Space & Story:
Constructing and Communicating Narrative Space
in Dungeons and Dragons
by
Alison McNeil

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.
This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required
final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically
available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Designing and communicating spaces is an ever-evolving practice and challenge for the architect who must translate individual and collective experiences of space both to those within the field of architecture, and those outside of it. Drawings of plans, renders, sections, and elevations conspire to make the imagined real in the minds of various stakeholders, treating unbuilt design projects as tangible. In narrative-based tabletop games such as Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), a central challenge is translating a sense of space to often non-spatially minded players.

This thesis seeks to explore how communication of space works in D&D as it re-interprets architectural methods to articulate imagined spaces, which are further reinforced in D&D by the use of spatial narratives. Research into spatial understanding through narrative has yet to critically examine D&D, which only recently achieved explosive global popularity. While architecture has previously looked to Film Theory, Set Design, or Radical and Speculative Architecture for novel approaches to understanding, rethinking, and communicating space, academic studies of D&D itself typically center psychology, ludology, and education. This thesis identifies where architecture too can learn from D&D's unique ability to translate sophisticated imagined spatial arrangements to 'real' immaterial space, such that a broad range of players can envision it.

Through a multifaceted approach that employs written analyses and drawing as research, Space & Story seeks to provide insight to architects on articulating space to non-architects. A literature review on how narrative forms space across multiple fields and media, and the abstraction and representation of space in map-making, architecture, and D&D past and present informs a hybrid design exercise. The production of a short D&D adventure focuses on how elements of story are identified, translated spatially, and then communicated through a narrative experience that is both designed and open-ended. Space & Story engages with D&D's process of conceptualizing and communicating immaterial spaces and explores how it both utilizes and diverges from traditional architectural methods, beginning to reflect on how preconceived understandings of program, type, and genre play into users' experiences of space. This thesis is a celebration and commentary on both practices and explorations of creating unique spaces for humans to exist and play within.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To Gary Gygax who said "most females do not play RPGs because of a difference in brain functions".

TABLE OF CONTENTS

x

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LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Architecture as a field of study and practice has long encompassed the physical manifestations of buildings alongside imagined ones. Imagined counterparts take form in a wide range of artifacts. From design explorations in university responding to often fictionalized problem statements, to a spatialization of hell in Dante's Inferno, we openly and often treat imagined designs as real spaces. Dimensions, flows and experiences of these spaces are treated as tangible concerns and, in a way, reflect a quote from Jorge Luis Borges' 1949 work, *The Immortal,* "We accept reality so readily - perhaps because we sense that nothing is real." It is not the physical manifestation that makes something architecture, but the design itself. In the 21st century there exist many novel manifestations of this relationship: images of buildings generated by AI engines, virtual architectures created and accessible only in virtual reality, simulated cities rebuilt in video games for the purpose of exploring in ways that are impossible in a physical city. The manifestation which the thesis centrally interests itself in is the pen and paper roleplaying games, specifically the most popular one, Dungeons and Dragons (D&D).

Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's 1974 publication of the original edition of Dungeons and Dragons under their company Tactical Studies Rules (TSR)

marked the release of the world's first ever roleplaying game (Gygax, Arneson and Greyharp, 2011). The game has been evolving thematically and representationally ever since (Bruner 2017). Currently D&D is experiencing explosive popularity with more than 50 million players to date worldwide (Wizards of the Coast 2020). What is extremely apparent and has remained consistent in the game throughout its nearly 50-year evolution, is a grounding in exploring collectively envisioned space. Where early editions kept their setting loyal to the title, taking place primarily underground in dungeons, its current evolution, 5th edition (5e) released in 2014, takes on representing expansive settings in its effort to cater to a growing base of players and play styles. They range from lighthearted settings of a Magic School to the oppressive depths of the Nine Hells to genre classics of high fantasy lands filled with goblins, orcs, elves, and the like. To consistently apply the same rule set to such a range of environments, Wizards of the Coast (WotC), owners and publishers of D&D and previously a subsidiary ('99) now division ('21) of Hasbro, supplies consistent visual and written material to support its players' spatial understanding.

This spatial understanding takes form in a similar manner to that of architecture, blending tangible material methods, with imaginative immaterial methods (Tobe 2017). Here and throughout the thesis, "material" refers to tangible, real-world objects and visual aids. In D&D these can encompass a wide breadth of tools ranging from physical maps, models, miniatures, and printouts to even the simple grounding of real-world references to history, location, and climate (Wizards of the Coast 2014a). Conversely, the "immaterial", encompasses the described and imagined settings and forms. The immaterial in D&D exists as collectively woven images of the worlds and spaces that are alluded to with the aid of material reference. In this way, the immaterial is the mental shared game space, which comes from collective narrativism, and material is the reflection of this space into our physical realm.

It is in this intersection of material and immaterial methods of spatial communication that Space & Story finds its focus. This focus encompasses several established subjects where this similar translation occurs, such as film. The thesis establishes and outlines D&D's re-interpretation of architectural methods to articulate its immaterial imagined spaces. The thesis asserts that D&D uniquely utilizes and encourages architectural methods in its game design through the use and production of complex tactical game maps, sections of descriptive atmospheric

text, and encouragement through tools and aids to enable the self design of maps. Further, by using these tools in tandem to manifest a cohesive image of space and world for the players and their characters to interact within[1], D&D presents intriguing intersections of programmed space to study.

To date this has not been explored academically, and this is only mildly surprising, as the field of Architecture rarely looks to game space for learnings of its own. Even as a game which has had a heavy reliance on spatial design and understanding, D&D is often only observed as a precursor to RPG video games. Academic interests primarily look at D&D's role-playing aspect, the use of proxy selves in characters of your creation, in worlds and settings of your own preference and influence, leading to studies in the fields of psychology (Ferguson 2022), sociology (Wright, Weissglass, and Casey 2020) and as a potential tool for teaching or therapy (Henrich and Worthington 2021).

This gap between studying the experiences of gameplay, and the game space can largely be attributed to the fact that D&D as a subject has not been seen as legitimate until recently, if you even agree that it is. The genre that the game is embedded within, fantasy, has a history of being disregarded academically. Falling victim to the same conviction observed by influential fantasy and science fiction writer Urusla K. Le Guin in *The Wave in the Mind,* fantasy is often infantilized as a genre for children. Imaginative fiction is treated as lesser by critics and academics for "... if they acknowledge Tolkien they'll have to admit that fantasy can be literature, and that therefore they'll have to redefine what literature is." In this critique of literature, Le Guin makes a statement especially poignant to the thesis, that "To think that realistic fiction is by definition superior to imaginative fiction is to think imitation is superior to invention." (Le Guin 2004). However, expanding this critique of the treatment of fantasy is not the focus of Space and Story, nor is outlining the shift of when the definitions of legitimate study expands to include the genre of fantasy. The focus is spatial design and communication in D&D, for when done well, it allows a unique and seamless translation of space that the players rarely notice they engage in or even as they play through a classical epic of their own direction within architectural floor plans.

Thus, this thesis topic is not only distinct from previous studies but is also well positioned to link and investigate D&D as a game with a very special relationship

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[1] It bears mentioning here, that there is more than one way to play and use the provided tactical maps. This is expanded further in the preface.

to the spatial imagination. As well, it is well positioned to investigate how a game developed broadly by non-architects, utilizes familiar architectural tools, such as floor plans and architectural descriptive text, to enrich understanding of imagined spatial arrangements, enabling interactivity in an immaterial world for the players. This thesis interests itself in how these multitudes of relationships between space and story build upon our understanding of articulated immaterial space within the context of narrative.

To investigate this requires a multifaceted approach consisting of a series of writings and analyses, a literature review on the representation of space and creation of it in Architecture and D&D, building to a hybrid design exercise exploring this relationship and the merits of such practice. These writings will look to selections of existing theory and methods in conceptual and literary analysis thereby establishing how architectural theory, game theory, and film theory approach spatial understandings and the tradition of storytelling. These writings then proceed to look at how past and present architectural practices work to articulate space, how D&D's method borrows and differs from these processes, and where relevant isolates elements of D&D's gameplay and world building to contextualize them in the game's history and the practice of space making.

The design exercise focuses on the production of a short D&D adventure, where the studied method of design, and game elements, will be explored by translating an architectural narrative into a short D&D adventure[2]. This translation will take the text, analyze it by isolating its spatial elements, key characters, and plot, then develop relevant material needed to run the adventure, including campaign writings, adventure art, and tactical maps. Development of the adventure utilizing identified methods in the previous chapters will be highly detailed and recorded, acting both as artifacts in previous chapters as well as analyses of a multitude of methods of space planning. This design exercise will serve as the primary artifacts and frame in which the final stage, the conclusion, and response to the thesis's central question will be conducted.

As mentioned previously, this study provides unique value and insight into a game of reputable history and popularity. It begins to explore how spatial understanding can broadly expand in service of narratives and play and how this is partially reflective of a continuing tradition of storytelling. Further, within a

2   Short adventures, commonly referred to as "one-shots" are shorter stories designed to be completed during a single session of play, as opposed to long "campaigns" which can run for years.

game that appropriates architectural tools, designed primarily by non-architects for primarily non-architect players, it reveals unique idiosyncrasies between the academic interpretation of space, and a novel method of applied understandings. It creates unique potential to see what changes or shifts occur when someone architecturally minded approaches or if the game changes at all. It broadens our understanding of spatial imaginations and how they interact with story telling in what is widely regarded as "the world's greatest roleplaying game"[3].

3   This is the slogan of Dungeons and Dragons 5e and published on the cover of every official publication.

ABRIDGED TIMELINE OF D&D

In 1974 in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson created and published the game Dungeons and Dragons. Evolving from war games and embedded in medieval fantasy genre; D&D became the world's first roleplaying gam. Predating and laying the groundwork for other games in which players become protagonists in their own story, D&D has grown far beyond the initial dungeon exploration it started with.

The following figures outline many of the anchors in time that define D&D, its many editions, and supplements to the rules, including new character options and campaign settings. Simultaneously, they chart the progression of RPG games in general, touch on the explosion of D&D live play podcast and shows that came with 5e and increased D&Ds popularity, and notes pieces of pop culture inspired by the game.

I should note that in the earlier period of the game's evolution, from 1974-2000 there were many editions and versions of D&D that branched off from the numbered editions. While they contributed significantly to the game, for ease of communication where these editions either "circled back" and came to be amalgamated into the next edition of D&D or formed its own version or game, they have been added to the timeline and labelled as supplementary rulebooks and alternative rulesets. Additionally, I want to note the editions in the timeline are the most popular, and thus the most relevant to this thesis in the way it frames game space. These are 2e, 3/3.5e, and 5e.

Tactical Studies Rules (TSR)

TSR™

Tactical Studies Rules is formed to be the publisher of Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson's new game D&D

Tactical Studies Rules restructures into TSR Hobbies ('75)

Dave Arneson Leaves TSR ('76)   Gary Gygax Leaves TSR ('86)

1973

1970   **1980**   **1990**

1974   1977   1989   1995

Original edition - 0e
Dungeons & Dragons

1974
Influenced/Based on
     Wargames
Published as Box Set
Limited Character Options
   3 Starter Classes
   4 Playable Races
   3 Alignment Options

1st edition - 1e
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

1977
Added onto 0e, rules going
     broader & deeper
Attempt to standardize D&D
Increased high-fantasy genre
Increased Character options
     More Classes
     9 Alignment Options

2nd edition - 2e
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

1989
Simplified rule set
New Artwork
Mentions of Devils &
     Demons removed
Increased Character options
Adds rule customization for
     specific settings/themes

2nd edition revised
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

1995
Player Option Rule systems
added allowing extensive
Character Customization

Supplementary Rulebooks & Alternate Rulesets

Holmes Basic '77

Moldvay Basic '81
Expert Rules '81

Mentzer Sets '83-86
Revised Expert Rules '83

Companion Rules '84

Unearthed Arcana '85

Immortals Rules '86

Black Box Basic '91
Tome of Magic '91

Rules Cyclopedia '92

The Classic Dungeons &
Dragons Game '94

figure. 1
Timeline of D&D Simplified, by author

12

Wizards of the Coast (WotC)

WIZARDS OF THE COAST

Hasbro

D&D BEYOND

- Wizards of the Coast purchases TSR becoming the publisher of Dungeons & Dragons
- WotC becomes subsidiary of Hasbro (99)
- WotC is incorporated into Hasbro games division (01)
- WotC becomes 1 of 3 divisions of Hasbro (21)
- WotC acquires D&D Beyond (22)
- A proposal to split WotC from Hasbro is put forward & rejected

1997

2000   2000   2003   2008   **2010**   2014   **2020**   2024

3rd edition - 3e
Dungeons & Dragons

2000
Introduces d20 system w/open game license
Gameplay simplified on all elements
Increased Character Options
Combat in spotlight w/ use of miniatures encouraged on a grid system

3.5 edition - 3.5e
Dungeons & Dragons

2003
2nd most popular edition
Adapted & Improved 3e based on player feedback

4th edition - 4e
Dungeons & Dragons

2008
Complete overhaul of rules & Mechanics
Criticized For
   Miniatures as mandatory
   Overt combat priority
   Video Game Influence, introducing online tools

5th edition - 5e
Dungeons & Dragons

2014
Most Popular Edition to date
Developed using public play testing
Most accessible edition to date using mechanics of oe, AD&D 2e, & 3e
Real-Play shows/podcasts showcasing gameplay increases popularity
Character Customization options are optimized
Simplified core rules w/ fun options to customize game

One D&D

2024
Designed to be backwards compatible with 5e
Developed using public play testing
Focuses on: D&D Rules, D&D Beyond, Digital D&D Play Experience
Digital Integration To Gameplay:
   D&D Beyond + Virtual Tabletop
Rules & Mechanics Modified:
   Spells Lists Simplified
   Feats are more common
   Character Race Options Adapted
   Ability Score comes from background

Unearthed Arcana '04
   Tome of Battle '06
   Tome of Magic '06
   Rules Compendium '07

Players Handbook 2 '09
Dungeon Master's Guide 2 '09
Monsters Manual 2 '09
D&D Essential "4.5" '10
Players Handbook 3 '10
Monsters Manual 3 '10

Unearthed Arcana '15-22
Volos Guide to Monsters '16
Xanathar Guide to Everything '17
Tasha's Cauldron of Everything '20
Monsters of the Multiverse '22
The Book of Many Things '23

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■ Dave Arneson Leaves TSR ('76)　　　　■ Gary Gygax Leaves TSR ('86)

1973

1970　　　　　**1980**　　　　　**1990**

1974　　1977　　　　　　　　　　　　1989　　　　　1995

Original edition - 0e
Dungeons & Dragons

1st edition - 1e
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

2nd edition - 2e
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

2nd edition revised
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons

Supplementary Rulebooks & Alternate Rulesets

Holmes Basic '77

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Dragons Game '94

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Mentzer Sets '83-86
Revised Expert Rules '83
Companion Rules '84
Unearthed Arcana '85

5 Years　　　　　　　　　11 Years　　　　　　　　　6 Years　　　5 Years

Notable Moments in History

Satanic Panic
1980s moral-panic painting D&D as a game of devil
worship, weakly linking it to select criminal events

Multiplayer Games '93
*LAN party becomes a
conventional term playing
games collectively*

D&D Centered Media

Dungeons & Dragons TV Show '83-86
Ran on CBS. Distributed for 10 yrs to 9 countries

D&D In Media

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial '82
Scene 2

Dungeons & Dragons:
Video Game

Pool of Radiance '88
First D&D Video Game

Eye of the Beholder '91

Evolution of the RPG
Video Game

Adventure '77
Colossal Game Adventure

Ultima I '81
The First Age of Darkness

The Bards Tale '85

The Elder Scrolls '94
Arena

The Legend of Zelda '86

Wizardry '81
*Proving Grounds of the Mad
Overlord*

Dragon Quest '86

Dungeon Master '87

Final Fantasy '87

figure. 2
D&D Timeline and Developments, by author

14

Wizards of the Coast (WotC)

WIZARDS OF THE COAST   Hasbro   **D&D** BEYOND

- ■ Wizards of the Coast purchases TSR becoming the publisher of Dungeons & Dragons
- ■ WotC becomes subsidiary of Hasbro (99)
- ■ WotC is incorporated into Hasbro games division (01)
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1997

