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SO WHAT'S THE RIDDLE LIKE ANYWAY?



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SO WHAT'S THE RIDDLE LIKE, ANYWAY?

A Pathfinder Roleplaying Game GM's RESOURCE supplement by Liz Smith

Your PCs are deep in the dungeon and have just encountered a terrifying monster which they have no chance of defeating. Luckily, the monster is bored and challenges the party to a riddling contest instead of simply just killing them. Alternatively, the party have encountered a sentient statue that will not let them past until they have answered three riddles correctly. At this point, a GM may panic and just hand wave the ensuing riddles or allow the PCs to answer them correctly by making skill checks.

So What's The Riddle Like, Anyway? banishes this problem by providing scores of ready-to-use riddles ready to insert into almost any GM's campaign. Now a GM (or aspiring bard) has loads of riddles in his arsenal ready to strike fear into the hearts of those hearing them!



CREDITS

Design: Liz Smith
Development: Creighton Broadhurst
Editing: Creighton Broadhurst
Cover Design: Creighton Broadhurst
Layout: Creighton Broadhurst
Interior Artists: William McAusland. Some artwork copyright William McAusland, used with permission.

Thank you for purchasing *So What's The Riddle Like, Anyway?*; we hope you enjoy it and that you check out our other fine print and PDF products.

CONTACT US

Email us at gatekeeper@ragingswan.com.

ERRATA

We like to think *So What's The Riddle Like, Anyway?* is completely error free, but we are realists. So in that spirit, we shall post errata three months after release on ragingswan.com. We aren't going to be correcting typos and spelling errors, but we will correct any game mechanic or balance issues that come to light.

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Liz Smith was born in the UK and has lived there ever since. Introduced to RPGs at the age of 14 she has been involved with them one way or another ever since, most notably in the long-running Joe Wood Commoner Campaign. Quiet, observant and an avid reader, she mostly finds herself pushed into the GM seat for games, leading to a long list of characters that find their way out in her writing, since they never have a chance to be played. She somehow manages to fit a lot of things into a 24-hour day, becoming a full-time writer in 2002. Repeatedly hit over the head by ideas and books, she is now a published poet, non-fiction writer and novelist, and is proud to be able to add RPG work to the list.

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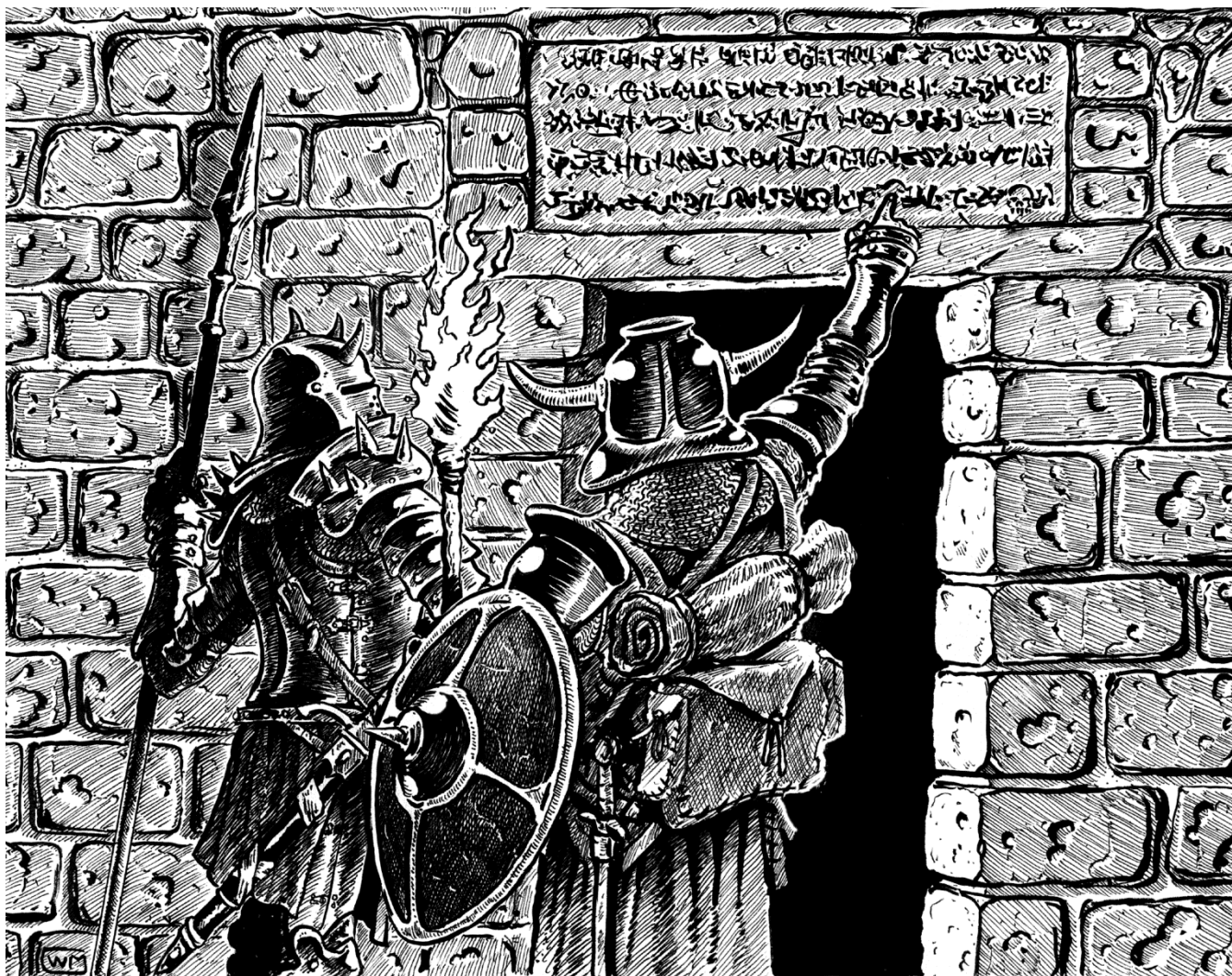
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FOREWORD

