

GM'S MISCELLANY:

DUNGEON DRESSING



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*Tired of dungeons lacking verisimilitude? Want to add cool, flavoursome features of interest to your creations but don't have the time to come up with non-essential details? Want to make your dungeons feel more realistic? Then *Dungeon Dressing* is for you! This book gives you –the harried, time-crunched GM–the tools to bring your dungeon alive in your players' minds.*

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"Here are the bones of the adventure. You must breathe life into the framework after you flesh it out."

Gary Gygax

"Features such as rooms and chambers must be described with verve and sufficiently detailed in content to make each seem as if it were strange and mysterious."

Gary Gygax

This book is dedicated to all the hard-working GMs out there who slave away over their dungeons. I hope *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* makes your job easier.

This book is also dedicated to everyone who has supported Raging Swan Press on Patreon. Your support makes books like this possible. Thank you.

Don't tell the wife, but I've been engaged in a torrid love affair since before we were married back in 2002. The source of my affection? Dungeon dressing.

I've owned my copy of the 1st Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* for well over 30 years. I remember teenage me outside in the garden poring over the book. I even have the muddy paw prints of our beloved family labrador on some of the pages. Apparently, I was ignoring her.

I was entranced by Appendix I (as well as Appendix A: Random Dungeon Generation). I loved the possibilities presented by the tables in Appendix I and used them whenever I could. It just seemed so cool. I'm not even sure now—almost 40 years later—I can explain it.

But let me try.

Adventures set in believable and immersive worlds are better than those that are not.

That's the basic premise of everything we do at Raging Swan Press. It follows, therefore, that adventures set in immersive and believable dungeons are better than those that are not. That's the basic premise of this book.

You don't need unending new monsters, new magic items and so on to make your dungeons exciting and memorable. Some of the best, most memorable adventures I've ever been on have featured lizardfolk, vampires and orcs—all monsters from the core books.

What an exciting and memorable dungeon crawl does need, however, is an exciting and memorable dungeon. And that's where this book comes in.

You can use *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* however you want. You can use the various entries wholesale—roll them up ahead of time and add them to your dungeon—or you can use the book during your game if your players do something unexpected or bizarre. You could take entries from the various tables herein and build a personalised list of dressings and features for each dungeon you design. You can even just browse the book for inspiration. It's all good.

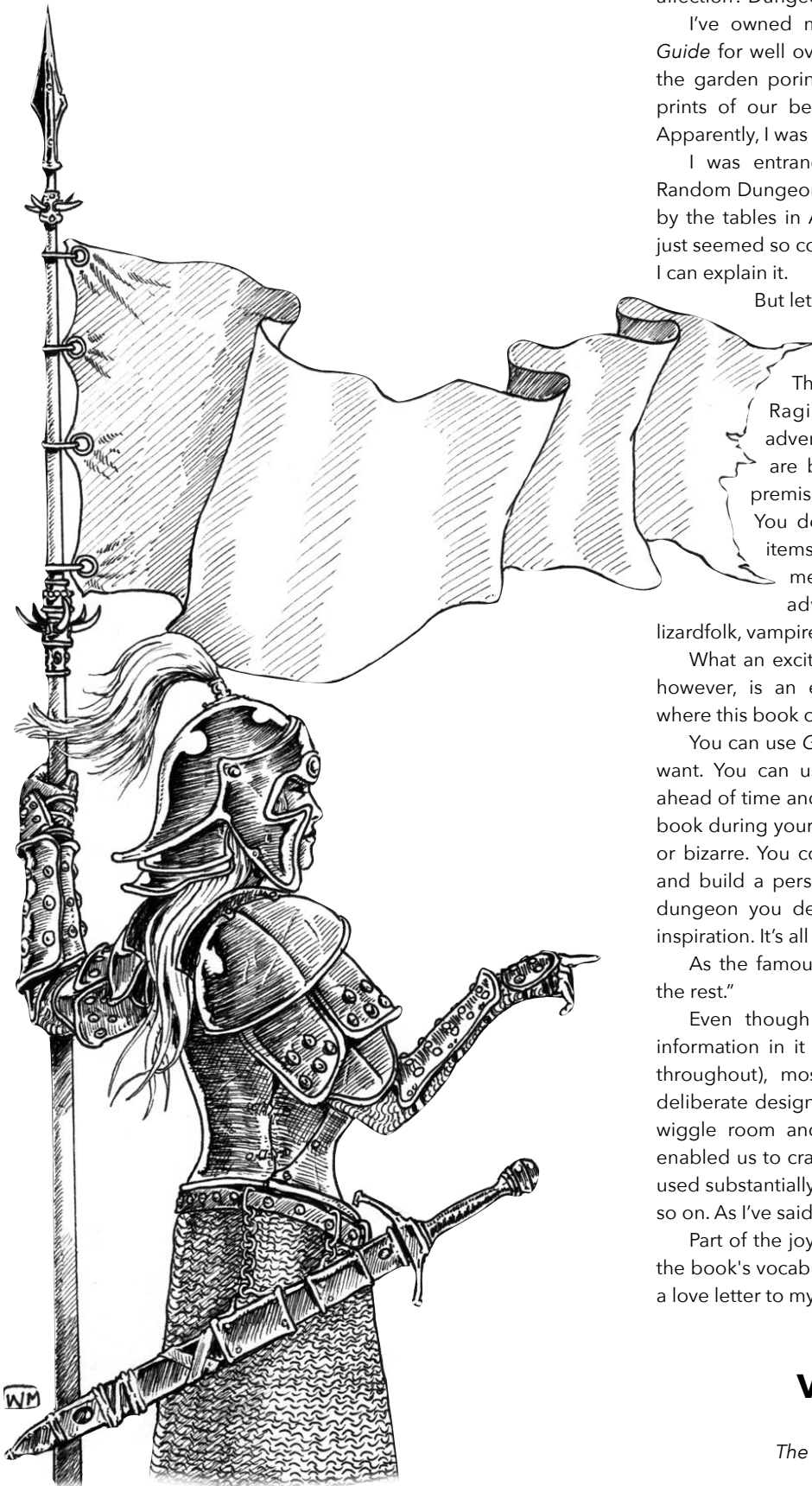
As the famous saying goes, "Take what you need, and leave the rest."

