the table in front of everyone. The benefit of this is that it builds team spirit as players cheer one another to “Roll that 20!” and even complex combats retain order.

A note here, this style of dice rolling makes a game extremely lethal as the GM cannot cheat the dice to save lives. I have rarely seen a GM cheat to kill a player, although I have seen dozens cheat to save them. My players know I don't, and this adds to the fairness and enjoyment of the game in my opinion. Success is earned by luck and skill, and not under false tenets.

## Damage Rolls and the Value of Magic Weapons

I use 1d6 damage for all weapons. Exceptions are as follows:

- Giants and other creatures larger than troll/ogre-sized roll 2d6, not 1d6
- Wizard weapons and daggers do 1d6-1
- Two-handed weapons do 1d6+1
- Two-weapon fighting does 1d6, and only one attack, but grants +1 to hit
- One weapon plus a shield gives +1 armor class
- Natural 20s (only) do +1 damage
- 13 or higher strength does +1 damage, and a strength less than 8 does -1 damage
- Missile weapons get a +1 bonus to hit and damage from high strength
- Improvised weapons and fists, etc. do 1d6-3 damage
- Charging lances or spears set vs. charge do +1 damage

This keeps things really simple. It even makes sense if you consider that 1d6 points of damage is enough to kill a normal man. Extra hit points on anything not giant-sized are implied to be skill and luck (from levels). This also ups the value of thieves, as they actually can cause massive damage on a backstab. It also makes *enlarge* spells quite useful.

There are no rules for critical hits and fumbles beyond an automatic hit at +1 damage (on a natural 20) and an automatic miss (on a 1). This style of game is just too deadly for “double damage” type attacks.

Magic weapons are powerful in my games. Unlike the original rules, which only gave bonuses to hit for most magic weapons, I grant a bonus to hit and damage. Hence, a +3 *sword* actually does +85% average damage over a regular sword. A +5 *sword* is almost too terrible to imagine. The GM must be very stingy with giving out such things, or else the campaign becomes unbalanced very rapidly.

## Hit Points and Rolls to Hit

Of all my house rules, this one creates the most controversy. Here goes: All creatures and characters need an 18 to hit AC 0, except monsters and pure fighters (not rangers or paladins) which need a 17. This never improves except by magic and strength bonuses (and

## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

dexterity bonuses for missiles). Thus, a 10th-level fighter and a 1st-level fighter need the same roll to hit.

OK, has everyone finished spraying the Mountain Dew out of their noses yet?

The idea here is that adding a bonus to hit along with extra hit points is double dipping. Higher-level characters not only hit easier, but can take more punishment than low-level guys. That just does not seem right. It is still hard to bust through that plate armor, even if you have 70 hp. It's commonly misunderstood that at the Battle of Agincourt, the French knights were not actually slain by arrows (although their unbarbed horses were), but instead by bowmen with daggers who killed them while incapacitated by falling wounds or mud. Armor is hard to penetrate for anyone. Arrows (or even bullets) still bounce off plate steel.

The idea here is that an attack dealing a slaying blow really only does 1d6 damage. Creatures with higher hit points just avoid that last 1d6 hit for a long time. The character skill is in the hit points, not the dice adds. A 10th-level fighter just avoids the first 9 attacks that would have killed him, only being slain when he is too weary or cut up to get out of the way. The 1st-level fighter lacks the skill (hit points) to dodge those first 9 blows.

While this does tend to make combats longer, it also gives a remote chance for a low-level player to beat a higher-level one. It means the separation in power and ability is linear rather than geometric (in relative terms). Monsters have bigger problems with heavily armored foes as well.

I treat grenade-like missiles separately. Things that would naturally ignore armor (like big rocks from giants or catapults, oil or holy water) just need to hit AC 9 (AC 10 for Pathfinder Roleplaying Game folks).

There are a few pitfalls one must observe if this rule is implemented. First, magic armor must be (like magic weapons) made very rare. A suit of +2 *plate mail* is hugely powerful. Most importantly, GMs must be very careful with placement of monsters with extremely hard to hit armor classes. Something like a will-o'-wisp is nearly impossible for anyone to hit (as it should be, really). Plate mail and shield (AC 2[17] in *Swords & Wizardry*) or full plate and a heavy steel shield (AC 21 in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game rules) is very good protection. A stone golem still needs a 16 to hit you.

Once again this increases the value of thieves (+4 to hit on a backstab), spells like *bless* and *prayer*, and magic weapons. Wizard (arcane) spells that cause damage are also deadlier (not requiring a roll to hit). I strongly advise any GMs who delve into the use of this rule play test a few combats to see what effect it has. Perhaps the best effect of implementing this rule is that hirelings and henchmen actually survive encounters.

## Travel and Getting Lost

One of the worst hazards of the wilderness is getting lost. In the *Lost Lands*, there is no GPS and few roads. Many areas are trackless wilderness, and getting from known areas to unknown areas is hard and fraught with peril. Movement through the wilds in my game is evaluated in 5-mile stretches. In the wild, there is always a chance a group can become lost and head in an unintended direction. This creates hazards related to food and water shortages, and can even lead to encounters with unintended places or monsters. In the past, I had simple applied conditions to this factor based on the old 1E *Dungeon Master's Guide*<sup>8</sup>. I encountered a simplified version while playing at a convention with my friend Jimm Johnson and have modified my approach here.

For each 5 miles moved, the party must roll 1d6 to determine if the direction they are going is as intended.

---

<sup>8</sup> Gyax, Gary. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Dungeon Masters Guide: Special Reference Work*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Games, 1979. Print.

# BILL'S LOST LANDS HOUSE RULES

**Table: Getting Lost**

Terrain Type	Lost?	Move as Desired
Plains or River	1	2-6
Hills and Mountains	1-2	3-6
Forest, Desert	1-3	4-6
Badlands, Swamp	1-4	5-6
City/Road/Trail	—	1-6
Open Ocean	1-3	4-6
<b>Modifiers (cumulative)</b> <i>Druid: +1 (land and sea)</i> <i>Ranger: +1 (land only)</i> <i>One Character with Wisdom 15+: +1</i> <i>Obvious Landmark: +1</i> <i>No Landmarks (cannot see sky or surrounding area): -2</i> <i>Familiar with area: +1 to +3, at GM's discretion</i>		

If the party is successful, they move five miles in the direction desired and nothing more occurs (until they move again). Should a party become lost, they move in a random direction as follows (1d8):

## Lost!

Roll	Direction
1	Straight ahead as intended, they got lucky
2	45 degrees right
3	90 degrees right
4	135 degrees right
5	Straight backward 180 degrees
6	135 degrees left
7	90 degrees left
8	45 degrees left

After 5 miles (1 hex) the party rolls another d6 at -1 on the roll (non-cumulative). If they are successful, they realize they are moving in the wrong direction and can choose to either backtrack (roll 1d6+1 and consult the "lost" chance again) or try to move in a different direction (roll 1d6 normally to determine success).

## SG Note:

Depending on the individual GM, overland travel in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game may be handled several ways. Some GMs prefer to roll dice and quickly get the “boring” travel done. Some roll endless dice to “liven up” the time with encounters of every form and fashion. Either way, here are some suggestions to mimic, as close as possible, Bill’s deadly wilderness. Each of these are a Knowledge (geography) check (GMs are given some leeway to make things interesting):

**Table: Getting Lost (Pathfinder Redux)**

Terrain Type	Move as Desired
Plains or River	DC 5–10
Hills and Mountains	DC 10–15
Forest, Desert	DC 15–20
Badlands, Swamp	DC 20–25
City/Road/Trail	DC 0–5
Open Ocean	DC 10–20
<b>Modifiers (cumulative)</b>	
<i>Obvious Landmark</i> : +4 circumstance bonus	
<i>No Landmarks (cannot see sky or surrounding area)</i> : –2 penalty	
<i>Familiar with area</i> : +2 to +6 circumstance bonus, at GM’s discretion	

Each hex requires a new roll from the GM. If the party is lost, roll the random direction (see **Lost!**), and the party moves in the new direction, up to their movement rate. When a new Knowledge (geography) check is required, give the PCs a –4 circumstance penalty on the roll. It’s very easy to get hopelessly lost in the *Lost Lands!*

## Food and Water, or “Let Them Eat Cake”

Travel through the wilderness and long dungeon treks often ignore several important aspects of life. One of these is food and water. Sure, a GM can extrapolate that adventurers eat rats and drink from subterranean streams, or that their travels through the plains assume that they nail a deer or a few conies each day, supplemented by berries, roots and other foods that they happen across.

In older games, especially the original rules, food and water were critically important to survival, both in and out of doors, as soon as the player characters left civilization. Anyone who has seen *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*<sup>9</sup> knows that this can also limit the amount of other gear and treasure that can be carried forth from the Aztec tomb, dragon’s lair, the dungeon, or anywhere else the players explore.

<sup>9</sup> *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., 1948.

# BILL'S LOST LANDS HOUSE RULES

One almost totally forgotten limitation to the player characters being able to carry mountains of loot and gear into the wilds is food. There is a reason that *create food* was a 5th-level spell in early versions of the game, available when a cleric reached 7th level; no mean feat (in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, *create food and water* is a 3rd-level cleric/oracle spell, available at 5th level). Not having to carry or worry about food creates a false “easiness” for adventurers. It also forces them to spend hard-earned gold on retainers, wagons and rations. The system below is designed to be fast and easy to use.

A typical traveler needs a gallon of water and 2 pounds of food each day. Horses need more than that amount. Hot or cold conditions, as well as strenuous activity, necessitate even higher intake amounts.

Food and water amounts required each day are as follows:

**Table: Food & Water Needs**

<b>Creature</b>	<b>Food (pounds)</b>	<b>Water (gallons)</b>
<b>Man</b>	2	1
<b>Light Horse</b>	4	5
<b>Medium Horse</b>	6	7
<b>Heavy Horse</b>	10	10
<b>Draft Horse</b>	8*	8
<b>Mule</b>	4*	5
<b>Dog, large</b>	0*	1

\*Draft horses, mules and dogs are hardy, and can forage food as long as conditions permit (eating scrub for horses and mules and mice, etc., for dogs). Obviously, things like frozen or desert conditions prevent this. Other creatures (e.g. camels) can be handled as the GM sees fit.

**Modifiers**  
Temperature greater than 80 degrees: double water need  
Temperature greater than 100 degrees: triple water need  
Temperature less than 30 degrees: double water need  
Temperature less than zero degrees: triple water need

Lack of water weakens creatures (−4 constitution per day after the first day). Lack of food has the same effect, but to a lesser extent (−1 constitution per day). Anything losing constitution this way loses movement capability at the same rate (e.g. 25% constitution loss is 25% movement loss).

## **SG Note:**

Starvation and thirst are covered in the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*, **Environment**, “Starvation and Thirst”)

## Foraging

Alternatively, players could forage their way through the wilds. This creates high value for ranger and druid characters (tracking, identification of safe water and food sources) as well as the ability to use some spells (*locate plants*, *locate animals*, *purify water*, *create water*) that are often

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

deemed worthless to players. I allow the player characters to forage by using one-third of their daily movement for each attempt. Success in foraging is dependent on a dice roll as follows (roll 1d20):

**Table: Foraging Success or Failure**

Roll	Result
1-10	Failure
11-16	Roll once on the table below
17-19	Roll twice on the table below
20	Roll 4 times on the table below
<b>Modifiers (individual)</b> <i>Druid: +3</i> <i>Ranger: +2</i> <i>Thief: +1</i> <i>Wisdom greater than 15: +1</i> <i>Wisdom less than 7: -1</i>	

Foraging generates food and water for each individual that is successful as follows:

**Table: Foraging Results**

Roll	Result		
01-50	No food and 3d6 gallons of water		
51-75	1d6 pounds of food and unlimited water		
76-80	3d6 pounds of food and unlimited water		
81-89	6d6 pounds of food and unlimited water		
90-95	No food and poisoned/tainted water (save or catch disease [parasites, 80%] or die [poison, 20%])		
96-00	Poisoned food and unlimited water (save or die in 1d3 days)		
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%; vertical-align: top;"> <b>Modifiers</b>  <b>(areas to be modified by the GM as desired as well)</b>                      Certain terrain types generate more food and water than others. What I typically use as a rule is as follows:  <i>Desert:</i> Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 1d6 gallons of water.  <i>Ocean:</i> No water is available.  <i>Plains:</i> None.  <i>Hills:</i> All food is +1d6.  <i>Forest:</i> All food is +1d6.  <i>Mountains:</i> All food is -1d6.  <i>Swamp:</i> 75% chance water causes disease.  <i>Scrub/badlands:</i> Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 2d6 gallons of water.  <i>River:</i> All rolls result in unlimited water.  <i>Underground (assumes living caves):</i> Food is one-third amount rolled. Water is dependent on conditions.                 </td> <td style="width: 30%; vertical-align: top;"> <b>Note</b>                      Druids of 3rd-level and higher are never affected by the conditions of rolls of 90-100, and can prevent the same if they inspect food and water before ingestion. Taint can be removed by use of a <i>purify water</i> spell. Poison food (e.g. toadstools) cannot be made nonpoisonous.                 </td> </tr> </table>		<b>Modifiers</b> <b>(areas to be modified by the GM as desired as well)</b> Certain terrain types generate more food and water than others. What I typically use as a rule is as follows: <i>Desert:</i> Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 1d6 gallons of water. <i>Ocean:</i> No water is available. <i>Plains:</i> None. <i>Hills:</i> All food is +1d6. <i>Forest:</i> All food is +1d6. <i>Mountains:</i> All food is -1d6. <i>Swamp:</i> 75% chance water causes disease. <i>Scrub/badlands:</i> Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 2d6 gallons of water. <i>River:</i> All rolls result in unlimited water. <i>Underground (assumes living caves):</i> Food is one-third amount rolled. Water is dependent on conditions.	<b>Note</b> Druids of 3rd-level and higher are never affected by the conditions of rolls of 90-100, and can prevent the same if they inspect food and water before ingestion. Taint can be removed by use of a <i>purify water</i> spell. Poison food (e.g. toadstools) cannot be made nonpoisonous.
<b>Modifiers</b> <b>(areas to be modified by the GM as desired as well)</b> Certain terrain types generate more food and water than others. What I typically use as a rule is as follows: <i>Desert:</i> Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 1d6 gallons of water. <i>Ocean:</i> No water is available. <i>Plains:</i> None. <i>Hills:</i> All food is +1d6. <i>Forest:</i> All food is +1d6. <i>Mountains:</i> All food is -1d6. <i>Swamp:</i> 75% chance water causes disease. <i>Scrub/badlands:</i> Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 2d6 gallons of water. <i>River:</i> All rolls result in unlimited water. <i>Underground (assumes living caves):</i> Food is one-third amount rolled. Water is dependent on conditions.	<b>Note</b> Druids of 3rd-level and higher are never affected by the conditions of rolls of 90-100, and can prevent the same if they inspect food and water before ingestion. Taint can be removed by use of a <i>purify water</i> spell. Poison food (e.g. toadstools) cannot be made nonpoisonous.		

## SG Note:

Simply put, Bill's advice works for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game system as-written. If, however, you wish to use more Knowledge checks, try these out:

**Table: Survival Check Foraging Success or Failure**

DC	Result
>10	Failure
11-20	Roll once on the table below
21-25	Roll twice on the table below
26+	Roll 4 times on the table below

Foraging generates food and water for each individual that is successful as follows:

**Table: Foraging Results**

Roll	Result
01-50	No food and 3d6 gallons of water
51-75	1d6 pounds of food and unlimited water
76-80	3d6 pounds of food and unlimited water
81-89	6d6 pounds of food and unlimited water
90-95	No food and poisoned/tainted water (DC 20 Fort save or catch disease [80%; filth fever] or poisoned [20%; Filthy Water, type poison (ingested); save Fortitude DC 11; onset 10 minutes; frequency 1/minute for 4 minutes; effect 1d3 Wis damage and 1 Int damage; cure 1 save])
96-00	Poisoned food and unlimited water (save or die in 1d3 days)

**Modifiers (areas to be modified by the GM as desired as well)**

Certain terrain types generate more food and water than others. What I typically use as a rule is as follows:

**Desert:** Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 1d6 gallons of water.

**Ocean:** No water is available.

**Plains:** None.

**Hills:** All food is +1d6.

**Forest:** All food is +1d6.

**Mountains:** All food is -1d6.

**Swamp:** 75% chance water causes disease.

**Scrub/badlands:** Rolls of 01-50 result in no water. Rolls of 51-80 result in 2d6 gallons of water.

**River:** All rolls result in unlimited water.

**Underground (assumes living caves):** Food is one-third amount rolled. Water is dependent on conditions.

# Surprise, Initiative, and Melee Order and Spellcasting in Combat

I tend to try to keep combat really simple. To that end, after surprise is determined, initiative is rolled each round for each party (the players and the monsters), and everyone just goes in order of dexterity on their side's turn.

Surprise is rolled on 1d6 for each party, with a 1–2 indicating that the group is surprised (a 1 with a Ranger in the group). Certain monsters can modify this, as can circumstances at the GM's discretion (e.g. if the player characters are using light in a dark place, they cannot surprise a creature that does not need light if in an open space). Surprise rounds grant the side that is not surprised 1 full round of actions. If both sides are surprised, or if neither is, the melee (tactical) round begins with an initiative roll.