I love riddles, and I love using them in my campaign, but I'm not very good at designing them. ("What's in my pocket?" is about the best I can come up with spontaneously!)

That's why I asked Liz to design this supplement. Liz has written loads of poetry before now and so she seemed a perfect fit for this project. Now if you need riddles to bedevil your PCs you need look no further!

I hope you find this product useful. It would be great to hear how you use these riddles in game – drop me a line at creighton@ragingswan.com.



DESIGNING RIDDLES

Riddles come in two main types: wordplay or language-dependent riddles, and descriptive riddles. Both types may rhyme, but have no requirement to do so. Descriptive riddles are the older type and were a common entertainment among Vikings and Anglo-Saxons during the winter, when the snow was too deep for much outside activity. Many of them were also full of innuendo, and in their original form were rhymed and set to music to be sung. They tend to be longer than word-play riddles, but easier to guess, and as the name indicates, they describe the object in question at length, without once ever mentioning that object's name. A classic example of this is the Sphinx's riddle:

*What walks on four legs in the morning,
Two legs in the middle of the day,
And three legs in the evening?*

A: A man

Oracles, auguries and fortune-tellers also commonly speak in descriptive riddles, although these tend to be about events rather than objects. Descriptive riddles are the hardest to make up on the spot, but the simplest to use once created.

Wordplay or language-dependent riddles are both a more recent development and more varied. Some rely on simple puns and multiple meanings such as:

When is a dungeon door not a door?

A: When it's a jar

Others give out a clue for each letter of the answer. For example:

My first is in seeks, but not in looks,
My second in text, but not in took.
My third is in flea, but never in flight,
My fourth is in maybe and also in might.
My fifth is in pea, but not in bean,
My sixth in royal, but not in queen.
My last is in pigeon and also in dove,
My whole was written out clearly above.

A: Example

A variant on this type of spelling riddle is the acrostic, where the first letter of each line spells out the answer to the riddle. In the riddle below, the lines describe, while the initial letters spell out the answer. It also twists things a little by dropping the initial "h" to get the desired result:

'Orrible hordes unnumbered
Rolling in wave after wave
Caught, killed, on heroes' blades.

A: Orc

Acrostic riddles are among the quickest and easiest to create, but work better as a handout so that the players can see them, rather than just hearing them, where they might miss the acrostic part altogether and get frustrated.