Even though this book has a fair amount of mechanical information in it (I'm particularly thinking of the traps scattered throughout), most of the material is system neutral. That's a deliberate design choice on my part to give you as much design wiggle room and flexibility as possible. Marvellously, this also enabled us to cram more flavour and detail into each table as we used substantially less space listing skill checks, saving throws and so on. As I've said above, flavour and detail are where it's at.

Part of the joy of the 1st edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* was the book's vocabulary. *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* is also a love letter to my favourite old-school word. The word?

VERISIMILITUDE

The quality of appearing realistic or true



Adding dressing to your dungeon helps your players suspend their disbelief. It helps them immerse themselves in your dungeon and get into the game. Dungeon dressing (and, for that matter, wilderness dressing and urban dressing) is well worth the effort. It is design time well spent. I hope this book inspires and helps you dress up your dungeons.

THANK YOU

I get a real kick out of knowing our books are used all over the world and that you'll be using it (hopefully) to have more fun with your friends. I'd love to know how you use it. Please drop me a line or leave a review wherever you got the book.

As always, thank you so much for supporting Raging Swan Press. Good luck with your games,



DRESS YOUR DUNGEONS

A musty dungeon corridor set with uneven flagstones whose walls are daubed in coarse goblin graffiti is infinitely more interesting than "a dungeon corridor."

Dungeon dressing is one of the most important things you can do to bring your dungeon (and campaign) alive. Sadly, dungeon dressing is not as critical to play as stat blocks or treasure hoards. Thus, most of us don't have time to dress our dungeons. Instead, we might improvise the odd description or (more likely) we won't bother. That's a shame, as there are many great reasons to dress your dungeon.

WORLD BUILDING

If you waffle on about the ancient style of dwarven construction or the fascinating intricacies of goblin art, your players will likely switch off and go to sleep. However, you can use dungeon dressing to build your world. For example:

- If you casually mention the intricate locking mechanism of a stone door, the players immediately want to know more.
- The skeletons the characters fight throughout the dungeon are all dressed in archaic or strange garb. Why?
- The dungeon lies at the centre of a snake cult. Snake carvings, paintings and statues feature throughout the complex. Other architectural features, including one-foot-diameter tunnels, ramps instead of stairs and so on, might predominate.

ADD VERISIMILITUDE

Surprisingly few dungeons are sterile, unchanging places; explorers and inhabitants (as well as time and nature) leave signs of their presence. Crude graffiti daubed on the walls, skeletal

remains, carved pillars, and more all add a sense of realism, which helps players maintain their suspension of disbelief. For example:

- The ogres dwelling in the dungeon are unlikely to be fastidious about mess. Their rubbish and leavings will no doubt lie everywhere.
- Goblins dwelling in the deep tunnels have decorated them with crude "art", showing the tribe's warriors slaying humans and so on.
- An old camp—stuffed-out torch, pieces of broken equipment and so on—hints at the presence of other adventurers.

STORY TELLING

What happened in the dungeon before the characters got there? Dungeon dressing can provide the players with answers or clues to this basic question. For example:

- Were the orcs slaughtered by something large and powerful that yet lurks in the lower caverns? Signs of the slaughter should abound and provide a clue to all but the most clueless adventurer that something is not right.
- Do parts of the dungeon periodically flood? Perceptive characters might spot signs such as watermarks, waterborne debris and the like and be forewarned.
- Was the dungeon originally a temple? If so, decorations and features of the original faith may still be in evidence.