Initiative rolls are likewise accomplished by rolling 1d6. Highest roll goes first. The player characters go in order of dexterity, and the monsters just go in whatever order the GM wishes. Actions before the initiative roll include:

- Declare Spells
- Declare Missile Fire
- Change Weapons
- Parley (talk)

Only after these are stated is the die rolled.

Thus, it is possible for an unlucky individual to have changed over to his bow and arrow, only to have a creature move in and melee him, losing an attack. Likewise, a spellcaster or archer must decide *before* initiative is determined whether or not he will cast a spell. If he loses initiative and is hit, the spell is lost. Any hit on a spellcaster that causes any damage disrupts the spell and prevents effective missile fire. A creature attempting to parley is assumed to have lowered his defenses, and an attacker gains a +1 to hit him during that round.

Once initiative is determined, all actions simply go in order of dexterity (unless it's a really long action, as determined by the GM). To keep it simple, I don't differentiate between a spell, an arrow or a sword slash.

## Hit Points, Death and Dying

A few house rules apply to this.

First, all 1st-level characters start with maximum hit points. After that, it's a roll. Seems strange that I am kind in this regard, but it's just too heartbreaking to play a 1 hp fighter. Player characters die at negative hit points equal to their level plus their constitution bonus (minimum 0). Hence a 3rd-level character with a 13 constitution lives to -4 hp, and a 10th-level character with a 6 constitution dies at -9 hp. If a character is killed, I do allow fairly readily accessible *raise dead* spells, assuming a Lawful Temple is close at hand (for a fee, and sometimes assuming a *quest* spell). The player characters have 1 day per level of the receiving cleric to get the body to a temple. Anyone slain loses 1 constitution point each time they are killed.

### SG Note:

In the *Swords & Wizardry* system, Lawful is considered the same as "good".

# Doing Things Rather than Rolling Dice

Back in the old days, there were no such things as thieves. The only way to locate a trap was to ask the GM to describe what you saw. Secret doors could be found with a dice roll, true, but to open them, you had to say exactly what you were doing and how.

When I added thieves to my game in 1978 or so, I allowed traps to be detected without a roll — but to disarm one, you still had to describe to me what you were doing and how. To be fair, characters with high disarm scores or with an ability to detect something (like elves with secret doors or dwarves with stone traps) were given more or better descriptive information, but everyone still had to interact with me as a GM rather than simply roll a die. The GM should give characters with better skills a better understanding of the effects of what they are doing could be. It should not be definite, but to tell the dwarf player “Based on your knowledge of stonework, it appears that the ceiling block may be triggered by moving the loose stone to the left” is reasonable (assuming you made the dice roll indicating he understood it). Likewise, telling the elf player “There appears to be a series of buttons along the edge of the wall. Two of them are slightly depressed and the other two protrude slightly from the wall” is a lot cooler than saying “Oh look, a secret door is present on the north wall.”

What this does is creates a realism of how something works, and converts traps and secret doors into something special rather than just a humdrum roll. In our publication *Tome of Adventure Design*, Matt Finch provides hundreds of pages of material that can assist you in this type of thing. Two examples are repeated here to illustrate what I mean by this. Anyone who truly wishes to implement this type of play into his adventures would benefit greatly from owning that book.

Doors and secret doors become interesting and more meaningful if you describe how they are opened. An example of how this could be done is:

**Table: Unusual Mechanisms for Normal Door**

Die Roll	Roll on this column (d100)	And then this column (d100)	And then roll on this column (d100)
01-02	Rotate (clockwise)	The Falcon head	Three times
03-04	Rotate (counterclockwise)	The King's crown	Forcefully
05-06	Lift up	The Second button	Hard
07-08	Push in	Each knob	Slowly
09-10	Push up	The shortest lever	Quickly
11-12	Push down	The entire keyhole	Carefully
13-14	Push left	The large flagstone	Until it clicks
15-16	Push right	The handle	Until the keyhole appears
17-18	Slide up	The serpent's tongue	Until the latch appears
19-20	Slide down	The curtain rod	Until the latch opens
21-22	Slide	The disk under the latch	Until the button pops up
23-24	Pull	The hidden lever	While the other door is closed
25-26	Pull down on	The doorknob	At the indicated time
27-28	Pull up on	The glass pane	While saying the word “Ni.”
29-30	Turn around	The gargoyle's buttocks	Until the real door opens

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

## Table: Unusual Mechanisms for Normal Door Continued

Die Roll	Roll on this column (d100)	And then this column (d100)	And then roll on this column (d100)
31-32	Turn	The carving on the bottom	Just after the chime sounds
33-34	Remove	The middle face	Then jump back
35-36	Use water on	The rope	Then run like hell
37-38	Apply heat to	The torch sconce	But pull your hand back quickly
39-40	Squeeze	The skull	Until the floor opens
41-42	Close	The statue	As hard as you can
43-44	Open	The eye of the idol	Until it aligns with the other side
45-46	Replace	The blue stone	Until it lines up with the yellow marker – NOT the red marker
47-48	Take weight off	The spiral thingy	To get it into the other socket
49-50	Put weight on	The knob	To make it match the other side
51-52	Shake	The numbered dial	While the eye of the statue is closed
53-54	Twist	The red pin	In complete darkness
55-56	Lower	The water valve	From a distance
57-58	Cover up	The large gear	Using a mental command
59-60	Shine bright light on	The twisted wire	Which is in the other room
61-62	Pry out	The other door	Out in the hallway
63-64	Use a wrench on	The floorboard	Until the water-tubes connect
65-66	Use electric shock on	The tripwire-looking thing	Until the electrical arcs have started
67-68	Press on	The hook	Then back away
69-70	Apply pressure to	The eyeball	Then cover your eyes
71-72	Move	The bell-pull	Until blood flows
73-74	Unfasten	The chain	Until you have heard two clicks
75-76	Lift and turn	The triangular piece	When it glows
77-78	Press and then turn	The faucet	While standing on the pressure plate
79-80	Disconnect	The carved hand	Until the other one makes a clicking noise
81-82	Reconnect	The eye of the tiger	Until the ticking noise stops
83-84	Hit	The gem	To start the process
85-86	Crank	The loop	Until the tubes fill with liquid
87-88	Don't touch	The talking part	In complete silence
89-90	Touch	The fig leaf	Very gently
91-92	Take pressure off	The wheel	Until the illusion disappears
93-94	Strike	The bolt	And wait for three hours
95-96	Uncover	The bladed apparatus	To remove the magnetic force
97-98	Rotate	The coupling	To make the stone rise
99-00	Spin	The decorative wing-nut	To keep that obviously very bad contingency from occurring

# BILL'S LOST LANDS HOUSE RULES

In my opinion, description and disarming of traps by describing them is even more important. The act of disarming the trap and saving the party, or of an epic failure causing the death of a player character, should not be left to a dice roll alone. Some examples the GM can use to describe “how traps work” and how players can try to disarm them are:

**Table: Mechanical traps – Concealment, Complicated Triggers**

Die Roll	Trap Concealment (d100)	Complicated Trigger (d100)
01-02	Alcove	A chemical requires a certain level of coolness to remain inactive. Nearby flames (such as torches) cause it to react and activate the trap
03-04	Altar	A chemical requires a certain level of heat to remain inactive. Shadows cause it to react and activate the trap
05-06	Aquarium	A coating of grease covers a substance that heats up when exposed to air; if the grease is smeared, the heat of the chemical reaction activates the trap
07-08	Barrel or cask	A feather is suspended over a very delicate pressure plate. If it is blown down by air currents, it will activate the trap when it lands (so would other very light objects)
09-10	Bath or basin	A glass globe (possibly quite small) contains a chemical that is highly reactive when exposed to air. If the globe breaks (and is still in the right place) the heat of the chemical reaction activates the trap
11-12	Bed	A hanging object or an object resting on the floor holds down a vertical tripwire. If the object is removed, the tripwire flies into the ceiling (probably due to a counterweight) and the trap is activated
13-14	Book	A highly reactive powder is located upon a heat sensor of some kind. Body heat, oils in skin, or exhaled carbon dioxide concentrations (three different triggers, here) cause the powder to react and activate the heat sensor or burn through a thread
15-16	Bookshelves	A part of the item can be moved, and contains a lever that activates the trap
17-18	Box or crate	Acid container tips onto string; when spring snaps, trap is activated
19-20	Bridge	Acid container tips onto string; when spring snaps, trap is activated
21-22	Cabinet	Beam of light (possibly invisible, possibly not, possibly visible only with unusual type of vision) has a “photoreceptor”: if the beam of light is broken, the trap is activated
23-24	Carpet or rug	Beam of light (possibly invisible, possibly not, possibly visible only with unusual type of vision) has a “photoreceptor.” Something blocks the beam of light, but if that item is moved, the light will hit the photoreceptor and activate the trap
25-26	Ceiling hook	Beam of light (possibly invisible, possibly not, possibly visible only with unusual type of vision) has a “photoreceptor”: if the beam of light is broken, the trap is activated
27-28	Chair or throne	Beam of light (possibly invisible, possibly not, possibly visible only with unusual type of vision) has a “photoreceptor.” Something blocks the beam of light, but if that item is moved, the light will hit the photoreceptor and activate the trap
29-30	Chest	Blade cuts twine if moved
31-32	Corpse	Blade cuts twine if moved
33-34	Dais, platform or stage	Change-up. A hammer is held suspended by a latch, which, if opened will cause the hammer to strike an obvious pressure plate. That pressure plate HAS to be hit in order to temporarily de-activate another, hidden, pressure plate in the floor. The pressure plate in the floor is the one that activates a trap.
35-36	Desk	Flint sparks a trail of flammable powder to the triggering point

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

Die Roll	Trap Concealment (d100)	Complicated Trigger (d100)
37-38	Display case	Flint sparks a trail of flammable powder to the triggering point
39-40	Door	Guitar-type string, if plucked, establishes a frequency that breaks a little sliver of glass, activating the trap
41-42	Door hinges	Latch releases gears to begin moving, if the latch is accidentally pulled off its holder
43-44	Doorknob or latch	Latch releases gears to begin moving, if the latch is accidentally pulled off its holder
45-46	Fireplace	Piece of tubing contains gas or liquid under pressure. The pressure keeps the trap from functioning; if a stopper is removed (possibly attached to a wire or chain), the pressure is removed and the trap activates. Same result if the tubing is broken or pierced.
47-48	Flagstone in floor	Pin (like that of a grenade) hold trap from functioning unless it is pulled from its socket
49-50	Forge or anvil	Pin (like that of a grenade) hold trap from functioning unless it is pulled from its socket
51-52	Fountain	Pressure plate with weight on it releases when weight removed
53-54	Idol or statue	Pressure plate with weight on it releases when weight removed
55-56	Jar, pot, urn	Pressure plate with weight on it releases when weight removed
57-58	Ladder	Pressure plate: when depressed, the trap is activated
59-60	Lamp	Pressure plate: when depressed, the trap is activated
61-62	Machine	Pressure plate: when depressed, the trap is activated
63-64	Manacles or chains	Pressure plate: when depressed, the trap is activated
65-66	Mirror	Pull-wire on item releases trap
67-68	Oven	Pull-wire on item releases trap
69-70	Pedestal	Pull-wire on item releases trap
71-72	Pews or benches	Sliding bolt keeps hidden gears from moving unless the bolt is pulled from its socket
73-74	Pillar or column	Sliding bolt keeps hidden gears from moving unless the bolt is pulled from its socket
75-76	Pool	Sliver of blown glass contains a light beam or a corrosive liquid that activates the trap if the piece of glass is broken
77-78	Portcullis	Something is delicately balanced upon a button. If it falls, the removal of weight lifts a pin and activates the trap
79-80	Railing	Spring releases trap
81-82	Ramp	Spring releases trap
83-84	Stairs	Trap is located on a balanced "seesaw" with another counterweight; if either item is removed, the seesaw will press onto a trigger and activate the trap
85-86	Stove	Trap is located on a balanced "seesaw" with another counterweight; if either item is removed, the seesaw will pull up a chain and activate the trap
87-88	Sundial	Trap is located on a balanced "seesaw" with another counterweight; if either item is removed, the seesaw will press onto a trigger and activate the trap
89-90	Table	Trap is located on a balanced "seesaw" with another counterweight; if either item is removed, the seesaw will pull up a chain and activate the trap

# BILL'S LOST LANDS HOUSE RULES

Die Roll	Trap Concealment (d100)	Complicated Trigger (d100)
91-92	Tapestry	Tripwire activates trap when pulled
93-94	Taxidermy piece	Tripwire activates trap when pulled
95-96	Telescope or kaleidoscope	Tripwire activates trap when pulled
97-98	Toilets or privy	Tripwire activates trap when pulled
99-00	Torch or sconce	Water container in trap, if disturbed, splashes water onto reactive substance; chemical reaction releases trap

## SG Note:

To add a sense of Bill's house rules to the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, a GM might give a PC a +2 to +6 bonus on Perception checks for vividly describing how they search.

# The Players Got Too Much Treasure

---



# Tax Collector

As the adage goes, nothing in life is certain except death and taxes. Having recently cheated death (assuming the players survived to gather treasure), the local lord/king, etc., has learned that a rich hoard of treasure was taken within his domain. Now he wants the players to wet his beak, because, after all, they are his subjects; or at least they are under his “protection” and within his domain.

The initial contact occurs when the players are back in town, right after they have spent a large sum on whatever it was that they wanted to buy (armor, horses, magic, etc.). Whatever the cause, the “rich” adventurers’ rampant spending catches the eye of an agent of the local tax collector.

The players are approached by the tax collector named, sure why not, Paul the tax collector, accompanied by six men-at-arms, all wearing the regalia of the local lord. Paul informs the players that he has learned that they recently came into a large amount of wealth, and that he has been instructed to inventory and value this wealth for purposes of the local income tax. Paul evaluates wealth based on retail (e.g. book) value of all mundane items. He is not a wizard, nor can he properly assess magic item values. Hence, a *staff of power* looks (to him) just like a fancy carved wooden staff, maybe with a few gems encrusted on it.

The tax rate, he explains, is 25% of the total value of wealth gained per year, and since the players are new to the area, the baseline amount (25% of their total wealth) is due now. Not to worry, he goes on, subsequent years will be taxed based on the amount of “new wealth” gained, and not residuals on the existing wealth assessed this year.

Now, part of what he says is true, and part is a lie. The local lord did indeed send him to collect a tax — but that tax is supposed to be 10%, not 25%. Paul and his men at arms are adding a “surcharge” to the lord’s taxes.

Several courses of action are open to the party at this point. First, they could just openly and honestly pay Paul the 25% and be done. Second, they could kill Paul and his men, thereby becoming outlaws in the realm and having the full force and opposition of the local lord against them while within the area. Third, they could comply with Paul’s request, but hide/hedge on the amount of material wealth they actually have (love that *bag of holding!*). A fourth course of action would be to demand to see the lord, which Paul attempts to stop (since he is a crook) by negotiating down the amount to tax (but never to less than 15%). Finally, they could just ride on over to the lord’s castle and negotiate payment with him directly.

Each of these scenarios is a great opportunity for roleplaying and setting the stage for local adventure hooks. Perhaps they pay the lord, but are offered service or land (see “**Here is your Castle [aka The Money Pit]**” below). Perhaps the lord has missions to send them on (e.g. adventures), or is an evil, greedy bastard intent on fleecing them out of their gains. In any case, this writer has found interaction with the local nobility to be particularly useful for making things happen in a campaign. Even better, you get to make your player’s characters pay for the privilege of getting adventure hooks and political connections. The clever GM uses this trick as an opportunity to flesh out his campaign. If it provides an opportunity to take away some of the players’ gold as well, all the better.

## Framed!

While not a particularly new or innovative dirty trick, this oldie but goodie can still have its place and be fun to add into a campaign, particularly if the GM is in need of a good roleplaying mystery session. The cliché encounter is to have a player character’s weapon

## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

found with a dead victim, or even to have an assassin using the disguise ability dress up like a character and murder someone with witnesses present.

Alternatively, a well could be poisoned, an adversary's farm burned or wife kidnapped, or some form of treason laid to rest at the character's feet. Certainly anyone who needs ideas on this could watch a few episodes of *The Tudors*<sup>10</sup> and get some ideas. This dirty trick is a tried-and-true method of generating an exciting adventure throughout the annals of literature and film.

Two methods of using this dirty trick can have very separate scenarios. The first and most obvious is the "prove them innocent and catch the bad guy" scenario. This one can force the player characters to examine their morals, perhaps even forcing certain lawful types (e.g. paladins) to submit themselves for justice. Other thoughts include a hostage trade to give them a month to prove their innocence or the hostage dies in their place (think Damon and Pythias). Alternatively, if a non-capital crime, perhaps they could be required as punishment to submit to a *geas* or *quest*.

The second, and in my opinion more fun option, is the "imprison the characters, take their stuff, and see how they react/escape" version. After all, one of their "mother's sister's cousins" may have told them of a secret way out of the dungeon (*Conan the Barbarian*<sup>11</sup>). Perhaps the princess has fallen in love with them (e.g. *Jason and the Argonauts*<sup>12</sup>, *Braveheart*<sup>13</sup>), or perhaps instead they just have to arrange an escape or rescue (*Robin Hood*<sup>14</sup>).

