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BE AWESOME AT:
VILLAGE DESIGN





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BE AWESOME AT VILLAGE DESIGN

Any GM can design a basic village. A dedicated GM, however, takes the extra time to craft exciting, logical and flavoursome villages that are so much more than a general store, village inn and some dreary peasant huts. Be Awesome at Village Design comprises village design essays by ENnie Award winning designer Creighton Broadhurst and a suite of tables designed to help the busy GM quickly and easily design a village ready for the game.

Whether you are a new GM just starting out, or a grizzled veteran, there's something for you in Be Awesome at Village Design.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—may yet lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

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DESIGNING A VILLAGE

Villages are a vital component of almost any campaign—adventurers tend to congregate on the borderlands of kingdoms as that is where many of the adventures they crave so much take place. Such places are replete with many small villages clustered along rivers or around crossroads, fortifications or other natural resources.

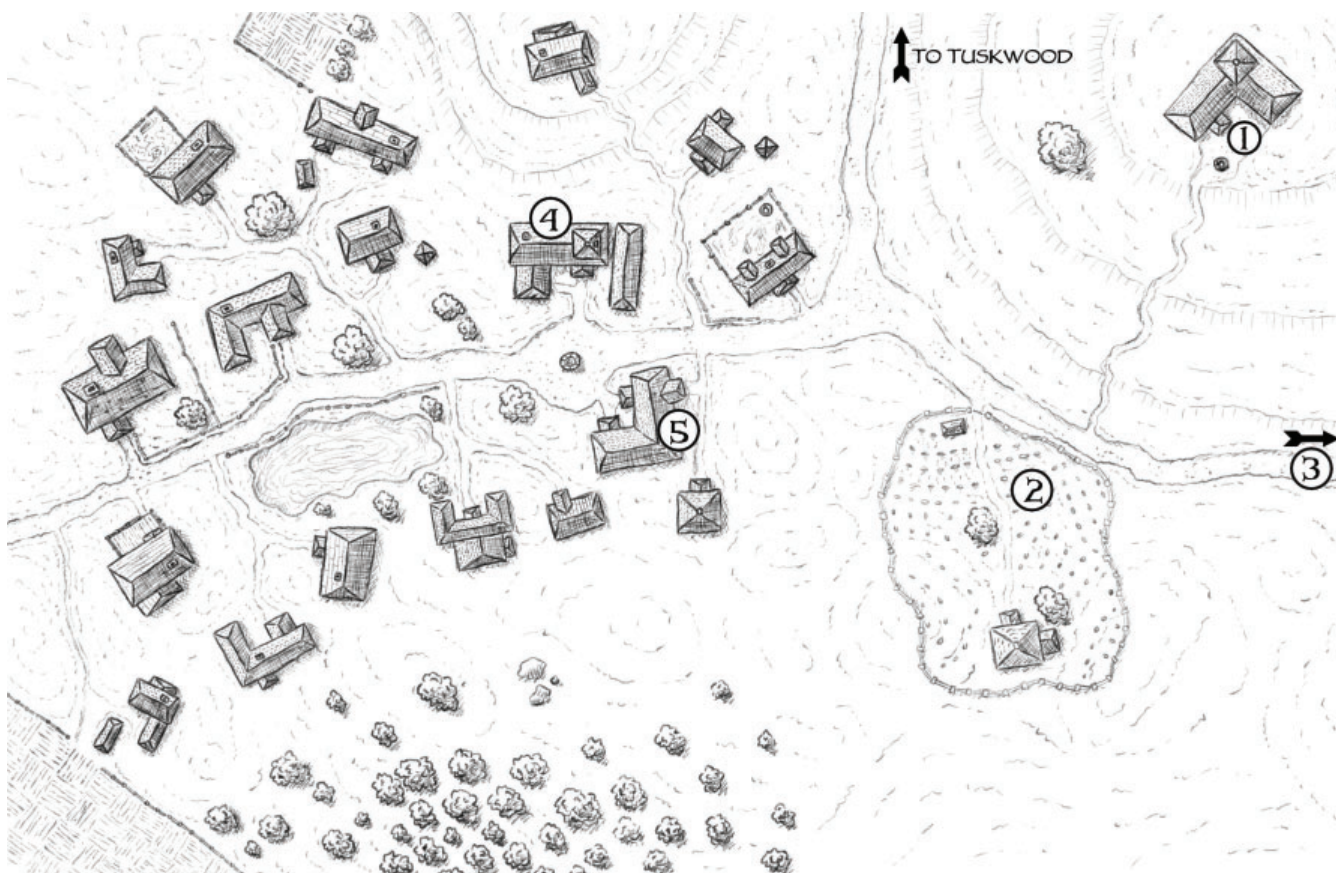
Whether the PCs are planning to rest for a while or just passing through, a well-designed settlement gives them a believable place to gather information, craft magic items and so on. Providing a flavoursome locale adds depth and verisimilitude to the campaign. A well designed village can even host minor adventures of its own and is an excellent investment in a GM's time. Villages can also serve as a temporary home base for the PCs from which they can strike out into the wilderness.

The other great thing about villages is they are much more manageable than a town or city. Many GMs shy away from running urban adventures set in large settlements as the PCs can literally go anywhere and it is very difficult to be prepared enough to cope with every eventually. The same is not true of a village, as there are a small, finite number of shops, services and other places of interest available to the PCs.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

As you might know, Raging Swan Press has a Village Backdrop line of products. These short supplements each present a detailed village ready to drop into virtually any campaign. The line has been very successful for Raging Swan Press, and I thought it might be a good idea to share some of the thinking behind the line. After all, virtually any GM can sketch out a map of a basic village and fill it with boring, bland or illogical buildings, folk and features, but it can be tricky to create a memorable, flavoursome village. The notes on the facing page comprise the overview design notes I send to new designers.

Throughout this book, I've scattered some of the maps we've used in the Village Backdrop line over the last four years. Use them to spark your imagination or in conjunction with the tables and suggestions herein to make them your own.