DESIGNING RIDDLES

First, decide a riddle's basic characteristics:

- Wordplay or Descriptive
- Rhymed or Unrhymed
- Long or Short

Then choose its situation and format:

- Contest or Directions
- Spoken or Written

Finally, decide on the answer you want the players to get. With those decided, focus in on the actual writing of the riddle. Here is an example:

Type of Riddle: Wordplay, Unrhymed, Short. **Situation:** The PCs are following a series of clues through a maze. They come to a fork in the path with options of left and right. (Directions, Written.) **Answer:** Turn Left.

First GM Liz looks up pairs of words that can be matched with "left" and "right", such as "sinister and dexter" and "port and starboard." Then she considers synonyms (words spelt differently but with the same meaning) and homonyms (words spelt the same but with different meanings). For "right," she gets: right, correct, privilege, dexter and starboard. For "left," she gets: left, lost, departed, sinister and port. Then GM Liz puts them together. She decides to be obvious with the first line, writing down "The left way is the right way." That suggests a wordplay link between the pairs right/left and right/wrong, so she follows that with "and the right way is the wrong way."

Moving on, GM Liz looks at other words meaning left and picks out "sinister" and "port", simply because those two have a lot of other meanings to play off, and she wants to keep this a short riddle. That gives her a final line of "If the way ahead looks sinister, turn towards port," playing off sinister (left) and sinister (nasty) as well as port (left) and port (safe harbour).

That means the final riddle looks like this:

The left way is the right way,
And the right way is the wrong way.
If the way ahead looks sinister, turn towards port.

This gives four clues to the answer, each pointing to the same result and giving a good chance that at least one of the clues will be recognised and the answer found.

USING RIDDLES

Riddles should be tailored to each gaming group. Some groups hate them, others love them. Some groups grind to a halt at the first sight of a riddle, others tear through them like a raging barbarian through goblins. If the group groans when a riddle comes up, don't put it on the only entrance to the main encounter or fight. Give them options, or other ways to get round it, even if those aren't as optimal as going straight through the riddle. If they are bad at spotting puns, but good at descriptions, eschew word play riddles in favour of descriptive ones. If they use puns and bad jokes all the time, trade your careful descriptive riddles for wordplay ones and watch them groan (in a good way).

Part of the problem is that riddles almost always challenge the players rather than the PCs. There are, however, ways to work round that problem. Although it's rarely as atmospheric to do so, it's also much better than spending an entire evening wrestling with a single riddle that no one can figure out and that stalls the whole game.

Intelligence checks are the quickest and simplest method of bypassing a riddle. Meet the GM's DC, get the answer and move on. While there's no doubt that this works, it can also feel very forced and flat in play. An alternative is for each PC to make a check in turn, perhaps Intelligence, or a relevant skill with each successful check yielding a clue to the answer. This might be the number of words in the answer, or a few of the letters, or a cryptic hint about the subject. It could be written out hangman style and each successful check allows you a number of guesses without risk. It could be mastermind style – you have the right/wrong number of words/letters/right letters in the wrong place/right letters in the right place. It could even be a variation on Twenty Questions and you find the answer at the end even if you get all the questions wrong.

PLACING RIDDLES

There are two basic situations where riddles can come up. They can either be direction- or location-based (telling you which way to go, or how to get there) or they can be part of a contest. The GM can also combine these, and have the contest riddles also give clues to the direction. Most contest riddles come up in situations like Gollum challenging Bilbo in the goblin tunnels, where someone or something says "beat me at riddles and I will help you/won't hurt you." and then the players and GM start throwing riddles at each other. For a moment there, it really is player vs. GM, but with the right group, it can also be both immense fun and very memorable.

Direction and location riddles are even more common in games and fantasy, from *divination's* suggestion of a cryptic or rhyming omen to riddles that unlock doors and treasure chests.

Place them over doorways and on maps, from simple instructions such as "Speak, friend, and enter," to more complex and cryptic ones such as "On the day of the dead when the year too dies, must the youngest open the oldest hills through the door of the birds, where the breeze breaks." or "Stand by the grey stone when the thrush knocks and the last light of the setting sun will shine upon the keyhole."