One very challenging way to do this is to have them captured and imprisoned in the deep dungeons below the city. Have the guard be a man that they once fought beside, perhaps even saved the life of, in a battle. After a few days, the slop tray conveniently contains a method of escape: a key, a set of lock picks, etc.



<sup>10</sup> "The Tudors." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, Feb. 2014

<sup>11</sup> *Conan the Barbarian*. MCA, 1982.

<sup>12</sup> *Jason and the Argonauts*. Time, 1963.

<sup>13</sup> *Braveheart*. Paramount Pictures, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> *Robin Hood*. Universal, 2010.

## THE PLAYERS GOT TOO MUCH TREASURE

The characters cannot go up and out of the dungeon, so they have to exit the city through the underworld — *without gear and spells*. Creating a hostile circumstance like this forces the characters to rely on their wits and not their +5 *holy avenger*. The GM simply creates a method (hopefully a chase scene) where the players have to run through a gauntlet of the populated dungeon (without killing any guards, since this would actually be a crime they were guilty of!), perhaps landing in a sewer system for cavern system below it. The challenge then becomes a survival race. They have to figure a way out of this underworld (without gear), figure out a method of exiting the underworld without being recaptured, and escape the area. Only then can they sort out a way to prove their innocence (perhaps re-entering the city in disguise?) and become outlaws in the process (very tough on the egos of Lawful characters). As the GM, you should provide them ample opportunity to prove themselves true, and thus regain their stuff.

Have fun with this one. Players always do. I don't think I have seen more high-fives and bigger smiles than when they have exonerated themselves and caught the bad guys.

## Wilderness Bandits

Those of you familiar with *Rappan Athuk* have seen this type of dirty trick before. As Thomas Tusser once famously said, “A fool and his money are soon parted.” The antagonists in this trick are well versed in taking loot from “fools” who go into the dungeon, barely make it out again, and expect that whatever they take out will actually go home with them. It should teach them to save something for the way back.

This trick is designed to teach a lesson to those who overstretch themselves and expect that the wilderness is actually safe to travel home through. Everyone knows that dungeons are dangerous, and some have learned that folk leaving the dungeon are usually weak, wounded and rich. For those grognards out there, this type of trick was used heavily in the old days. I have used two types of this trick over the years, the first I call the “**Gatekeeper**,” and the second is the “**Opportunist**.”

## The Gatekeeper

Several very well-known modules from the '70s used a dragon gatekeeper who would “tax” parties going in and out of “its” dungeon. The dragon, you see, was far too large to fit in the entryway. Likewise, the tax rate was not too heavy — after all, the keeper *wants* adventurers going in and grabbing him loot. Too high a fee and they might either attack the dragon (just bad for business) or decide to go elsewhere. While dragons make excellent gatekeeper types, a myriad of other creatures could be used in their stead. Basically anything intelligent and powerful that does not want to/cannot enter the dungeon. This critter just sets up camp at or near the dungeon entrance and charges a fee, either as a fixed rate or a percentage, of anything taken out. I usually have the beastie ask for 30%–50%, subject to negotiation of course. Cruel GMs give the gatekeeper a means of detecting magic — that way, magic items can be assessed and taxed as well.

The GM should take care to ensure that the beastie is large and powerful enough that the players don't just decide to kill it. One advantage of this type of trick is that the GM can use the gatekeeper as a source of rumors and legends about what is inside — either for a charged fee or just as a roleplaying opportunity (after all, the gatekeeper *wants* the players to bring out more loot). Alternatively, this can be used as a source of adventure links or missions. For example, the gatekeeper might send the players on a quest to obtain a certain item, with promise of a reward or some information, etc., should they succeed. Again, this type of trick can be used as a source of campaign enrichment, similar to the **Tax**

**Collector**, the players can develop long-term relationships with the Gatekeeper monster, perhaps developing a symbiotic friendship at some point (powerful monsters need minions like the PCs after all!).

## The Opportunist

“Stand and deliver” is the battle cry of the opportunist. These bandits watch for groups of adventurers going into places where there is loot, let the adventurers do the hard work of obtaining it (think Belloq in *Indiana Jones*<sup>15</sup>), and then grab them on the way out — presumably weakened, wounded and low on spells. They live by the adage that it’s much wiser to have someone else do the dirty work for you and reap the rewards that others worked for. Many of these guys grow up to be oil barons or Wall Street CEOs in later life.

The rule of thumb I use for this type of trick (encounter really) is a non-player character or monster group of approximately the same power level as the player characters if they were fully prepped and healed. Unlike the gatekeeper type of bandit, the opportunist rarely forms a long-term relationship with the players (and often forms the basis of the “hunt it down and kill it” adventure). These guys tend to make players *very* angry. These bandits are usually not in it for the long haul, and don’t hesitate to attack and kill a group if they believe they can.

The typical way to use the opportunist is with an ambush. Either they take over the players’ henchman-staffed camp (and horses), holding it hostage when the characters emerge from the dungeon, or else they hide in the bushes and emerge with arrows nocked and spells ready when our heroes start toward civilization again. These guys’ only goal is to take everything the characters have and walk away.

For these types of encounters, I like to use a few powerful foes laced with many weaker ones (usually all armed with missile weapons). A good example would be an NPC party of equal or slightly lower level (approx. 1–2 levels lower) than the PCs with a corps of 30 or so men-at-arms with bows or crossbows (and orders to shoot arrows at the unarmored “wizards” and run away from Joe Platemail III types). I have also used a higher-level wizard with a troll pack, as well as an ogre with 200 kobolds.

The key to this type of encounter is that it should be a) dangerous but possibly defeatable and b) the bad guys really do not want to fight. They want loot, but fight to obtain it if they think they can win. These types are usually cowardly (else they would go into the dungeon themselves), and usually flee if they might lose. Where the gatekeeper-style encounter (a lion) must include a super-powerful beastie (else the gatekeeper would have been slain by every group that came before), the opportunist exists to prey upon the weak (a coyote pack). The clever GM uses the opportunist encounter to make the players mad. Pure and simple. Once they are mad, the next game session is almost certainly dedicated to getting revenge.

## A Friend in Need

How many times have you seen this happen: An old friend, down on his luck, needs your help. Sometimes its circumstance, sometimes just bad luck, and sometimes, well, you know. One great way to take some of that treasure away from your players is to tug on the old heart strings. Remember that bartender in that inn from your first adventure? You know, the one who gave you the rumor that led to the ogre’s lair when you made 2nd-level? Well, here he is, and he needs your help. What about that henchman who was killed last year? Well, his wife and three orphan kids are about to lose the farm. They need you

---

<sup>15</sup> *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Paramount Pictures, 1981.

# THE PLAYERS GOT TOO MUCH TREASURE

to bail them out.

These and other scenarios like them can be periodically used to take away some of that extra loot. These types of tricks should be used fairly frequently (the player characters are likely *very* wealthy by game standards), as the people they know would naturally look for rich Uncle Joe Platemail III to help them. They do not have to be huge requests — some could be very small (the old one-legged soldier, the poor homeless waif on the street). In my home game, I tend to throw in a friendly request for funds at least once every two game sessions, and I keep note of it for reasons I will describe below. I keep most of these cash drains small, so as to avoid suspicion, only hitting them up for big bucks when they are feeling particularly rich and invulnerable.

This could also be presented as a business opportunity — for example, “Gosh, I could open this inn and make us both a ton of cash,” or “I need 1000 gp to finish my research on this new spell.” Things like that. Some of the bequests could actually show a profit; however, it should be noted that most just eat the investment and/or have the beggar ask for more money because “for another 500 gp we can start to turn big profits!”

Most businesses in the Dark Ages and antiquity rarely made a “living” (e.g. enough to live on, and that is all) for their proprietors. The odds of making an investment show a return are quite small. If it were not, why would the adventurers risk life and limb fighting vampires and trolls in dark caves rather than grow barley and sell ale? One solid tactic is to have an investment pay (a small return) and then burn down (see “**Here is your new Castle [aka The Money Pit]**” below). You can entice them to spend a ton by having *their* bar burn to the ground. I have yet to fail to get a player to do this.

It is important that the GM make the players feel good about doing these things. After all, they are the local heroes. This type of trick can be used to make the players feel important, all the while really taking away that gold. Likewise, if properly done, it can form the basis of logic as to why the players actually attract followers at name level. For example, if Joe III from the above example becomes Lord Joe III at 9th level and builds a castle, he attracts followers. Rather than just say 200 nameless, faceless men-at-arms show up, what about a cool scene where Captain Briggs arrives with 30 men-at-arms in tow, explaining that he heard you were looking for men, and he remembered that time you helped his poor old mom save the farm. Likewise, when Joe’s buddy Father Tim builds his temple, that homeless waif may just have become a cleric, and arrives with some friends to serve the man who kept him from starving that winter. Followers and henchmen come into service for a reason; and for good-aligned folk at least, a charitable master is a major driving force in this.

There are plenty of story-building opportunities here. You see, gentle reader, that if the players are rewarded for, ahem, “spending” their cash, they don’t resent it. In old school games like *Swords & Wizardry* where cash is experience points, this makes far more sense anyway (see the **Alternate XP rules**).

## Holy War

One surefire way to get rid of a ton of “excess” cash is to have your local temple, you know, the one dedicated to the god your clerics and paladins follow, or the one that heals you, cures your diseases and raises you from the dead, go to war or face some other fundraising crisis. Instead of the standard 10% tithe that the players gave, now the church demands 50% or even 90%. Be very careful with this one, for if most of the tricks in this section are bombs, this one could be a nuke.

This one is similar to the “**Tax Collector**” encounter previously described, but much, much less voluntary. The clerics and paladins really have no choice in the matter (if they want to remain clerics and paladins). Likewise, the potential for getting healing magic cast



# THE PLAYERS GOT TOO MUCH TREASURE

in the future may well be limited to “the faithful” (e.g. those who gave money).

The GM must be careful not to invoke this event too frequently. I personally have used it maybe 4 or 5 times over the course of 30 years. If you use it more than once with a particular group of players, it becomes obvious that you are just screwing them and that is never good for a game. The advice I would give is that if you resort to this trick, make sure you have a way for the player characters to participate in the war or other event.

If the levy being collected is for a crusade, plan to have the players assist. If there is a war, perhaps the church can ask the “brave adventurers” to go on some special mission or something to support the cause (in addition to the cash). Basically, if the end product involves the players and appears meaningful, then their money went to something meaningful, and was not just fiat grabbed away by the GM being a jerk.

An example of how I once did this is described below.

My player group had a particularly successful series of adventures (some luck, some skill) where they had simply gained far too much loot far too quickly. It was one of those “oops, I messed up” GM moments. I mean the kind where you look at their sheets and consider resetting the campaign because they are so rich that there is no way they would ever adventure again. How I handled it was as follows:

The church of Muir demanded a 90% tithe of all goods and holdings from all players (and non-players). Bannor the Paladin and Flail the Great *had to give* the money. Spiegel the Mage, Frac Cher and Helman did not have to (all real players in my campaign).

The problem was that the forces of evil (led by priests of Orcus, of course) had burned two cities to the east of Bard’s Gate. The marauding army was ravaging the countryside, and a call up of an army, aided by mercenaries from the south, was needed to stop it. The players were used to getting healed and cured by the temple, and so all but Helman decided to pay the fee (he fooled them into thinking his 40% or so was really 90%). The high priests (Flail was still an adventurer at the time, and had not yet become the high priest of Muir), after graciously taking away 90% of the players’ monetary wealth, asked them to help with the war as well.

The players were sent on a mission to recover three holy artifacts for use in the war. This adventure formed the basis of 14 months of play. The players never once questioned the fact that the “evil GM” had stolen all their money, because it was meaningful. The money taken by the priests had purpose, and in the players’ minds was worth spending. Until I wrote this (at least three of them will likely get copies of the book), I doubt any of them knew that I invented the storyline to get rid of all their loot. (John Murdoch is wringing his hands as he reads this.)

The point is, I was able to fix the mistake I made (well, Frac had this crazy knack of rolling 20s) that had the potential to kill the game, and I am fairly sure the players never were wise to what I had done.

Alternate uses of this that are not game changing could include an increase in fees to build a new temple, a requirement that *raise dead* spells include a quest to recover something, or to pay some huge amount of cash over time (my *raise dead*’s usually require a *quest* to tithe as a paladin). Just be careful how you use this one in particular, as it can be an obvious “screw the players” technique if used often or without proper planning.

## Disaster in Home Town

One’s roots always inspire loyalty. When Isiah Thomas won the NBA championship, he went to East St. Louis to help kids. Never mind it was crime-filled, industrial and poor, he was a hero made good. One of the genius things about developing backgrounds for player characters is that the GM is afforded the opportunity to create humble beginnings to which erstwhile heroes can return. Player characters are the elite, the “kids who won,” and the best

## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

of the best of an often agrarian and poor society. Sure, your random paladin player character may have been the privileged rich kid with the “save the world complex,” but by and large all characters come from humble beginnings, and have made their own way in the world.

It's the clever GM's job to make this work against them (and perhaps for them). Similar to the “**Friend in Need**” trick, this trick combines the player loyalty to a perceived idea of “roots” with the ability to make the player feel like an important big shot, all the while accomplishing the GM's goal of reducing character wealth and providing the need for the engine to consume more gasoline (to make the players head off to get more wealth).

I have used this trick several times over the years. Examples include plague in the village (requires hiring priests to go there), a huge fire or crop blight (rebuild or import food), an ankheg or purple worm assault (save us!), and other items. Perhaps the best time I ever had using this trick was when I had a purple worm destroy the village (think *Dune*<sup>16</sup>). The player characters had to first defeat the worm, then rebuild the bulk of the town. Lots of fun for all, and once again, the players came out of the ordeal feeling like heroes.

Another take on this is for the homeland to be ruled by an evil knight/wizard/priest, and the players have the opportunity to take over as the new rulers by defeating him. This can have some of the same effect as “**Here is your new Castle (aka The Money Pit)**”, if the GM makes the town poor or destroys it during the “rescue” by the player characters. This has the same effect on the game as “**A Friend in Need**” if used to justify followers and/or acquisition of a stronghold. Since the player characters rescued the poor oppressed peasants from the evil lord, then rebuilt the town, it makes sense that Sven the blacksmith joins up as a follower.

Additional examples that could fill this trick include:

- The local ruler and former patron of the party falls on hard times and may lose his castle/men at arms, etc.
- An earthquake levels all of the stone buildings (temple, castle, etc.) in the players' place of origin.
- A player character's family is heavily mortgaged, and the family estate will be lost absent the player's intervention.
- A bandit lord threatens to destroy the village unless a huge ransom is paid (could either be a battle, a compromise or a payoff).
- The kind old benevolent lord dies, and the territory goes up for sale by the king/overlord, etc.

## Here is your new Castle (aka The Money Pit)

OK, so this one is an oldie but a goody. One of the common tactics of the Tudor kings was to bequeath estates that had historically lost money to noblemen they wanted to destroy. Either the nobleman turned around the fortunes of the estate (and the king's taxes became more profitable) or they went bankrupt trying. It was a sort of “F-you, pay me” situation for the nobleman. He owed the king a fixed fee for taxes on the estate, he received income from it, and he hoped that the latter exceeded the former. It often did not.

This trick, if properly handled, can form the basis of a scenario that many players find to be the most rewarding part of the game. They actually get to build a home and base of operations and can take pride in how well they run it. Sure, you as GM are fleecing them out of most or all of their gold — but I have yet to have any player complain or even realize that this is what I was doing to them.

This is another situation that looks like a great deal for the player(s), but is actually a

---

<sup>16</sup> *Dune*. Universal, 1984.

THE PLAYERS GOT TOO MUCH TREASURE



## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

money sink that eats up cash and forces the player(s) to head back into the dungeon for yet more gold to keep the machine fed. The irony is that increased taxes on the population has the effect of decreased population, so the answer on the agriculture side is often take a larger loss in the near term for a larger gain later on.

It could be that the estates inherited by the player character house a rich gold mine, a rock quarry, or a hotspot along a trade route. Maybe the gold runs out, the rock quality wanes, or the trade route gets disrupted by the plague, a bandit chief, or a war. No matter, the king's taxes are still due.

Failure to pay is at best a disgrace, with an interest-bearing debt, and at worst (especially after a few years) banishment or even accusations of treason. The key is to make the player believe that he can "make this work."

Several key ideas play into this scenario. First, the player must do something that warrants the granting of lands and title. This could include offending the ruler of the area, or it could simply be fate that destines the player character to get the money pit. Second, the land and castle need to be designed by the GM so that they currently lose money. This could be due to a number of factors — bandits, poor farmland, lack of resources or lack of peasants to work the land, massive repair bills on old crumbling castles, large pay increases for men-at-arms (who are billeted with the character by the overlord), etc. Lastly, there needs to be a way for the character to improve his lot. This cannot be a "must lose" situation. There needs to be a means of redemption and "victory" if the player plays well.