VILLAGE DESIGN TIPS

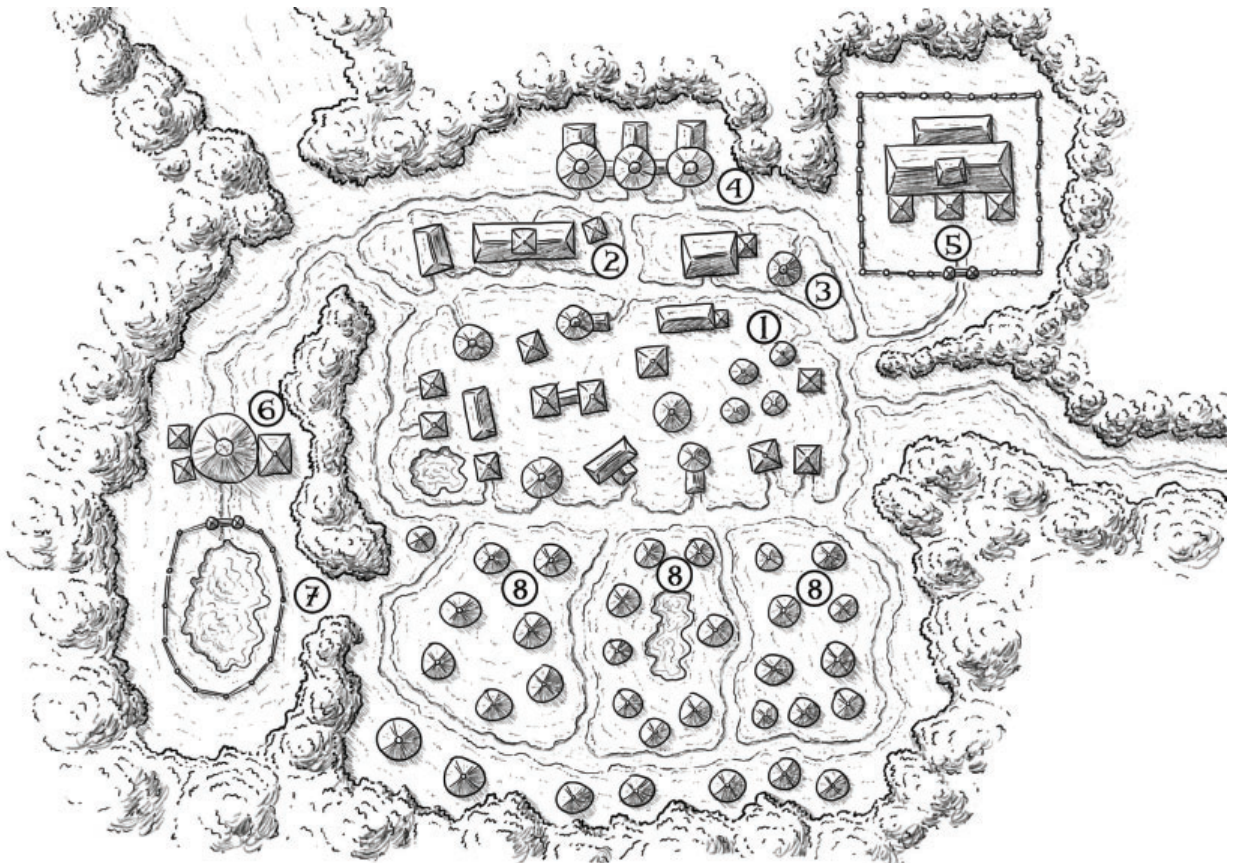
When designing a settlement, a GM should consider the following basic factors:

- **Conflict:** A village should have both internal and external conflicts. If it doesn't, it's going to be a boring place for the PCs to visit. This doesn't necessarily mean the populace is fighting in the streets; instead there might be tension or bad feeling between certain folk or segments of society. Some of these the PCs may come across and some they may not uncover, but their presence shapes both the village's physical and social landscapes. Without conflict of some sort, a settlement is a pretty boring (and unrealistic) place for adventurers.
- **Flavour:** Do the villagers have certain strange religious practises or do they wildly celebrate certain festivals? Are the buildings constructed in a certain style or does everyone dress in a particular fashion? Including local flavour helps differentiate a place from its neighbours.
- **History:** A settlement should have a defined, vibrant and relevant history. This should be evident both in the layout and condition of the place. It's always cool if a village has one or more secrets in its past perceptive or diligent PCs can discover.
- **Industry:** Above all, the trades folk, industries and shops present should make sense in the overall context of the village. For example, unless there is a good reason for their existence,

there are no magic shops or highly skilled weaponsmiths there "just in case" adventurers should visit.

- **Nearby Adventures:** Have a nearby site of adventure which the PCs can explore if they wish. A ruin, a haunted forest or old burial mound are all excellent locales to place nearby.
- **NPCs:** Describe key NPCs in evocative fashion, so they are memorable to the PCs. Just as importantly, many NPCs have their own goals, aspirations, foibles and relationships which further build on the feeling the village is a real place and that its folk are not just waiting for adventurers to turn up before springing into life.
- **Reason for Existence:** Every settlement has a reason to exist. Perhaps the village has sprung up around a small castle or it sprawls either side of the only ford for dozens of miles in either direction. The settlement's reason for existence often heavily influences its physical makeup and populace.

Final Note: When designing a village, remember its inhabitants need food and water to survive. Every village should be located near a source of fresh water and they should ideally be able to provide (at least in part) their own food.