Players figuring out what happened in the dungeon before they got there could gain a tactical advantage from their insights. They will also get a sense of achievement from divining the truth behind your clues.

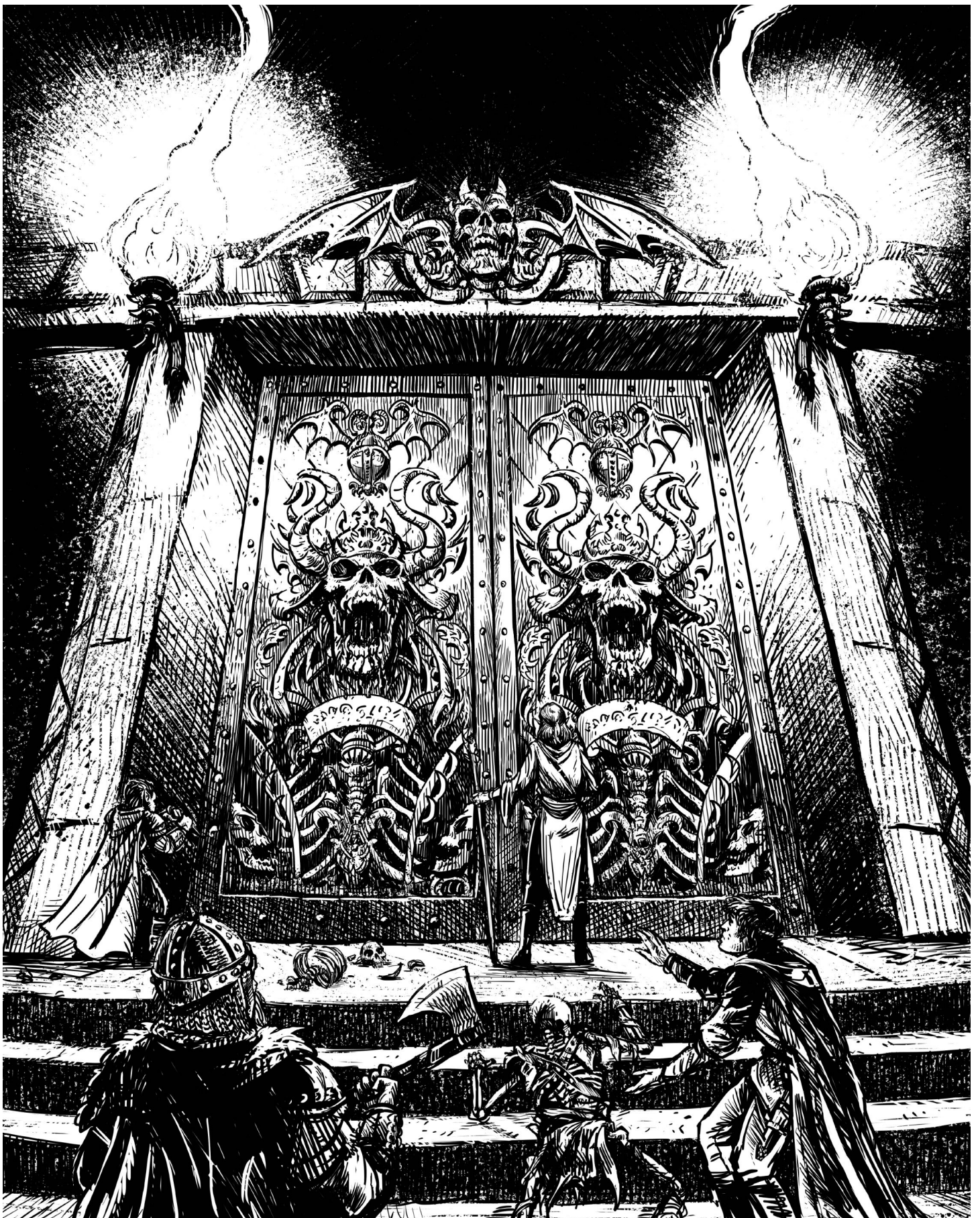
FORESHADOWING

Are the dungeon denizens working toward some evil scheme? No doubt, if they are, the characters will find signs of their work throughout the dungeon. Alternatively, is the dungeon about to suffer some calamity? Are the signs of impending disaster evident? For example:

- A hobgoblin tribe planning an invasion or raid into a nearby human kingdom will likely stockpile arms, equipment and provisions in their lair. They may also have maps showing their targets and so on.
- Does a necromancer work to raise an army of the dead? If so, she might require many live subjects to work her magic on.
- If an earthquake struck the dungeon, cracks in the ceilings, piles of rubble, rock falls and the like would feature throughout the complex.

THE FINAL WORD

Don't go mad with dungeon dressing. Adding too much detail creates confusion and eventual apathy in players; eventually, they won't see the wood for the trees. Instead, concentrate on a couple of notable features in each area.



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