One common theme is **the clearing of the land**, in which the players can greatly improve the conditions of the area by defeating monsters or bandits plaguing the area, making it more hospitable to the people working the land, as well as safer for others to travel through and visit the area. The GM can pre-set a series of bad guys in the region, and have them impact trade and commerce. Ideas include having a hill giant ransack the tax delivery, or have a chimera kill off a cattle herd. Hippogriffs taking horses, and bandits extorting peasants and burning crops are other ideas. This gives the player characters several good mini-adventures with a defined purpose, as well as letting them establish themselves as good stewards of the land with the local populace (as well as their lord).

The GM should have new denizens creep in every now and again to keep things interesting. Typically, I allow a 10% chance per game month that some new randomly determined bad guy creeps into the land and harasses or kills some peasants or livestock. This provides for continuing adventure and increased responsibility (and pride of ownership) for the characters. One of the best situations I was able to create along these lines was when Spiegel the Mage (who kept trolls in cages to make healing potions from their blood) had his laboratory destroyed and apprentices killed when a troll escaped inside his castle!

Another idea for "making it work" is to provide the player characters with the ability to hire "experts" in various fields to look for ways to make the land wealthier. This could include hiring prospectors to look for metal deposits, subsidizing farmers to allow them to grow larger crops and build up reserves (basically the characters pay the taxes and allow the peasants to build up surplus, thereby growing population and tax base), or building infrastructure (roads, ferries, bridges) to attract trade, etc.

The real goal of all these scenarios is to make the characters pay out money (a lot) to make their land holdings better. Finally, low taxes and fair, honest and just rulership net more inhabitants. The opposite nets less. More inhabitants net more gold, and more gold nets a happy overlord.

One way to handle this is to apply some factor of success and failure to economic and population morale.

### SG Note:

Additional kingdom-building information can be found in the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Ultimate Campaign* sourcebook.

# Situational Advantage (Environment)

---



# Slippery Conditions

This one has always inspired me, and those who have read my work know I use it often. Simply put, this dirty trick can turn relatively easy encounters hard by making combat more difficult (for the players) or by adding slapstick entertainment (by having everything slipping and falling).

The way I like to use this is to create muddy or slimy floors, either inside or out, that force the player characters to make saving throws every time they take an action that forces them to move rapidly. Easy examples include ice and mud; more complex examples could include things like *oil of slipperiness* (see “**Kobolds with Toys**” below), or simply wet floors.

Monsters, particularly in cold climates, would be unaffected. Likewise, this is a great opportunity to use a flying monster (such as stirges or a will-o'-wisp), that is unaffected by the ground conditions. An example follows:

## The Cold Cave

Exploring the area, the player characters come across a small cave entrance buried below some rubble at the base of the cliff. After a few minutes of excavating the debris, a 4-foot-diameter tunnel can be cleared, leading down at a steep slope into a cave below. The hole is covered with a thin layer of mud and silt, although below this layer is a layer of ice. The lower area glows with a faint light.

Characters descending without ropes immediately find themselves sliding down the tunnel at a high rate of speed, landing rather roughly (save or take 1d6 points of damage; DC 15 Reflex save) on a sheet of ice covering a 20-foot-diameter pool of water in a 40-foot-diameter cave with a 10-foot ceiling. The ice has a 20% chance of cracking if a character misses a save (20% for each one) when sliding down the tunnel. Each time the ice cracks, it has a 20% cumulative chance of shattering and dumping the characters into a 20-foot-deep icy pool with slippery sides (save at -4 to escape the pool from the sides; DC 20 Reflex save). Each round spent in the pool gives the character a -2 cumulative penalty on all dice rolls as the cold numbs the character's hands and feet. In 10 rounds, the character succumbs and drowns.

Hovering over the pool is a **will-o'-wisp**. It glows brightly should anyone fall into the water. Otherwise, it winks out and waits patiently, hoping the characters crack the ice and fall into the pool. Normal movement at one-quarter speed still creates a chance of slipping and cracking the ice (save at +4, each fall has a 20% chance of cracking the ice; DC 12 Reflex save).

The wisp can be attacked normally; however, anyone touching the icy floor must save each round or slip and fall prone (and have a 20% chance of cracking the ice if on the pool; DC 15 Acrobatics check, treat the pool as difficult terrain). Spell casting can be performed normally, although if the caster is hit in combat, he must save or fall as well (concentration check applies to not lose spell; DC 15 Reflex save to stay standing). Should roped characters escape the cave, the wisp does not follow. Climbing up the tunnel without assistance is nearly impossible (one-eighth speed, if spikes are used to create a series of handholds; DC 25 Climb check, +5 circumstance bonus if spikes used).

The wisp's treasure is at the bottom of the pool and consists of 200 gp, a *jewel-encrusted +1 warhammer*, and many rusty bits of armor and weapons.

## Bad Air

Similar to slippery conditions, this dirty trick can be used to make a mundane encounter very dangerous. Those of you who have read my will-o'-wisp lair on **Level 0A** of *Rappan Athuk* have seen this one in action before. Monsters that don't breathe, or those that breathe just fine in a respiratorily hostile environment, have a huge advantage over opponents that have to worry about their lungs. We all remember James Bond cutting the villain's SCBA air hose while deep underwater. If you cannot breathe, you cannot fight.

A couple of variations on this dirty trick are possible. Poison air, flammable air, and air that lacks oxygen are all good ideas. Underwater combat is similar, although I'll cover that later. The first time this was used was in an early adventure called *The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan*<sup>17</sup>, or *Lost Tamoachan* for you purists. A (relatively) easy dungeon was made into a deathtrap by use of poisonous air. The air created a race against time, putting the 7th-level characters fighting the 3rd- and 4th-level monsters at real risk because of the time it took for the combats.

Poisonous air can take several forms, and certainly the GM should think this through before using this trick. It is no fun to create a "save or die" type atmosphere, unless of course the player characters know that in advance and still choose to enter the area. Slow-acting poisons (the one in *Tamoachan* did 2 points of damage per 10 minutes) or debilitating poisons (damage or ability loss over time) are certainly a better approach. I like to either have a more severe effect (like 1 point a minute), and let the players know the air is bad, or a lesser, subtle effect (1 point an hour) and not tell them.

Explosive air is another matter. This one can be fun if played in conjunction with a monster they would normally use fire against (such as a mummy). The GM should drop subtle clues about the nature of any gas present ("your torches glow blue, and sputter and spark") to let them know that they are reaching what is called the lower explosive limit of flammable gas in the air. The impact of this gas can be scaled as needed; however, something like a fireball could have its range massively expanded, and in some cases even a torch could cause the air to ignite. Two things occur when this happens: One is that the explosive gas causes damage to all within its confines, and the nastier side effect is that the oxygen in the area is immediately depleted (see below). Conveniently for the GM, mummies don't need oxygen. The good news is the fire usually is blown out and goes away immediately.

Air that lacks oxygen is just plain deadly. We have all heard the stories about men going into confined spaces like a series of lemmings to rescue a fallen comrade, only to immediately collapse themselves, leaving many dead in some real-world cases. Each round a player character is in an oxygen-deficient atmosphere, the character must save at a cumulative -4 or collapse (DC 20 Fort save to negate). Death results in 1d6 rounds. One can see where this would be a big problem in the aforementioned mummy encounter. If used as a trick, the GM is advised to give the players plenty of warning—make them feel tired or dizzy, have their light sources burn poorly, and even have their canaries (if you ever wondered why there was a songbird on the equipment list in the *1st Edition Player's Handbook*<sup>18</sup>, this is why) fall asleep or even die, before they are affected. Purposefully holding one's breath allows for 1 free round of action before any saves must be taken. It is hoped the character uses this free round to get back to where he can breathe again. An example follows:

---

17 Johnson, Harold. *The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan: An Adventure for Character Levels 5-7*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Games, 1981. Print.

18 Gygax, Gary. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Players Handbook*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Hobbies, 1978. Print

## Acid Air

On a raised mound in the center of the swamp is what appears to be a large animal burrow of some sort. The hole is four feet across and roughly almond shaped. Daylight filters down the hole, revealing a tunnel descending 15 feet or so into a cave below. Near the entrance, the smell of rotten eggs is noticeable.

The smell seems to go away once anyone descends into the cave below. The cave contains what is best described as “hazy” air, and torches and candles burn with a weird, yellow hue. What anyone down in the cave fails to realize is that their sense of smell has been deadened by the sulfur dioxide gas present in the cave. The cave has exits to the left and right. The left tunnel goes back 50 feet and ends in a roughly circular cave. The right tunnel leads 80 feet back and ends in a fetid pool of swamp water.

The circular cave from the left tunnel contains the bones of several creatures, some as large as a badger. Careful inspection notes that the bones are yellowed and corroded, as if they had been subjected to acid. The pool at the end of the left tunnel is 10 feet deep and full of rotting vegetation (zero visibility; -20 circumstance penalty to all Perception checks). It eventually leads down a 200-foot-long submerged path to the outside swamp.

The real problem here is the toxic and corrosive gas anyone exploring the cave is exposed to. Each round, this gas does 1 point of damage (do not tell anyone this until they exit or collapse). After only 2 rounds in the cave, saves must be made to avoid feeling dizzy each round. If saves are made (to avoid being dizzy as noted above; DC 15 Fortitude save), tell the player making the save they taste a strange, bitter taste in their mouth. Anyone reaching 0 hit points collapses and dies unless removed from the cave.

## Stinky the Skunk

Of huge importance in this game is the element of surprise, and it's awfully hard to surprise an opponent if they can smell you from 500 feet away. Lots of ways can cause this to happen. The obvious and most used is the encounter with the skunk, wolverine or the dire variant of them.

Anyone who has had a real-life encounter with a skunk (or owns a dog that has) knows that the stink lasts for many days. I myself, having no experience with wolverines, have heard that they are even worse. Certainly in the fantasy environment, where tomato juice baths and high-tech soap are not available, the smell would last somewhat longer than usual.

This type of encounter can be sprung on players in less ignoble ways as well; a chamber pot tossed out a window, for example. Regardless of cause, the effect of such an encounter, whether by monster (dire animal), menace (chamber pot), or annoyance (a skunk) can cause headaches for the player characters. An example follows:

## Pepé Le Pew

As the party sets up camp, a skunk enters the campsite. Their actions determine its actions. If they calmly back away and don't have any pesky pets (e.g. guard dogs) that bother it, it simply passes. Should they get within 20 feet or harass the skunk in any way, they get a nice dose of stink. Anyone sprayed must save or be blinded for 2d4 rounds and is incapacitated for 1-2 rounds due to retching.

Assume any creature sprayed has a -4/6 chance of surprise for 1 week, and a -2/6 chance of surprise for 3 weeks. This applies to anything within 100 feet of any object

SITUATIONAL ADVANTAGE (ENVIRONMENT)



## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

or creature sprayed. Items subjected to this effect retain their stink four times longer than creatures. Hence, the need to replace armor (and spend gold) and other items is real. It is, of course, imperative that the GM not tell players what in game effect this has. Further, reactions with any creature with olfactory senses are affected. Unless the creature has an affinity for bad smells (like an otyugh), the reaction is negative. Innkeepers are loath to allow stinky players to stay in their inns. They would charge as much as 10 times the normal cost — if they even agreed to lodge the characters at all!

**Giant Skunk:** HD 4; HP 17; AC 7[12]; Atk bite (1d6); Move 9; Save 13; AL N; CL/XP 5/240; **Special:** sprays musk. (*Monstrosities* 431)

### SG Note:

Creatures sprayed by a giant skunk risk being nauseated (or worse).

#### GIANT SKUNK

XP 800

hp 27 (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary* 3 "Skunk, Giant")

CR 3

**MUSK (Ex)** Up to twice per day, a giant skunk can spray a stream of noxious musk at a single target within 30 feet as a standard action. With a successful ranged touch attack, the creature struck by this spray must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d6 rounds and then sickened for 1d6 minutes by the horrific stench. A successful save reduces the effect to only 1d4 rounds of being sickened. A creature cannot use the scent ability as long as it is affected by this musk. The save DC is Constitution-based, and includes a +2 racial bonus.

## Slow Movement (Mud, Brush and Rubble)

Similar to slippery surfaces, obstructions to movement cause a disadvantage during combat to all who move on the ground. I frequently use this type of terrain feature to make things more interesting — giving penalties on movement and obstructions to charge actions, as well as things to hide behind. Frequently, caves and caverns have obstructions (e.g. cover) in the form of stalactites and stalagmites, and rough ground in the form of rock piles and loose flooring. Forests come to mind, as do brush, bushes and rocks.

The key is that you as a GM establish penalties to movement during combat, as well as prohibit activities that player characters and monsters would normally perform (e.g. charges, missile fire). Creating an atmosphere that takes away some uber attack ("I charge on my heavy horse with my +2 lance!") forces the characters (and monsters) to rely more on tactics to which they are unaccustomed.

During 3.X, I had a player who figured out a way to do massive damage every time he found himself outside due to a sequence of mounted combat feats and a heavy warhorse. Imagine my disdain for a 3rd-level player character being able to wipe out a hill giant with 2–3 attacks.

## SITUATIONAL ADVANTAGE (ENVIRONMENT)

In a similar vein, the sicko elven archer with the +10 *bow of death* can be forced to act differently if the 10 hobgoblin enemies he faces can be shot at only once a round, or at a huge penalty. This is not to say that you as a GM should use this type of trick only to nullify player abilities. Like slippery conditions described above, it can be used to emphasize tactics on both sides of the dice by creating conditions that slow down damage dealt in combat.

A good example of how this could be applied is as follows:

### Encounter in the Woods

The party has been traveling for two days through the forest. The brush creates a virtual wall of twigs, leaves and wood, making it difficult to see even 30 feet in any direction (–10 penalty to Perception checks). Roots and fallen branches block even the deer paths here. Movement is half normal, and even that rate of travel has caused a number of scratches and cuts from nearly invisible thorns that cut and poke unsuspecting noses and foreheads (treat as difficult terrain when using the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game system).

Hidden from each other, a pack of **kobolds** (no stats given here) runs into the group. The chances of surprise are triple (e.g. 6/6, with a ranger 3/6) for each group. The encounter actually starts with a kobold physically stumbling into a player character. Each must make a save, or trip and fall prone.

Once combat is joined, all missile fire is assumed to be at long range (–5 to hit), and movement is one-quarter at best (kobolds and halflings move at one-half speed; there are fewer obstructions at waist level). Anyone may attempt to move half speed during combat (the little people can move normally) by making a save at –2. Failure indicates 1d2 points of damage (01–25%), trip and fall (25–90%), or knocked unconscious (91–00%). The kobolds flee if more than 25% of their party is slain.

#### SG Note:

The kobolds in this scenario have the following advantages in a Pathfinder Roleplaying Game: +10 to Stealth; DC 10 Reflex save or fall prone; targets of missile fire receive cover (+4 to AC); terrain is considered difficult; if a PC attempts to move more than 1/2 speed, they must make a successful DC 15 Reflex save, or suffer 1d4+1 hp of slashing damage from branches.

### Death from Above!

Always look up. Always look up and “never get out of the boat. Absolutely goddamn right!” That is the battle cry of Martin Sheen in *Apocalypse Now*<sup>19</sup> and also most of the players in my game.

Ceiling monsters such as the lurker above, and even Katniss in *The Hunger Games*<sup>20</sup>, both realized the advantage of attacking from above. Most people look around at eye level. It is reasonable to assume player characters do the same. Unless it is specifically stated that the characters are examining the area above them, the GM may assume they are not.

After a few attacks from above, the player characters will become well-versed in “looking up.” Attacking from above has several advantages. First, it gives +1 to hit for

<sup>19</sup> *Apocalypse Now*. Paramount Pictures, 1979.

<sup>20</sup> *The Hunger Games*. Roadshow, 2012.



## SITUATIONAL ADVANTAGE (ENVIRONMENT)

hand-to-hand combat. Most importantly, it allows the attacker to do things such as drop rocks (or bees) and other objects at +2 to hit. Finally, and most importantly, it also prevents defenders from striking back in melee if they are out of reach.

### SG Note:

In the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, attacking from higher ground gives a +1 to all melee attacks. Ranged attacks are unmodified.

The other fun thing to do is to actualize the power of the air force. If nothing else is plain about every war since 1918, it's that air power wins the day. In every case.

It's awfully difficult to fight something that flies overhead and attacks via dropped objects only when *it* wants to, by swooping in with claws or even feint attacks and veers off at the last moment. It may not seem like a dirty trick to rely on flyers for attacks, however, but most GMs underplay the value of this ability and treat it just like melee combat.

The trick here is to prepare monster ambushes from above. Dropped rocks, oil and even well-fortified positions can provide cover and protection from those poor little monsters. Joe Platemail III cannot thump your kobolds with his +25 *holy sword of monster slaying* if he cannot reach them. Meanwhile, they are bombarding him with oil, rocks and missiles (and hiding behind cover themselves).

The other effect this has is that your players soon grow accustomed to examining ceilings and other “up-there” features. This allows you as a GM to put hidden doors, entrances and exits and other cool stuff above normal vision range, thus creating a 3D adventure. It also means that things such as rope, grapples and spikes become necessary gear (and weigh a ton!) that player characters have to start carrying.

