

THE DUNGEON ALPHABET

AN A-TO-Z REFERENCE FOR CLASSIC DUNGEON DESIGN

EXPANDED THIRD PRINTING

BY MICHAEL CURTIS



FOREWORD BY DAVID "ZEB" COOK
ILLUSTRATIONS BY EROL OTUS, JEFF EASLEY,
JIM HOLLOWAY, JIM ROSLOF, AND OTHERS

THE DUNGEON ALPHABET

AN A-TO-Z REFERENCE FOR CLASSIC DUNGEON DESIGN

EXPANDED THIRD PRINTING

Writer: Michael Curtis

Foreword: David "Zeb" Cook

Editors: Elizabeth Bauman, Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

Cover Artist: Erol Otus (color edition), Stefan Poag (gold foil edition)

Layout: Peter Bradley and Joseph Goodman

Interior Artists: Jeff Easley, Jim Holloway, Doug Kovacs,
William McAusland, Brad McDevitt, Jesse Mohn, Peter Mullen, Russ Nicholson,
Erol Otus, Stefan Poag, Jim Roslof, Chad Sergesketter, Chuck Whelon, Mike Wilson

Publisher: Joseph Goodman



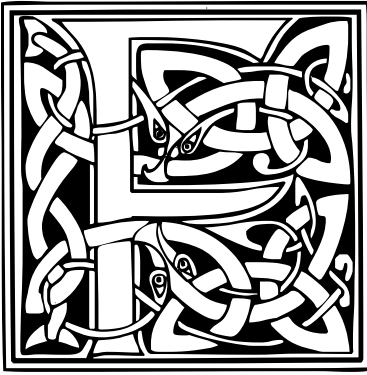
www.goodman-games.com

Text ©2009, 2012 Michael Curtis, art and design elements ©2009, 2012 Goodman Games, Inc.

THIRD PRINTING

Table of Contents

Foreword	2	M is also for Maps	31 - 32
Introduction	3 - 4	N is for No Stone Left Unturned	33 - 34
A is for Altars	5 - 6	O is for Oozes	35
A is also for Adventurers	7 - 8	P is for Pools	36
B is for Books	9 - 10	P is also for Potions	37 - 38
B is also for Battles	11 - 12	Q is for Questions	39
C is for Caves	13	R is for Room	40 - 42
D is for Doors	14	R is also for Relics	43 - 44
D is also for Dragons	15 - 16	S is for Statues	45 - 46
E is for Echoes	17	S is also for Stairs	47 - 48
F is for Fungi	18	T is for Traps	49 - 50
G is for Gold	19	T is also for Treasure Chests	51 - 52
H is for Hallways	20 - 21	U is for Undead	53
I is for Inscriptions	22 - 23	V is for Vermin	54 - 55
J is for Jewels	24 - 25	W is for Wierd.	56 - 57
K is for Kolbolds	26	X is for Xenophobia	58 - 59
L is for Levers	27	Y is for Yellow	60 - 61
M is for Magic	28 - 30	Z is for Zowie!	62 - 63



OREWORD

BY DAVID “ZEB” COOK

When I was asked to write an introduction for *The Dungeon Alphabet*, I could hardly pass it up. I'm an ex-English teacher and all those wordy conceits – riddles, kennings, and alphabets – fascinate me. Plus, I'm a game designer with a head deep in the interwoven puzzles of game systems; the quantifying, enumerating, listing, and naming of things to create paper realities is in my blood. *The Dungeon Alphabet* combines my passion for obscure details and the creation of structures into one elegant package. Basically, I'm a sucker for literary contrivances.

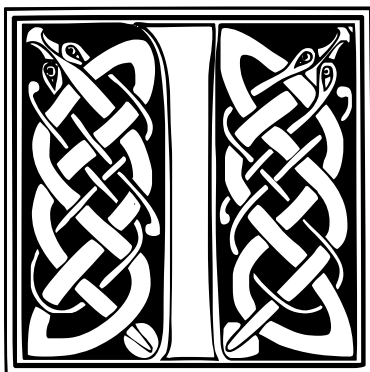
It also hits my ultimate geekiness – alphabets and tables. They've been captivating men ever since they were invented. There's a long tradition of alphabetical lists. Mankind – you and I – have an inborn passion to catalog and organize things. Alphabets have been a fascination of mine ever since I first figured out what they were. Since then I've discovered all manner of alphabetical works – medieval bestiaries filled with hopelessly inaccurate descriptions, crazed efforts to define all of mankind's knowledge within a single set of symbols, dictionaries of slang, and encyclopedias of places that never existed. The passion to catalog and analyze can be wonderfully strange.