VILLAGE LOCATION

Villages don't just pop up in any old location. To make your world believable, each settlement must have a reason for existing. Giving thought to a settlement's location adds another layer of verisimilitude to your game world which aids the players in suspending their disbelief. A village's location affects its:

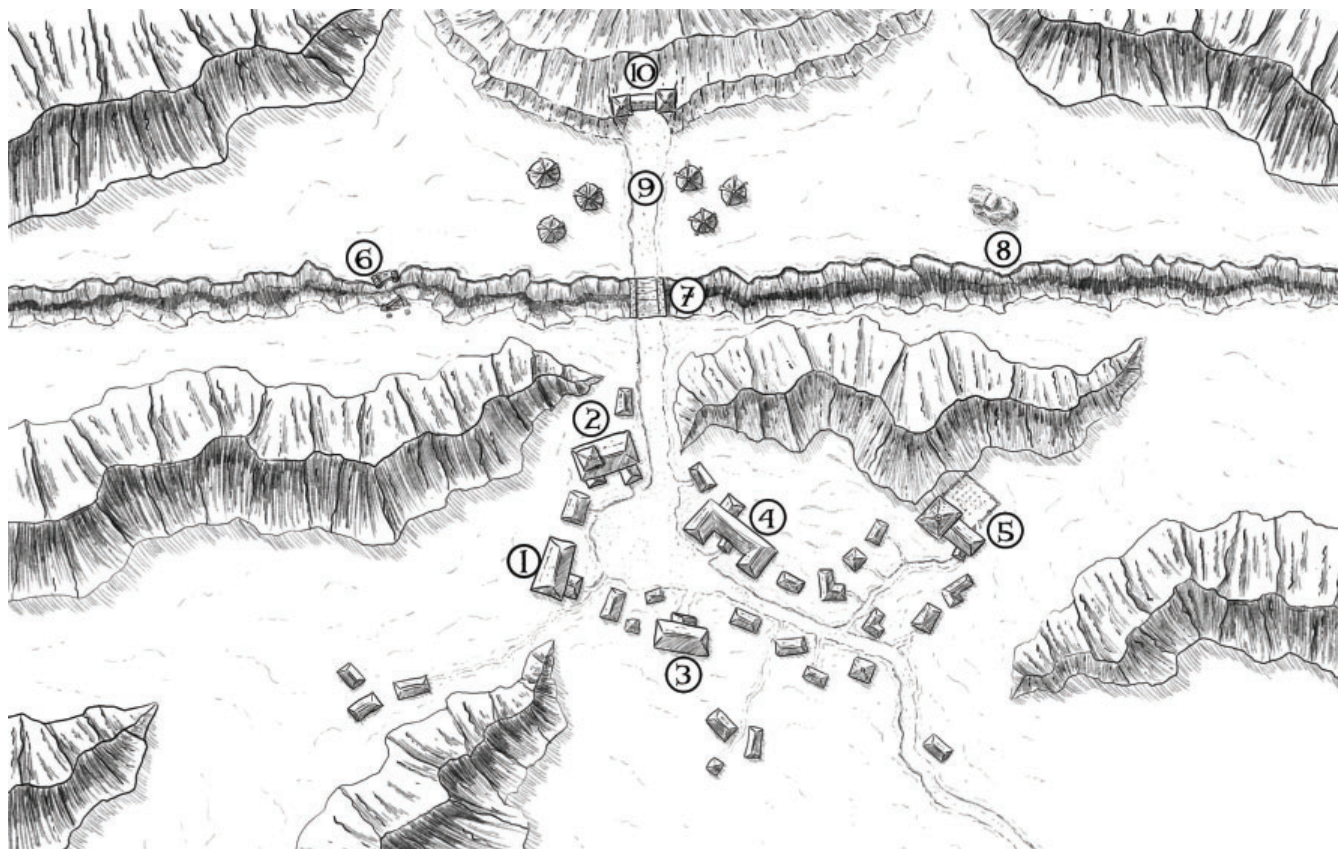
- Buildings and layout.
- Defences.
- Economy and prosperity.
- Feel and flavour both of the layout and inhabitants.
- Local natural features.
- Nearby adventure sites.
- Rules, laws and traditions.

Commonly, the presence of one or more of the five features listed below determines a village's location:

- **Fortification:** Often, a kingdom or local lord builds a castle or tower in a strategic location to either act as a defensive point or as a springboard for attack. When this happens, invariably a settlement grows up around the site to service the needs of the fortification's inhabitants. Such settlements may even be built before the fortification—the builders, masons and other

craftsmen engaged to build and maintain the castle must live somewhere, after all.

- **Geographical Feature:** The lie of the land often determines the location of a settlement. For example, if there is only one place to ford a particularly fast-flowing river a settlement is sure to spring up at that location. Similarly, the mouth of a pass cutting through a hill or mountain range is a great location for a village.
- **Natural Resource:** Villages often spring up near to a natural resource. The nature of the natural resource—a deposit of rock or precious metals, fertile land, plentiful fishing or whatever often affects the size and flavour of the village.
- **Site of Religious Significance:** If a site is of particular significance to a powerful religion, they may build a church, cathedral or monastery at the location. As with a fortification, such buildings often become the nucleus of a village. Here, the tradesmen and shopkeepers both tend to the need of those dwelling at the site and of the pilgrims coming to worship.
- **Trade Route:** Trade is the life blood of civilisation, but often the merchants carrying out such trade must travel great distances. Whole villages and towns can spring into existence along trade routes to service the needs of these caravans.



VILLAGE FEATURES

The tables in this supplement provide the busy GM with the tools necessary to quickly and easily generate the basic details of a village the PCs are about to visit. (The tables herein can also—at a push—be used to design small towns, but the GM should tweak some of the results somewhat).

When using these tables, the GM should keep in mind the surrounding terrain (and parent kingdom, if applicable) as such factors influence the village's social and physical composition.

A GM should move through the tables in the order presented noting the results of his work as he progresses. A GM should ignore or change any result rendered illogical or undesirable by other rolls. Alternatively, a GM can simply use these tables as inspiration.

GOVERNMENT

Every village has a government type. Most are ruled by an overlord—normally a hereditary local ruler who may, or may not, dwell in the village. If the ruler does not dwell in the village, one of his representatives will undoubtedly do so.