2000   **2010**   **2020**

2000   2003   2008   2014   2024

3rd edition - 3e
Dungeons & Dragons

3.5 edition - 3.5e
Dungeons & Dragons

4th edition - 4e
Dungeons & Dragons

5th edition - 5e
Dungeons & Dragons

One D&D

Unearthed Arcana '04
Tome of Battle '06
Tome of Magic '06
Rules Compendium '07

Players Handbook 2 '09
Dungeon Master's Guide 2 '09
Monsters Manual 2 '09
D&D Essential "4.5" '10
Players Handbook 3 '10
Monsters Manual 3 '10

Unearthed Arcana '15-22
Volos Guide to Monsters '16
Xanathar Guide to Everything '17
Tasha's Cauldron of Everything '20
Monsters of the Multiverse '22
The Book of Many Things '23

3 Years   5 Years   6 Years   10 Years

Broadband Internet '07
By '07 over half of dial-up users replace systems with broadband

Mobile Games '15
Mobile surpasses revenue of console games

Covid 19 Epidemic
Huge increase of D&D players & sales

D&D Film '00

D&D Film '05
Wrath of the Dragon God

D&D Film '12
Book of Vile Darkness

The Adventure Zone '14-TBA

Critical Role '15-TBA

Dimension 20 '18-TBA

Dungeons & Dragons Film 2023
Honor Among Thieves

Freaks & Geeks S1E18 '00
'Discos and Dragons'

Futurama Film '08
'Benders Game'

Community S2E14 '11
'Advanced Dungeons & Dragons'

Community S6E10 '14
'Advanced Advanced Dungeons & Dragons'

Stranger Things S1 '16

Stranger Things S2 '17

Stranger Things S3 '19

Stranger Things S4 '12

Baldur's Gate '98

Baldur's Gate '01
Dark Alliance

Planescape '99
Torment

Baldur's Gate '04
Dark Alliance II

Neverwinter Nights '02

Neverwinter Nights 2 '06

Dungeons & Dragons Online '06

Baldur's Gate 2 '13
Enhanced Edition

Neverwinter '13

Chronicles of Mystara '13

Baldur's Gate 3 '20

Lords of Waterdeep '17

Dungeons & Dragons '21
Dark Alliance

System Shock 2 '99

Everquest '99

Diablo '97

Final Fantasy VII '97

Fallout '97

Deus Ex '00

Morrowind '02
Arena The Elder Scrolls III

Runescape '01

World of Warcraft '04

Mass Effect '07

The Witcher '07

Fallout 3 '08

Dragon Age '09

Fallout '10
New Vegas

Skyrim '11
The Elder Scrolls V

Dragon Age II '11

Dragon Age '14
Inquisition

Fallout 4 '15

The Witcher 3 '15
Wild Hunt

Bloodborne '15

Undertale '15

Elder Scrolls Online '17

For the King '18

Monster Hunter '18
World

Hades '20

Cyberpunk 2077 '20

Gloomhaven '21

Tiny Tina's Wonderlands '22
D&D inspired Borderlands Spin off

God of War '22

Elden Ring '22

PREFACE

THE GAME

———

Overview of Dungeons and Dragons

Preface: The Game
Overview of D&D

For those who have never played a tabletop roleplaying game, or something similar, asserting that D&D is a unique case with sophisticated explorations of material and immaterial spaces may seem unintuitive or arbitrary. First, this thesis asks these readers who have never played the game to dispel whatever assumptions they may hold. For while the game attracts attention for its high fantasy and escapism, many of its merits lie a layer beneath in its approach to storytelling, adaptive yet rigid organization, and ideation of being a hero. This preface focuses to comprehensively outline the essence of the game, how it is played, and what game space is, to both begin analysis of these aspects and present them to those who unfamiliar with the subject.

What is D&D?

"The core of D&D is storytelling. You and your friends may tell a story together, guiding your heroes through quests for treasure, battles with deadly foes, daring rescues, courtly intrigue, and much more." (Wizards of the Coast 2022)

In essence, D&D is a table-top collaborative storytelling game in which there are 2 Roles: The Dungeon Master (DM) and the Player Characters (PC).

The Dungeon Master is "the game's lead storyteller and referee. The DM creates adventures for the characters" (Wizards of the Coast 2014b, 5), they take on the role of the narrator, enemies, supporting cast, referee, and ultimately interprets the results of actions. Everyone else plays a Player Character, a single main character in the story attempting to "navigate its hazards and decide which paths to explore." (Wizards of the Coast 2014b, 5).

"Narrator"
Dungeon Master
(DM)

"Main Character"
Player Characters
(PC)
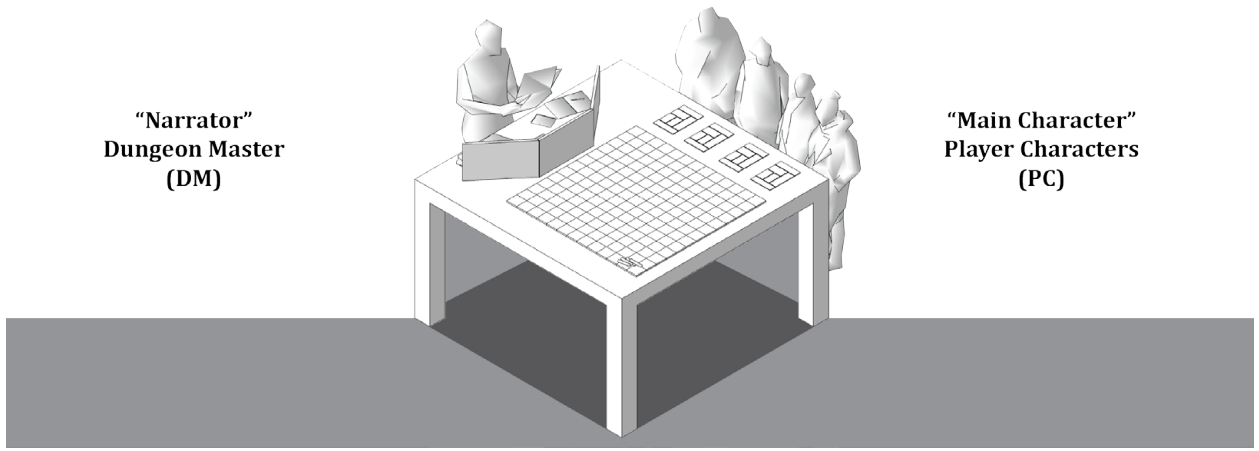
figure. 3
How to Play Dungeons and Dragons: DM and Player
Outlining role of DM and PC generally

How is it Played?

Table Set-Up: Table set up isn't prescriptive and there are many ways D&D can be played. In fifth edition (5e) it is common for the DM to sit behind a divider hiding game notes, miniatures, or other 'spoilers'[1] from the players. In the center of the table will often be a map, gridded or plain, to represent game space. Surrounding the other sides of the table, the players set up is minimal in comparison, with simply character sheets and dice.

Gameplay: While the DM sets up scenarios to respond to, the PCs, within the frame of the rules of the game, outline their characters responses, which the DM then narrates and determines the results of. This can be seen in Figure 2, where the process is similar to a "choose your own adventure" book, but the choices at the base of the page are no longer prescriptive. Instead, they are open to whichever direction the player wishes to take in response to a presented challenge, within the framework of the rules. These actions are not, however, guaranteed to be successful.

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[1]   Just as in other forms of media, spoiler here refers to information on an important game element which if previously known may reduce surprise or enjoyment for a player

1. The DM
Describes the scenario.

2. The PCs
Determines their actions/reponse.

3. The DM
Narrates and determines
the result.

If required, roll dice

d20   d12   d8   d6   d4
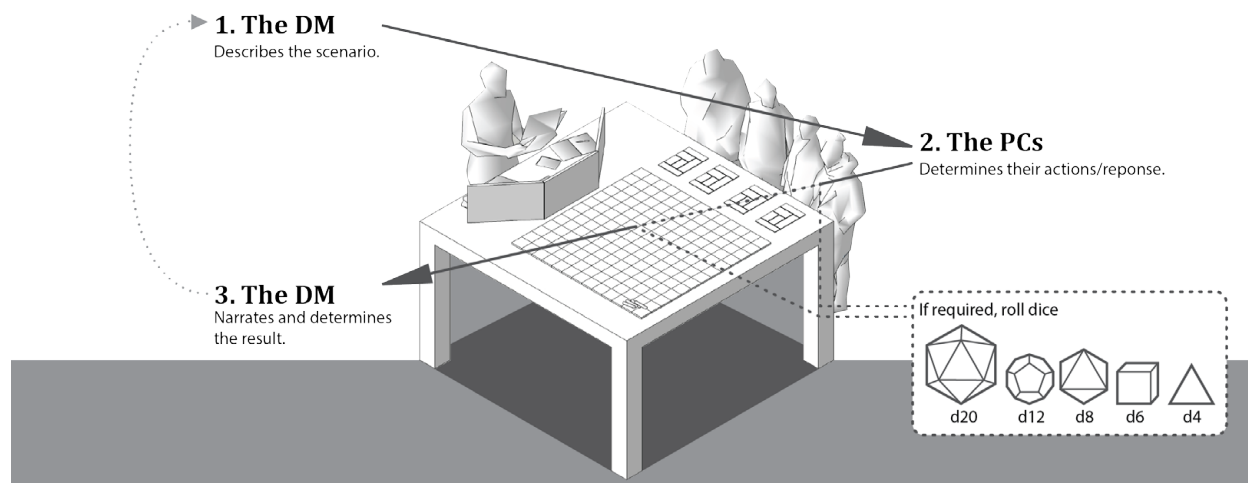
figure. 4
How to Play Dungeons and Dragons: How to Play the Dice
Rolling dice, primarily the d20 is how actions within the game are resolves, successfully or unsuccessfully

"Unlike a game of make-believe, D&D gives structure to the stories, a way of determining the consequences of the adventurers' action." (Wizards of the Coast 2014b, 5)

Rolling the Dice: Rolling dice is ubiquitous with table tope role-playing games as a method of determining an actions results, consequences, and are primary arbiters of chance in the rules of D&D. Taking shape of platonic solids, the primary dice of note used to further the story is the d20 or Icosahedron. Whether landing a killing blow, seducing a local noble for information, or avoiding the effects of a devastating spell a single dice roll determining a success or failure can be the linchpin of which direction a story goes and what areas are left unexplored. The rules and structure of the resulting rolls however are not without their own literature. The Player's Handbook (PHB) and Dungeon Master's Guide (DMG) provide a detailed 55 pages of guidance on determining the outcome of dice rolls, though the choice of what precisely unfolds is ultimately the DM's.

Game Space: Space as presented and explored in D&D is not necessarily free flowing but framed with specific contexts. In official published adventures, stories are provided with plot points, characters, drawings, and maps for the DM to run and adapt. One of the most important types of drawing is the tactical map, in which combat is simulated. This mapping process introduces a blend of material and immaterial game tools to create an understanding of space and flow into a translation from a roughly drawn map to a fully understood space where it becomes "a kind of authoring environment within which players can define their own goals and write their own stories." (Jenkins 2004 128)

"In simulations, knowledge and experience is created by the players actions and strategies, rather than re-created by a writer or moviemaker." (Essen Aarseth 2004, 52)

In Dungeons and Dragons, the knowledge generated by the player's actions are facilitated by the DM. They are the ones to describe the nature of the trees, and if they are climbable. They are the ones to explain to the players the aesthetics of the house and create a sense of atmosphere. When the player determines strategy or action to gather information, the DM resolves what they discover.

Dungeon Master (DM)

Official published adventures have the story, plot points and drawings for DM to run adventure

Maps from adventures get conveyed to players

Player Characters (PC)

Players understanding of game space Hinges on this translation. Which is often through the DM redrawing maps.
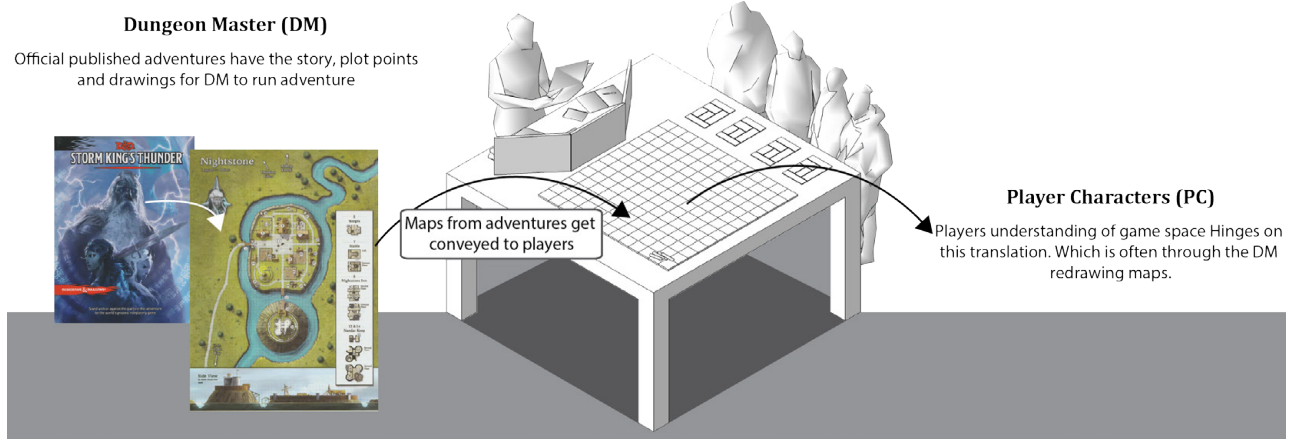
figure. 5
How to Play Dungeons and Dragons: How to Play the Map
The DM translates the game spaces to the players. Either by re-drawing them or with detailed descriptions.

1 The material representation of game space.

2 The understanding of there existing an scaled immaterial game space for the player character to interact with.

Tactical Map

The DM

3 Game maps are translated to players. Usually re-drawn to some form of gridded sheet in simplified forms.

4 Players interpret abstractions of map as described program.

5 Players understand map beyond what is drawn, and beyond 2D material articulation.

figure. 6
Translation of Space In Game
Where in D&D, material and immaterial representations conspire to form interactive space.

What is it Played With?