Place them on walls, where single lines of a descriptive riddle can be found one by one, each not seeming to mean much by itself, but when the lines are all placed together, the riddle and the answer become clear. A classic example of this kind of placement can be found in Susan Cooper's *Silver on the Tree* where seven barriers must be broken to reach a crystal sword, each of which yields one line of the descriptive riddle that must be spoken aloud to breach the final barrier and gain the sword.

Place them in the mouths of seers and oracles. The Delphi Oracle in Ancient Greece was infamous for its cryptic rhymes and answers, with one of the better known ones being the oracle's answer to the Spartan King Leonidas when he asked about the Persian invasion.

"O ye men who dwell in the streets of broad Lacedaemon! Either your glorious town shall be sacked by the children of Perseus, or, in exchange, must all through the whole Laconian country mourn for the loss of a king, descendant of great Heracles."

Prophecies like this are almost always descriptive riddles that unravel at just the right time to defend the world against the next big evil. However, riddles are also best used sparingly, like spices, rather than found everywhere and needing to be solved all the time.

Again, some of this comes down to knowing your group and tailoring the riddles to them. Just as people's curry preferences vary from khorma to vindaloo, so too does their preference for more or fewer riddles in a game. If you have a split group, where some like riddles and others hate them, give the haters something to do while the others work on it. There's no reason why a riddle can't be guarded, or trapped, or the solution to a trap, or the trap trigger, or on the mcguffin that multiple NPCs want just as much as the PCs do.

One last word and riddle. However you decide to introduce riddles to your campaign, remember this:

When one does not know what I am, then I am something;
but when one knows what I am, then I am nothing.
What am I?

A: A riddle

SAMPLE WORDPLAY RIDDLES

My first is in sob but never in weep
My second in crawl but never in creep
My third is in woe but never in joy
My fourth in forever and ever is found
My fifth in the sheep, but not in the hound
My whole is a counter to day's active play
And a child will find me tucked in with a toy.

A: Sleep

What walks all day on its head?

A: A nail in a horseshoe

I am the beginning of sorrow, and the end of sickness.
You cannot express happiness without me,
yet I am in the midst of crosses.
I am always in risk, yet never in danger.
You may find me in the sun, but I am never out of darkness.

A: The letter S

What always runs but never walks,
Often murmurs, never talks,
has a bed but never sleeps,
Has a mouth but never eats?

A: A river

A mile from end to end, yet as close as a friend.
A precious commodity, freely given.
Seen on the dead and on the living.
Found on the rich, poor, short and tall,
But shared among children most of all.

A: A smile

What comes once in a minute,
Twice in a moment
But never in a thousand years?

A: The letter M

I am pronounced as one letter but written as three,
There are two of me, I am single, I am double,
I can be blue, brown, black or green.
I can be read from right to left or
Left to right and am still the same.
What am I?

A: An eye

I can run but not walk.
Wherever I go, thought follows close behind.
What am I?

A: A nose

When things go wrong,
What can you always count on?

A: Your fingers

I have five faces that call one name
I have a twin who will never be the same
But together we laud a hero's name
What am I?

A: A hand

What goes round the house and in the house but
Never touches the house?

A: The sun

What is it that you will break even when you name it?

A: Silence

Until I am measured I am not known,
Yet how you miss me when I have flown.

A: Time

What does man love more than life
Fear more than death or mortal strife
What the poor have, the rich require,
And what contented men desire,
What the miser spends and the spendthrift saves
And all men carry to their graves?

A: Nothing

What has a neck but no head,
Two arms but no hands?

A: A shirt or tunic

It may only be given, not taken or bought,
What the sinner desires, but the saint does not.

A: Forgiveness

The more of me you take,
The more you leave behind
What am I?

A: Footsteps

What has no beginning, end or middle?

A: A ring

What is the difference between a tailor and a groom?

A: One mends the tears and the other tends the mares.

Deep-delver
War-monger
Axe-wielder
Real-ale drinker
Forge-firer
Speak my name

A: A dwarf or dwarves

What has a head and a tail, but no body?

A: A coin

The one who made it, didn't want it.
The one who bought it, didn't need it.
The one who used it, never saw it. What is it?

A: A coffin

What creation allows you to look through a wall?

A: A window

What loses its head in the morning but gets it back at night?

A: A pillow

What is something that is feared by everyone,
Yet you cannot touch, see, smell, or hear it?