And then there are tables. As a game designer, I know all too well the damage that can be done by blind adherence to tables. But, nonetheless, I love them. There is a joy in the enumeration of things, that by listing them you give them life and form. Well-built they are an inspiration – they become springboards for imagination, sketches that leave you to create the whole. The tables here are just that, ideas for you, the reader, the DM, the player – the gamer – to play with as you will.

However, *The Dungeon Alphabet* strikes home for me even more directly. Way back, even before I created games professionally, I was inspired by a fantasy encyclopedia of things subterranean and monstrous. It was filled with bemused descriptions and evocative drawings, a book with entries for dragons, firkins, heralds, and wizards. (Naturally now I cannot remember the title or artist.) It fueled my imagination with possibilities and led me to incorporate that fantastic whimsy into my own games – to want to create worlds with those touches of detail, irony and just out-and-out wonder. Games needed more magical chains made from cat's whiskers, shirts without seams, and morosely riddling trolls living under bridges.

Take what is here in the spirit of fun. None of this is meant to be serious. None of this is meant to bind. These are the streams of possibilities that you can turn into flowing fountains of adventure and fun within your games. Someday you might even be inspired to create your own alphabet!





INTRODUCTION

BY MICHAEL CURTIS

If you were to ask the average person to define “a dungeon,” chances are they would describe a dark prison located beneath a medieval castle, a place where ill-kempt prisoners are chained to dank walls and a hooded executioner stands ready with his instruments of his trade. Ask a fantasy role-player to describe a dungeon and the results would be much different.

He'd regale you with tales of subterranean labyrinths filled with fearsome monsters, deadly traps, and undiscovered caches of gold, jewels, and magic. A place frequented by daring heroes, wise wizards, and pious clergymen who hope to escape with both untold riches and their lives intact, if only to venture into its depths once again. And, while some of these traits would appear in the accounts of all fantasy gamers, it wouldn't be long before you'd notice there were differences in these descriptions. The older gamers might tell of a place

where logic seemed to have taken a holiday, a place where things didn't always make sense and where anything – furniture, fountains, statues, floors, and ceilings – could kill you just as quick as the monsters. Younger gamers would describe a more rational place where a plausible ecosystem kept the monsters fed, each room and hallway had a purpose, and the creatures within were always just about equal in power to the adventurers who dared to enter. Both would be correct in their descriptions, as the older gamers remember the dungeon in its infancy, a time when it had yet to grow sensible and still reveled in the impetuosity and irrationality of youth. The younger gamers are more familiar with the dungeon that has grown more staid and plausible with the passage of time, losing some of its more outlandish traits to the slow march of time.

With fantasy role-playing now approaching its fourth decade of life, the dungeon is no longer the unexplored country it was in its youth. And, like any unexplored land, it has lost its wildness and unpredictability with the arrival of more and more people and the laws and rules that a population brings with them. The dungeon has been mapped and codified, rendered predictable with familiarity. It is no longer the Wild West or the lawless high seas. It can still be mysterious and dangerous, but the dew is off the rose.

It is the purpose of this book to turn the clock back a bit, allowing the dungeon and its delvers a chance to revel in the fun and excitement of a younger time. It seeks to re-explore a time when the rules weren't quite so well-defined, the sources of inspiration more varied, and the feeling that anything could be found in the dank halls beneath the ground still permeated the air. Collected within these pages are twenty-six of the classic trappings that the dungeon has accumulated since the birth of fantasy role-playing. While the twenty-six included within these pages are by no means a comprehensive collection of all the stereotypes associated with the dungeon, they are amongst those most commonly encountered by adventurers in their subterranean explorations.

In addition to collecting these classic dungeon elements in one easy-to-use sourcebook, this supplement also attempts to look at these overworked characteristics in a somewhat new light, turning the overly-familiar on its ear in order to challenge and entertain even the most hardened and experienced fantasy role-player. Whether you're looking to build your first dungeon or your hundred-and-first, you're bound to find something in these pages that will challenge both the adventurers and, more importantly, their players.