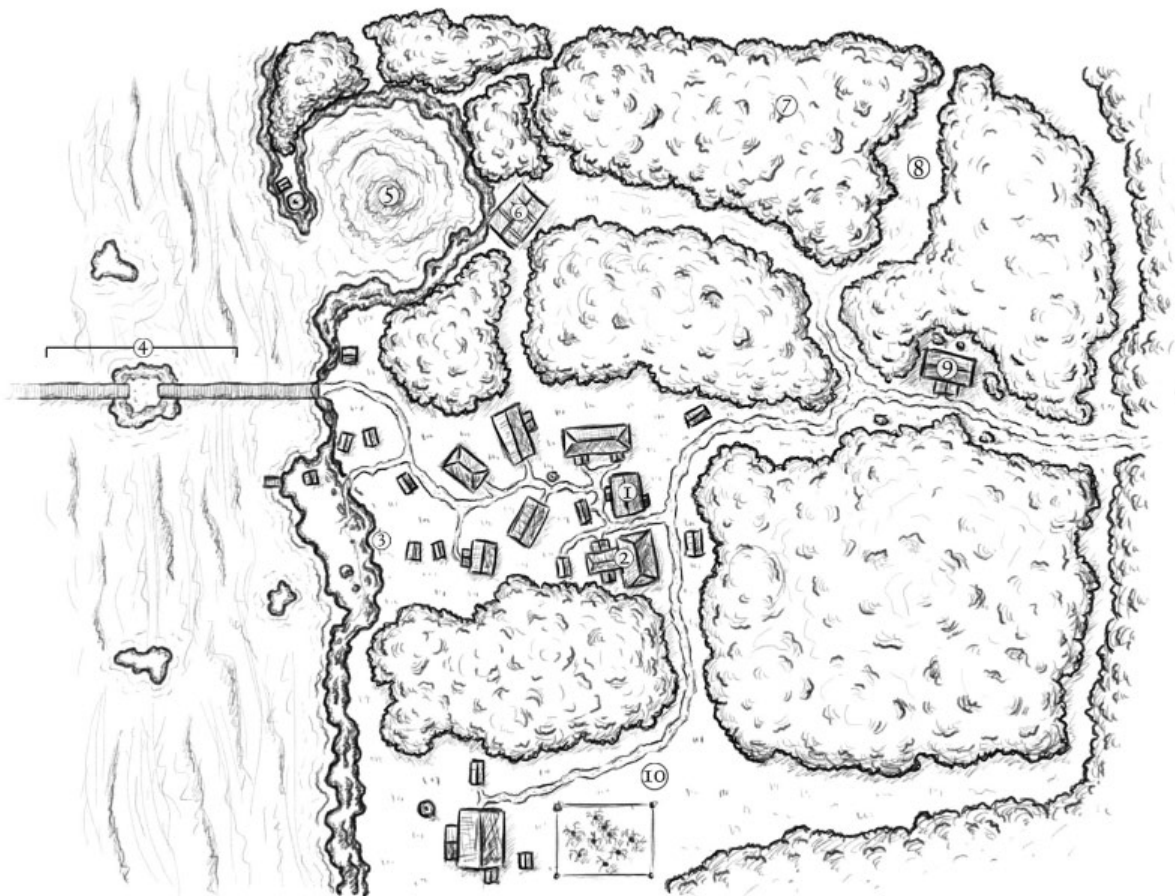
D20	GOVERNMENT
1-5	Autocracy
6-10	Council
11	Magical
12-19	Overlord
20 ¹	Secret syndicate

¹ If the settlement is ruled by a secret syndicate, roll again to determine the type of government that it controls. Ignore subsequent rolls of 20.

ALIGNMENT

Determining the alignment of a settlement enables the GM to get a feel for the overall ethos of the place. Of course, not everyone in the settlement is the same alignment, but most encountered NPCs should be of this alignment (as should the village's ruler).

D20	ALIGNMENT
1-7	As parent kingdom
8-9	Lawful good
10	Neutral good
11	Chaotic good
12-13	Lawful neutral
14-15	Neutral
16	Chaotic neutral
17-18	Lawful evil
19	Neutral evil
20	Chaotic evil



PROMINENT FEATURES

A village should always have a reason to exist. For example, a fishing village may spring up in a sheltered bay, while another might stand near the only ford crossing a mighty river. Others can grow up around castles, monasteries or other sites of interest. Use the table below to determine what prominent feature lies in or nearby the village. A prominent feature may suggest an industry—if this is the case simply pick an appropriate one.

D%	FEATURE
1-3	Burial mound(s)
4-6	Ancient monument
7-9	Battlefield
10-14	Lake
15-19	Ponds
20-24	High hill/vantage point
21-22	Sinkhole
23-25	Caves/caverns
26-28	Well
29-31	Spring
32-36	Orchard/fruit trees
37-38	Mine
39-42	Major road
43-48	Crossroads
49-50	Natural harbour
51-53	River
54-56	Valley
57-59	Waterfall
60-62	Giant/old tree(s)
63-70	Fertile soil
71	Barren soil
72-73	Prone to flooding
74-77	Old/ancient ruins
78-81	Adventure site (roll again)
82-87	Dense forest
88-91	Marshland
92-93	Rift/chasm
94-95	Escarpment
96-97	Extensive graveyard
98	Strange weather
99	Planar gate
100	Site of reputed magical properties (roll again to determine feature)

INDUSTRY

The below table does not present an exhaustive list of fantasy medieval industries. Rather, it focuses on industries most likely to be found in a village. Most villages have one main industry, but at the GM's discretion may have one or more secondary industries. Such activities will also leave their mark on the social and physical landscape of the village.

Of course, depending on a village's location some industries (such as shipbuilding) may make no sense whatsoever. A GM should reroll such results.