The game itself is played with a variety of tools, as touched on in the previous section. The earlier editions used to include a recommended equipment list. In the very first edition this was listed as:

"Recommended Equipment
- Dungeons and Dragons (you have it!)
- Dice – the following different kinds of dice: 1 pair of 4-sided dice, 4 to 20 pairs of 6-sided dice, 1 pair of 8-sided dice, 1 pair of 10-sided dice, 1 pair of 12-sided dice and 1 pair of 20-sided dice.
- 3-Ring Notebook (referee and each player)
- Graph Paper (6 lines per inch is best)
- Sheet Protectors (heaviest possible)
- 3-Ring Lined Paper
- Scratch Paper and Pencils
- Imagination
- 1 Patient Referee
- Players" (Gygax and Arneson 1974, 6)

The current edition, 5e, deviates by emphasizing D&Ds spirit of storytelling. D&D designer, Mike Mearls, makes this clear in the preface to the 5e *Players Handbook*: "To play D&D, and to play it well, you don't need to read all the rules... What you need are 2 things, the first being friends with whom you can share the game...The second thing you need is a lively imagination." (Wizards of the Coast 2014b, 4) It is only when it gets to the section titled "How to Play" that it begins to mention materials required, by stating: "Often the action of an adventure takes place in the imagination of the players and DM, relying on the DM's verbal descriptions to set the scene...a DM might lay out a map and use tokens or miniature figures to represent each creature involved in a scene to help players keep track of where everyone is." (Wizards of the Coast 2014b, 6)

Material
- Players & DM
- Dice
- Map Sheet(s)
- Notes
- Character Sheets
- Miniatures

Immaterial
- Characters
- Story
- Game Space
  - World
  - Environment
  - Objects & Spaces
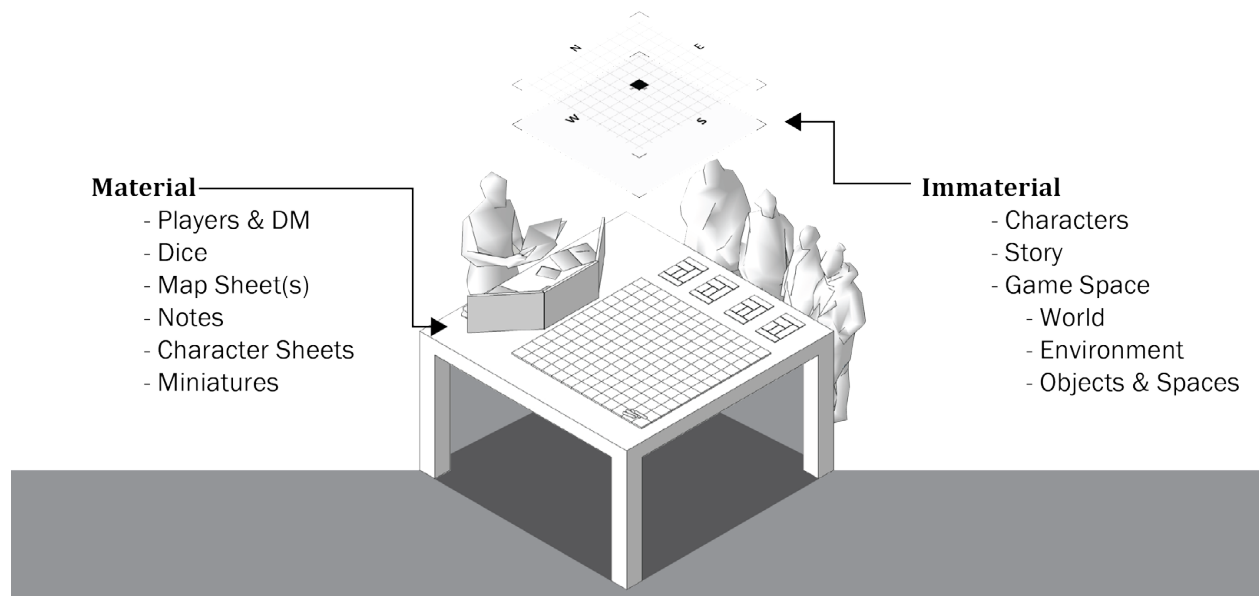
figure. 7
How to Play Dungeons and Dragons: Material vs Immaterial Elements

Where: Ways D&D is Played

Table-Top

Outlined earlier in the preface, this method uses maps and a grid to position D&D miniatures and game spaces physically for everyone, DM and Player to see. This method is regularly how people think of D&D, 5 friends huddled around a table with dice, and how I frame much of this thesis. Maps help to relay aspects of a space to players, but immaterial space in D&D goes into far greater depths than what maps can depict.

figure. 8
D&D Playstyle: In Person Table-Top

Theatre of the Mind

Played without any material representation of game space, everything occurs in the imagination guided by the DM with meticulous descriptions of space and many rounds of back and forth. This was the primary way D&D was played until the releases of the games 3rd edition and using maps and minis became more common.
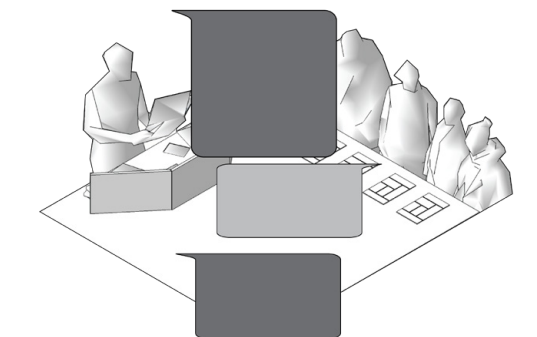
figure. 9
D&D Playstyle: In Person Theatre of the Mind
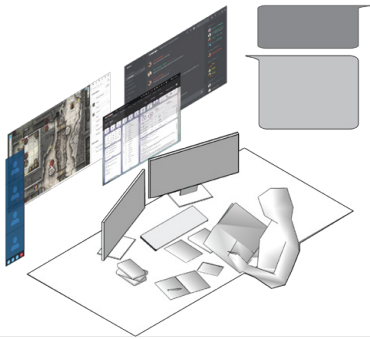
figure. 10
D&D Playstyle: Virtual Table-Top Online

figure. 11
D&D Playstyle: Theatre of the Mind Online

figure. 12
D&D Playstyle: The next Installment One D&D

Virtual Tabletop Online

Becoming an option in the 2010's, websites like Roll20, Foundry, and Fantasy Grounds enables tabletop games of D&D to be played virtually. DM's can combine maps, icons, and music through these platforms for the 'next best thing' to playing in person. Often paired with audio visual connection through the website itself, or other platforms such as Discord or Facebook Messenger, this method saw a rapid rise in popularity when the 2020's COVID-19 pandemic left many isolated at home looking to fill their free time.

Theatre of the Mind Online

Through simple audio and visual connections such as Discord or Facebook Messenger, the theatre of the mind method is used, relying again on the descriptive prowess of the DM. Online, some visuals such as NPC art or setting art is occasionally shared.

One D&D

WotC (Wizards of the Coast) officially has a planned release for 2024 titled One D&D. One aspect this new release, which 'builds upon 5e', is putting forward a sophisticated virtual tabletop platform. This proposed virtual tabletops integrates with D&D Beyond, the digital toolset for D&D recently acquired by Hasbro in April 2022. It appears from reports of the beta testers that the virtual play space both enhances an in person play experience and offers a more immersive experience to digital play by depicting the space with 3D assets.

Why: Why do people Play?

"I am not a wizard, but I play one every Tuesday night" (Ewalt 2013, 4)

The why to the game can be summarized easily: it's fun. It's a fun game people enjoy playing.

However, the reason any individual player enjoys it can range wildly. One player may see the combat mechanics as the most compelling element, facing off against monsters selected by the DM and learning to outmaneuver them trying to out-smart the omniscient DM. Another player might see roleplaying as the ultimate fun, taking on a new persona in a second reality liberated from their day to day. Yet another player might even see exploration as the ultimate fun, learning the history and lore about the fantasy world the adventure takes place in.

For the DM, the one in charge, the reason they play and enjoy taking on the largest role of designing and facilitating the game can present an even broader range of motivations. It might be they were the only one willing to learn the rules, and as a result are now tasked with being a 'forever DM'. Or perhaps that they delight in laying out a dungeon and witnesses how players navigate it. It could even

be a certain sadistic pleasure in laying out a near impossible challenge to see if players can come together and out maneuver it. However, regardless of the reasons of the individual, there are some notes of ludic study and comments to fantasy that merit mentioning.

Game designer Eric Zimmerman wrote an article that explicitly looked to narrative, interactivity, play and game, where he comments on the nature of rules, "rules might not seem like much fun. But once players set the system of a game into motion, play emerges. And play is the opposite of rules. Rules are fixed, rigid, closed, and unambiguous. Play, on the other hand, is uncertain, creative, improvisational, and open ended. The strange coupling of rules and play is one of the fascinating paradoxes of games." (Zimmerman 2004, 161) D&D fitting into this needs the context that it is a relatively complex game. To sit down and explain the base rules of game takes roughly an hour. However, this understanding is often incomplete with frequent in-game questions and clarifications for the first two to six 3-hour game sessions. This complex sets of rules rewards players by opening up a new game type to them. One which is highly interactive and malleable to their imaginations and lets them play through an epic fantasy of their own directing.

And then why do people like fantasy? Many don't, but those that do can appreciate the creativity within it, a sense of escapism from the dullness of reality into a world of magic, one rich with contracts of good and evil, of clear actions which can then be enriched with other meaning, metaphor, and analogy. Though the nature of an adventure varies in depth of meaning, it can imbue complex metaphor or a simple black and white linear plot. Its potential is reminiscent of the following quote from Ursula K. Le Guin. "While fantasy can indeed be mere escapism, wish-fulfillment, indulgence in empty heroics, and brainless violence, it isn't so by definition — and shouldn't be treated as if it were. Fantasy is a literature particularly useful for embodying and examining the real difference between good and evil." (Le Guin 2004) and D&D enables both DMs and Players engage with this to their own determination.

PART 1

NARRATIVE AND SPACE

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Understandings of Spatial Narratives

Outlining Narrative

"Narrative is often seen as a form of representation bound with sequence, space and time (Cobley 2001: 3). But it is also regarded 'as structure, a particular way of combining parts to make a whole' or as narration, as the process or 'the activity of selecting, arranging and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on a perceiver' (Bordwell 1985: xi). A narrative requires a narrator and a reader in the same way in which architecture requires an architect and a viewer. A narrative, therefore, is not only the content of the story that is narrated, or the way in which it is interpreted by readers, but also the way in which it is structured and

presented to an audience by an authorial entity..." (Psarra 2009,2)

In their definition of narrative, which additionally draws from the definitions from Paul Cobley Professor of Semiotics and Communications at London Metropolitan University and David Bordwell the American film theorist, Sophia Psarra Professor of Architecture and Spatial Design at The Bartlett School of Architecture partially outlines narrative as "the way in which it is structured and presented to an audience by an authorial entity." In outlining this authorial entity Psarra mentions filmmakers alongside architects, I would readily extend this title to include game designer, as well as dungeon masters. While the disciplines these authorial entities belong to differ in medium thus in how they explore narrative,

they all share a similar exploration of narrative distinct from that of literature. These alternate approaches to narrative are ones that intertwine treatments of narrative alongside space.

This chapter looks to spatial narratives expressed materially and immaterially in architecture. It then broadens its scope, looking to similar immaterial mediums of film, and games, specifically video games, which similarly connect narrative and space. These are explored for multiple reasons; to define the territory of spatial communication through narrative, that this thesis centers itself within; to showcase how architectural writings understand spatial communication and narratives at large; and to outline the different approaches linked disciplines take to exploring narrative spatially. Further, where relevant, written or illustrated studies deepen this understanding by exploring spatial narrative within the central subject of the thesis, D&D. D&D is uniquely explicit in the manner in which it calls upon different mediums as referential footholds to aid in the formation of spatial narratives. From film's portrayal of medieval cities to the spatial qualities of architectural space, to video games' fascination with hidden rooms, these reflections consider the broad influences within spatial narratives.

Interpreting Narrative

Narrative as a term in and of itself continues to be applied broadly in and across many disciplines. At times it is synonymous with story, but within the context of this thesis an understanding of where my distinction is drawn is required. The following glossary outlines several terms as they relate to this thesis:

- **Story** refers to the central accounting of characters and their actions. The 'who and what', which occupy the stages that architecture, film, or game spaces offer.
- **Narrative** at its core it is the overarching idea interpreted within what is presented. The 'why' which may give simple objects and events meaning and context.
- **Spatial Narrative** further specifies an overarching idea that is interpreted with the space, frame or stage. It also calls beyond a sense of authoring to a deeper cognitive understanding of the underlying layer of communication. Outlined by Psarra, whether

'perceptual' or 'conceptual', spatial narratives are intrinsically linked to a human experience of the medium

- **Narrative architecture** refers to architectural objects, designs, constructions and spatial arrangements that use narrative as a clear and intentional guide for design. Narrative architecture frames views and uses other visual cues to enable free flow between spatial experiences.

Umberto Eco: Semiotics and Narrative

To explore the way un-built space is more easily understood through narrative, spatial communication in terms of semiotics becomes of interest. This curiosity brings forward the enduring explorations of philosopher Umberto Eco, specifically from his 1986 article *Function and Sign: Semiotics of Architecture*. Within this article, Eco applies his general semiotic theory to architecture by identifying the systems of signs within, with connotative and denotative functions outlining how these systems operate historically, the codes within architecture and the concept of mass communication through architecture. Specifically of interest when examining spatial narratives, Eco remarks on connotative and denotative meaning for architecture. Eco outlines denotative meaning, the most readily understandable semiotic function of architecture, as "the sign vehicle of a precisely and conventionally denoted meaning-its function." Connotative meaning is more of an abstract function, as "the architectural object could connote a certain ideology of the function. But undoubtably it can connote other things." In an example of a primitive cave Eco outlines the denotative function as shelter, with possible connotative meanings being "'family' or 'group', 'security', 'familiar surroundings',

etc." [1] This framing of connotative and denotative meanings is especially of interest when considering spatial narratives and a framework D&D appropriates to generate an understanding of immaterial space. In D&D, connotative and denotative meaning can be outlined with the simple example of a tavern. As the game is more symbolic in nature denotative meaning describes a space's purpose in the game. A tavern, for instance, functions as a resting spot, or a site to introduce a new character or quest. In turn, a tavern might connotate opportunity, guidance, or safety.

When presenting Eco's semiotic functions, a conflict comes into that consideration there presents architectures which reject the importance of narrative and connotative meaning. Conscious or unconscious of the outlined function types, the resulting architecture rejects the importance of the symbolic connotative meaning and in turn rejects architectures underlying semiotic relationship identified by Eco. This rejection stems from a prioritization of function over connotative to combat this attitude Eco comments that "...with respect to life the 'symbolic' capacities of these objects are no less 'useful' than their 'functional' capacities." While Eco acknowledges most architectural objects, regardless of intent, fulfill their primary function as a result of being built forms, he also highlights these architecture objects without exception communicate. Although with a prioritization of donative the overly functional, utilitarian, buildings present in the built world easily invite criticisms of it. Trends titled 'gentrification buildings'[2], and the reliance on repetitive materials, foster shallow criticism that 'now all buildings look the same'. Further is continuing a trend observed by Architect Nigel Coates when modernism explicitly aimed to present purely functional forms, "Modernism celebrated the fact that it had broken free from the 'tyranny' of decoration. And yet despite this, the built environment inevitably 'communicates' -it cannot avoid doing so." (Coates 2005, 13)

Certain architectures seem to persist to celebrate an avoidance of

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1   When expanding on connotative meaning, Eco presents a succinct example distinguishing denotative and connotative "A seat tells me first of all that I can sit down on it [denotative]. But if the seat is a throne, it must do more than seat one: it serves to seat one with a certain dignity, to corroborate its user's 'sitting in dignity'...[connotative]" (Eco 1986)

2   This trend of calling out the architectural style of copy paste architecture was highly present on the internet for a while. Mainly in social media such as Instagram and TikTok during covid when much of the world was becoming hyper aware of our immediate surroundings.

communication[3], while others sacrifice broad functionality so that the symbolic is visible. Which calls to finding a middle ground as Eco concludes their article.

Outlining a binary of conclusions to their 1986 article one might draw, Eco comments "both go too far". Summarizing that, one extreme creates an illusion and misconception that an architect can find a 'perfect form' of the primary function which "accepts on faith certain sociological and ideological determinations made by others" as well noting the danger of this that these assigned determinations "may not be founded." While "According to the second, the architect...becomes a demiurge, an artificer of history." they become too deterministic in what their designs impart and express, failing to allow the dimension of social meaning to evolve by the cultural messaging. Eco concludes that, in truth "the architect should be designing for variable primary functions and open secondary functions." It is this open secondary function that narrative and specifically spatial narrative, in architecture truly finds itself. This is not to imply the denotative does not also impart narrative, but that tied to the nature of the two functions, narrative predominately lies within the connotative. As narrative contextualizes the overarching idea to be interpreted within what is presented, the 'why' which may give simple objects and spaces meaning and context, it embraces this open secondary function.

3   Ambition of design vs Reality | It can be acknowledged that not every building is inspired by narrative or has the ambition to instill one. However, a perception of being exempt from presenting a narrative by not selecting one is a false one. As "*the built environment inevitably 'communicates' -it cannot avoid doing so*" (Coates 2005) architecture is the product of cultural meaning. When capital focused and simplified to being a product in real estate, often we see attempts to remove any perceived burden of narrative. This, in turn, decides one for itself and is how the criticisms of sameness in our cities have become a broad focus of the publics view of buildings. For in architecture every building communicates to its users, it is important that in service to the experiences contained within them that we engage the narratives with intent.

Narratives in Built Spaces

"...narrative provides architects with an additional tool drawn from the rich and wonderful world of human nature." (Coates 2012, 161)

Many architectural writings exist that explore unique relationships and dualities within architecture, including narrative. To deepen our understanding of the concept of connotative meaning as it is presented in architecture, I explore select writings with special attention given to Professor Sophia Psarra and architect Nigel Coates due the depth which their books explore narrative.