Flying monsters provide a whole new level of problems. They can choose to avoid a combat entirely, do nasty things such as drop rocks and trees, and even circle above and spy on non-flyers (or act as spotters for a ground force). I typically apply a -4 to hit with missile fire aiming at a flyer, and give the flyers -2 to hit while moving. The degree of paranoia that can be instilled in a group of players just by having a strange and unassailable flyer swoop overhead every few days is well worth it. An example follows:

## Hey, Hey, We're the Monkees!

Traveling through these woods is easy. Huge trees and large open spaces are everywhere, with the giant canopy preventing scrub and plants from getting sunlight. The redwood trees tower more than 300 feet high, with some trunks reaching 40 feet in diameter. Suddenly, the still nature of the woods becomes less still.

In the trees are **12 Carnivorous Apes**. The apes surprise on a 5/6 chance, and initially attack by hurling rocks and feces down on the player characters. Each ape has 2 rocks (1d6 points of damage) and two lumps of feces (1 point of damage, humiliating, but no other effects). Rocks and feces attacks are -4 to hit, but ignore armor.

The apes move between the trees at will, easily swinging from branch to branch. Once they run out of missiles, the apes descend and attack on the ground. If wounded for more than 50% of their hit points (individually), or if more than 4 of their number are slain, the apes retreat to the trees and leave the player characters alone (other than screaming and shrieking at them for several rounds). Extremely loud noises or significant pyrotechnic effects (*fireball*, *lightning bolt*) cause the apes to retreat and hide in the canopy.

Anyone reduced to 0 hit points or slain is carried off by an ape (moving at half speed as it climbs) to the nest. The nest is 200 feet up in an extremely branchy tree. In the nest are 4

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

baby carnivorous apes and the remains of two half-eaten deer.

**Carnivorous Apes (12):** HD 4; AC 6 [13]; Atk 2 hands (1d3), bite (1d6); Move 12; Save 13; CL/XP 4/120; AL C; **Special:** hug and rend (if both hand attacks hit, additional 1d6 damage). (*Monstrosities* 17).

## SG Note:

### CARNIVOROUS APES (12)

CR 2

XP 600

NE Large animal

**Init** +2; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; **Perception** +8

---

**AC** 14, touch 11, flat-footed 12; (+2 Dex, +3 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 19 (3d8+6)

**Fort** +7; **Ref** +5; **Will** +2

---

**Speed** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

**Melee** 2 slams +3 (1d6+2)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

**Special Attacks** rend

---

**Str** 15, **Dex** 15, **Con** 14, **Int** 2, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 7

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 17

**Feats** Great Fortitude, Skill Focus (Perception)

**Skills** Acrobatics +6, Climb +14, Perception +8, Stealth +1

# Time Wasters

---

## Fake Secret Door

One of the fun tricks I like to play with elves — especially when a party consists of *groups* of elves — is to toss a few fake secret doors into my dungeons. Sure they find the secret door easily, but they still have to figure out how to open it. I had one circumstance at a convention a few years ago where I had 8 elves in the player group. Secret door rolls became a joke (rolling 8d6 and not getting a 1–2 is nigh impossible). How I finally countered this was by putting in a fake one. It took them almost an hour and 6 wandering monster checks to give up and leave the door alone.

Simply have a false door, studded with buttons, twisty knobs, keyholes and other things, and stand back and watch the fun. This is really a rotten thing to do very often, but given extreme circumstances (such as 8 elves) it does give a GM a bit of payback. An example follows:

## Bells and Whistles

One panel in the hallway has an obvious crack in it. If the crack is inspected, it is noted that there is a thick layer of plaster covering a 4-foot-by-4-foot wall section. Behind the plaster is a strange panel. The stone of the panel is dark gray, contrasting with the lighter gray of the main section of wall. On the panel are 11 buttons.

The buttons do nothing besides push in and out, and neither does the wall panel. The only noticeable effect is that a maximum of three buttons can be pushed in at the same time. Pushing a fourth button causes one of the others to reset in the “out” position.

## False Adventure Lead

Another nasty thing to do to your players is to create a fake adventure lead. This trick is occasionally necessary to ensure your campaign does not feel like it’s being run by a train conductor. After all, if every adventure lead is real, then you are really leading the players around by the nose rather than letting them explore and find things themselves.

These false leads can take several forms. Fake treasure maps (also good for relieving them of some gold), false rumors, and weird writings and puzzles that lead nowhere should be used occasionally just to prevent the “GM said go here so it must be here” mentality. Certainly some con artists would make fake maps to sell. Rumors regarding the Holy Grail and lost Templar artifacts, Captain Kidd’s treasure and many other “lost wealth” stories have had people digging on Oak Island at great expense for years. Is something actually there? Who knows? After a few of these, clever players will have their characters do more investigation regarding these leads. They may even consult sages or cast divination spells to determine whether to throw resources at some adventure.

One way to do this in multi-part quests is to have several real clues followed by a false one. A great example of this is the fake horcrux in the *Harry Potter*<sup>21</sup> tales. After

---

21 Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter: And The Deathly Hallows*. New York: Scholastic, 2007. Print.

## BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

discovering several of these, our heroes are misled into questing for a false item, only realizing it after finding the fake. So sure are they that they are on the right track that they ignore even obvious clues to the real goal.

If the sacred *Ark of Neverstone* is supposedly hidden in 3 or 4 places, the player characters need to do some homework to find out which location is real. Rumors of vampires could really be goblins or stirges, or perhaps the reverse. The goal here is to provide some doubt in their minds about the task at hand. This causes the players to prep for many different challenges rather than load up on their vampire kits and holy water squirt guns.

A word of caution here: Most of your storyline leads need to be real or else you won't get the players to bite on any of them. Real is a relative term, however. Just because an adventure lead may not be what is expected does not mean some adventure is not at its end. This is also a great way to have seemingly innocuous bad guys set traps and ambushes for the characters. The treasure map may lead to a box canyon where they are ambushed by archers from the cliffs above, for example. An example follows:

### I'm the Map, I'm the Map, I'm the Map!

While sitting in the tavern drowning themselves in well-deserved ale, the party is approached by an old man. He has been listening to their tales, he tells them, and they sound like brave and adventurous souls. While ploughing his field, he came across a strange clay tablet.

The tablet shows a map of the area to the west, distinct by two mountain peaks and the confluence of three rivers. Strange writings on the tablet show a symbol of a dragon and a cave. Certainly dragons guard vast wealth, he extolls, and while he is not an adventurer, he would be willing to sell the map to the party for a fair price. *Read Languages* and other abilities cannot decipher the runes at all.

The man is a charlatan. He made the map himself (he is a potter), and carved the runes and cryptic sigils into it before he baked it and buried it in mud for a week or so. His asking price is 1000 gp. He can be haggled down to 250 gp, but will not sell any lower.

The map leads to a hilly area about 4 days from the village but no trace of a cave (or dragon) is there. If threatened (drawing the ire of the other villagers), the man admits the fraud. Short of this, he does not refund the money, telling the player characters that they "must not be looking in the right place" or "that they must be blind."

#### SG Note:

In the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, *Read Languages* is *comprehend languages*. The runes could also be determined as fake with a DC 25 Linguistics check, if desired.

### Magic Key (Does Nothing)

Another fun time waster is the fake key. Players love keys because, after all, keys open *something*, right? I am sure they do, but maybe nothing that matters to the player characters, and also maybe nothing in the general vicinity.

This trick can be done in several ways. It could just be a large ornate metal key found in a treasure pile that truly has no use. A second type could have a magic aura on it — perhaps it used to open some magic lock and was discarded after use. In any case, the goal here is to force the player characters to spend time looking for a lock when none exists.

## TIME WASTERS

In a similar vein to the fake adventure lead and fake secret door, this trick must be used sparingly or else it becomes cliché and the players won't even bother looking again (even if they find a key that matters). These types of tricks are all thrown in to allow the GM to create some mystery ("I wonder where that magic lock actually was") as well as to keep them looking around the area that you want them to be in. Imagine a magical mystery key found in *Rappan Athuk*. I have done this, and had players explore 5 or 6 levels of the dungeon looking for a nonexistent lock. I wanted them in the dungeon, but needed the key as a carrot to keep them looking around. An example follows;

### That's not a Key, *This* is a key!

The party finds a large key in the treasure pile. It is made of bronze, and its handle is studded with turquoise (worth 10 gp). The key itself is 2 feet long, and its handle is 6 inches wide. What it opens is lost in time, and unless the GM decides otherwise, it is of no use other than to sell. The key weighs 10 pounds.

## Unobtainium

This is another one that is always fun. The idea here is to create a treasure so huge and vast (and heavy) that there is no way it can be recovered and taken by the players. The Mithril Gates in *Rappan Athuk* are a fine example. Worth perhaps a million gp, but weighing in at 200 tons, all the player characters can do is gaze upon the wealth of kings — but not take it.

Veins of magical or precious metal in dangerous places have the same effect. Sure, you "could" mine that gold out of the bedrock. But the purple worms would likely eat you before you finished. Those of you familiar with my work have seen this many times. In the *Lost City of Barakus*, precious minerals cover an entire chute leading down to a small dungeon. The problem is the chute off-gasses toxic fumes and is a caldera of hot hydrothermal water (a geyser) that blows up at random intervals.

Creating large treasures that the players cannot easily obtain is fun, but beware: Six players may be smarter than one GM. You really need to be cautious to prevent them from developing a plan where they actually do get the 2 million gp thing out of the dungeon. An example follows:

### We Don't Need No Stinking Badges!

Deep within the desert is a large cave. The interior of the cave is more than 200 feet in diameter, with a towering ceiling reaching 200 feet in the center. The whole of the cave is covered in mineral encrustations, huge quartz crystals, flowers of pyrite and gypsum, all arrayed in a spectacular series of colors and shapes.

In the ceiling is a large quartz vein containing strips of gold ore. More than 20,000 gp of gold ore is present. The problem is twofold. First, the ore weighs more than 40 tons and would need to be refined to obtain the gold. Of greater importance is this: Should the vein be mined out, the cavern itself collapses, burying anyone in the cave under 40 feet of debris (save or die, successful save indicates 6d6 points of damage, and they are trapped within the cave). A dwarf immediately recognizes the risk of collapse. Anyone inside the collapsed cave can dig his way out in 3d6 days. The only problem is there are only 6 man days of air present in the cave.

Even if the ore can be removed after all of this, the cave is 10 days travel by horse from

the closest town. Obviously, the player characters could mount an expedition to retrieve the gold. Should they do so, they will have earned their reward.

## SG Note:

In the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, make the following adjustments; the damage from the falling cavern is 10d6; DC 20 Reflex save for half. PCs are still trapped. Anyone with Knowledge (dungeoneering) may make a DC 20 check to determine the dome is unsafe to mine. Likewise, a DC 15 Knowledge (engineering), or DC 25 Knowledge (nature) check comes to the same conclusion. PCs with stonemasonry may add that bonus to their roll.

## Extra Heavy Flavor Text

I always wondered why a certain group of players always readied for combat at exactly the right time. I never seemed to be able to spring a trap on them, never seemed to catch them unawares, and they never seemed to fall for my feints of danger (yes, Speigel and Flail, I am talking about you!). It turns out that I would click my teeth whenever the risks were real, and after 4 years of twice-weekly play, these guys could read me like professional poker players. It was only years later that they told me how they knew (and returned my infamous black d20).

The key here is to figure out what your “full house” signs are, and what your “bluff” signs are. In one episode of *Knights of the Dinner Table*<sup>22</sup>, the players all got geared up every time the GM’s flavor text got heavy. One of the things I have tried to do over the years is to buff up the flavor text in dire and non-threatening situations. If you can make a harmless situation appear to be dire (e.g. “the blue flowers are unlike any you have ever seen before,” or “the wind blowing through the trees sounds like a strange voice whispering on the wind”), you can get players to waste their characters’ spells, sit on the edge of their seats, and better yet, become complacent when the danger is real.

Another piece of this dovetails with later tricks, and in fact is just the sign of a great GM. *Never* describe a monster as a “goblin” or a “ghoul.” Always use descriptive language when talking about a monster. A ghoulish is far more intimidating as “a leathery gray-skinned creature with three-inch claws and red, piercing eyes that emits a howl of glee as it hops toward you, its mouth foaming with pus and blood.”

I have had a 6th-level party run away from a single ghoulish by doing this.

I often act really excited or humdrum at random intervals, dangerous or not, just to throw on my game poker face. This is tough to do (it’s a lot more fun for the GM to have that ambush planned than it is to have the character cross over some harmless blue flowers), but it can be done.

One of the tools I use for this is a series of materials made by Tabletop Adventures ([www.tabletopadventures.com](http://www.tabletopadventures.com)). They make outstanding flavor text and setting material (just add monsters and plot) for each type of terrain and even dungeons. I keep a few of these examples handy and toss them out at random intervals during each play session.

One example of this is included here (from *Into the Wildwood*, by Tabletop Adventures, 2005, Pg 15),

---

<sup>22</sup> Blackburn, Jolly R. *Knights of the Dinner Table*. Mundelein, IL: Kenzer &, 2000. Print.

*“Traveling along, as you scan the area, you think that you hear the sound of water, as if from a rippling stream. The sound is coming from directly in front of you. **[If the adventurers follow the sounds of the water:]** You advance only about fifty yards farther when the sound becomes more distinct. As you move around a particularly large tree you see the source of the noise. About twenty yards ahead of you there is a large pool of water, big enough to call a pond, but too small to describe as a lake. **[If the party advances farther:]** A stream is feeding the pond on the opposite side from where you stand. It strikes you as odd that although the gurgling rivulet is running into the pool of water, there is no stream running out.*

**[If the group has some knowledge of nature it may deduce the following:]** You know that water must be leaving the pond from somewhere, or else it would continuously rise and flood the area, which doesn't seem to be happening. Your only guess is that there must be an egress below the surface of the water where the overflow makes its way underground to some unknown destination. **[The GM may decide that the hidden waterway pathway leads to an underground cavern or all the way to another stream that resurfaces elsewhere.]** The sun holds sway here due to the size of the pond, and you can see about ten feet down into the clear water, but beyond that you can't tell how deep this pool goes. **[The water is fresh and drinkable. The pond is about thirty feet deep and the cavern that leads underground is at the bottom.]** As you take in the scene, you know that you must move on, but this does seem like a good place for a short rest.”

The key here is that none of what you just said/read to the players may have any danger at all involved. Or else it could have a giant octopus squirrel living in the pond that has 24 HD. The point is, if you do things like this randomly, you can absolutely keep the players on their toes. I would wager that they will tell tales of you to their gamer friends about how great you are on scene setting as well. Some folks are really good at coming up with this stuff on their own. For people like me, however, this is my shameless plug to go out and buy all the TTA material you can (and their stuff is excellent and inexpensive).

## Monkeys Typing Shakespeare

Over the years I have had a great deal of fun with this one. Usually, whenever a written clue is found, it has great significance to the adventure. Coded clues, mysterious writings and such are the stuff of great adventure. *Read* or *comprehend languages* spells, along with general Linguistic-type skills make it relatively trivial to decode and read these mysteries.

Just to shake things up now and again, I like to toss in one that has completely no meaning. This can be done in a couple of ways, and either way works well. The first is to create a written clue of absolute gibberish, one that is a random set of scribbling with no meaning whatsoever. A few dozen characters or a few paragraphs of totally meaningless words or letters and numbers can have the player characters puzzling about for hours. The second method is to create actual words and sentences that also have no meaning. This could include some random writing about some meaningless (to the adventure) subject — anything that misleads or wastes the time of the player characters.

Similar to any false clue, these need to be used sparingly. After all, you don't want the players to ignore Acererak's poem on the floor, only to have it in the back of their mind that it could be meaningless. Used infrequently, these false writings can cause the player characters to waste money on sages, perhaps leading them in circles of false paths, or cause them to develop some totally wrong assumptions about what the message truly means. What is in reality a grocery shopping list could be interpreted as a map to a dragon's lair,



## TIME WASTERS

for example. The key is that wise players will soon realize that the *Read Languages* spell (and other variations) they cast on the mystery code has no meaning. This has the effect of sharpening their skills in interpreting the real clues that you give them, and is for all a good exercise.

# Buttons and Levers

Another false clue time-waster that I like to use is a bunch of levers, bells and buttons that do absolutely nothing. Because traps in my campaign are disarmed by characters actually *doing something* with the trap or secret door components rather than roiling a die, my players are used to having me explain how things move/twist and pull when it comes to traps and other physical challenges.

Sometimes, it is just as fun to hone your skills in describing such things as it is to fiddle with the real ones when the time comes. It also forces the player characters to be careful and take their time on this type of thing. Any of you with small children have seen baby toys that consist of randomly moving objects, sometimes complete with lights and noisemakers. This type of trick is a good training ground to teach the players how to interact with physical puzzles when the time comes. After all, you never know if pulling that cord will have no effect whatsoever or if it will cause the ceiling to fall down and crush them. As I explained in the discussion above on the fake secret doors, this can be quite useful when the players are used to being able to do something without fail every time (like having 8 elves and finding secret doors).

# Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

---

## Cursed Items

Cursed items are an old trick long used by GMs on poor, unsuspecting player characters. I am actually of the mind that this has often been done unfairly (you put on the necklace and die, no save), especially since most of the time the nature of the item is undetectable.

Truly awful cursed items should provide some warning. Sort of a “how dumb can you be” situation, like the cursed glowing purple gem in *Tomb of Horrors*<sup>23</sup>. I mean seriously, anyone who picked that thing up just deserved to be killed by it.