In order to get the greatest use out of this supplement, it's best if you be willing to reenter the dungeon with an open mind. Forget for the time being everything you think you know about how to design a dungeon. Don't allow yourself to be burdened with the shackles of plausibility and reality. The dungeon bows to neither of these. Deep within the depths of the earth, the rules associated with the sunlit lands do not always hold sway and the bizarre becomes the norm. So stop worrying and love the dungeon, no matter how odd or implausible it may seem. You might find yourself coming away with some ideas that could never have taken root in the more modern and mature dungeon of today.

HOW TO USE THIS SUPPLEMENT

On first glance, you'll notice that this book is different from other fantasy role-playing supplements you might be acquainted with. Unlike most of the more recent gaming supplements, this one is not filled with stat-blocks, hard numbers, or new monsters and powers, that which is commonly referred to as “crunch.” The reasons for this are several.

First of all, the dungeon is a big place and there is a lot of ground to cover. In order to squeeze as much as possible into these pages, the author elected to concentrate more on the ideas than their implementation. Secondly, the role-playing game hobby has recently undergone some big changes. As a result of these, there are a number of different fantasy role-playing rule systems being embraced by gamers, even to the point where people are playing different versions of the same game. As such, to provide hard numbers for one system might make this book less useful to those playing another. Finally, as this book is heavily influenced by the gaming supplements produced in the hobby's youth, a time when the rules were less strictly codified and much was left up to the interpretation of the individual referee, to weigh it down with hard numbers would be dismissive of its roots. No one knows your preferred gaming system, your players, the power levels of their

characters, or what your gaming group likes more than you, the referee. Adapt what you find herein to best suit your needs.

Rather than a collection of stats and ready-to-run encounters, this book provides you with the inspiration to create custom designed challenges and interesting locales to present to your players. As with most things in life, the more work you put into these encounters, the more reward you and your players will reap from them. But as most referees know, even the most well developed encounter is meaningless once the adventurers decide to wander off-script and start pursuing courses of action you hadn't planned on. In times such as these, the referee often has to rely on his own quick thinking to keep the game flowing along smoothly and still entertain the players. To help in this matter, each of the twenty-six entries in this book is accompanied by a random table to allow the referee to quickly generate something for the characters to confront in the event they wander off the beaten path. When time allows, you can flesh out these encounters to more seamlessly work them into the overall dungeon canvas, but for the moment, it gives you more to work with than another empty 30' x 30' room.

As one last note, you will see mentioned within these pages that certain items or events have a probability associated with them based on **dungeon level**. This probability is based on the classic ten-level megadungeon complex, with the first level of the dungeon being roughly equal in power to a party of beginning adventurers and the challenge increasing the deeper the party descends. If you intend to use this supplement in the construction of a similar dungeon complex, you can use the dungeon's actual level as the base for determining the probability for these events and encounters. If you're constructing a dungeon for adventurers of higher power, it might be best to use the average power level of the creatures and challenges encountered on each section of the dungeon as the actual **dungeon level** when determining the probability of these events and encounters. Thus, if the first floor of the dungeon is filled with monsters roughly equal to fourth level in power, treat that level of the dungeon as if it had a **dungeon level** of four rather than one.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD PRINTING

In the fall of 2008, I ran a weeklong series of posts on my gaming blog, The Society of Torch, Pole and Rope. Intended to be nothing more than a means for me to organize my thoughts about dungeon design and to identify the classic tropes of the dungeon crawl, the series was well-received by the old school gaming community and by those whose roots in the hobby are not quite as ancient. Amongst those readers impressed by my categorizing of dungeon phenomenon was Joseph Goodman, who approached me with an offer to turn the series into a game supplement. With nearly thirty years of involvement in the roleplaying hobby and dreams of becoming a professional game designer occupying a large portion of those years, I readily accepted and got to work turning the series into a fully fleshed-out book.

The Dungeon Alphabet was published in January of 2010 and immediately began attracting attention from gamers throughout the hobby. Regardless of what fantasy game they played or which edition they preferred, *The Dungeon Alphabet* had something to offer players of all stripes and quickly broke down the barriers we gamers are fond of erecting around our most beloved roleplaying title. Much faster than anticipated, the first printing of *The Dungeon Alphabet* sold out, making a second printing necessary. At the time, *The Dungeon Alphabet* was one of Goodman Games' most successful publications, and interest in the book remains strong. Our story does not end there, however.