A: Fear itself

What is put on a table,
Cut, but never eaten?

A: A deck of cards

I go up and down,
But never move.
What am I?

A: A staircase

I am thought to be everywhere.
I only have one rival.
He hides within himself,
And stays wherever I cannot reach.
Who am I? and Who is my rival??

A: Light, and its rival dark

I am like day,
You can find me near the river
And you can make almost anything out of me.
What am I?

A: Clay

What flies when it's on and floats when it's off?

A: Feather

I have an eye but cannot see.
I am stronger and faster than any man alive,
But have no limbs.
What am I?

A: A hurricane

I can be cracked, I can be made.
I can be told, I can be played.

A: A joke

Give me food and I live;
Give me water and I die.
Who am I?

A: Fire

I have four fingers and one thumb,
Yet am not flesh, fish, bone, or fowl.
What am I?

A: A glove

Remove the outside,
Cook the inside,
Eat the outside,
Throw away the inside.

A: A chicken

How can you calm down an angry fire-breathing dragon?
A: Throw water at him and he will let off steam.

Everyone needs it, asks for it and gives it,
Almost nobody takes it.
What is it?

A: Advice

What is the beginning of eternity,
The end of time and space;
The beginning of every end,
And the end of every race?

A: The letter E

What is the difference between a dog and a gossip?
A: One has a wagging tail, the other a wagging tongue

What has six legs, yet only walks on four?

A: A horse and rider

A farmer stands in a field with two horses, a donkey, a mule
Three cows, four sheep, a cat with six kittens, and his dog.
How many feet are in the field?
A: 2 – The farmer's (everything else has hooves or paws)

SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVE RIDDLES

A riddle, a riddle, a farmer's riddle
Alive at both ends and dead in the middle
What am I?

A: A horse-drawn plough

A box without hinges, key or lid
Yet golden treasure inside is hid

A: An egg

From cracks of stone I came in molten flood,
While flames were battering the rocky core,
And the loud-roaring furnace brightly glowed.
Now clear as ice am I, capricious too,
And very brittle; men may break my neck,
Taking my slippery body in their hands.
Yet wits I alter, when I kiss men's lips,
And fill their cheeks with Bacchic sweets, and make
Their tottering footsteps bring them to the ground.

A: A wine glass

Four brothers were all born together.
The first runs and never wearies.
The second eats and is never full.
The third drinks and is always thirsty.
The fourth sings a song that is never good.
Who are they?

A: Water, fire, earth and wind

A cloud was my mother, the wind is my father,
My son is the cool stream, my daughter is the land's fruit.
A rainbow is my bed, the earth my final resting place, and I'm
The torment of man.
What am I?

A: Rain

What's black when you get it,
Red when you use it,
White when you've finished with it?

A: Coal or charcoal

If you break me I do not stop working,
If you touch me I may be snared,
If you lose me nothing will matter.

A: Your heart

Each morning I appear to lie at your feet,
All day I follow no matter how fast you run,
Yet I nearly perish in the midday sun.

A: Your shadow

An iron horse with a flaxen tail.
The faster the horse runs,
The shorter his tail becomes.

A: Needle and thread

I cannot be other than what I am,
Until the man who made me dies
Power and glory will fall to me finally,
Only when he last closes his eyes

A: Heir to the throne/prince or princess

I wear a red robe,
With staff in hand,
And a stone in my throat.
What am I?

A: A cherry

She awakes, I touch her and she spreads her legs apart.
We are both nervous but I continue.
Finally the white liquid comes.
What happened?

A: Milking the cow

This old one runs forever, but never moves at all.
He has not lungs nor throat, but still a mighty roaring call.

A: Waterfall

Halo of water, tongue of wood
Skin of stone, long I've stood.
My fingers short reach to the sky
Inside my heart men live and die.

A: A castle

Snake coiled round and round,
Snake deep below the ground,
Snake that's never had a head,
Snake that binds but not with dread.

A: Rope

Thirty white horses upon a red hill
First they champ, then they stamp, then they stand still

A: Teeth

Once I was water, full of scaly fish;
But, by a new decision, Fate has changed
My nature: Having suffered fiery pangs,
I now gleam white, like ashes or bright snow.