That being said, like any trick listed here, an occasional use of such an item is a good thing, if nothing else than to prevent complacency and immediate use of any item found. I personally am not a fan of the “don it and die” type item. This is certainly true unless the GM provides some clues that the item is cursed. Items that create problems for the player characters are another matter. One of my old time favorites was the *cursed berserking sword*, and the *backbiter spear* (functions normally unless you roll a 1). These items have some use, but backfire or create some terrible consequence if misused or if a poor roll is made.

The one ring, as a good example, gave the wearer great power, but it also bore a terrible curse that drove the wearer insane (and called Nazgûl to his location). Items that “dare” the player to use it in times of dire need, or only fail to work in specific circumstances, work well for this type of trick. A few examples of these that I have used in play over the years include:

- Magic plate mail that falls apart if the wearer is at less than 5 hit points
- Magic weapons that heal certain types of monsters (e.g. a +2 *sword that heals golems*)
- Magic potions that end rapidly or create delusional effects (*flying is fun*)
- Altered items such as a *growth* potion that ignores equipment

Certainly anyone who owns an old 1E *Dungeon Master's Guide*<sup>24</sup> can look up minor effects on the “bad stuff” tables. Scaling risk and reward (e.g. a very powerful wand that does a 12-HD fireball with a 10% chance of it being centered on the wielder), with powerful rewards being balanced by very bad things, and minor items having relatively minor side effects.

---

<sup>23</sup> Gygax. *Tomb of Horrors*

<sup>24</sup> Gygax. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Dungeon Masters Guide*

## SG Note:

Wow, I'm getting tired...

Neither the *cursed berserking sword*, nor the *backbiter spear* exist in the *Swords & Wizardry* rules. Some unofficial stats for each are:

### Cursed Berserking Sword

This +1 *two-handed sword* seems to be a "normal" magic sword in all tests, save actual combat. In the heat or mortal combat, its wielder goes berserk, attacking the nearest creature and continuing to fight until dead or until no living thing remains within 60ft. The possessor of a *cursed berserking sword* can be rid of it only if a *remove curse* or stronger magic (*wish*, etc.) is used.

### Backbiter Spear

This +1 *spear* is to all tests a "normal" magic spear (very rarely +2). When it is used in combat against an enemy it will initially perform properly, but each time it is used there is a 1 in 20 cumulative chance that it will damage its wielder instead. Once this occurs, it cannot be removed without a *remove curse* (or more powerful) spell. When the spear attacks its wielder, it curls to strike in the back, negating any shield and/or dexterity bonuses to armor class. Backbiting may occur even if thrown, but if the wielder throws the spear, he must spend the next round recovering it. In addition, if thrown, the spear inflicts double damage to the wielder.

## Kobolds with Toys

Perception and fear are certainly good tools in the GM's arsenal. Ever since *Dragon Mountain*<sup>25</sup> was written, the use of "little bugs" against powerful characters has been a staple in most GMs' campaigns. This has the benefit of providing risk while at the same time limiting XP and treasure. After all, are not player characters "little bugs" to big monsters? Yet by trickery and creative use of items and abilities, the player characters often overcome monsters much tougher than themselves.

The same can be done by the monsters.

One of my favorites is to use kobolds (or goblins, orcs, etc.) and give them tactics and items that make them much tougher than they are in a stand-up fight. This only makes sense anyway. If a 3-foot-tall kobold has seen his friends slaughtered in droves by Joe Platemail III, there is no way he blindly rushes to his death against Joe IV. Specific ideas and tactics I have used include the following:

- Flaming oil and other grenade like missiles (green slime is a nasty one)
- Poisoned weapons — I would advise limited use of these, although a scorpion on a stick is fun
- Missile weapons en masse — and running away from all hand-to-hand
- Preferential targeting or grappling of spellcasters while avoiding tanks
- Traps, especially for kobolds, that detain or separate them from the party
- Hit-and-run tactics that target food, mounts or one individual with all attacks
- Large objects dropped from above (nets, rocks, barrels of sewage)
- Pets — rust monsters and such work well
- Leading the party into a larger monster (think Gollum with Shelob)
- Using Agincourt tactics (like leading heavy armor into slippery conditions of mud)

<sup>25</sup> *Dragon Mountain*. Lake Geneva, WI, U.S.A.: TSR, 1993. Print.

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

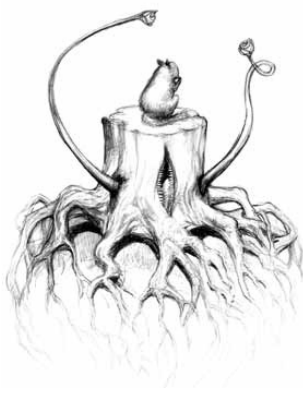
The best way to think about this is to think like a player character fighting a much more powerful monster, and adjusting tactics accordingly. Things with high cunning, such as kobolds, ghouls and mites, would be much cleverer than something like an ogre or an orc. I personally can never think of a situation where a kobold would go hand-to-hand with a human-sized foe unless cornered.

## Super Bunny

Super bunny has been a favored tactic of anyone who has ever seen *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*<sup>26</sup>. A seemingly harmless monster (Nibbler from *Futurama*<sup>27</sup> comes to mind) is in reality very tough and very powerful. A good example of this is the **intellect devourer** — a 3-foot-tall clawed brain that is virtually unkillable (not *actually* unkillable — that is another subject).

The best use of this type of critter is to make it non-aggressive, only revealing its true terror when the players attack it. Clues about danger are mandatory: a pile of crushed skulls and bones, watching it claw its way through solid rock, etc. The key here is to demonstrate that size and appearance doesn't always matter, and that even the smallest critter may be best left alone. *Arduin*<sup>28</sup> had several of this type of monster and would make a good reference for anyone who needs ideas.

The other factor here is that if the player characters are smart, or if they are kind or helpful in some way to this critter — they may gain either a guard while they sleep or be able to use the monster as a booby trap for some powerful foe.



## Symbiotic Monsters

Symbiotic monsters are those that cover for some weakness of their own by teaming up with another monster that makes up for this weakness. This also could be the reverse case, where a monster uses some strength or power it has to greatly boost the effectiveness of its teammate. Just like fighters need clerics and wizards to keep them alive and to weaken their foes, and thieves need fighters to distract their opponents to allow them to backstab them, monsters can use “party members” to gain an advantage.

Examples of these types of these pairings that I have used over the years include:

- Rust monsters with anything not using metal.
- Medusae and anything without eyes.
- Will-o'-wisps and blobs (of really any kind).
- Mummies and gas spores (a fireball would be a bad idea).
- Incorporeal undead with spiders (pass through webs).
- A wizard with hellhounds and an iron golem (fire heals).
- Ghouls or ghosts with carrion creepers.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Cinema 5 Distributing, 1975.

<sup>27</sup> *Futurama*. 1999. Television.

<sup>28</sup> A., Hargrave David. *The Arduin Grimoire*. 1977. Print.

**SG Note:**

Unofficial conversion from the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game...

**Intellect Devourer**

**Hit Dice:** 6

**Armor Class:** 2 [17]

**Attacks:** 4 claws (1d4)

**Saving Throw:** 11

**Special:** immune to physical damage, magical abilities (at will—*charm monster, confusion, invisibility, reduce size*; 1/day—*cure light wounds*), magic resistance (75%), +3 or better weapon to hit, steal body

**Move:** 15

**Alignment:** Chaos

**Number Encountered:** 1 (rarely 1d4+1)

**Challenge Level/XP:** 20/4400

An intellect devourer is 3 feet long, weighs about 60 pounds and has no head, or any features at all save for four short, clawed legs. This creature's body looks like a large, glistening brain with feet. Intellect devourers are thought to be invaders from another dimension or planet, due to their wholly alien nature and actions. Lone intellect devourers often dwell in ruins or caves on the edge of a civilized region so they can make periodic forays into town to "shop" for an attractive new body. An intellect devourer can reduce its size, crawl into the mouth of a helpless or dead creature, and burrow into the victim's skull to devour its brain. When the devourer attempts this on a living victim, they must make a save at -2 or die instantly. If the save is successful, the victim takes 6d6 points of damage (which will probably kill them anyway). If the victim is slain by this attack (or already dead), the intellect devourer usurps control of the body and may use it as its own. The intellect devourer has full access to all of the host's defensive and offensive abilities except for spellcasting and magical abilities (although the intellect devourer can still use its own magical abilities). A host body may not have been dead for longer than 1 day for this ability to function, and even successfully inhabited bodies decay to uselessness in 7 days. As long as the intellect devourer occupies the body, it knows basic information about the victim's identity and personality, yet has none of the victim's specific memories or knowledge. Damage done to a host body does not harm the intellect devourer, and if the host body is slain, the intellect devourer emerges and is dazed (unable to act) for 1 round. *Raise dead* cannot restore a victim of body theft, but *resurrection* or more powerful magic can. Intellect devourers are only damaged by +3 or better weapons, and they only one point of damage from those weapons. They take full damage from magic, if it bypasses their resistance.

The benefits of teaming up with each other has to benefit both parties — for instance, the medusa is weak in combat and her available allies are few, but teaming her up with eyeless creatures such as grimlocks gives her the ability to stand back and let them take the brunt of combat while she uses her eyes and arrows from afar. The wraith inhabiting the spider nest may not even be known by his allies, but his ability to safely slay victims while trapped does not prevent the spiders from getting their meal (soul-drained corpses taste just fine).

There are countless examples of this teamwork for monsters beyond just pets (like ogres with wolves, a dragon with kobolds or other types of arrangements).

# The Unkillable Monster

Again, if this trick is used sparingly, it is incredibly effective. The dung monster in *Rappan Athuk* is the most famous of mine. The goal here is to create a situation in which the player characters must use their brains and not their sword arms. Those of you reading this may also see this trick in *Sword of Air* — but it would be a spoiler to reveal it here.

The GM must take care not to turn this trick into an unfair and un-fun encounter. There needs to be some reason or some story behind why the monster cannot die. The monster needs to be slow or uninterested in killing the party as well, else some warning needs to be provided before they encounter it. The goal of defeating or bypassing the monster becomes the goal. Perhaps it hides some great treasure, or a key to the next area; perhaps it can be used as a trap by leading others into its lair. In any case, creating an unbeatable foe should not be taken lightly. The reward for Dunge was vast, if you could determine a way to get it. Dunge moved slowly and could be easily avoided.

That being said, many hardheaded players may succeed at suicide when encountering such a foe.

There are many ways this trick can be used that significantly add to the thrill of the story and create great opportunities for smart play. Perhaps the monster has one Achilles heel — some method of destruction that is the only way to kill it and move on. This could require research away from the field or quick thinking while in the encounter. The monster in this case is treated like a sort of “living artifact” with only one method of destruction. The reward for destruction should be important.

## Beauty is only Skin Deep

One of the biggest mistakes a GM can make is to have the beautiful, sexy villain woman be in every adventure. Nothing has been more entertaining for me than to have the player characters slaughter the gorgeous (and innocent) princess, only to have the modestly dressed, normal-looking woman be the true villain. Nothing makes a group of players more suspicious than the “hot chick” who they just know is a succubus, vampire or worse. It's important that the GM mix this up, else the “rescue the maiden who is really an evil monster” trick won't work.

In *Demons and Devils*, I wrote a she-devil encounter that was to be played a little differently. Having Princess Leia tactics, her snarky insults were incredibly disarming (and fatal) to many player characters. Would I have presented the lady as a dumb, horny, beautiful girl, they would have attacked immediately.

Playing these villains as something not obvious is the key to success. Certainly the poor farmer, the old woman, or the homely fighter is less a threat than the silk-clad beauty. You need to mix the “Dark Natasha”-style villain (from *The Lost Lands: Stoneheart Valley*) in every now and again, but to truly develop the wolf-in-sheep's-clothing, variation in appearance is key. Sometimes these villains can make multiple appearances. If the player characters encounter them several times, perhaps even initially under the guise of an ally or friend, they grow to trust them, only to be set up for the grand betrayal later.

Good examples of this in modern games include Sarah Oakheart in the *Lord of the Rings Online*<sup>29</sup> game. Sarah is a doddering old gal, desperately in need of saving. The first 10 or so encounters involve rescuing her from various foes and returning her to safety. Finally, it turns out that she is an evil servant of the dark lord and she attempts to sacrifice the players to him. The same could be done in a tabletop game. There is also nothing to say that an “ally” cannot simply use the player characters to achieve some end. This could be theft, assassination or ambush. Consider the following sequence of events:

<sup>29</sup> “The Lord of the Rings Online.” *The Lord of the Rings Online*, Turbine, Inc.. 2007.

## WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

- The players encounter a “priestess of Muir” who heals them in the wilderness and then mysteriously leaves.
- The same priestess is encountered as a “prisoner” of a band of orcs and they rescue her, only to have her leave again.
- The third time they meet her, she is in combat with a pack of undead. She eventually “turns” the creatures after sustaining several wounds. She heals the player characters and then leaves again.
- The priestess vouches for the player characters during another trick — “**Framed**” comes to mind — getting them off the hook and establishing yet more trust.
- The priestess agrees to go on some major quest with the party to recover an artifact.
- Once the artifact is recovered, the priestess either a) attacks the party with a large group of minions or b) steals the artifact and leaves for good — completely betraying them.

The same could be done with an aging fighter (really a high-level foe), a little kid, or an old farmer. Gary Gygax always seemed to use the town merchant (see the *Village of Hommler*<sup>30</sup> or *Necropolis*<sup>31</sup>). In the *Conan* stories, it was usually one of the sexy vixens or some loyal henchman. Whether you treat these types of villains as double agents or as direct threats, it is imperative that the setup of the encounter is not obvious.

Another fun way to handle this is to have the villain pretend to be the victim, causing the player characters to select the wrong side in a fight. I have seen this done well several times. In the *Hall of the Fire Giant King*<sup>32</sup>, for example, several of the prisoners were worse opponents than the giants. Consider this:

- The player characters happen across evidence of a party being slaughtered in the wild or dungeon. There is evidence that many were taken prisoner, and the logical solution for the Lawful party is to rescue them.
- They track the survivors back to their camp.
- They battle with the monsters/brigands, etc.
- They locate the prisoners, all of whom are dead except for an old woman.
- The old woman is in reality an evil witch who was the monster/brigand leader, but is pretending to be a victim to escape or slay the player characters. She killed all the others so they wouldn't talk. She wails and cried about her treatment, telling PCs she is a poor merchant's wife, and while not rich, she will see that they get a reward for their bravery.
- The witch proceeds to kill them in their sleep. Of course she doesn't actually want to get back to civilization! Or else she escapes if the PCs are too powerful to kill, stealing what she can in the process.

Now if that old woman was a young nubile girl, the players would likely become suspicious. Rescuing the “merchant's wife” seems a lot less dangerous than rescuing the “princess.” Likewise, promises of great rewards, in my opinion, make players suspicious. Offering little other than “a good deed done” is quite disarming.

---

<sup>30</sup> Gygax, Gary. *The Village of Hommler: Introductory to Novice Level*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Games, 1979. Print.

<sup>31</sup> Gygax, Gary, Bill Webb, Clark Peterson, and Scott Greene. *Necropolis*. United States: Necromancer Games, 2002. Print.

<sup>32</sup> Gygax, Gary. *Hall of the Fire Giant King*. Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Games, 1978. Print.

# Sheep in Wolf's Clothing

---

## Kobold with a Glowing Stick (aka the "Wiz")

"I am Oz, the Great and Powerful!"

Everyone remembers the end scene in *The Wizard of Oz*<sup>33</sup> where the wizard is found out to be a charlatan who uses fear and intimidation to create fear and awe, only to be revealed as a simple old man (albeit wise).

This trick has been used over the decades to great effect. Essentially, a weak creature is made to appear as something far more powerful. Sometimes the creature has a magic item or a potion that temporarily creates what I like to call the "nilbog effect." A nilbog (goblin backward; these appear in *The Tome of Horrors Complete* for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game and *Swords & Wizardry*, pages 446 and 399, respectively) grew in power if you damaged him, and could only be slain by casting healing spells on him.

The plan here is that the creature involved wants to either make the party go away, or even possibly extort something out of them. For example, a creature using a *potion of gaseous form* and pretending to be a djinni could "grant them a wish" if they give him 1000 gp, only to consume the rest of the potion and take off with their loot never to return. A kobold with a *light* spell on a bone wand-like device could threaten to "blast them all to oblivion" if they don't leave him alone. A small creature with a *potion of giant strength* (*potion of bull's strength* in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game) could perform some amazing feat such as tearing a metal breastplate in two (or it could pull a rigged object in two even without a potion) to scare or intimidate players. Really, anything that makes a weak creature appear very powerful works here. One key is that, as I discussed above, the GM should not describe creatures as a "goblin," but rather as "a small, fanged humanoid, covered with tattoos of mystical symbols, wearing numerous bone and metal amulets and talismans, carrying a two-foot-long glowing femur bone."

Ideas I have used in the past for such an encounter include:

- A kobold wearing bright clothing and carrying a glowing bone "wand" with a *light* spell cast on it.
- A goblin shaman with *faerie fire* or *dancing lights* cast on him.
- A low-level evil wizard coming out of a bottle using a *potion of gaseous form* to be a "djinni."
- Any small creature with a growth potion or spell that makes them get big.