D%	INDUSTRY
1-30	Farming (crops)
31-50	Farming (livestock)
51-60	Hunting or trapping
61-65	Fishing
66-70	Trading post
71-72	Lumber/charcoal makers
73-74	Hospitality
75-76	Weapon or armour crafting
77-78	Pottery
79-80	Leatherworking or tanning
81-82	Brewing
83-84	Clothes
85-86	Metalwork
87-88	Animal training
89-91	Supporting nearby nobles, castle, church etc.
92-93	Shipbuilding or cart building
94-95	Religion
96-97	Finished food stuffs (honey, salted meat etc.)
98-99	Mining
100	Supporting adventurers exploring nearby dungeon or wilderness area

POPULATION

A village is so much more than a collection of houses and businesses. Some villages are little more than hamlet while others verge on the size of a small town.

- To determine the population of a village, roll 2d8x10+40.

The population of a village determines how many notable buildings the place has:

POPULATION	NOTABLE BUILDINGS
60-80	1
81-120	2
121-140	3
141-170	4
180-200	5

Most villagers will be normal, unremarkable peasants. Roughly 10% of the populace will differ from the norm. NPC villagers should rarely be above 3rd-level, but a few could be as high as 5th-level. NPCs over 5th-level should be specially placed by the GM and could be retired adventurers. They should have a decent reason for settling in the village. Other high-level folk could be visiting the village on specific business (perhaps at the behest of an employer).

SPELLCASTERS FOR HIRE

Wandering adventurers often need spellcasting services—perhaps while trying to recover from a disease or when discerning the properties of a magical item. Most villages can offer some sort of spellcasting service, although often its spellcasters are not particularly powerful.

Village priests, local druids, retired wizards and the like are all good sources of such spellcasting. Additionally, other wanderers or visiting travellers may also be able to provide spellcasting services, but—obviously—such services shouldn't be permanently available.

NOTABLE BUILDINGS

Very few villages are nothing more than a collection of hovels. Even the dreariest settlement has some kind of notable building, whether it be a tavern, inn or church. A notable building isn't necessarily architecturally significant; instead it may offer travellers special services or an interesting or important NPC may dwell within. In many cases, a village's prominent features and main industry provide a GM with guidance on which notable buildings to place in the village. If they do not, use the table below and discard any odd or nonsensical results.

A notable building is a perfect locale for interesting NPCs—be they retired adventurers, skilled craftsmen or the like. They are also excellent places for adventurers to access spellcasting services and buy and sell magic items (if your campaign features such services). Not all individuals dwelling within, however, will be pleased to deal with meddling, self-centred adventurers.

D20	BUILDING
1	Church, shrine or monastery
2	Bridge or ford
3	Tavern or inn
4	Manor house
5	Wizard's tower
6	Castle/keep
7	Mill
8	Village hall
9	Trading post
10	Shop
11	Skilled craftsman
12	Prison or asylum
13	School/university
14	Fortified building
15	Noble's retreat
16	Adventurer's home
17	Retired adventurer's home
18	Hovels
19	Industrial site
20	Ruins (roll again)

CONFLICTS

The potential for conflict exists in every settlement. While these factors may not be immediately obvious to visitors, their effect should become apparent to anyone spending any decent amount of time in the village.

Most villages should only have one major source of conflict, although particularly dangerous places may have two or even three!

D20	POTENTIAL CONFLICT
1	Nearby humanoids
2	Adventure site
3	Monstrous inhabitants(s)
4	Competing religions
5	Secret cult
6	Oppressive ruler
7	Nearby rival settlement
8	Family blood feud or vendetta
9	Land claims
10	Rival nobles
11	Segregated society
12	No ruler
13	Impoverished
14	Impending war or raid
15	Competing guilds or powerful merchants
16	Progressive political ideas
17	Endemic thievery
18	Recent natural disaster
19	Ineffective or uncaring ruler
20	Impending natural disaster

SECRETS

Secrets lurk within every village. Some may have no effect on the adventurers at all, while others could spawn whole adventures or side treks.

Most villages should only have one secret of note, otherwise the place could get too confusing and unfocused. While certain individuals may have other, minor secrets these are unlikely to affect passing adventurers (but they could provide interesting role-playing opportunities).

D20	SECRET
1	Evil cult
2	Hiding adventurer
3	Hiding/plotting villain
4	Secret treasure trove
5	Unknown burial ground
6	Thieves' or bandit lair
7	Smugglers' den
8	Monstrous inhabitant
9	Dungeon or caves
10	Curse
11	Illegitimate lord's child
12	Secret society
13	Slavers
14	Hidden lore
15	Undead inhabitant
16	Secret government
17	Guarding/protecting something
18	Allied with local humanoids
19	Disease
20	Wholesale tax evasion

SECRETS & CONFLICTS

At first glance, secrets and conflicts are two sides of the same coin, with one perhaps spawning the other. Of course, this is perfectly acceptable: a village allied with nearby humanoids may have an oppressive ruler or even be built over the dungeon in which the humanoids live! In other instances, the two may be wholly separate; rival nobles may both seek control of the village—while being completely unaware an evil cult lurks among the populace.

There is no magic formula to determine how, or if, a village's conflict and secret are related; a GM should use his creativity and reject any results from either table that do not seem to work. Remember, the goal of a village's secrets and conflicts is to make the place an interesting place to visit.

VILLAGE NAMES

Villages can be named in any number of ways. Some of the most common include:

- **Named for the Founder:** A village founded by an important or famous personage often commemorates that fact in its name. For example, Denton's Rest was founded by the renowned adventurer turned sage, Denton Algier.
- **Named for a Local Feature:** The village of Ashford stands near a ford surrounded by ash trees while Longbridge is named for its most prominent building.
- **Named for an Event:** Some villages stand on the site of a famous event. The village of Slaughterford, for example, may stand near the site of a terrible battle between raiding orcs and the king's bodyguard.
- **Named for Another Settlement:** Sometimes a settlement springs up near an old one and has a name based on the other settlement. For example, "Little Orten" or "West Chiveley." Such names do not appear in the following table as they are relatively easy to develop.

The table presents 100 ready to go village names.