In 2011 at the North Texas RPG Convention, *The Dungeon Alphabet* was awarded the Three Castles Award. And while convention awards might seem a dime a dozen, the judges' panel who deemed the book worthy of the trophy was not. Adjudicating that year's award were Paul Jaquays, Tim Kask, Robert Kuntz, Dennis Sustare, and Steve Winter, five designers with more years' experience in the field of game design combined than this author has seen of life. Having such luminaries in the industry believe *The Dungeon Alphabet* deserving of recognition was the culmination of a dream long deferred.

At the start of 2012, it was obvious a third printing of *The Dungeon Alphabet* was necessary. To commemorate that occasion and the winning of the Three Castles Award, Goodman Games decided to expand the book and give me a few more pages to play with. I've continued to be active in the field of game design since *The Dungeon Alphabet's* debut, writing several new books for Goodman Games and other RPG publishers. My continued participation in the industry has taught me a few more dirty tricks, introduced me to new sources of inspiration, and allowed me to keep building on the material first presented in *The Dungeon Alphabet*. Some of the strange fruit that grew from that fertile soil has now been harvested and added to this book, while other entries consist of material that had to be cut for space limitations the first time around. Regardless of where the new pages originated from, I think you'll find it as interesting, entertaining, and inspiring as their previously seen companions.

The dungeon is a vast and mysterious place, and even with more room to explore its contents, there is a finite limit to the amount of territory one can cover in a single book. I hope one day either I or another up-and-coming game designer writes a *Dungeon Encyclopedia* that gives the subterranean world the comprehensive coverage it deserves. Until that day arrives, however, *The Dungeon Alphabet* remains a valuable sourcebook for filling your dungeons with danger, tricks, and interesting inhabitants. Now, turn the page, get out your graph paper and dice, and start crafting your next fiendish dungeon!