When observed in our built spaces, narrative can embody a particular duality in its overt expressions and subtle understandings. Remarked on by Psarra on what they observed in two groups of buildings they had selected to study, she summarizes that "The buildings in the first group engage with narrative as a strong message. The rest do not narrate but present. They do not speak explicitly but inexhaustibly indicate, provoking an interpretive process rather than directing interpretation." (Psarra 2009, 230) This duality is observable and is captured in how narrative manifests in the practice of architecture, both practically and conceptually. In a practical sense, spatial narratives present themselves while displaying a design to

a client, revealing drawings and representations to comprehensively communicate *how one might experience the space. A simple, "as you descend the stairs your view expands into the living room. You see a flood of natural light entering the large room as clerestory windows stretch to the ceiling, framing an outlook into the forest" presents subtle underlying narrative of descent and privacy, imbued into a personal space that then frames a view to be unique and precious. Spatial narrative in the more conceptual sense encapsulates a design's broader purpose, the answer to 'why is this important' but is more often captured in ephemeral experiences which are explored and catalogued in selective architectural writings. Writings in this territory* include *Narrative Architecture* by Nigel Coates, and *Architecture and Narrative* by Sophia Psarra. These selected writings point to a sense of narrative which call upon scale and iconography, evoking deeper reactions from its users, resonating with them at a core level. They outline a sense of narrative that "has the potential to engage human experience in ways that mere style does not." (Coates 2012, 31) and that, within architecture "the conceptual properties, perceptual experience and the organization of the cultural message as its potential instruments for narration." (Psarra 2009, 4) Throughout these analyses there is a sense that spatial narrative is not necessarily specific elements, styles, or forms, but a collective construction of the whole. "Narrative is not an option selected from a pattern book or looked up on the Internet. It relies on your ability to draw from the world around you and render it light enough to move into the territory of the imagination." (Coates 2012, 32) Statements like these build on what was observed by Kevin Lynch in 1960: within the concepts and assertions of narrative in architecture, design does not predetermine it's use or meaning. "A landscape whose every rock tells a story may make difficult the creation of fresh stories." (Lynch 1960,6). Instead spatial narratives, in whatever form they make take, should aim to create a "sense of place [that] enhances every human activity that occurs there, and encourages the deposit of a memory trace." (Lynch 1960, 119)

Spatial Narratives and Architecture

Established Theory

Professor of Architecture and Spatial Design Sophia Psarra's *Architecture and Narrative* explores exactly the concepts the title so implies. Psarra defines it as a "book about architecture, spatial cognition and meaning". She sections the book into four parts, with analyses ranging from outlining a selection of buildings for their presentation of aesthetic ideal abstractions of space, to studying the intersection of language and space, and exploring selected exhibitions that center on conceptual organization relevant to narrative. To Psarra, "Narrative enters architecture in many ways, from the conceptual 'messages' it is made to stand for to the illustration of a design through models, drawings and other representational forms." (Psarra 2009, 2) further within these immaterial explorations of design "This aspect of architectural expression, what the design speaks of, is relevant to narrative as representation. It concerns the semantic meanings of buildings and places, and the contribution of architecture to the expression of social and cultural messages. But architecture does not only express meaning. It also participates in the construction of meaning through the ordering of spaces and social relationships" (Psarra 2009, 2) With regards to spatial narrative in architecture specifically, Psarra does well to acknowledge architecture is not a narrative in the traditional sense such as it

is portrayed in literature. Psarra sees "...the conceptual properties, perceptual experience and the organization of the cultural message as [architecture's] **potential** instruments for narration." (Psarra 2009, 4) It is these three notions space (the conceptual, perceptual, and social) that underline all the investigations of the book. Similar to denotative and connotative meanings, Psarra also notes a familiar binary throughout the book "that has characterized architectural theory, often expressed as a split between the conceptual characteristics of buildings and their physical and cultural dimensions." (Psarra 2009, 233) While not the definite or final answer, her investigation of narrative in the context of conceptual, perceptual, and social space, begins to frame how narrative and architecture intertwine.

The other piece of architectural writing I identify, *Narrative Architecture* written by Architect Nigel Coates, is an exploration of the experiential dimension of architecture in terms of narrative. In it, Coates discusses manifestations of narrative rich architecture, and "explores the potential for narrative as a way of interpreting buildings from ancient history through to the present." As one of the founders of NATO (Narrative Architecture Today) Coates offers a multitude of comments on how narrative and architecture interact.

"Narratives arise spontaneously in the course of navigating the world- from inside to outside, private to public, personal experience to collective myth. Even unplanned settlements such as shantytowns or medieval villages contain complex narrative content; for an inhabitant they will configure a three-dimensional map of social relations, possible dangers, and past events." (Coates 2012, p.13) Further Coates claims that "In architectural space...narrative approach depends on parallel code that adds depth to the basic architectural language.... [N]arrative in architecture is rarely a prescribed sequence of meanings, but it is instead an anti-sequential 'framework' of associative meanings...it communicates subtly and unpredictably, and often works better when hidden rather than overt." (Coates 2012, 15)

Exploration: Narrative Types Nigel Coates

The most productive analysis from Coates' book (as it pertains to this thesis at least), is an exploration of built works that center the use of narrative. Coates identifies and outlines 3 types of narrative in architecture: binary, sequence, and biotopic. In his words "Some make simple combinations of function and metaphor; others incorporate a time dimension, either through a sequence drawn out in space, or is a matrix that presents an orchestrated variety of options." (Coates 2012, 81) Coates prefaces these definitions, that "the basic mechanisms of narrative correspond to Kevin Lynch's Elements of the city [where]...each element can be intensified with a narrative overlay" (Coates 2012, 81)
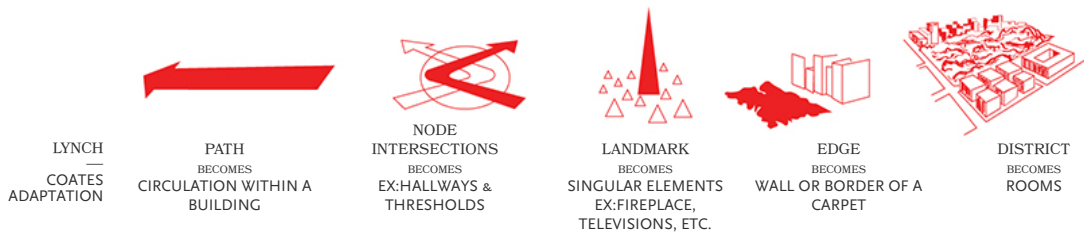
| LYNCH
—
COATES
ADAPTATION | PATH
BECOMES
CIRCULATION WITHIN A
BUILDING | NODE
INTERSECTIONS
BECOMES
EX:HALLWAYS &
THRESHOLDS | LANDMARK
BECOMES
SINGULAR ELEMENTS
EX:FIREPLACE,
TELEVISIONS, ETC. | EDGE
BECOMES
WALL OR BORDER OF A
CARPET | DISTRICT
BECOMES
ROOMS |

Binary Narrative

"investing the object or 'situation' with a parallel identity - not one derived from function but trans-function - that is a function of the mind, a transgression, a sublimation, a presence from the imagination that can 'heat up' the otherwise banal object"

Example: Herzog & De Meuron with artist Ai Weiwei Beijing National Stadium 2008

"Known as 'the bird's nest', the building itself is so nest-like as to comply with a powerful binary narrative."

Sequence Narrative

"...they want to guide a viewer from space to space...lays out spaces along a predetermined route tying together several 'situations', each of which has its own spatial coherence. Although not always sequential, English landscape gardens were designed to stimulate a sense of reverie by materialising mythical event..."

Example: Diller Scofidio + Renfro: The High Line, New York City, 2009-2011

"According to the architects, this is 'agri-tecture' plainly a public space in which nature and landscape substantiate an elaborate sequence narrative that runs right through the heart of the city."

Biotopic Narrative

"...an urban field that includes a variety of functions and storylines that are mutually supporting yet independent, as on a university campus or in an urban village... a biotopic narrative helps create a homogenous condition of equal opportunities; it simultaneously exhibits functional clarity and stimulating incongruity, form and fiction."
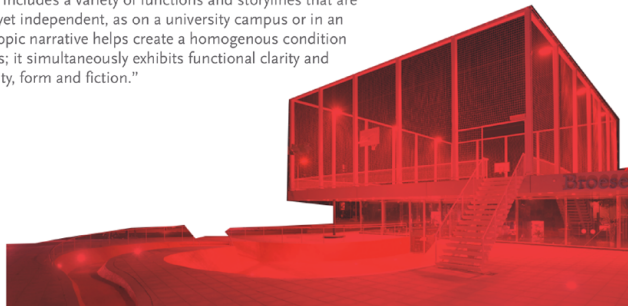
Example: NL Architects: BasketBar, Utrecht, 2003

"This is not so much cross programming as free planning, an amalgam of three components cleverly interlinking...Despite each of the objects possessing objective clarity. combined they built a biotopic narrative out of relative behaviours: each of the 'actions' informs and invades the others."

figure. 13
Nigel Coates Narrative Type Illustration

Spatial Narratives in Other Mediums

Spatial Narrative and Film

Spatial narratives are not restricted solely to architecture, and especially in immaterial explorations of space, it is integral to expand and broaden this interest the first of these subjects explored in this section being film.

> "Nothing disappears completely ... In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows ... Pre-existing space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements, but also representational spaces and their attendant imagery and mythic narratives."
> (Lefebvre 2005)

Film is a narrative-forward medium. When we watch a film, we, generally, expect to be told some form of story. However, we can also intuitively understand this perception of narrative to be surface level, and but one understanding. Just as there is a deep breadth of genres that the medium of film encompasses, from unique art house films projected in small one-of-a-kind cinemas to popular franchises whose main draws are the actors themselves, the manifestations of narrative in film is similarly broad. As this is not a film focused thesis, I center my brief exploration in film to that which is relevant to architecture: spatial narratives. Narrative in this sense is not necessarily the story, but where it is clear that "Place and event, space and mind, are not outside of each other." (Pallasmaa 2001, 22). This understanding

of spatial narratives within film centers on the intersection of space, architecture and cinema, and is observed by Juhani Pallasmaa in *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*. When Pallasmaa comments that "lived existential space" is "the shared ground of architecture and film" (Pallasmaa 2001, 8)

In *The Architecture of Image*, Pallasmaa organizes their analyses in devoted sections reviewing selected directors selected works. These analyses outline the selected work's unique merits with regards to space and architecture. As a preface to these explorations, Pallasmaa more generally outlines the relationships between space and narrative, architecture, and cinema and within this preface he asserts that "Studying the poeticized architecture of cinema helps us architects to rediscover the symbolic dimensions of both life and our own artform." (Pallasmaa 2001, 10) In a sense, being audience to an artistic treatment and exploration of space relieves the restrictive functional limits often imposed by architecture. An aspect which is significantly reflective of D&D. Further, his writing reflects on how the intangible nature of spatial narrative in film affects its audience.

"The essence of architectural space as determined by an artist, is free of the functional requirements, technical restrictions and limitations of the professional conventions of architects. The architecture conceived by artists is a direct reflection of mental images, memories and dreams; the artist creates an architecture of the mind. Yet, even the works of architects, built in matter, obtain their psychic content and echo from the very same existential experiences and images accumulated in the human mental constitution. Even real architecture can affect our soul only if it can touch the stratum of forgotten memories and feelings." (Pallasmaa 2001, 22)

Throughout the book, Pallasmaa successfully connects narrative with this ephemeral affect that space within architecture and film can impart. He additionally does well to ground his definition of space within film. Similar to how Henri Lefebvre comments, "In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows", we understand that film space is always viewed through a selected frame determined by the director. That "The structuring of place, space, situation, scale, illumination, etc. characteristic of architecture - the framing of human existence - seeps unavoidably into every cinematic expression." (Pallasmaa 2001, 20) This filmic idea of space, continues beyond this frame, as sequences of frames structures

narrative through space.

I want to highlight her that similar to Eco, Psarra, and Coates, Pallasmaa also outlines a duality in film. Similar to material and immaterial, denotative and connotative, "Place and event, space and mind, are not outside of each other. Mutually defining each other, they fuse unavoidably into a singular experience; the mind is in the world, and the world exists through the mind. Experiencing a space is a dialogue, a kind of exchange - I place myself in the space and the space settles in me. This identification of physical and mental space is intuitively grasped by writers and film directors." (Pallasmaa 2001, 22-23)

Exploration: The Shining

Within The Architecture of the Image, many case studies of the unique spatial reflections in films are explored. One case study in particular notably mirrors a relationship of presented space versus understood space also present in D&D. Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film *The Shining*, endures as a highly architectural film. It's plot is tied closely to its location and built spaces, and the explorations of these spaces express the film's themes of isolation, dread, and disorientation, not only does it present architecture in that way, but it also has a legacy as a film where spatial narrative is strongly, but perhaps unnoticeably, applied. It exists in the polarized divergence between the presentation of framed spaces against navigated filmed space, subverting our mental mapping of spatial arrangements.

Throughout the film certain 'impossible' architectures are presented, ones which often go unnoticed on first watch. Spatial reversals, discontinuities, inversions, all work to be perceived unconsciously as the space being 'wrong'. Analyzed by Rob Ager in 2008 in his in-depth analysis of The Shining "*Mazes, Mirrors, Deception and Denial*" in Chapter 4 "Around Every Corner", annotated floorplans are presented alongside contradictory film stills. These plans outline the deliberate spatial disorientation in the film, how these disjunctive spaces are

impossible, and in turn reinforce the spatial narrative of unease and unreliability of perception[4].

This imposed delirium is also present in the disconnected imagery of the maze. As noted by Pallasmaa, "A miniature model of the Overlook base shown in the lobby in the strange scene with Jack looks at it all the camera moves directly above and suddenly shows Wendy and Danny in the middle of it... The maze is also shown as a visitor guides plant outside the maze itself... The actual maze set does not follow either the model or the drawing: it is a simplified design to facilitate the required actions and camera moves. The set assimilates a section of the complete design suggested by the miniature model in the plant drawing." (Pallasmaa 2001, 133)

I mention this case study because it mirrors D&D in the understood space versus the presented space. The game of D&D, when using a pre-written campaign, is one where a general plan is given within maps, sections of text, and general plot, however, the extent which is explored in an adventure is determined by the players themselves, as they interpret the presented narratives and engage with them to find their own path forward. This in turns creates a significant malleability for DMs to engage with. This malleability often has some 'reasonable barriers' to still be interpreted as playing through the intended campaign, but similar to how in *The Shining* the filmed maze significantly differs from the model which differs from the map, shifts and adaptations of both plot and space are not unheard of in efforts to present a cohesive intended experience. While in *The Shining* this discrepancy of spatial presentation is to reinforce a sense of unease and ominous foreboding, in D&D a discrepancy between the provided map and what is transcribed to the players can be to reinforce immersion, reward or penalize actions, connect a new player to the campaign, or any number of other narrative reasons. This is not to imply that discrepancy is encouraged in a blasé treatment of canon but to acknowledge that the "negotiation between narrative structure and player freedom ... forms the core of the procedural narrative of pen and paper RPGs." (Schallegger 2018, 186)

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4   While the intentionality of this disorientation is occasionally questioned, often citing that the inconsistencies are likely filming mistakes due to the near-constant on set directorial decisions. The volume of impossible architectures within the film is simply too large and in-line with the intent of film to be coincidence.

figure. 14
Film Still from The Shining
Jack Torrance looks over model of hedge maze present in lobby, which has visible discrepancies
with that present on the signboard outside of the maze.