D%	
1	Abbotswell
2	Avbury
3	Barrowhill
4	Bilbrook
5	Black Tower
6	Blackhill
7	Bodwen
8	Bonehill
9	Bowbridge
10	Burn
11	Caldwell
12	Caverswell
13	Clash
14	Colepool
15	Cornhill
16	Cresswell
17	Duntish
18	Elmridge
19	Erak's Stand
20	Fallholt
21	Fenhill
22	Five Roads
23	Fogmarsh
24	Foleshill
25	Four Trees
26	Greytower
27	Hare Green
28	Horncliff
29	Jer's Rest
30	Kingsbridge
31	Kingsfell
32	Little Hampton
33	Livermere
34	Lofthouse
35	Longdrop
36	Longford
37	Middlemoor
38	Midford
39	Midlee
40	Milham
41	Miller's Hill
42	Minehead
43	Monkton
44	Newport
45	Ogwell
46	Orehill
47	Orton
48	Owlbrook
49	Pitoaks
50	Pool
51	Pyreford
52	Radyr

53	Ravenshead
54	Rayne
55	Redcastle
56	Rimswell
57	Riseley
58	Rockview
59	Ryall
60	Ryle's Wood
61	Salthill
62	Seabrook
63	Seaton
64	Shirebrook
65	Six Ashes
66	Skelton
67	Slaughterford
68	Smalley
69	Smerral
70	Smithsby
71	Somer's Hill
72	Stonehouse
73	Swallowfeld
74	Swinefleet
75	Talkin
76	Tercott
77	Thornwood
78	Tonwell
79	Tor Abbey
80	Tovil
81	Treetop
82	Tulloch
83	Two Bridges
84	Ubley
85	Ughill
86	Ulf's Dell
87	Vowchurch
88	Waterside
89	Wellswood
90	Westerdell
91	White Chapel
92	Wildmoor
93	Witchford
94	Wolfhill
95	Wolverton
96	Woodend
97	Wragby
98	Wyken
99	Yeoford
100	Zeal

STREET & ROAD NAMES

Even a small village with only two roads probably has names for both—otherwise how do locals get around, give directions to travellers and so on? Naming a few roads in the village helps bring the settlement alive in the players' minds. For example:

- Why is that shady lane called Dagger Alley?
- Why is that road called Dead Troll Road?
- Is it worth avoiding Beggars' Way?
- Is Temple Way a good place to find magical healing?
- What could possibly go wrong on Cutthroat Alley?

Such questions not only breathe life into the setting, but can even lead to interesting minor encounters or even the genesis of the PCs' next adventure. Adventurers venturing down Cutthroat Alley, for example, deserve everything they get while those wandering Market Street might discover a bargain or hear a particularly juicy rumour.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

There are many different ways a road could be named. Here are a few of the most common styles:

- [Descriptor] street/alley/lane: Example, Dagger Lane, North Street and so on.
- Street of [Descriptor]: Example, Street of Swords, Road of the Dragon and so on.
- [Feature] street/alley/lane: Example, Water Street, Church Way and so on.
- [proper name's] street/alley/lane: Example, Krorz's Promenade, Sorn's Alley and so on.
- [Race, creature or monster] street/alley/lane: Example, Giant's Street, Orc Alley and so on.

THINGS TO NAME A ROAD AFTER

Once chosen, a name can enhance a village's flavour and verisimilitude. Roads can be named for or after a variety of features, events or personalities. For example,

- **Major Building or Urban Feature:** If a road runs to or passed an important urban feature, sometimes the road becomes known by that feature. For example, a road running passed the lord's castle may be known as Castle Street, while a road festooned with temples might be called Temple Way. Streets could also one named for churches, local markets, town gates and so on. Similarly, a street linking the town to a nearby village may become known by the name of the village.
- **Business Type:** In an urban area, businesses often cluster together, and within this mercantile district sometimes

businesses of the same type establish themselves nearby to one another. So, for example, a street might become known as the Street of the Smiths for all the metalworkers found there. The more important locally a trade is, the more likely a street will be named after it.

- **Proper Name:** Perhaps someone famous lived on the street. Alternatively, a street could be named after a legendary personage thought to have once visited the area or even someone who died there. Some streets could even be named after deities and other semi-mythical beings. Additionally, streets could be named after important local families, famed bands of adventurers and so on.
- **Feature:** A street running by a river might become known by the name of the river—for example, Fleet Walk—while a road running in a cardinal direction may be called North Street. For example, Abbey Road leads toward the ruins of an abbey, Market Street hosts a market and Fleet Walk runs along the River Fleet's banks. Other examples could include Water Street, Marsh Lane and so on.
- **History:** Sometimes streets are named for events of either local or national importance. Perhaps a troll was slain on Dead Troll Street and it was named (or renamed) to commemorate the event. Alternatively, a street could be named after a prominent local—perhaps Culven's Way—or for some feature that no longer exists (or which is now buried beneath the modern village).
- **Flavour:** If the party head down Dagger Alley before turning into Cutthroat Lane it's a pretty clear indication they are entering an unsavoury area. Similarly, the Street of Silks likely stands in a nicer area while many towers probably flank the Road of Spires. Street names are a quick and simple way to impart a location's flavour.

OTHER THINGS TO NAME

Of course, a GM doesn't have to stop at naming streets. There's lots of other things to name in a village. Such features include:

- Bridges
- Gates
- Markets
- Squares/plazas
- Wharfs/docks
- Hills
- Rivers/streams