---

<sup>33</sup> *The Wizard of Oz*. MGM, 1939.

SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING



## SG Note:

Unofficial...

### Dancing Lights

**Spell Level:** Magic-User, 1st Level

**Range:** 0

**Duration:** 1 round per level

A magic-user may create up to four lights that resemble lanterns or torches (and cast that amount of light), or up to four glowing spheres of light (which look like will-o'-wisp), or one faintly glowing, vaguely humanoid shape. The *dancing lights* must stay within a 10-foot-radius area in relation to each other but otherwise move as you desire. The lights have a Movement rate of 18. A light winks out if the distance between you and it exceeds 400ft.

A magic-user can only have one *dancing lights* spell active at any one time. *Dancing lights* can be made permanent with a *permanency* spell. If you make this spell permanent, it does not count against the limit of one spell active at a time.

## Stuffed Dragon

Similar to the last trick, this one uses environmental factors to trick and intimidate the player characters into retreating or paying off some tricky low-level monster. The “if you bother us, my momma is going to eat you” method is tried and true, and usually works. The idea here is that some low-level critter has something like a gong that he will ring, ostensibly summoning a huge ally. Alternatively, a fake dragon (with someone operating bellows to create smoky fumes or something like that” makes it appear that a giant monster will join the fray if the party attacks the “little ones.”

The best way to use this is to sprinkle it in with a real instance of a “dragon with kobolds.” Have the real one actually be involved in an encounter early on (e.g. the **sybiotic monsters trick**, combined with a **wolf in sheep's clothing**) in an adventure. That way the fear of an unknown ally becomes real, and the player characters are more susceptible to the reverse case.

There are several other ways that fear and intimidation can be used:

- Noise (drums, loud grunting, metal clanking, etc.) that makes it appear that many more or larger creatures are “just around the corner” (think Samwise in the orc fortress).
- Scarecrow monsters deep in the shadows with fake missile weapons.
- Illusion spells that make it look like there are tens or hundreds of creatures near (I like to use wraiths and shadows from *phantasmal force* spells).
- Ropes and pulleys that move some large puppet creature.
- Obscured vision due to smoke, steam, etc., added to any of the above.
- Cave echoes or other sound-manipulating effects.
- Pet gas spores or other monsters that seem intimidating because they look like something else. (I used a blue dyed worg once to great effect).
- Really scary door covered with skulls, etc., that actually is the only safe path forward.

# Scary Looking Things

Another way to create a harmless yet intimidating situation is to provide either a creepy sense of dark evil, simple grossness or even something that the players are “sure” is dangerous, but is in fact harmless. For example, large bloodstains are one way to create a situation that just screams danger. Oozing slime running down a wall, glistening in the torchlight, may just be naturally occurring goo, but if properly described, it sounds like some big, bad ooze monster is near.

One of my personal favorites is to have floating chunks of green goo floating in rooms partially filled with water. The green goo is probably harmless, although sometimes it can be green slime. This also works in outdoor settings, even though astute players realize that green slime perishes in sunlight.

Additional outdoor tricks like this include huge footprints, bark scratched off trees by what appears to be huge claws (and may just be beavers), and loud nocturnal noises. Trees falling in the woods do make noise after all. Strange smells work wonders in getting player characters to cast defensive spells immediately as well. An example follows:

## The Loud Leaping Ghoul

This **ghoul** is just like any other, with a couple exceptions. First, he is a chimpanzee. Second, he has a *very* loud voice. When in combat, the ghoul swings from trees and vines, all the while screeching in a menacing, horrible, throaty voice. Being fiendishly cunning, the ghoul uses tactics during combat and seeks to engage and paralyze one opponent at a time. It moves on to a second opponent as soon as the quivering body of a victim hits the ground.

### SG Note:

The ghoul monkey appears in *The Tomb of Horrors 4* for both *Swords & Wizardry* and the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. If you want to use the stats presented there, for the Pathfinder version, please add the following: **Melee** bite +4 (1d2+1 plus disease) and 2 claws +4 (1d2+1 plus disease and paralysis); **Special Attacks** paralysis (1d4+1 rounds, DC 13, elves are immune to this affect).

## Illusions

Illusory walls, doors and other objects are of great value to the GM. They can be used to hide things such as passages, pits and traps. They also have been the source of much angst and confusion in the game since they were first introduced. Adjudication of illusions has never really been clearly defined by any game system, and the GM must use judgment in figuring out how they work. While not the answer to all, these are some ways I use illusions, and some clever ways to add them to your game.

First, in order to disbelieve an illusion, I require a “leap of faith” similar to Indiana Jones crossing the invisible bridge in *The Last Crusade*<sup>34</sup>. One must close his eyes and just walk right into/through the illusion, unless of course it is dispelled. Some reason must be present for a player character to even have a chance at disbelief. For example, if the demon suddenly changes places with the cleric (see Scramge in *Rappan Athuk*), this seems strange and could be disbelieved. If one falls through a floor and a splash is heard beneath it, it makes sense that the player characters would notice that “something is strange” about the floor, and would likely attempt to disbelieve.

<sup>34</sup> *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Paramount Pictures, 1989.

# BILL WEBB'S BOOK OF DIRTY TRICKS

The way I play illusions is governed by several rules:

- Illusions themselves cannot cause damage (some exception could be made for higher-level spells). They cannot turn you to stone or incinerate you (yes, I know, *Swords & Wizardry* allows 2d6 damage — I do not).
- Illusions that are found out do not disappear.
- Failure to disbelieve prevents someone from successfully navigating past/through the illusion (think Harry Potter's platform at the train station) because they veer off at the last second rather than hit the wall they "know" to be there.
- I allow players to use judgment to do things like "close their eyes and cross the invisible bridge" or "attack my friend the cleric, who I believe is really a demon" without making any rolls.

Some higher-level spells are slightly different. For example, the spell *phantasmal killer* creates a situation very similar to the one in *Conan the Destroyer*<sup>35</sup> (the wizard in the mirror room). The illusion cannot be harmed, but it can harm you if you believe it can. Higher-level spells just have to be handled differently because, well, they are higher-level spells. I treat *hallucinatory terrain* as an incredibly powerful spell. Imagine walking through woods that are disguised as a grassy field. The twisted ankles and knots on heads as PCs step on invisible roots and run into branches would be innumerable.

Some great uses of even simple illusions (using the spell *phantasmal force*) I have had experience with include:

- Illusions of wraiths/shadows in a pack in front of the caster. To get to him, you have to pass through the grasping shadowy hands reaching out of walls and the floor.
- Illusions covering a pit or other trap.
- Illusory walls (see *The Lost Lands: Stoneheart Valley*) causing player characters to miss the direction they need to go and leading them into a big monster.
- A false camp with sleeping people and a small fire burning. This allows the caster and his allies to spring a trap when their "sleeping bodies" are attacked.
- Illusions to cover hiding places, such as a false forest in front of the party (think Hermione and the snatchers from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*<sup>36</sup>).

## SG Note:

Unofficial...

### Phantasmal Killer

**Spell Level:** Magic-User, 5th Level

**Range:** 100ft.

**Duration:** 1 round

A magic-user may create a phantasmal image of the most fearsome creature imaginable to the victim. Only the spell's subject can see the *phantasmal killer*, a vague shape of doom. The victim first gets a special save to recognize the image as unreal. The victim must roll 3d6 and score under their int score. If that save fails, the phantasm touches the subject, and another (normal) save must be made or the victim dies from fear. Even if the second save is successful, the subject takes 3d6 points of damage.

If the victim of a *phantasmal killer* attack succeeds in disbelieving and possesses telepathy, the beast can be turned upon you. You must then disbelieve it or become subject to its deadly fear attack.

"Conan makes his save by smashing the mirrors and slaying Thoth Amon"

— *Conan the Destroyer*<sup>37</sup>

35 *Conan the Destroyer*. MGM Home Entertainment, 2004.

36 *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Warner Home Video, 2011.

37 *Conan the Destroyer*. MGM Home Entertainment, 2004.

SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING



# Trickery

---

## Hidden Compartment within a Hidden Compartment

This one can be quite entertaining. The player character thinks himself a genius because he was smart enough to find that hidden compartment. But he almost always fails to check the hidden compartment for a second hidden compartment. This is best played by having the false (first) hidden item contain something of value (a potion, some gems) while the second interior hidden compartment contains the real treasure (a ring, perhaps).

One of the keys to treasure distribution is that it should be hard to get. It should be either hard to find (e.g. hidden) or hard to carry. This trick makes a great tool in the GM's arsenal to keep those pesky player characters from finding the loot. One of the biggest errors a GM can make is to make treasures obvious and easy to get. After all, most creatures would go to great lengths to hide their wealth lest it be stolen by their neighbors. I play this pretty tough. In honest estimation, I would bet that more than half the loot in my games is missed by player characters.

Another way this can be done is similar to what I did on **Level 9B** in *Rappan Athuk*. A chest contained a hidden compartment containing a magical extradimensional chest. The real treasure (well, and a demi-lich) was found inside the chest. Opening the chest was a difficult task, requiring divination spells and perhaps trips to a sage.

## Trap on a Trap

This one has been a great gag ever since the spell *phantom trap* was invented with another name in 1E. Two primary methods can be used to achieve this trick. The first is to have an obvious trap trapped by a less obvious one, and the second is to have a fake trap that, if disarmed, triggers the real trap. The true purpose of this trick, much like the double hidden compartment trick previously described, is to teach players to be careful and avoid complacency.

An example of the first type of trick would be a pit trap with pressure plates along its sides. The pit would be easily located. To avoid the pit, you just walk around it, right? The pressure plates would do something fun like release hidden spears or drop a ceiling block down, covering the pit and squashing anything along its edges. Anyone who has read *Grimtooth's Traps*<sup>38</sup> has seen a great deal of this type of trap. That tome could be used as a great reference aid in using this type of trick.

The second type of trick in this category can either have a real secondary trap or none at all. A mechanism is set up to be easily detected and obviously a trap. It actually does nothing, or certainly nothing dangerous, but is almost impossible to disarm in any way. The reason something like this might exist is that some denizen wants to scare off any would-be looters or intruders but does not want to stop and disarm its "trap" itself. A good example would be

---

<sup>38</sup> O'Connor, Paul Ryan., and Steven S. Crompton. *Grimtooth's Traps: A Game-master's Aid for All Role-playing Systems*. Scottsdale, AZ: Flying Buffalo, 1981. Print.

**SG Note:**

Unofficial *Swords & Wizardry* spell, converted from the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.

**Phantom Trap**

**Spell Level:** Magic-User, 1st Level

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** permanent

A magic-user makes a lock or other small mechanism seem to be trapped to anyone who can discover traps. The spell is placed upon any small mechanism or device, such as a lock, hinge, hasp, cork, cap, or ratchet. Any character able to detect traps, or who uses any spell or device enabling trap detection, is certain a real trap exists. Of course, the effect is illusory and nothing happens if the trap is “sprung”; its primary purpose is to frighten away thieves or make them waste precious time.

If another *phantom trap* is active within 50 feet when the spell is cast, the casting fails.

a ceiling that appears ready to collapse, but is in fact quite stable. Another example would be having the trigger for the real trap be the disarming of the fake one.

This is another example of how I use actual description of actions taken to disarm a trap by manipulating its components during play rather than just having the players roll dice. The action of cutting a wire or pulling a lever is much more stress inducing (and fun) than simply saying roll a d20 to see if you disarm the trap.

Finally, this trick can be fun when used to hide some means of egress or treasure. A good example is the pit traps in *Tomb of Horrors*<sup>39</sup> that “lead to a fortuitous fall.” The only way a group was able to bypass many of the early (and deadly) traps was to get trapped and locate a secret door inside the trap. This could also be used with an obvious trap that “cannot” be disarmed guarding some form of treasure. Is the party willing to set off the trap to grab the gold?

## Time-Limited Magic Item

Nothing steps up the pace of an adventure like a ticking clock. Similar in effect to the “*Bad Air*” trick noted above, this one creates a situation in which the player characters have to react in real time to do whatever it is they need to do. This is akin to holding a grenade that has had its pin pulled. This trick can take many forms. One might be a magical sword that only works until it has slain the one creature it was enchanted to slay. Another could be a magical *potion of flying* that only lasts 1d6 rounds instead of its usual duration. An insidious trick would be an item that allows a creature to fly or breathe water until a certain height (say 200 feet) or depth was reached, then turns off. Other ideas include a magic wand that only works for 7 days or any other item that, instead of being stable, is slowly drained of power.

It is a good idea if the player characters know this effect is occurring. This creates a sense of urgency for using the item and for completion of whatever quest it is associated with. One example I used last year at Gen Con is described below. In this encounter, no one had a +3 weapon, and the player characters were all 4th- to 6th-level. So just how did they defeat an iron golem you ask?

<sup>39</sup> Gyax. *Tomb of Horrors*

## The Golem Pool

The party enters a circular room fully 60 feet in diameter. In the center of the room is a small pool of liquid, 6 feet in diameter. The pool is filled with a silvery liquid, and cold radiates from it. On the far side of the room is a large throne, upon which sits a large iron statue of a fully armored knight. Its visor is pulled back to reveal a close-fit iron grating like a tiny portcullis. Both the pool and the statue radiate magic if *detect magic* is cast.

The pool lining itself is magical and keeps the liquid from freezing as long as it remains in the pool. The pool's contents are a chemical mixture that freezes rapidly if removed from the pool. Anything placed in the pool is immediately frozen (flesh is destroyed; 2d6 points of damage if an arm or leg is placed in, 1 point of damage for a finger, instant death for anyone diving in, no save). Use of metal implements (pots, helmets, etc.) to remove the liquid makes them very cold, with the liquid inside freezing to ice in 1d3+1 rounds after removal. The residue forms a strange silvery solid (worth 10 gp a pound to an alchemist). A total of 300 pounds of material could be removed. Any hasty attempt at removal (see combat below) requires a save to avoid being splashed for 1d3 points of damage as icy liquid sloshes about (DC 15 Reflex save in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game).

The statue is an **iron golem** enchanted with a fiery breath weapon instead of the usual poison cloud. The monster, like most of its kind, is immune to virtually everything. It does, however, have one major vulnerability — magical cold directed at its furnace face can harm it, making it vulnerable to the “freeze-shatter” effect.

### SG Note:

**Modified Iron Golem:** HD 16 (80hp); AC 3 [16]; Atk fist (4d10); Move 6; Save 3; AL N; CL/XP 17/3500; **Special:** cold vulnerability (head only), fiery breath (3d6 damage in a 30ft cone), immune to all weapons +2 or less, slowed by lightning, healed by fire, immune to most magic.

#### MODIFIED IRON GOLEM

CR 13

XP 25,600

**hp** 129 (*Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary* “Golem, Iron”, with the following changes: add Weakness vulnerable to cold (head only); Breath Weapon (Su) As a free action once every 1d4+1 rounds, the iron golem can exhale a 30-foot cone of fire. Vulnerable to cold (Su) This modified iron golem take double damage from cold, on its head only. On a round after it has taken cold damage, it loses all damage reduction for 1 round.

Unofficial...

#### Rod of Smiting

A *rod of smiting* is a +1 heavy mace with a +3 bonus against golems and mechanical enemies. If the wielder rolls a natural 20 on a hit, it completely destroys the golem (no saving throw).

The golem breathes fire every round it is able. During the round it does this, its face visor opens, revealing the grated head behind. If the icy liquid is tossed into its face (save or take 1d3 points of splash damage, and treat as a grenade-like missile), its breath fails to take effect, and for the next round, its head (targeting a creature's head gets a -2 to hit on the attack roll) is affected by normal weapons. In addition, any hit with a blunt object does

double damage that round.

The golem wields a *rod of smiting* with 21 charges.

## The Melting Lock

This trick has been seen in games and in movies for a long time, but is often neglected in actual play. Like most tricks, it has various applications. First, a critical key required to open the proverbial “door to the treasure” could be used in one of a series of locks. If used in the wrong one — poof, no key. The second method of applying this trick (while kind of mean to your thief characters) is to have a bottle of acid in a door/chest, etc., that if the lock is picked, dissolves the lockpick. Yet a third way to apply this is to create a riddle or puzzle that must be solved to open some item or to know how to use the key. Perhaps it must be turned three times to the left and never to the right. Perhaps there is a keyhole within a keyhole. Anyone who has seen *National Treasure*<sup>40</sup> remembers Nicolas Cage having to trouble over a mysterious puzzle lock containing acid that was set to dissolve a key clue if not deciphered first.

All of these scenarios provide an excellent way to continue the challenge after the monster is slain. Sure the player characters have found the treasure — but they still have to get it out safely. The idea of self-destructing treasure items forces the player characters to stop and use their brains, even long after the monster is slain.

## Tesseract and Teleportals

Misdirection and getting people lost is an old standby. Teleportals, bottomless pits and even simple mechanical things such as one-way doors, and sealing corridors and rooms change the whole nature and focus of an adventure. The nature of the adventure becomes focused on escape rather than exploration.