figure. 15
Film Still from The Shining
Film still of the signboard outside of the maze, displaying its design. This map has visible discrepancies to the model Jack looks at in the lobby of the hotel.
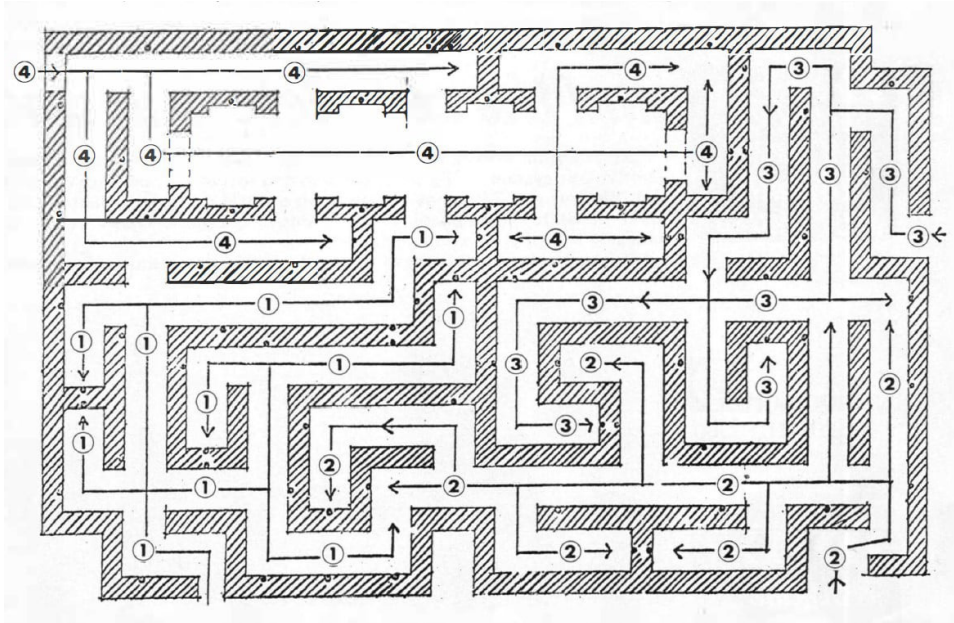
figure. 16
Film Plan of the Maze Set
A wooden mock up of the maze was used for the winter scenes, and presents significant differences from presentations of it in the film.
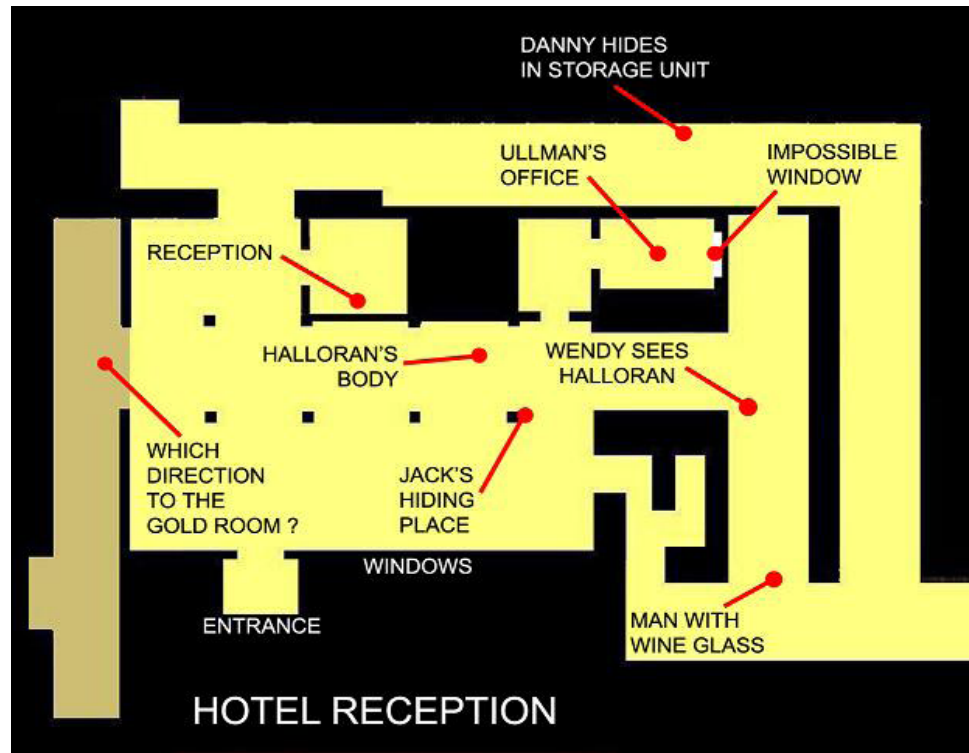
figure. 17
Diagrammatic Impossible Floor Plans of the Shining
Outlined and analyzed by Rob Ager, the Shining filmic spaces are rife with impossible connections
of space. Ager demonstrates this by creating plans to outline the disconnects.

figure. 18
Film Still from The Shining 1980
Ager uses several scenes to track the location of the "impossible window", where long shots
directly show the movement of characters through connective spaces that surround the office as
located on the plan.

Spatial Narrative and Ludology

"In simulations, knowledge and experience is created by the players actions and strategies, rather than re-created by a writer or moviemaker." (Aarseth 2004, 52)

Spatial narrative and the field of ludology have a direct relationship, as space is often a central aspect of games. Stated by Essen Aarseth prominent Norwegian academic of video games and electronic literature "any game consists of three aspects: (1) rules, (2) A material/semiotic system (a gameworld), and (3) gameplay (the events resulting from application of the rules to the gameworld)" (Aarseth 2004, 47-48) It is within this 'material and semiotic'[5] aspect that spatial narrative come through, in that gameworlds are often explored and detailed with a sense of narratives in mind. This is further expanded for videogames specifically by Sebastian Domsch, when as a precursor to asserting spatial narratives are "...the opposite of sequence narrative...[they] are especially dominant in computer games that use navigable space." Domsch comments on the role of space in video games that "Though these spaces can be presented as pure abstractions devoid of any meaning but their spatial properties, such a presentation will run counter to

5　　Semiotics, the study of signs, symbol and signification, in video games refers to signification within story worlds, game spaces. Ultimately how communication occurs between the player and the game.

human cognition's tendency to semanticise spaces - to give space a meaning. As we experience spaces, whether they be real or created by computers, we read them for their meaning and the stories they contain, and as we perform these spaces through movement and interaction, we inscribe our own narrative into them." (Domsch 2019, 104)

Video games have demonstrated this relationship throughout their evolution. Even when at times a game's narrative evolved only to be a surface treatment of the 'why' to a game, it is still often manifested spatially and central to the game and its playability. In early text-based games, infusing narrative helped make games playable by cuing the players what to guess and type. Modern video games often center explicitly on the use of space and creation of spatial narratives, adding depth and a sense of importance to their worlds. This use of spatial narrative is especially popular in the model of open-world or sandbox games where game designers must "find new forms to 'narrativise' space; to provide it with high narrativity, without linearizing it back into a sequence in time." (Domsch 2019, 103) As well, with the demographic of people playing video games trending to be older it is becoming increasingly expected that narrative is expressed through multiple elements of the games. (Stone, 2019)

However, video games' relationship and expression of spatial narrative is deeper and more nuanced then simply in its use and expression of semiotics. In their 2002 article "*Game Design as Narrative Architecture*" American media scholar and professor of communication Henry Jenkins outlines, responds to, and attempts to reconcile a ludology versus narratology argument, where, at least at the time, ludologists asserted games were not narratives, while narratologists argued the opposite. In truth, I believe in the modern discourse surrounding games, it is often understood that, as Jenkins claimed, while not all games are narrative in nature or aim to tell stories, many are. Even further that many games which one may not expect to have a focus on aspects other then gameplay, perhaps surprisingly, have much to offer[6]. Early in their paper, Jenkins extends the observation on perception versus experience of narrative stating "Monopoly, for example, may tell a narrative about how fortunes are won and lost; the individual Chance cards may provide some

6   An example such as League of Legends presenting as an indirectly narrative as a multiplayer online battle arena game actually has a lot to express. Lots of broader world building and that in a story that only used 8 of a possible 140 characters became the most popular animated series of 2022, Arcane.

story pretext for our gaining or losing a certain number of places; but ultimately, what we remember is the experience of moving around the board and landing on someone's real estate." Throughout this paper establishing games as having narrative, a significant contribution are the narrative types and definitions Jenkins identifies and presents. "Environmental storytelling creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four ways: spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground for narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives." (Jenkins 2003, 123) Many aspects of the outlined evoked, enacted, embedded, emergent are truly spatial in nature for "In each case it makes sense to think of game designers less as storytellers than as narrative architects." (Jenkins 2002)

figure. 19
Screenshot from *Adventure* (1982)
A text based adventure game, Adventure supported simple 1-2 word commands to navigate hundreds of locations, guided only by the overall evoked narrative mission of rescuing a princess.

figure. 20
Screenshot from *The Last of Us* (2013)
Gameplay displays subtle prompts to the embedded narrative.
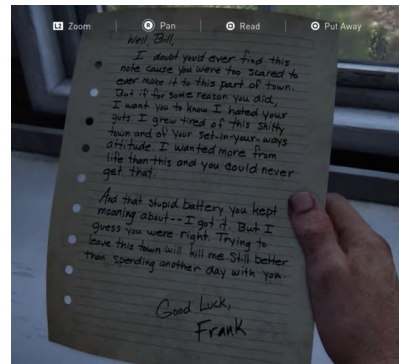
figure. 21
Screenshot from *The Last of Us* (2013)

figure. 22
Screenshot from *Death Stranding* (2019)
In its open world nature, the game provides the staging ground for narrative events for players to enact.

Exploration: Game Narrative Henry Jenkins

The following is a set of illustrative explorations of the narrative types Jenkins outlines, and of the exploration of narrative architecture in roleplaying games Rene Reinhold Shallegger investigates. These illustrations are specifically applied to D&D by visualizing these concepts with respect to gameplay, game spaces, game experience and so on.

EVOKED

Henry Jenkins Definition

"[evocative spaces] do not so much tell self-contained stories as draw upon our previously existing narrative competencies. **They can paint their worlds in fairly broad outlines and count on the visitor/player to do the rest.** Something similar might be said of many games. For example, American McGee's Alice is an original interpretation of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland."

The Fantastical

Evoking the middle ages as pretext, fantasy worlds uniquely blend aspects of magic, monsters and creatures, alongside an older history of humans.

Dungeons & Dragons Interpretation

Dungeons and Dragons uses and represents this well due to it's use of genre-inspired spaces. Drawing from mythology, fantasy, medieval history, classical story-telling motifs and various other elements, it can operate as a game which calls upon broadly painted worlds, specifically explored in-game.

Exploratory Space

The worlds are often "open world" alluding to and implying a broader world beyond the presented map.

The Labyrinth

Underground mazes where monsters roam free call to the Greek myth of the minotaur tangibly.

Layered Realities

Evoking medieval cosmological models, the reality the game inhabits has many planes of existence existentially, as well as physically buried.

Program, Type and Genre

Where the description of each calls upon previous knowledge. Such that if we place a potential locale where the program is assembly, the type is temple, & the genre is gothic, players immediately have a set understanding of expectations of what might be present within the space.

figure. 23
Illustrated Research of Evoked Narrative

EMBEDDED

Henry Jenkins
Definition

"...one can imagine the game designer as developing two kinds of narratives - one relatively unstructured and controlled by the player as they explore the game space and unlock its secrets; **the other pre-structured but embedded within the mise-en-scene awaiting discovery**. The game world becomes a kind of information space, a memory palace."
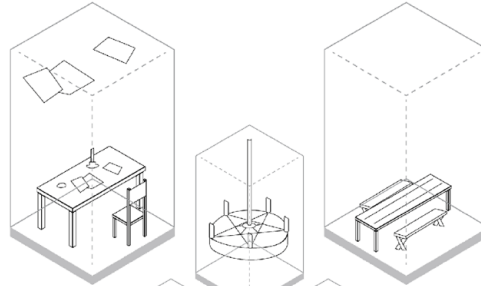
Dungeons & Dragons
Interpretation

Game elements as presented within the space of D&D are often redundant in the information they provide to ensure the information is passed along to players.
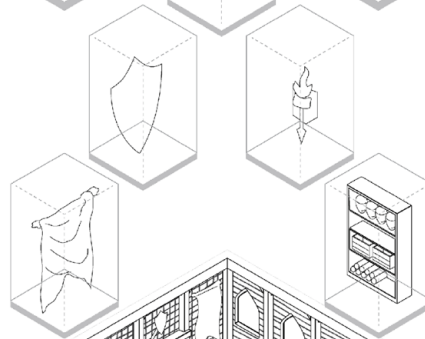
Re-contextualizing

In D&D, theme elements such as a bookshelf, a desk, or a tapestry, take on new roles from the ones they have in real life. They are embedded with information which players can discover through investigation. While they are unique in certain aspects, they largely work together as structured tools for the author and DM.

Hidden Elements

While many of these elements embedded with information are "visible", others are hidden. Traps, hidden stairwells, secret messages, all work in ways hidden to the characters and player but can still be imbued with information.

Progression

Much like in a detective film and book, these embedded plots and information progress stories and games with intentionality.
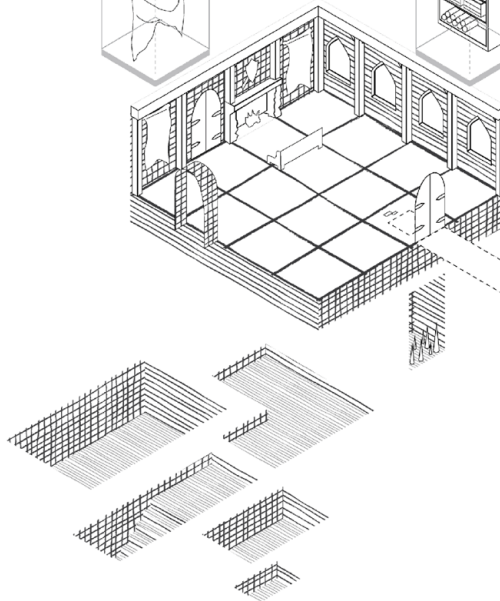
figure. 24
Illustrated Research of Embedded Narrative

ENACTED

HENRY JENKINS DEFINITION

"Spatial stories are held together by broadly defined goals and conflicts and **pushed forward by the character's movement across the map**... The organization of the plot becomes a matter of designing the geography of imaginary worlds, so that obstacles thwart and affordances facilitate the protagonist's forward movement towards resolution."

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS INTERPRETATION

Enacting the narratives is the primary "play" engaged with by the players. While the design and DM set the stage, it is the players choices and movements that push it forward.

IMMATERIAL ENACTING

PLOT PROGRESSION

MATERIAL ENACTING
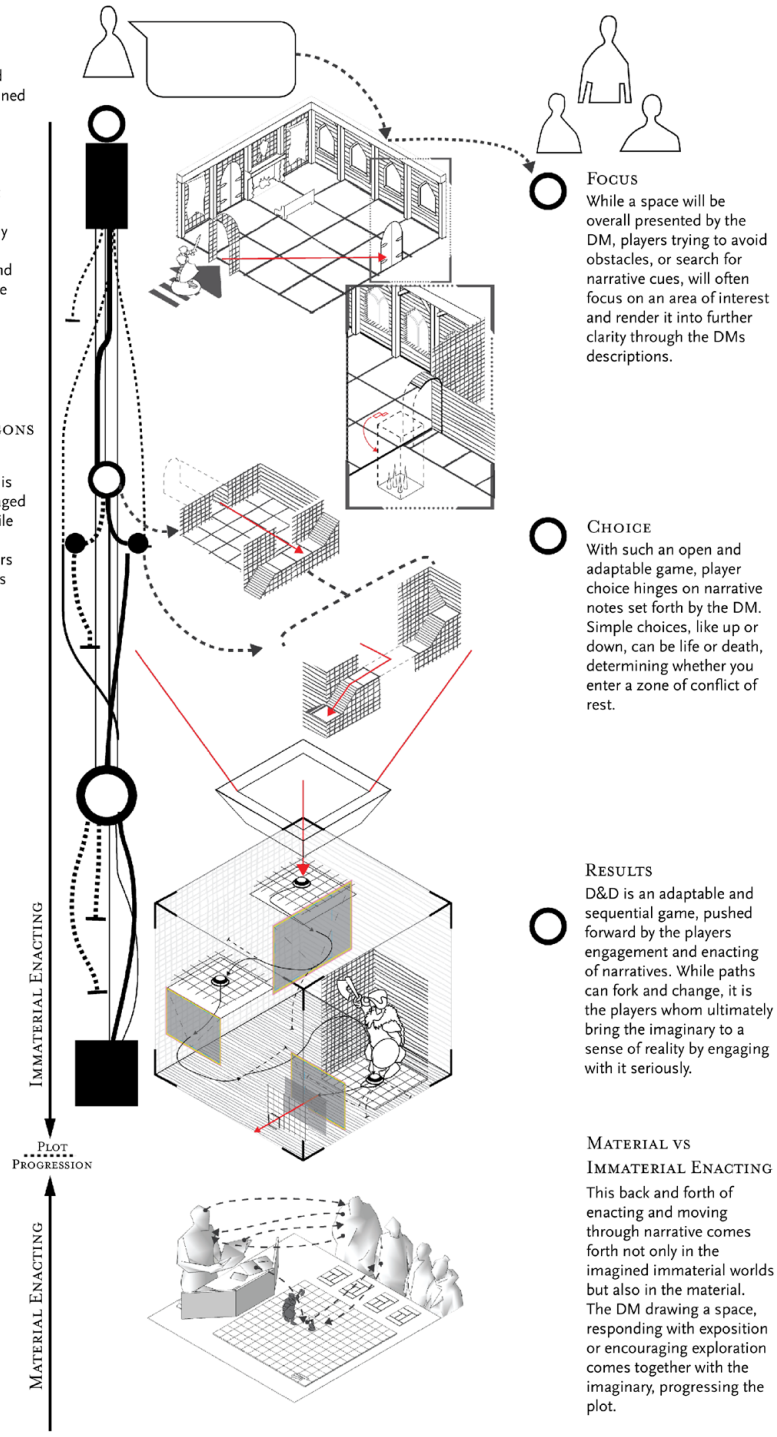
FOCUS

While a space will be overall presented by the DM, players trying to avoid obstacles, or search for narrative cues, will often focus on an area of interest and render it into further clarity through the DMs descriptions.