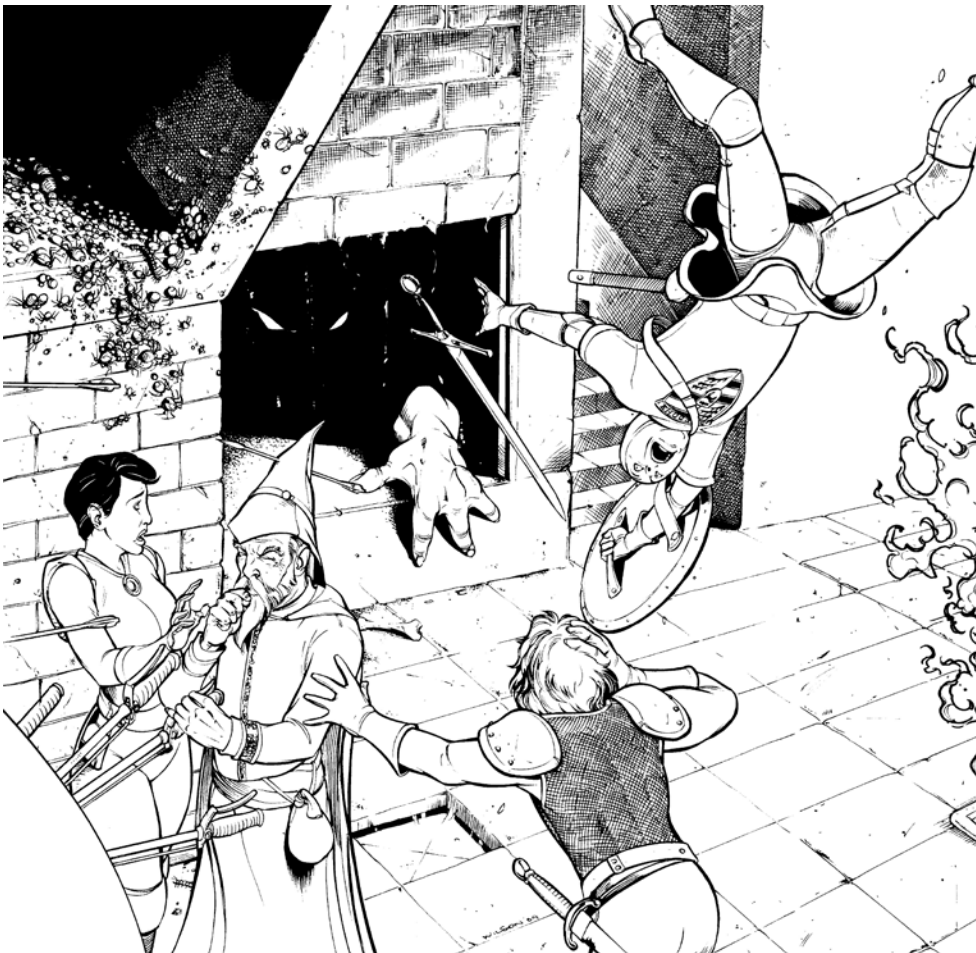
4 THE DUNGEON ALPHABET



IS FOR LEVERS

Protruding from floors and walls, these mechanical devices are often the cause of many arguments amongst adventurers. Pull it or don't pull it? These debates usually last until a monster is drawn to their location by the intense bickering or a brave or foolish soul throws the lever to the dismay of the others. In either case, the results are rarely uninteresting.

Levers are the litmus test to determine how courageous or brash a party is, especially if there are no hints to the possible consequences of throwing that lever. Once thrown, an array of results may confront the party. Hidden passages are revealed, monsters are unleashed, traps are sprung, ability scores rise or fall, electricity arcs across the chamber, whole **Rooms** descend, **Statues** come to life, or simply that nothing observable occurs are all common results of a thrown lever. When stuck for ideas, a referee need do nothing more than place a lever in the center of a barren room and wait for the party to work themselves into a frenzy.



THIRTY RESULTS FOR A PULLED LEVER

1	Drops gates/portcullises throughout the dungeon level.	16	Causes a useful item to be dispensed.
2	Triggers alarm – monsters come to investigate.	17	Hidden door opens.
3	Gout of fire envelopes the lever-puller.	18	Activates/deactivates trap in another location.
4	Floods room with water.	19	Puller ages 1d20 years.
5	Causes liquids in the room to boil.	20	Whirling vortex carries puller off to some other location.
6	Frees dangerous monsters to prowl the dungeon.	21	Triggers trap in the room.
7	Summons enchanted servant to do the puller's bidding.	22	Saps the spirit of the puller, resulting in loss of 1 random ability point.
8	Infuses puller with spiritual energy. Puller gains 1 random ability point.	23	Activates anti-magic field temporarily neutralizing any spells or magic items in the room.
9	Causes room to descend/ascend.	24	Activates powerful magnets. Armor-clad adventurers incapacitated.
10	Trapdoor opens under party.	25	Nothing happens.
11	Activates self-destruct sequence.	26	A magical banquet, complete with table and chairs, appears.
12	Magically cleans and refreshes the puller.	27	Erases the puller's memory of the last 24 hours.
13	Concealed ceiling vents open and begin to rain snakes, toads, vermin, etc. on the party.	28	Illusionary music begins to play within the room.
14	Causes torches, candles, fireplace, etc. in the room to ignite.	29	Alters temperature of the room (sweltering heat or frigid cold).
15	Locks/unlocks doors within the dungeon.	30	One-armed Bandit – pulling this lever randomly increases/decreases the puller's personal money as determined by the referee.

THE DUNGEON ALPHABET

EXPANDED THIRD PRINTING

AN  -TO-  REFERENCE
FOR CLASSIC DUNGEON DESIGN

DESIGNING DUNGEONS IS AS EASY AS A, B, C!

THE DUNGEON ALPHABET COMPILES INSPIRATIONAL TABLES ON CLASSIC DUNGEON DESIGN ELEMENTS TO ASSIST THE GAME MASTER IN CREATING SUBTERRANEAN CHALLENGES. THIS THIRD PRINTING ADDS EIGHT NEW TOPICS TO THE EXISTING TWENTY-SIX FOR THIRTY-FOUR TABLES OF INSPIRATIONAL MATERIALS.

A IS FOR ALTAR, B IS FOR BOOKS, AND C IS FOR CAVES: THE DUNGEON ALPHABET HAS ADVICE, HINTS, AND RANDOMIZED TABLES THAT BRING NEW LIFE TO YOUR ADVENTURES.

THE ENTRIES ARE ACCOMPANIED BY OUTSTANDING ART FROM CLASSIC FANTASY ILLUSTRATORS AND ARE COMPATIBLE WITH ALL FANTASY ROLE PLAYING GAMES.



GMG4385E
\$19.99

WWW.GOODMAN-GAMES.COM