Like many of these tricks, this one should be used sparingly. The goal of my play is to allow the players to set the nature and context of the adventures they go on. The occasional disruption of this is a good thing, however. “Endless” pathways need to have some clue or method of escape (such as the White Corridor on **Level 11–A** of *Rappan Athuk*, or the encounter with the Sphinx in the *Tomb of Abysthor*). Each has an endless trap that requires a creative solution to escape). Perhaps the player characters have to walk backward, answer a riddle or solve some puzzle to escape. Trial-and-error solutions are fine, as long as they are not too difficult (e.g. hopeless).

Teleporters are a different animal. I tend to use these as a method of egress that once learned allows the user (or the local bad guys) a rapid means of travel within the area. For example, in the lair of an evil wizard, the wizard could have built these things as a means to get around rapidly. Of course he knows where each one goes and which lead to danger (the useless, dangerous ones are made as a trap to snare others trying to use his toys). Once the player characters learn the patterns, they have an effective means of travel as well. Of course, the occasional random teleport (very occasional, else it is just a “screw the players deal”) is not out of place either. I encourage any GM to decide “why” the teleporter exists before adding it in. Creatures like crypt things and demi-liches have their powers to divert people away from them or their lairs. Where you send player characters teleported by hostile creatures like these could and should be bad.

The simple mechanical “no-retreat” mechanism has many uses. One-way doors, falling portcullis traps and shifting walls are great ways to create multi-part traps. From dead-ends

<sup>40</sup> *National Treasure*. Buena Vista Pictures. 2005.

filled with oozes and blobs to starvation death traps, this concept occurs in the real world and in fantasy. The ancient Egyptians created such things to seal tombs and kill tomb robbers. In a fantasy setting, there is no reason to assume the vampire princess would do any less.

## I Can Get In and You Can't!

This is yet another trick I like to use fairly frequently when using monsters that can move through places or know how to move through places that player characters cannot. Good examples include the small holes in a bricked-up wall allowing a vampire in gaseous form to pass through, solid walls preventing access to the lair (and treasure) of an incorporeal monster, long stretches of underwater rivers or lakes preventing anything that needs air to breathe from accessing it, and tiny tunnels through which small monsters (such as mites and rats) can pass, but players cannot. Illusory walls are also a great way to do this.

Certainly there are magical and mundane solutions to these situations. Spells such as *locate object* and *find the path* and *potions of gaseous form*, *reduce person* and *treasure finding* become extremely valuable to your players. Frankly, if I were a vampire, I would certainly hide my treasure and resting place somewhere inaccessible to others.

You should keep in mind that if the treasure is say, behind a wall, a method to get it there in the first place must exist. Players who are wise will figure out that they need to bash the wall down to get at what is behind it. Some clue about passing through the wall needs to be provided, at least to the careful player who asks. Perhaps the 6 wraiths coming out of the east wall are enough of a heads up that something lies beyond! An example follows:

### Sealed in Stone

This 20-foot-by-20-foot room contains an 8-foot-by-3-foot crypt shaped like a man, with ancient paintings and runes detailing curses (non-magical) that befall any who open the tomb. No exits from the room, other than the one through which the party entered, are present.

The crypt can be opened using a crowbar or lever. Its lid weighs more than 300 pounds. If dislodged, it opens to reveal the mummified remains of a man dressed in rotten finery and adorned with several pieces of costume jewelry (6 pieces worth 2d6 gp each). The crypt itself contains no secret compartments of other means of hiding anything. The real treasure of course, lies underneath the nearly 1,400 pound sarcophagus itself. If the whole thing is moved, it can be noticed that instead of smooth stone, the floor beneath is composed of mud brick and mortar. If the bricks are removed, 6 pieces of jewelry almost identically matching the fakes found on the body are found. They include:

- A cat's-eye ring, made of gold, worth 200 gp.
- A silver necklace, set with 10 small emeralds, worth 900 gp.
- A platinum-and-gold brooch in the shape of a spider with rubies for eyes, worth 600 gp.
- A gold ring engraved with runes (*read magic* reveals the command word —“Cassius”).

This is a *ring of water elemental command* (2 charges remaining).

- A gold bracelet set with a large polished red agate, worth 70 gp.
- A solid jade snuff bottle filled with “ancient snuff” (really *dust of appearance*, 6 uses), worth 1,200 gp.

**SG Note:**

Unofficial for the *Swords & Wizardry* ruleset...

**Ring of Elemental Command**

*Rings of elemental command* are very powerful. Each appears to be nothing more than a lesser magic ring until fully activated (by meeting a special condition, such as single-handedly slaying an elemental of the appropriate type or exposure to a sacred material of the appropriate element), but each has certain other powers as well as the following common properties.

Elementals of the plane to which the ring is attuned can't attack the wearer, or even approach within 5ft of him. If the wearer desires, he may forego this protection and instead attempt to charm the elemental (as *charm monster*). If the charm attempt fails, however, absolute protection is lost and no further attempt at charming can be made.

Creatures from the plane to which the ring is attuned who attack the wearer take a -1 penalty on their attack rolls. The ring wearer makes applicable saves against the creature's attacks with a +2 bonus. He gains a +4 bonus on all to hit rolls against such creatures. Any weapon he uses my strike such creatures.

The wearer of the ring is able to converse with creatures from the plane to which his ring is attuned. These creatures recognize that he wears the ring, and show a healthy respect for the wearer.

The possessor of a *ring of elemental command* takes a saving throw penalty as follows:

Element	Saving Throw Penalty
Air	-2 against earth-based effects
Earth	-2 against air- or electricity-based effects
Fire	-2 against water- or cold-based effects
Water	-2 against fire-based effects

In addition to the powers described above which function constantly, the following magical abilities may also be used. Each elemental ring has 12 charges, and each magical ability drains charges as listed.

*Ring of Elemental Command (Water)*

- *water walk*
- *create water* (1 charge)
- *water breathing* (1 charge)
- *wall of ice* (2 charges)
- *ice storm* (2 charges)
- *control weather* (4 charges)

Other *elemental rings* have similar abilities and powers. These rings may be worn by any class.

**Continued on following page.**

**SG Note: (Continued)****Water Walk****Spell Level:** Cleric, 4th Level; Druid 3rd Level**Range:** touch**Duration:** 1 hour

The spell-caster can tread on any liquid as if it were firm ground. Mud, oil, snow, quicksand, running water, ice, and even lava can be traversed easily, since the subjects' feet hover an inch or two above the surface. Creatures crossing molten lava still take damage from the heat because they are near it. The subjects can walk, run, or otherwise move across the surface as if it were normal ground.

If the spell is cast underwater (or while the subjects are partially or wholly submerged in whatever liquid they are in), the subjects are borne toward the surface at a Movement rate of 24 until they can stand on it.

Opening the bricked-up area does in fact release a real *curse*. All within 20 feet must save or be affected by the *curse*, which causes anyone wearing the jewelry to lose all their hair. Hair regrows as soon as the affected individual receives a *remove curse* spell, although this could take several months. (This is a DC 20 Will save for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game)

## I Got It, Now What?

This one is also an entertaining trick that can test the players and make them work for the treasure you give them. A clear example of this is a magic item or gem secreted away inside a Rubik's Cube. You simply pass the cube across the table, inform them that it rattles around a bit, and make them solve it (in real life) to get the goodies. Another thing I have done is used a ring puzzle — you know, one of those wire things with a ring that slides back and forth, but is almost impossible to get off. The only time I have ever given a player a *ring of spell turning* I used this. The player had to get the ring off the wire puzzle before I would let his character wear it. Of course, the ring is quite fragile, so attempts to cut it off would destroy it. Examples of these types of puzzles can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disentanglement\\_puzzle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disentanglement_puzzle). It took the player four gaming sessions before he finally got the thing loose!

TRICKERY



# Greed is Bad!

---

## Collapsing Treasure Room

We all remember the scene from *The Mummy*<sup>41</sup> where the greedy evil henchman gets trapped inside the sealing tomb because he is unwilling to leave behind the hundred-pound sack of gold. Whether you trap a player character for being greedy or have the ceiling fall down on him, it's a useful lesson that greed can get you killed.

Several ways I have seen this used in the past include:

- Incorporating the treasure into a support for the roof (e.g. gold in the walls) that causes the ceiling to fall in if too much is removed.
- Having the evil wizard's enchantments fail when he dies (e.g. *wall of stone*) or fail if dispelled by a *dispel magic*.
- A big, dumb monster bursts out of supporting structures when it is obvious the bad guys are going to lose, pulling a Samson-type collapse.
- Creating situations requiring speed to escape — characters that are encumbered by sacks of treasure won't have time to escape (Goodbye, Bennie).

Numerous other situations like these can of course be used. The most important thing is that you allow the player characters to escape with “some” but not all of what they are trying to get. Forcing them into rapid decision making and forcing a choice between safety and death is the idea. One thing I have done in the past is explained the situation, and then set a timer. I rapidly ask each in turn “what are you doing *exactly*” and give each the same amount of time, only revealing the consequences of their choice after all have acted. A good explanation of this is in *Tomb of Horrors*<sup>42</sup> — both the sealing corridor at the start and the lava pit trap near the false tomb. Adding an element of real time to this trick is essential.

Vivid description by the GM is also critical when using this type of trick: “At first just dust and small pebbles fall from the ceiling, then larger stones start to fall. The ceiling groans and creaks as even larger bits start to fall. The exit is about 100 feet away, and the pile of gold from the dragon's treasure still has not been gathered up. What exactly do each of you do now?”

## The Apple Tree

Sometimes the player characters encounter something in their travels that is beneficial, but limited in quantity or that takes months or even years to replenish. Those of you familiar with *Rappan Athuk* recall the mushrooms on **Level 7**. Some of these took 100 years to regrow. Others would regrow faster, but would not regrow at all if all were taken. The idea here is to teach the players that “overfishing” leads to no more fish. Two examples follow:

---

<sup>41</sup> *The Mummy*. Universal Pictures, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Gygas. *Tomb of Horrors*

GREED IS BAD!



## The Silver Apples

Deep in the forest is a clearing. Birds and chittering critters dart about, making a cacophony of noise that is almost maddening. In the center of the clearing is a small red-leaved tree. The tree is a strange variant of an apple tree and bears 4 silver apples. If *detect magic* is cast, the apples and tree radiate magic.

The apples are indeed magical and have the effect of a *cure serious wounds* spell if eaten within 12 hours of being picked. After that time, they lose all magical properties. The apples regrow over a period of 12 months and, while on the tree, retain their potency for two months.

## Fishy, fishy, fishy, fish

The pond in the cavern is filled with a dozen or so small fish. In the darkness, the fish radiate a strange blue glow. Should *detect magic* be cast, they do in fact radiate magic. This magic has the effect of granting *water breathing* for 20 to 40 minutes upon anyone consuming one of the fish. As long as at least 6 of the little fish remain in the pool, they lay eggs that hatch once every two months, creating an additional 2d6 fish each time. If the fish population drops below 6, this number is halved. If fewer than 3 fish are left in the pool, no more fish hatch, and the remaining fish die off within two months.

From both of these examples, the GM can teach a powerful lesson in conservation. The apples fail to function if taken but not used in time, and taking too many of the fish means that the resource no longer exists. A druid character would certainly understand the second situation.

## Magic Pools and Potions (Is One Enough and Two Too Many?)

Another lesson in “don’t overuse the gift horse” is similar to mixing magical potions and going “boom.” Too much of a good thing is sometimes just that. Good examples of this include:

- A magical fountain that generates some beneficial effect (e.g. healing, flight) that is poison if too much is consumed.
- A magical statue that grants wishes, or increases attributes, etc., for the first one to use it, but creates the opposite effect for anyone else doing the same.
- An herb, potion or other substance that solves some problem (wounds) if ingested, but causes an entirely horrible effect if too much is taken.

We all see things like this in real life. Three beers are good, 30 not so much. It’s good to remind your players that moderation and caution of all things magical is necessary, and that too much of a good thing can result in an overdose.

**SG Note:**

The “Potion Miscibility Table” from the 1E *Dungeon Master's Guide*<sup>43</sup> is still the greatest resource for scaring players when their characters drink 2 potions, or drink one while still under the effects of another.

## Hiding in Plain Sight

Plain-looking things attract less attention than shiny ones. If Jesus was a carpenter, it simply makes more sense that the Holy Grail is a wooden cup rather than a gem-encrusted solid gold goblet. One trick I have used in the past is to have the mundane (or cursed) items be huge, valuable-looking and shiny. No one pays attention to the flea infested, stinky bedding of the ogre, even though it may be a *cloak of elvenkind*. In most cases, it pays to hide your magical treasure well, and hiding it in plain sight, perhaps in the trash heap of the aforementioned ogre's bed, is a good place to do it.

## Conclusion

Well, gentle reader, I hope you have enjoyed this brief peek into my brain, and I hope you have a better understanding of how I think when I run a game. Certainly all of you reading this have similar tricks up your sleeve, all of which I would love to hear about. This sampling of a few ideas is at best an idea generator for all of you, and at worst a list of one-off things you can try in your home campaign.

I graciously hope that you have enjoyed this book, and that you will share your experiences and other dirty tricks (or applications of the general ideas presented here) with us and with the gaming community. More GMs using more dirty tricks creates more skilled players. More skilled players mean more skilled GMs, and the cycle should continue. Endless, mindless combat and rolling dice to determine everything does not a roleplaying game make. Interaction and careful thought by the GM and the players has created, at least for this GM, the most memorable times at a table I have ever had.

Bill Webb  
26 January 2014

# Legal Appendix

**Designation of Product Identity:** The following items are hereby designated as Product Identity as provided in section 1(e) of the Open Game License: Any and all material or content that could be claimed as Product Identity pursuant to section 1(e), below, is hereby claimed as product identity, including but not limited to: **1.** The name "Frog God Games" as well as all logos and identifying marks of Frog God Games, LLC, including but not limited to the Frog God logo and the phrase "Adventures worth winning," as well as the trade dress of Frog God Games products; **2.** The product name "Cyclopean Deep," as well as any and all Frog God Games product names referenced in the work; **3.** All artwork, illustration, graphic design, maps, and cartography, including any text contained within such artwork, illustration, maps or cartography; **4.** The proper names, personality, descriptions and/or motivations of all artifacts, characters, races, countries, geographic locations, plane or planes of existence, gods, deities, events, magic items, organizations and/or groups unique to this book, but not their stat blocks or other game mechanic descriptions (if any), and also excluding any such names when they are included in monster, spell or feat names. **5.** Any other content previously designated as Product Identity is hereby designated as Product Identity and is used with permission and/or pursuant to license.

This printing is done under version 1.0a of the Open Game License, below.

**Notice of Open Game Content:** This product contains Open Game Content, as defined in the Open Game License, below. Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of the Open Game License.

**Designation of Open Game Content:** All text within this product — excluding any text on the inside or outside of the front or back cover or on the Credits page — is hereby designated as Open Game Content, subject to the Product Identity designation included in this Legal Appendix.

**Use of Content from *Tome of Horrors Complete*:** This product contains or references content from the *Tome of Horrors Complete* and/or other monster *Tomes* by Frog God Games. Such content is used by permission and an abbreviated Section 15 entry has been approved. Citation to monsters from the *Tome of Horrors Complete* or other monster *Tomes* must be done by citation to that original work.

OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

**1. Definitions:** (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity; (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures; characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor; (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content; (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

**2. The License:** This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

**3. Offer and Acceptance:** By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

**4. Grant and Consideration:** In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

**5. Representation of Authority to Contribute:** If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content,

# LEGAL APPENDIX

You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

**6. Notice of License Copyright:** You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

**7. Use of Product Identity:** You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

**8. Identification:** If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

**9. Updating the License:** Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

**10. Copy of this License:** You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

**11. Use of Contributor Credits:** You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

**12. Inability to Comply:** If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

**13. Termination:** This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

**14. Reformation:** If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

## 15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE

**Open Game License v 1.0a** Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

**System Reference Document** Copyright 2003, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

**Swords & Wizardry Core Rules**, Copyright 2008, Matthew J. Finch

**Swords & Wizardry Complete Rules**, Copyright 2010, Matthew J. Finch

**Swords & Wizardry Monstrosities**, Copyright 2013, Matthew J. Finch

**Pathfinder RPG Bestiary**, © 2009, Paizo Publishing, LLC; Author: Jason Bulmahn, based on material by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams.

**Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3**, © 2011, Paizo Publishing, LLC; Authors Jesse Benner, Jason Bulmahn, Adam Daigle, James Jacobs, Michael Kenway, Rob McCreary, Patrick Renie, Chris Sims, F. Wesley Schneider, James L. Sutter, and Russ Taylor, based on material by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams.

**The Tome of Horrors Complete**, Copyright 2011, Necromancer Games, Inc., published and distributed by Frog God Games; Author Scott Green.

**Dirty Tricks**, copyright 2014 Bill Webb, Frog God Games.



*Bill Webb's Book of*  
***Dirty Tricks***

This fun little tome is a GM utility for use during regular play when either too many good things happen to the players due to luck or just whenever the GM feels they need a little push to remind them that success is fleeting.

Dirty tricks are intended to create great players. That is and should be the only reason a GM springs such things on them. It also has the effect of creating a great game, where even mundane tasks cannot be taken for granted, and boredom is rare.



FROG GOD  
GAMES



\$4.99

ISBN 978-1-62283-200-2