CHOICE

With such an open and adaptable game, player choice hinges on narrative notes set forth by the DM. Simple choices, like up or down, can be life or death, determining whether you enter a zone of conflict of rest.

RESULTS

D&D is an adaptable and sequential game, pushed forward by the players engagement and enacting of narratives. While paths can fork and change, it is the players whom ultimately bring the imaginary to a sense of reality by engaging with it seriously.

MATERIAL VS IMMATERIAL ENACTING

This back and forth of enacting and moving through narrative comes forth not only in the imagined immaterial worlds but also in the material. The DM drawing a space, responding with exposition or encouraging exploration comes together with the imaginary, progressing the plot.

figure. 25
Illustrated Research of Enacted Narrative

EMERGENT

Henry Jenkins Definition

"**Emergent narratives are not pre-structured or pre-programmed, taking shape through the game play, yet they are not as unstructured, chaotic, and frustrating as life itself**... it should be understood as a kind of authoring environment within which players can define their own goals and write their own stories. Yet...the game doesn't open on a blank screen."
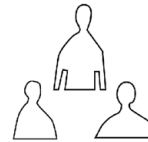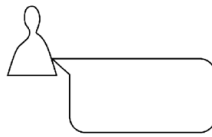
René Reinhold Schallegger Definition

"evoked, embedded and enacted narratives will conspire to create a holistic experience of the second reality, resulting in an emergent narrative... Emergent narrative is not merely the player making a choice between pre-designed and pre-scripted option (A), and...(B), but how the way the game space is set up will allow for additional creative and ad hoc options."

Dungeons & Dragons Interpretation

While adventures in D&D will present spaces imbued with narratives, it is by the players relatively free actions and choices that determine how the things play out. If players simply walk away from adventures, there is nothing but the out of game social agreement to play a challenge stopping them. Quests can be failed, or enemies allied with, and the agency of the players bring individual stories and goals to the forefront.

Enacted

The introduction of a primary conflict, requiring player interaction to expand and progress the potential narrative.

Evoked

Drawing on mythology and archetypal characters imagery and mold hearkens to the bound giant, David vs Goliath, general epic battles, etc.
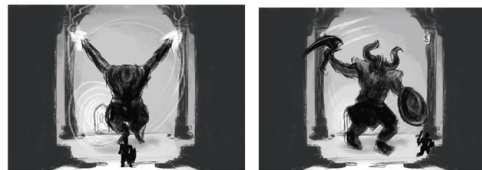
Embedded

Within the space itself, even spaces of conflict, opportunities are presented to embed and enable further discoveries of information.

figure. 26
Illustrated Research of Emergent Narrative

75

Spatial Narrative and Dungeons and Dragons

"A new appreciation of space instead of time [in RPGs] as the dominant order in principle leads to concepts such as environmental storytelling, bringing together the exhilarating freedom of agency with the profound meaningfulness of structure." (Schallegger 2018, 214)

In one way or another, every game of D&D represents a spatial narrative, within layered interpretations of what is presented spatially. Further that the imagined space is presented with sufficient resolution to present embedded and emergent narratives and so that even 'unimportant' spaces can have a sense of purpose and interpretation. Something that must be noted is that while every game of D&D creates a sense of space, and follows a story, not every game engages narrative to its full potential. Player and DM agency, dictates the experience of this potential, every time. A map or an adventure cannot control how one plays the game. The space could be reduced to a figurative stage for soliloquy if so desired. Though regardless of this free adjacency, D&D creates the potential for rich narratives and offers tools that make these experiences of spatial narrative possible and rewarding.

These potentially rewarding spatial narratives are not the exact same as architecture, or film, or games. However, as I have showcased in this chapter, D&D

uses many of the same techniques as these fields to express spatial narrative. Whether reflecting a sequence narrative as Coates defines, or an enacted narrative as Jenkins does, they point to avenues where narrative exists, demonstrating where open interpretation and expression exists. D&D encourages us to engage with space actively, and interpret the narratives and connotative meaning we embed, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the world we inhabit.

PART 2 - A

HOW D&D CREATES SPACE: REINTERPRETED ARCHITECTURAL METHOD

Dungeons and Dragons places players in the midst of a story forcing them to answer, "Why are we here again?". It relies on the player's immersion into a secondary reality grounded in character motivation and driven by a strong narrative structure. Although immersion in a narrative is imperative, D&D gameplay additionally relies on a player's free will, understanding of imagined space, and freedom of movement within the game. For example, questioning how to find cover, being wary of hidden elements and interacting with peers. This chapter explores how D&D borrows from architectural methods and representation, and how it utilizes maps as space. This section explored this nuanced translation of space occurring, clad in the cloak of a game. D&D calls upon the practice of spatial design and spatial exploration while alleviating the common preconception that people can't read a floor plan'.

D&D describes and imagines space through re-interpreting architectural tools and methods. For example, strategies, symbols, and systems are utilized to communicate the game spaces within D&D. The chapter begins by analyzing' organizational guides, priorities, and considerations, noting various similarities and differences between architectural techniques and D&D. Following this, selective formal design strategies of organizing spaces in plan are presented and summarized. The section then looks at the resulting drawing of such planning, the Floorplan, centering on comparative presentation of selected elements and their respective symbols used within the floorplans of architecture and D&D maps. This exploration of re-interpreted architectural methods concludes with an analysis of an element unique to the approaches and strategies of architecture and D&D, the Grid. Through these analyses and strategies, I assert D&Ds design methods to reflect architectural methods, and further that the design and organization of spaces in D&D adapts this architectural practice to be accessible to non-architects.

figure. 27
Map of Faerûn
A prominent map in the canon of D&D this presents the northwest corner of Faerûn, which is the primary
setting for D&D in the Forgotten Realms.

Program

Program Organization

"Unlike a game of make-believe, D&D gives structure to the stories, a way of determining the consequences of the adventurers' action." (Wizards of the Coast 2014b, 5)

Both in Dungeons & Dragons and in architecture, the planning and arrangement of programmed space is of the utmost importance to consider. When planning a building, logical principles guide decisions, such as stacking washrooms vertically and placing stairwells near entrances. Similarly, D&D has a system of logic and rules to define the gameplay. For example, the designer knows not to place an ultimate reward nor an Ancient Red Dragon in the first room of a Dungeon Crawl. However, other elements within a building, and a gameplay, follow different principles. For example, where storage closets should be located, how large a foyer should be, and at what point in a dungeon should the swinging axe trap be triggered? Broadly speaking in both architecture and D&D dungeons design and narrative space, organization is guided by a combination of design intuition, organization guides, and creative intent.

Treatment of Program and Space

For architecture and D&D, the expectations and treatment of programmed space differ. In architecture, the understanding of program organization is both taught during years of rigorous study in university and learned during professional experiences. Alongside studying and learning conventions of space, an architectural student slowly develops an aptitude and understanding of spatial organizations. In D&D, however, you are not designing a building, but a game space and game experience. This complex puzzle of spatial design and programming is primarily guided by intentions of plot, rather than material limitations. D&D's plot is not restricted by laws of physics or structural requirements. Instead, the elements of the spatial narrative, like the qualities of spaces, description of enemies and integrated puzzles, drive the adventure and give purpose to the activity.

firmitas

Architecture

utilitas   venustas

plot

D&D

game space   game play

figure. 28
Diagram Of The Simultaneous Considerations Of Design In Architecture And D&D

Simultaneous Considerations of Design

The organisational ideals at the heart of architecture and D&D are fundamentally different. In architecture, there is a continuous balancing act of conceptual intent and practical realisation. Identified by the foundational first century B.C.E Roman Architect Vitruvius, this balancing act can be summarized as 3 necessary elements, firmitas, utilitas, and venustas. Firmitas, identifying the building's durability against the elements, utilitas, identifying a building's efficient arrangement and utility, and venustas, calling to the goddess Venus that the building responds to its context and culture with a sense of beauty and aesthetics. These often competing, but ultimately complementary forces, describe the complexity of the practice; where structural grids are considered alongside the creation of a spectacle. While the early conceptual phases of a design project are oftentimes guided by narrative, architecture is ultimately governed by material limitations. In stark contrast, the game of D&D is free to explore narratives unburdened by the laws of motion.

D&D defines itself as a "collaborative storytelling game" (Wizards of the Coast, 2014), and narratives connect imagined storied spaces. In turn, story elements and narrative devices are embedded throughout the designed world, developing the

underlying plot and its built-in intentions. Henry Jenkins observes this stating, "The organization of the plot becomes a matter of designing the geography of imaginary worlds, so the obstacles thwart and affordances facilitate the protagonist's forward movement towards resolution." (Henry Jenkins 2004, 124-125) In D&D, this practice of organizing plot simultaneously with designing imagined worlds, falls to both Dungeon Masters and official game designers alike.

Narrative

Architecture and D&D can additionally differ in their treatment of narrative. Previously I outlined how spatial narratives are important in both architecture and D&D. Outlining architecture as a vehicle for the narrative, architect Nigel Coates articulates that "On one hand the physical nature of architecture makes it comparable to the physical object of a book, which sits between the author and the reader. On the other hand, buildings can be invested with Narrative...Having both substance and void, content and relations, space is the medium ready to soak up associative meanings." (Nigel Coates 2012, 31-32) While D&D this sense of spatial narrative manifests in space, it is additionally true that "The players themselves produce narrative in awareness of the social, narrative and ludic rules regulating their behavior and the given context influencing it." (Schallegger 2018, 200) A player's agency is a core element in the game, "Whatever the participants can imagine, can be done - no preparation time, no costly CGI... just the collectively agreed-upon social contract of the group" (Schallegger 2018, 187-188)

Method of Organization Considerations

With these differences stated, architecture and D&D adopt similar methods to organize space. Architecture works with potential rich spaces, where organization functions to conceptualize rooms, alongside elements that make it functional to its potential occupants and users such as furnishings, utilities, building systems and the like. And provides what is ideally seen as an "unbiased space", where its size is determined by the intended number of occupants, use, and program proximities, and its shape is determined by its program as well as by the form of the building it is located within. Paralleling this, D&D works with narrative rich spaces, where additional details make it functional to a larger plot of the adventure, embedding it with elements to solidify localized goals, and immediate story and challenge. Rooms and spaces in D&D are highly biased, leading players to or away from elements. Similar to architecture, sizes are determined by intended number of occupants, use, and program proximities, and its shape is determined both by its program as well as by the form of the larger area it is located within. Though the occupants can be eldritch monsters, the use can be as a zone of conflict, the program proximities can be an escape route for an evil wizard. The larger 'building' can range from a tavern, to ruins, to an underground network of caves. The considerations can be seen to

directly mirror considerations of space apparent in architectural design, despite not sharing the magnitude of auxiliary support spaces required in architecture.

When considering the similarities in the organization of space and the priorities that lie within, that the study of strategies and tools used by the architect and the D&D designer have intrinsic value. The following section explores individual strategies and tools for architecture as well as D&D that guide this process of organizing programmed spaces. Limiting to three tools or strategies each, I outline what they are, how they are used, and where relevant, how they contribute to the underlying priorities of the subjects' organized spaces which were identified previously. The nature of these tools differs significantly in these aspects as the nature of the product differ but function as good comparisons in their goal and purpose. Producing space. Where one is a formal subject existing for centuries, the other is a comparatively game. As such the former, architecture, alongside its imbedded logics of the practice has formal tools that are well studied and utilized over the years. The other, D&D, utilizes tools and methods that are less rigid and rather focus on encouraging creativity and new approaches. The similarities remain both tools and exercises of designing spaces work to balance the initial spark of creativity alongside practicality. Both subjects have developed organizational exercises and tools to guide this process, whether the designers decide to utilize them it up to their own agency as creatives.

Formal Design Strategies

Architectural Design Strategies

As stated previously, the design and organization of a building's complex system is not a precise science. Blending Art and Engineering, it is both about efficiencies, and following core inspirations. Broadly speaking to breakdown and approach these complex systems, program organizations start big and go small. They begin within a context of listed priorities and requirements from client considerations, develop a central thesis or parti in response and then work out the program aspects to form the pieces of the puzzle so that they can work out how they co-relate in these broader goals. Not all Architects rely on formal tools, relying instead on years of exposure to organizing spaces, and personal strategies. However, most architects have exposure to some form of these tools. This section, in the interest of establishing those which are shared across field, puts forward three tools and strategies often referenced and utilized by architects initially approaching and defining the puzzle of organizing spaces.