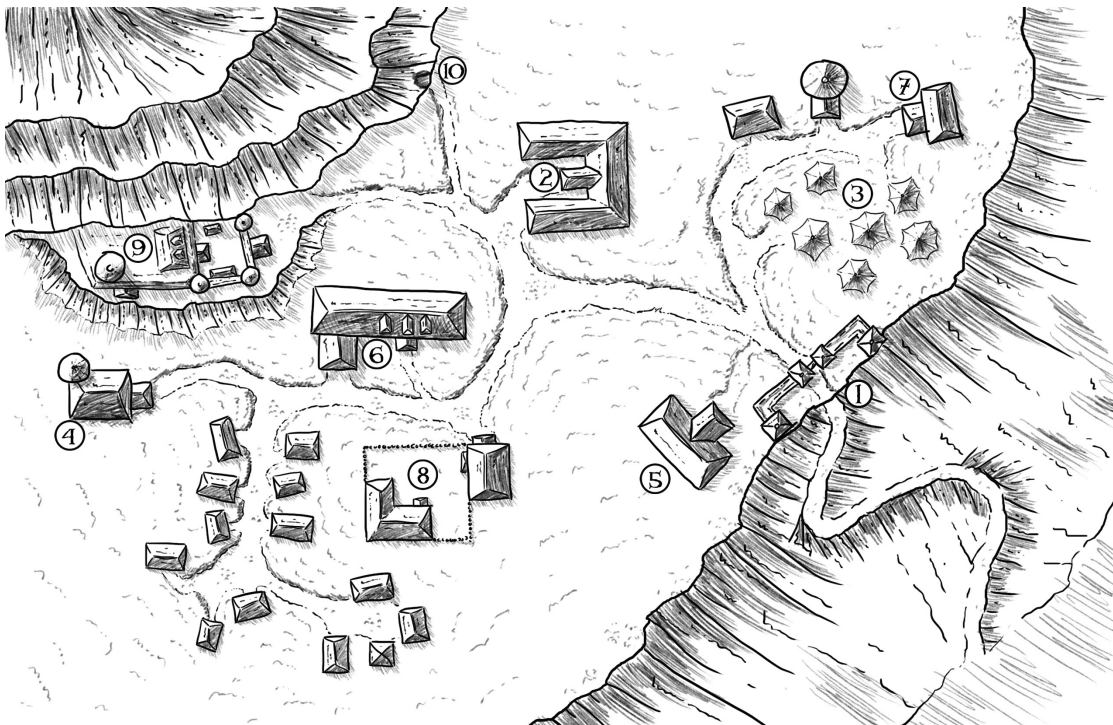
DESIGNING VILLAGE FESTIVALS

Every village has its own traditions and customs. Whether a festival is relatively normal, or downright odd, they are a tremendous way to breathe character and verisimilitude into a settlement. Include festivals in your campaign for these reasons:

- **Local Flavour and Verisimilitude:** A festival or holiday is an excellent way of underlining the locality's flavour.
- **Adventure Backdrop:** A festival or holiday is a great backdrop to an adventure. Additionally, these adventures could be a great change of pace from the normal dungeon delving, hack and slash fare of most adventures.
- **Change of Pace:** If the PCs are allowed to participate in a festival, they'll invariably get to make skill checks, ability checks and so on as part of the celebrations. It's a fun change for the players to make such rolls without the lives of their characters being on the line. Festivals can be a great time for the PCs to let their hair down and have a bit of fun.
- **Meet NPCs:** Festivals are a great time for the PCs to meet NPCs, both significant and insignificant. This is particularly handy if one or more of the NPCs appear in a later adventure. It gives the PCs a connection to the NPC, which might come in handy later on both in terms of emotionally investing them in the adventure and giving them a reason to participate in the first place.

When designing a festival, consider:

- **The Event's Origin:** What historical event gave birth to the festival? Was it good or bad for the community? Is the festival a celebration, commemoration or does it serve some other religious or secular purpose?
- **How the Locals View the Festival:** Do the locals look forward to the festival or do they participate out of a feeling of duty?
- **When It Is Held:** Festivals held in the depths of winter will by necessity be different to those held at the peak of summer. The events, traditions and special foods, entertainments and so on will all be different.
- **Where It Is Held:** The festival might be held at a particular landmark or in a certain building. Alternatively, it may be celebrated publicly throughout the village or privately in individual homes.
- **Composition of the Festival:** If the PCs have the option of attending the festival, what will they see and hear? Will they be able to participate or must they observe only? Also consider if everyone in the settlement celebrates the festival or if only one segment (perhaps those of a certain race, religion or nationality) celebrate it. If it is not a universal festival, how do the other folk feel? Do they care? A festival that acts as a flashpoint between rival groups or settlements is a great basis for an urban adventure.
- **The Festival's Frequency:** If the festival is celebrated yearly, no doubt its tone and scope will be different to one celebrated monthly or weekly. Similarly, if the festival is only rarely observed—perhaps every decade—it will no doubt be the focal point of the year and be a very special event.



STRANGE VILLAGE FESTIVALS

Village celebrations are community events—an excuse to come together and celebrate (or commiserate) previous events of import. Often they draw in folk from the surrounding area. The odder the festival, the more powerful the draw.

Here are ten odd, ready-made festivals:

1. **Cheese Racing:** The village is well known for its cheese industry. To celebrate, the villagers practise cheese chasing in an annual race. Every year, they gather atop the nearest steepest hill where the most prominent cheese producers unleash large, circular cheeses down the hill. The goal of the race is to get your cheese as far as possible down the hill without carrying it. Competing teams work to protect their cheese from the attentions on their rivals. Fistfights invariably ensue as scores of villagers charge after each cheese.
2. **Witch Hunting:** In the past, the village was beset by a coven of witches. After a reign of terror, the witch was caught and burnt at the stake. To celebrate their liberation, the villagers have a witch hunt every year. Four local women dress up as witches and hide in the village or its locality. The other villagers must find them. Afterwards, the villagers celebrate late into the night around a huge bonfire on which are burnt the effigies of the original four witches.
3. **Dead Raising:** Once a year, the villagers exhume the decaying bodies of the recently dead and carry them through the streets in celebration of their lives. Afterwards, the dead preside over a great feast eaten by the flickering flames of giant bonfires set about the village.
4. **River Dunking:** A river runs through or near the village. Every year, when the winter snows have melted and the river is at its most swollen, the villagers gather at the river for a day-long tug of war competition. Rivalry among teams is fierce and—of course—there's lots of eating and drinking. By the end of the day, almost everyone is tired, cold, wet, drunk and happy.
5. **Pig Racing:** Every year, the villagers gather as part of the harvest festival to race their prize pigs. Farmers ride their favourite pigs through the streets in a mad race to the finish. The ensuing race is pure chaos and little more than a rough and muddy free for all. Although participants cannot carry weapons injuries are common as good-natured fistfights erupt along the course between riders (and sometimes spectators). There is no set prize for winning the race, except for the prestige of being the best rider.
6. **Barrel Burning:** Participants fill old barrels with tar and set them aflame. The competitors then carry the barrels as far as possible through the village while being cheered on by spectators. The winner is the person who carries the barrel furthest. Injuries are common in this bizarre practise and the use of magic is frowned on (at least until the race is over). This race takes place at night and is a spectacular sight. Afterwards, there is much drinking and merriment.
7. **Barrel Boating:** The villagers take to their barrels and attempt to “sail” them down the river that runs through the village. In the same manner as the pig racing described above, the race is wild and has few rules. Competitors work at capsizing or holing their rivals and just actually finishing the race is considered an achievement. The first person to finish gets his barrel filled with ale by the local lord. Folk come from the surrounding villages to watch (and/or participate).
8. **Wife Stealing:** This festival's roots go back hundreds of years to when the villagers raided other nearby settlements for womenfolk. In it, participants—or raiders—must carry a neighbour's wife over a set course comprising several obstacles. The “stolen” wives' husbands lurk on the course and try to recapture their wives. Of course, the competition is good-natured. If a raider gets to the end of the course with a stolen wife he can claim a prize from the wife's husband—usually a flagon of ale, handy tool or suchlike. Shockingly, afterwards much drinking ensues.
9. **Gods Awakening:** In this once-yearly festival held at the winter solstice, the villagers light a huge bonfire on the nearest highest hill. Building the bonfire can take weeks. Once it is lit, the villagers stand about and sing songs of praise to their gods and pray for a year free of raiders and pestilence. During bad years, the villagers build particularly large fires in the hopes this will please the gods and return favour to the village. Persistent rumours whisper that sometimes the villagers secretly practise human sacrifice; unfortunates are said to be tied to a stake in the midst of the bonfire and burnt alive.
10. **Dance of the Dead:** In this macabre celebration, held every year to mark the village's deliverance from an evil necromancer's undead army, the villagers dress as skeletons and zombies and dance through the streets in wild abandon. Some of the villagers' costumes are disturbingly realistic—comprised as they are of actual bones. The festival is held at night and adventurers witnessing it without knowledge of the celebration's significance could be forgiven for thinking an evil cult is at work in the village.

Remember, there's nothing to stop the PCs taking part in some of these festivals! Such events could represent a welcome change to the normal pace of the campaign, and allow the PCs to unwind and relax. It's also a great way to meet folk and to build the party's emotional attachment to a village and its folk.

VILLAGE EVENTS & TRADITIONS

A good way of breathing life into a village is to determine what notable event occurred just before the PCs arrived. When they arrive, the GM can describe the event's aftermath. Alternatively, knowing what is about to happen enables a GM to prepare a short interlude or side adventure to bring the locale to life.

D20	EVENTS
1	Marriage
2	Murder or sudden death
3	Festival or celebration
4	Raid by humanoids, bandits etc.
5	Fire
6	Strangers arrive
7	Noble visits
8	Animal attack
9	Disappearance
10	Natural event (flood, earth tremor etc.)
11	Odd weather
12	Disease or plague
13	Adventurers arrive
14	Theft
15	Omen (good or bad)
16	Trader or merchant arrives
17	Accident
18	Visiting preacher or pilgrims
19	Madness
20	Treasure found

TRADITIONS

Many villages have interesting, quaint or atypical traditions and festivals. Some may be annual events, while others take place much more frequently.

D20	EVENTS
1	Running races.
2	Other races (involving horses, carts, boats or other means of travel).
3	Strange races (chasing large cheese wheels down a steep hill etc.)
4	Storytelling competitions in which competitors vie to tell the most fanciful tale.
5	Ritual dancing; the villagers dress in strange costumes and prance about for a whole day.
6	Themed chase (the villagers catch someone dressed up as prominent local villain such as a witch).
7	Feats of skill (archery, wrestling, boat racing and so on).
8	At the time of every new moon, the villagers process around the village in the dead of night. They carry torches and chant hymns to banish ghosts and other foul spirits from the village.

9	Outside each house grows a luscious rose bush. They are the villagers' pride and joy. Each year, a competition is held to judge the best bush; rivalry is fierce.
10	Whenever a storm batters the village, the villagers build a huge bonfire to ward off evil storm spirits.
11	Marriages, births and deaths are a community affair. A joint celebration is held each month to mark all such occasions; everyone in the village attends.
12	The villagers have an odd ritual to bless their children. Infants are laid down in a row and the local priest jumps over them while reciting a blessing.
13	The villagers believe in the deep, everlasting power of nature. Once a year, when the local river floods they coat themselves in the mud from its banks in the belief this imbues them with nature's strength. An all-night revel ensues.
14	The villagers enjoy watching (and betting on) animal fighting. They could use foxes, weasels, chickens or other small beasts. More families participate, although a vocal minority deride the practise as barbaric.
15	The villagers enjoy wood carving and hold regular competitions. Many of the trees, shrubs and wooden buildings are festooned with intricate carvings.
16	The villagers are renowned for their skill in growing large fruit and vegetables. Every harvest the villagers display their best crop before enjoying a communal night-long revel.
17	Every year, the villagers enact a battle or skirmish crucial to the village's existence. Every year, the heroics of the villagers and the treachery of the attackers becomes more and more exaggerated.
18	The villagers believe a ghost haunts a certain part of the village. Every year, on the anniversary of the person's death, they leave offers to placate the unfortunate's restless spirit.
19	At the end of the summer, the villagers enter the nearby woods and gather as many nettles as possible. They then make all manner of nettle-related food and drink which they consume in thanks for nature's bounty.
20	On the longest night of the year, the villagers race burning barrels coated in tar through the village. Many of the participants are more than a little drunk and a plethora of minor burns and injuries results.

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