A: Salt

Now I plough, now I toil,
Jaded throughout the years;
Many harvests come, but no bread I get;
Many acres I cultivated, but never tasted malted ale.

A: A plough-ox

One by one we fall from heaven
Down into the depths of past
And our world is ever upturned
So that yet some time we'll last

A: Sand in an hourglass

Weight in my belly; trees on my back;
Nails in my ribs; feet I do lack.

A: A ship

What force and strength cannot get through,
I, with a gentle touch, can do.
And many in the street would stand,
Were I not a friend at hand.

A: A key

I have learned that something grows in the corner,
Swells and expands, has a covering;
On that boneless thing a woman grasps
Around with hands, with a garment
The lord's daughter covered the swollen thing.

A: Bread dough

When I am alive I do not speak.
Anyone who wants to takes me captive must cut off my head.
They bite my bare body.
I do no harm to anyone unless they cut me first.
Then I soon make them cry.

A: An onion

My home is not quiet but I am not loud.
The lord has meant us to journey together.
I am faster than he and sometimes stronger,
But he keeps on going for longer.
Sometimes I rest but he runs on.
For as long as I am alive I live in him.
If we part from one another it is I who will die.

A: A fish

Voiceless I cry, wingless I flutter,
Toothless I bite, mouthless I mutter.
Who am I?

A: The wind

This creature is odd, its habits unaccountable.
It sings through its sides. Its neck is curved,
Skilfully carved, and above its back
It has pointed shoulders. It plays its fated part
As, gracefully, it stands by the roadside,
High and handsome, useful to men.

A: A harp

I am the black child of a white father,
A wingless bird, flying even to the clouds of heaven.
I give birth to tears of mourning in pupils that meet me,
Even though there is no cause for grief,
and at once on my birth I am dissolved into air.
Who am I?

A: Smoke

When you stop and look, you can always see me.
If you try to touch you cannot feel me.
I cannot move, but as you near me, I move away.

A: The horizon

Some ducks were walking down a path.
There was a duck in front of two ducks,
A duck behind two ducks,
And a duck between two ducks.
How many ducks were there in all?

A: Three ducks, in single file.

An eye in a blue face saw an eye in a green face
That eye is like to this eye, said the first eye
But in a low place, not a high place.

A: Sun on the daisies

What has roots that nobody sees, is taller than trees,
Up, up it goes, yet it never grows?

A: Mountain

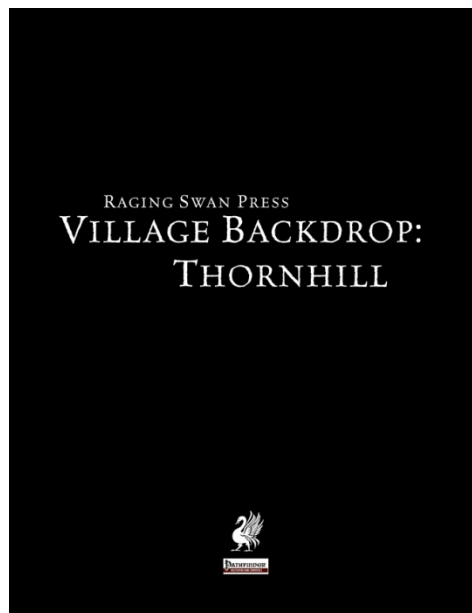
I'm up and down and round about,
Yet all the world can't find me out.
There's neither chariot, coach nor mill
May move one inch except I will.
What am I?

A: A circle

VILLAGE BACKDROP: THORNHILL

Standing on the fringes of a vast and noisome swamp, Thornhill is a miserable, hard place of cloying mud, grasping thorns and insular, superstitious folk. There is a little cheer to be had in Thornhill; the few visitors describing it as dull and dreary as the surrounding swamps. For all that, though, a steady trickle of adventurers visit Thornhill for the half-buried and drowned ruins of several tombs are said to lie forgotten in the surrounding marshland and the villagers have friends among the nearby degenerate lizardfolk who make excellent guides in the trackless, far reaches of the swamp.

Village Backdrops are short, richly detailed supplements that each present a single village ready to insert into almost any home campaign. Perfect for use as a waystop on the road to adventure, as an adventure site themselves or as PC's home, Village Backdrop present the details so the busy GM can focus on crafting exciting, compelling adventures.



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