Neufert

"It is better just to hand students the elements of architecture, as is done in this Architects' Data, where I have attempted to reduce the building blocks of design to the essentials, to schematise and even to abstract in order to make imitation difficult and force students to produce form and content from within themselves" - Ernst Neufert

Neufert's Architects' Data is an essential reference for architects. Gifted the moniker of "the Architects Bible" this compendium of critical architectural information, in one concise but comprehensive and large volume, provides the core information needed to design a building. From giving program organization strategies and suggested adjacencies, to detailing averages of sizing and dimensioning of every aspect in a building, it's a critical resource for all designs. While not as consistently center on program organization, Neufert's vision of its use is often realized as a core architectural aid from listing common requirements, schemes, and considerations of designing space.
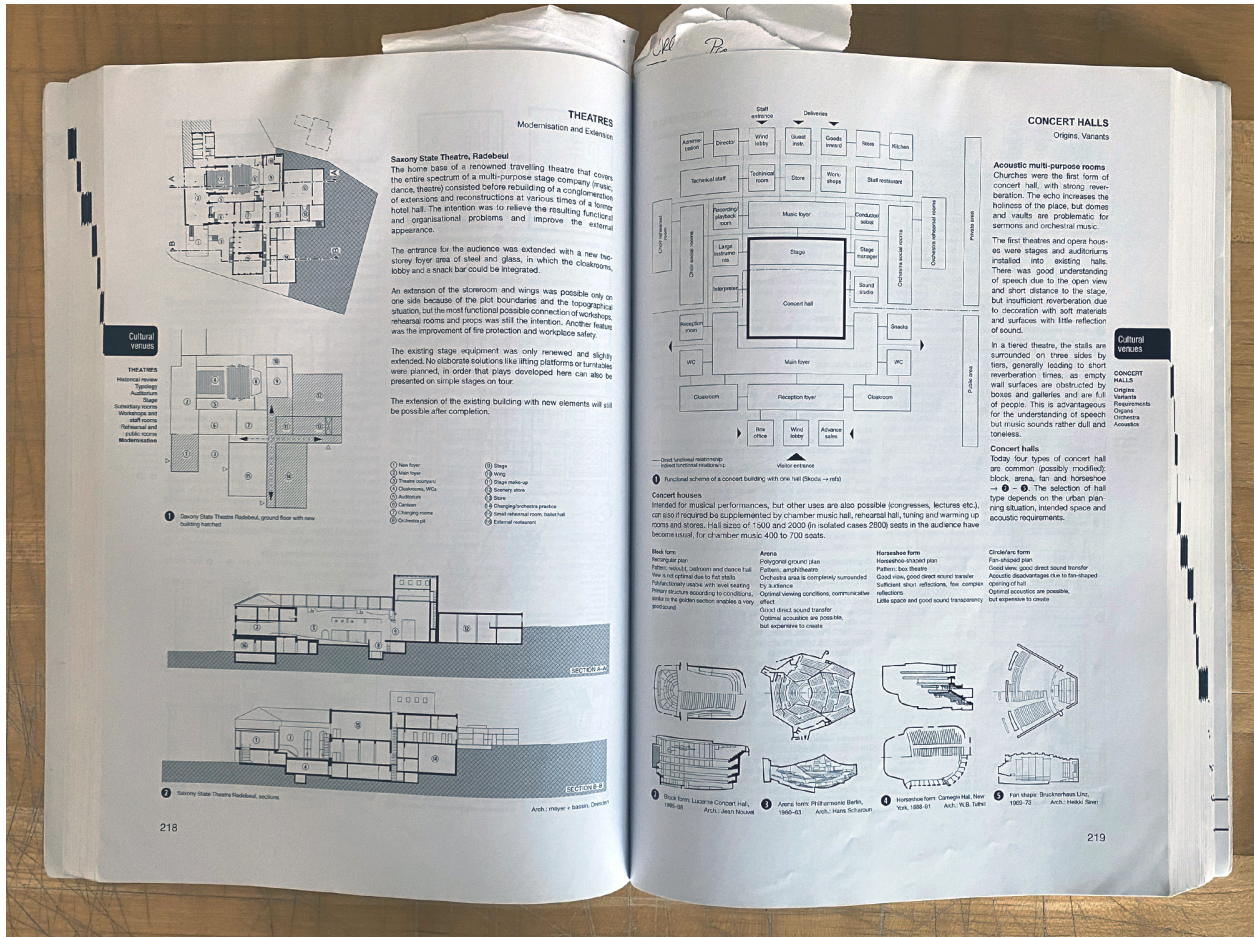
figure. 29
Page Spread of Neufert Architect's Data, 5th Edition

Bubble/Block Diagram

Distinguished between general and relational, bubble and block diagrams work to show program layouts in a 2-dimensional illustration. General diagrams use oval and circles to represent individual programs and rooms within a space and their relationship to one another. The size, and refinement of being either circle and oval "bubbles" or rounded off squares as a block, can be used throughout different phases of designing the program organization. Relational diagrams look more akin to a mind map, with lines linking bubbled rooms according to their priority relationships. Both working to communicate the organization of the space, to then be adapted and placed into the frame of the building or room.
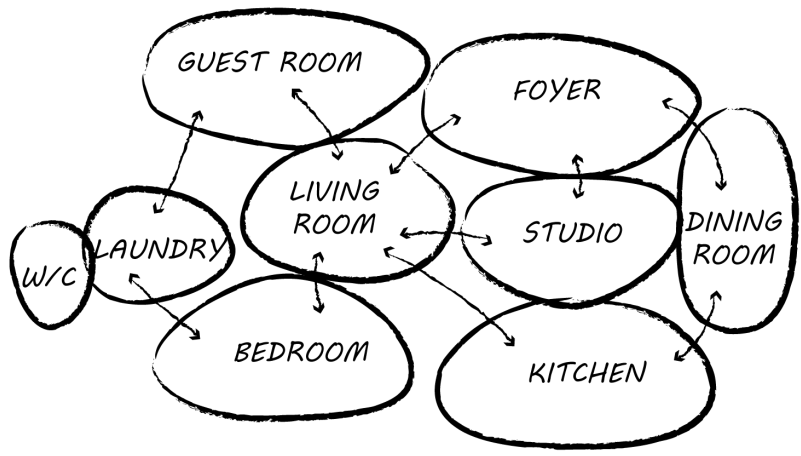
figure. 30
Example of Spatial Bubble Diagrams

Adjacency Matrices

In architecture adjacency matrices are used when a design encompasses or overlaps significantly with Interior Design. Program matrices are a tool where visual summaries associate and organize program adjacency requirements. Where each room or space is listed to the side, designers can go through space by space to determine "Direct/Primary Adjacency, Convenient/Secondary Adjacency, Distant/Remote Adjacency" relationships. Where bubble and block diagrams tend to center on spaces which have significant area requirements, adjacency matrices will typically list any and all elements which require any considerations of space.

- ● Direct / Primary Adjacency
- O Convenient / Secondary Adjacency
- − Distant / Remote Adjacency
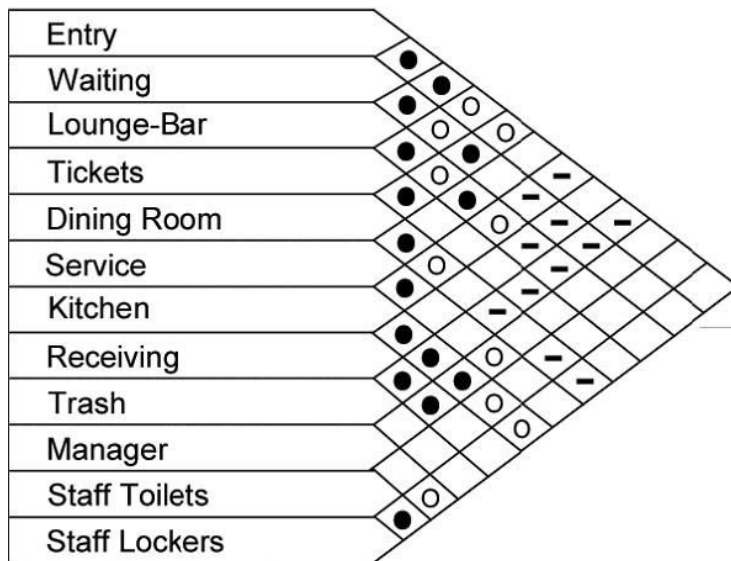
figure. 31
Example of Adjacency Matrix

D&D Dungeon Design Strategies

As stated previously, a large consideration when designing game spaces for D&D is the immediate narrative. In terms of gameplay questions and considerations such as if there is a primary high-level enemy to search for and find, where would they hide? How many rooms precede them? How many underlings do they have to thwart the party?[1] Within these rooms and spaces exist many layers of potential. Such as to offer subplots, provide additional information and resources to the players, and as they explore to complete their immediate goal to provide storied moments contributing to a larger adventure.

There are as many methods to approach these dungeon designs spatially as there is long-term D&D designers and DMs. As D&D is a game where "As soon as an RPG text is published, it will be appropriated, interpreted and used by thousands of individual groups in their own way due to the de-centered and rhizomatic social structure of the community and the medium." (Schallegger 2018, 210), these strategies respond to the distinctive flexible design of D&D. Some of the methods are more spatially based, some more social, some inherently relying

[1]   While there is a method of calculating the number of enemies to use per "average" party termed 'CR' or Challenge Rating. CR's base assumptions of play are so uncommon the system is often seen as irrelevant, and that there exists guides on how "deadly" to make an average encounter.

on the improvisational skills of the DM, and some that are so intense they fall into the trap of overplanning and are fated to derail. Considering this nature of the game, I note here that the selected outlined approaches by no means encompass the entirety of strategies, but instead are simply ones I have identified to reflect critical spatial design considerations in their identification of program, sequence, and time.

5-Room Dungeon

The 5-Room Dungeon, credited as an idea originally by JohnnFour, is a simplified method of dungeon design that was so strong and clear, a version of it was published in the official Fourth Edition *Dungeon Master Guide*. Defined by the online resource 1d4 Chan, in their article *Five Room Dungeon*, the idea was that,

> "Maps and stats aren't important, you can work those out after you have the sequence of the plot and challenges down...You don't even need exactly five rooms, just five scenes in sequence. The five rooms are: Entrance with Guardian, Puzzle/Roleplaying Challenge, Trick or Setback, Big Climax, and then Reward/Revelation."

Once these 5 elements are established in proximities to one another, it is then that the designer adds theme-able elements to make it unique to their setting or intent. Adding or removing divisions of space and modifying from the 5-Room outline as needed. Through this method, we can tangibly understand what Henry Jenkins is alluding to with localized incident when he states, "Narrative enters such games on two levels -in terms of broadly defined goals or conflicts and on the level of localized incidents." (Henry Jenkins 2004, 124) These localized incidents as defined are not limited to the 5-room dungeon but are immediately understood through them. They are indeed adaptable to any genre of game and contain a multiplicity of potentials within them, where the participants of the game can find one 'room' or concept compelling to explore deeper. Then for the designers it is a foothold of potential 'localized incidents', programs that can be broken down into a variety of lists.

the railroad the rooster the cross the spiral

the mighty duck the decision the wrong way

E= entrance
P= puzzle
S= setback
B= boss fight
R= reward

figure. 32
Clave Jones Diagrams Of 5 Room Dungeons Arrangements Redrawn

Trick or Setback
The Big Boss

Big Climax
The True Threat

Reward

Puzzle/Roleplay Challenges
The Tomb
Skull-Skull

Entrance w/ Guardian
Sludge Pit

Kobold Hall
One square = 5 feet

figure. 33
Annotated Map of 5-room dungeons from 4th edition Dungeon Masters Guides

The Dungeon Design Checklist by Arnold K and Goblinpunch

Written by Arnold K and published as *Goblinpunch's Dungeon Checklist,* this checklist expands the concept of the 5-rooms dungeon, listing 7 elements they are as follows:

- 1. Something to Steal
- 2. Something to be Killed
- 3. Something to Kill You
- 4. Different Paths
- 5. Someone to Talk To
- 6. Something to Experiment With
- 7. Something the Players Probably Won't Find.

Notable to this method of design is a lack of sequence. It is simply intended to include a large variety of localized incidents in game to facilitate the broadly defined goal feeling both rewarding, and as grandiose as intended. Within the explanations are primarily suggestions and expanding where some of the titles feel self-explanatory. However, within Arnold K.'s explanations are a few comments that cue to their spatial interest, as well as their perhaps overlooked nature.

> 6. Something to Experiment With: "These are the unexplainable, the weird, and the unknown...players don't know anything about how to solve this problem, and they have to figure it out anew."

> 7. Something the Players Probably Won't Find: "I think it's important to hide things because there is a sincere joy in exploration and testing the limits. If all of the things in a dungeon are obvious, why even bother wondering what is at the bottom of the well? ...Sure, completion is a nice feeling, but so is wonderment"[2]

Both reach beyond what one may think of pen and paper role-playing games and ask for experimentation. Establishing and outlining how environmental storytelling and exploration are required for a successful experience of the game. While the experience of one player could be as simple as they understand the monster in a space and need to attack it and see that goal as complete while another might seek out and search the undefined and hidden, understanding the imagined space with a sense of physicality and interactivity.

---

2   This is similarly felt in architecture, city planning, and installation design. Where the threshold of a door, the curvature of a streetscape, or the arrangements of objects, can all operate to present a restrained experience in service of the joy of discovery.

DUNGEON CHECKLIST:
1. SOMETHING TO STEAL
2. SOMETHING TO KILL
3. SOMETHING TO KILL YOU!
4. DIFFERENT PATHS
5. SOMEONE TO TALK TO
6. SOMETHING TO EXPERIMENT WITH
7. SOMETHING THEY PROBABLY WON'T FIND
BONUS ROUND → 8. ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS
9. PUZZLE/TRICK/RP-CHALLENGE
10. ONE THING THAT MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL!

figure. 34
List of Dungeon Design Checklist
Originally developed by Arnold Kemp at Goblin Punch. The visual is a
crop of an image created by twitter user Skullfungus

Threat, Timer, Treat by Hankerin Ferndale

Outlining a simplified list of 3 components to include in every room, the 3 Principles of Room Design put forward by Hankerin Ferndale of Runehammer distills how seemingly complex and multifaceted D&D room designs can be approached in an accessible and focused way.

1. Timer "is some kind of doom that's approaching. E.g., a goblin army that will march in. The room will get flooded etc."
2. Treat "is stuff the players can find and use. Treasure, loot, tools that can turn a situation into their favor."
3. Threat "Threat is the immediate danger they are in. Monsters, traps, etc."

(Hankerin 2019)

Not only do these three Principles summarize some of the broader considerations from the previous strategies. It identifies and isolates the concept of in-game time. As players and characters move through spaces in-game, without a looming threat or understanding that the monsters can think too[3] threats can feel one-note and static in a game that is known for its adaptability and dynamic challenges.

3   This is further emphasized in the blog and a series of books my Keith Ammann *The Monsters Know What They're Doing: Combat Tactics for Dungeon Masters*

figure. 35
Listed Threat, Timer, Treat
Originally developed by Hankerin Ferndale, the visual is a crop of an image
created by twitter user Skullfungus

Architecture and D&D Design Strategies Compared

Evident throughout outlining these respective strategies is that while architecture and D&D understand the nature of space quite differently, they treat designing a sequence of space with similar importance. Architecture puts forward tactile, material spaces of interaction, human occupation, and programmed use. D&D puts forward imagined, immaterial spaces of interactivity, generating programmed spaces for the games use. While architectures space is defined and static with each room, its program, and its proximities to each other firmly specified. D&Ds is more dynamic, without a rigidity of an inherently built form, or necessity of volumetric design, the aspect of interpretation and layered opportunities invite improvisation.

Both encompass similar spatial organizational approaches; they generate spaces which are simultaneously passive, in that they attempt to be an unbiased setting for biased activity to inhabit, and active, in that simply by being designed to be interacted with and experienced, they take on certain designed agencies and intents of experiences. Though at present, when finalized and enacted into their material or immaterial spaces, assumptive differences of realities are presented. Architecture is too often presented with a defined finality, that while users can

adapt their spaces with interior design, renovations, and redefining the program, there is a defined intent and end of design rigidity. D&D is then presented a sense of malleability, even in a defined resolution. While organization of rooms are established with clear intent of use, their use is also inherently simplified and responsive to its users. The element that defines the "something to kill you" could move, therefore leaving an empty room, the defined intent of all rooms then shift in response. Where architectural space assumes that it does not inherently change by the intended actions taken within it, D&D's imagined space tangibly changes by the actions and events surrounding it, and within it as it has potential to shift in response to player adjacency.

As architecture and D&D can be understood through their similarities and differences, introducing new and intriguing processes of designing and ordering space this interaction allows reflections benefitting both end designs. When in architecture to think of space as static limits the human quality of the design. It limits the empathetic response to the occupant. To conceptualize the aspects contributing to a larger experience of narrative, enables a beneficial feedback loop. Inversely, approaching a game design utilizing architectural mindset enables a more robust and immersive experience of space. Where relational scales and purpose are considered within this logic of a building design, allows these immaterial spaces to invoke impacts of scale, style, and utility.

Now, while these strategies show D&D and architecture share many considerations of space, the way this space is required to be designed, and outlined does differ. The design strategies as presented and outlined, specifically for D&D, are strategies for organizing orthographic space. They are intentionally positioned for designing in plan view, with designs that do not necessitate every auxiliary support program to be included and even so far as in D&D to black out space on a map that doesn't need to be used for the adventure. For D&D, this works to great success, as even when portrayed in 3D visually or built physically in models of rooms, terrains, or tiles, these are in essence planometrically displayed. Any walls or details are 'built-up' from the plan as flat panels with some articulations of material, and without a roof. When volumetric space is considered and visualized in D&D, it is often to a binary. The ceiling is high or low, hallways are wide or narrow, vertical connections are simple up or down. Occasionally an intricate

series of vertical connections will be a core element of the adventure, but in these cases, it is more often than not that the plans then become a simplified element. In contrast, this is the understanding of space that is developed and explored by first-year architecture students. Where early on, students tend to focus on flat drawings and understanding spatial relationships, rather than volumetric aspects of 3D space, and in turn the orthographic drawings of the sections and elevations tend to be less resolved. In subsequent years, students are taught, guided to, and expected to design beyond this flat treatment of space and to engage with architecture as complex 3D networks of spaces. They are aware and cognizant of both the interior and exterior quality of design and interactions of program and space.

figure. 36
3D Battle Map - Exandria Unlimited
Built for a miniseries of a well-known live-play D&D web show, Critical Role, the 3D model for Exandria Unlimited presents a space with more visual interest than a simple map to present visuals audience will enjoy. This extruded space functions to detail the space in a more visually compelling manner. Though the articulation of the space remains in simplified forms, as it often does in 3D articulation of D&D maps.

Floorplan Styles and Symbols

In both architecture and D&D, a critical drawing to express spatial organization is the floorplan. The tactical battle maps within which D&D is played are in essence illustrated floorplans which commonly use a 5ft grid. These maps use genre and narrative to quickly communicate expectations, an aspect which will be expanded upon in a later chapter, and they do so with much the same goals as architectural floorplans where "Designers use drawings and diagrams to communicate information in a factual unambiguous and geometric form that can be understood anywhere in the world." (Neufert et al. 2019, 19) Both architecture and D&D in this need of communicating designed spaces share many building elements they represent through symbols. These contrast between these symbols range from the content of the small drawing to simply presenting differing aesthetics. Architecture uses floor plans as both communication and as a reference and organizational tool. The floorplan, displaying the result of program organization to a higher resolution of design, also presents with embedded references for other drawings in a set such as a section, elevation, detail, etc. Dungeons and Dragons primarily uses this communication tool as the singular visual to represent space. While it is also the result of narrative program organization, its plans will embed references to sections of descriptive text and illustrated elements, which are utilized to enhance explanations of space, forming similar but unique experience for each player.

Doors

ARCHITECTURE

The architectural symbol prioritizes the information most critical to communicate not only to the client, but the designers and engineers. It works to communicate:

- Swing. (Placement of hinges, and compliance with code)
- A break in the wall. (Added framing and structural considerations)
- Location (minimum distance from wall, connection between rooms)
- Door Type (single, double, revolving, bifold, saloon, etc.)
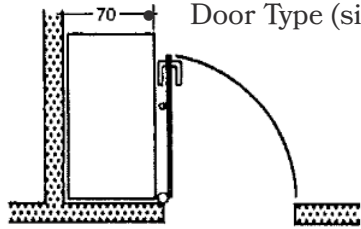
2 Good door arrangement for use of room

figure. 38
Door Arrangement Drawing

Doors, scale 1:100

9 Single-leaf door without lintel
10 Single-leaf door pair, with lintel — combined window
11 Double-leaf swing door
12 Double-leaf door
13 Pivoting door
14 Pivoting door
15 Without threshold
16 Threshold one side
17 Rising single-leaf door
18 Sliding door
19 Double sliding door
20 Sliding door with lifting mechanism
21 Two-leaf revolving door
22 Three-leaf revolving door
23 Four-leaf revolving door
24 Folding partition

figure. 37
Construction Drawing Symbol Door

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

The D&D symbol prioritizes the information only critical to communicate to the DM which they then need to communicate to the players. This works to communicate:

- Location (connection between rooms and thus plot points)
- Door Type *typ.* (single, double, revolving, bifold, saloon, etc.)
- Door Type *D&D.* (normal, secret, concealed, one-way, trapdoor, false door, etc.)
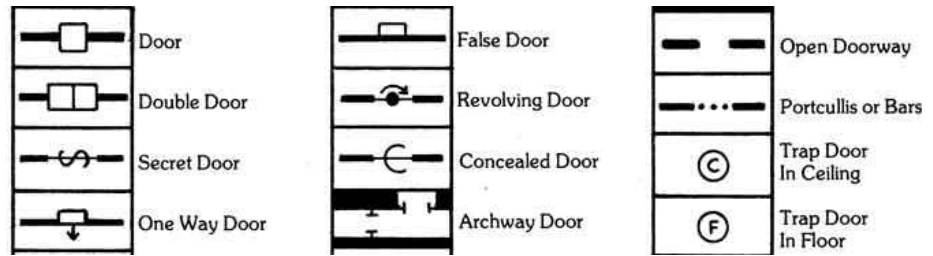
figure. 39
Door Icons - Dungeon Mapping Key of *D&D Basic Rules Set* (1983)

figure. 40
Door Icons - Dyson Dodecahedron Map Icons (2023)

figure. 41
Door Icons in the Sample Dungeon - *5e DMG* (2014)

119

Stairs

ARCHITECTURE

The architectural symbol prioritizes the information most critical to communicate circulation and height. It works to communicate:

- The number of steps
- The rise and run of each step
- The elevation gain from the set of stairs
- The stair types. If it is for general feature and circulation, or function such as a fire stair
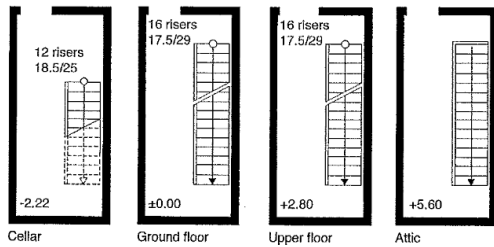
figure. 43
Construction Drawing Symbol Stairs

Image ❻: 16 pitches 17/29, high level 2.75 m; maximum width 1.0 m

❺ All stairs without landings, whatever the type, cover practically the same surface area; curving of the steps only varies the distance between the bottom and top of the stairs. From the architectural point of view, therefore, only straight or curving stairs should be used. The latter have the advantage that the bottom and top stairs at storey levels lie above one another

❻ Stairs with landings cover the surface area of single flight stairs + the landing. Stairs with landings are required in legally essential stairways with a storey height of ≧2.75 m. Landing width ≧ stair width.

❼ Minimum space required for furniture transport

❽ For the carrying of stretchers

❾ For a spiral staircase

figure. 42
Stair Landing Guides

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

The D&D symbol prioritizes the information only critical to communicate to the DM and players in terms of "up and down", and narrative considerations, they work to communicate:

- Direction, notably using perspective as steps get smaller or larger
- Placement within a map, if they are in a room and the elevation change is open and potentially relevant to combat. Or if as a direct connection the order of the movement of the party may be crucial.
- Narrative, as they can be a moment of decent or accent in progressing the adventure the proximity to the 'end' or 'beginning' can affect communication and treatment of the stairs
- Separating the adventure into sections as a new floor requires new maps

figure. 44
Stair Icons - Dungeon Mapping Key of *D&D Basic Rules Set* (1983)

figure. 45
Stair Icons- Dyson Dodecahedron Map Icons (2023)
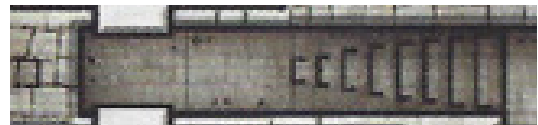
figure. 46
Stair Drawing Redbrand Hideout Map - LMoP (2014)

figure. 47
Stair Icons in the Sample Dungeon - *5e DMG* (2014)

North Arrow
ARCHITECTURE

This architectural symbol works to communicate the cardinal coordinate to be able to communicate:

- Sun path directions
- Cardinal orientation
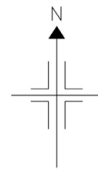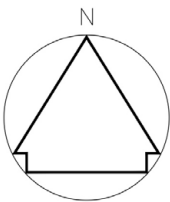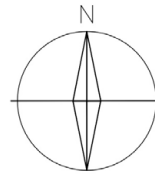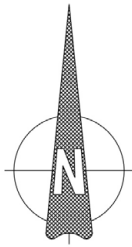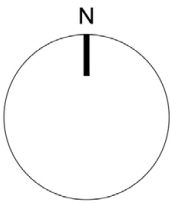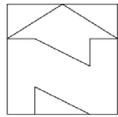
figure. 48
North Arrow CAD Block

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

This D&D symbol works to communicate the cardinal coordinate. Intriguingly though, as it is not a material reality, it is not impacted by the direction in the same manner as it's architectural counterpart. Instead, it works to communicate:

- Reference, for cardinal directions are often utilized in descriptive sections of texts
- Player direction, to allow for a mental map of the players to form.
- Player direction, to allow for a player to "draft their own maps based on the referee's verbal descriptions to avoid becoming lost in the underworlds they were exploring." (Witwer et, al, 2018, 31)

figure. 49
Illustrated North Arrow *Descent to Avernus* (2019)

figure. 50
Illustrated North Arrow *Tomb of Horrors* (2017)
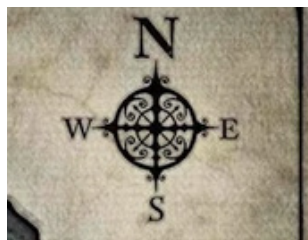
figure. 51
Illustrated North Arrow *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)

figure. 52
Illustrated North Arrow *Strixhaven*(2021)

Scale

ARCHITECTURE

This architectural symbol works to communicate the scale at which the drawing is drawn and printed, to be able to communicate:

- Details to the expected level per the drawing type and scale
- Drawing Type
- Increased or decreased level of detail expectations.

SCALE BAR 1:1000

SCALE BAR 1:50
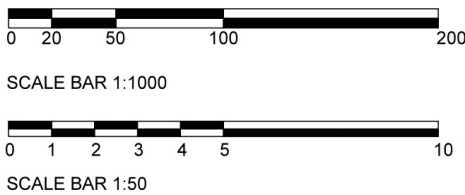
figure. 53
CAD Block Scales

	Scale	
I	1:100	schematic recording of the building type and the plan structure for layout plans, approximate calculation of floor areas, analysis of use – sufficient for works which do not alter the structure
II	1:50 precision ± 10 cm	almost precise survey of the geometry, relation of the vertical position of the floors, illustration of the load-bearing structure
III	1:50 precision ± 2.5 cm	exact measurement, including historical deformation, as basis for restoration, construction drawings and scientific investigations
IV	1:25–1:10 precision ± 2–0.5 cm	exact measurement, including historical deformation, for building with stringent scientific and technical construction requirements
V	1:25–1:1 precision ± 2–0.1 cm	exact measurement, including historical deformation, for archaeology and building research for particularly demanding buildings

6 Measurement precision stages. I and II can be extended up to stage V for difficult historic building projects and scientific investigations.

figure. 54
Scale Guide Reference

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

This D&D symbol works to communicate the distance represented by 1 square on its grid. This works to communicate:

- To the DM, the scale which to transcribe the space to the players.
- To the Players, the general dimension of rooms and spaces
- Tactically, the arrangement they might want to place and move their characters on the board.
- In the use of regional maps, it's to approximate travel time and measured in miles.
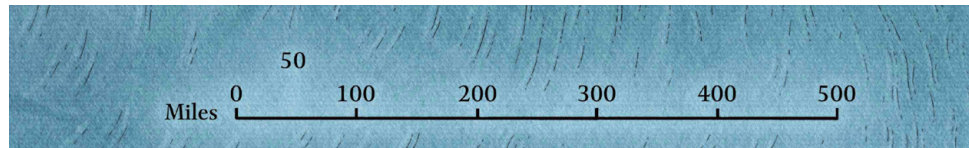
figure. 55
Scale on the Map of Faerûn
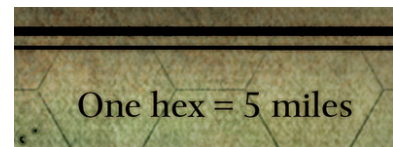
figure. 56
Scale on region map for *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)
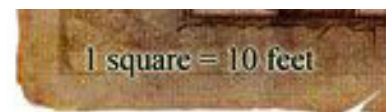
figure. 57
Scale on map for *Tomb of Horrors*
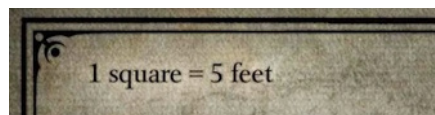
figure. 58
Scale on map for *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)
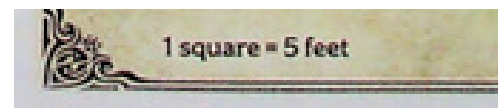
figure. 59
Scale on map for *Strixhaven*(2021)

Furniture
ARCHITECTURE

This architectural symbol works to communicate the furniture arrangement in a room and give a sense of scale. It varies in that:

- Some architects leave it as an abstracted square.
- Some architects detail to the level of including if a bed is messy or not, depending on the drawing type.
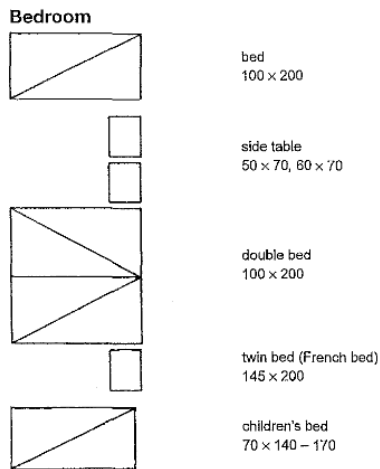
figure. 60
Construction Drawing Symbols Bedroom

figure. 61
SANAA Moriyama House

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS

This D&D symbol works to communicate the furniture arrangement in a room and give a sense of scale. It varies in that:

- Some maps leave it as an abstracted square.
- Some maps detail to the level of including if a bed is messy or not, indicative if there is a particular character intended for it, or if there are narrative/atmospheric reasons to increase the resolution of it.
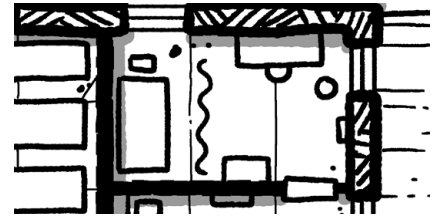
figure. 62
Bedroom Dyson Dodecahedron Manor of the Doom Map

figure. 63
Bedroom Redbrand Hideout Map - LMoP (2014)

figure. 64
Bedroom - Uncaged Goddesses-Ythryn Athenaeum Map

Floorplan-Different Maps

Another level present in the similarities and differences of floorplans in architecture and D&D is that there often exists multiple versions of the floor plans and maps for adding or removing layers of understanding for different uses. In architecture this comes in the form of the construction drawings versus the artistic drawings. Where one will emphasize grid lines, building details, construction materials, site instructions, etc. its illustrative counterpart removes the additional information for use in editorials, academic lectures, and client presentations. In D&D this comes in the form of DM versus Player maps. Where the omniscient DM will know the full plot of the adventure and see all the mapped spaces, and symbols, and understanding the end purpose of exploring such spaces omit details from their explanations that the Players are not privy to. The Player only discovers the plot and space as the DM reveals and expands the adventure to them. Often seeing a space seemingly in its entirety, before a deeper investigation of space allows the DM to illustrate a large "S" on one of the walls revealing a secret hidden door.
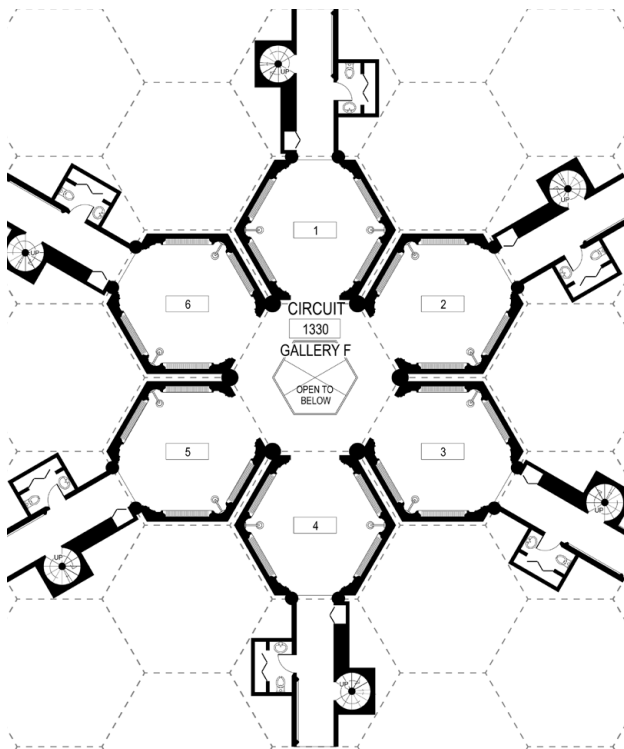
figure. 65
Library of Babel Drafted Architecture -D&D Map
A drafted style map displays the use of architecture symbols and
techniques to display spaces in an objective and clear manner.
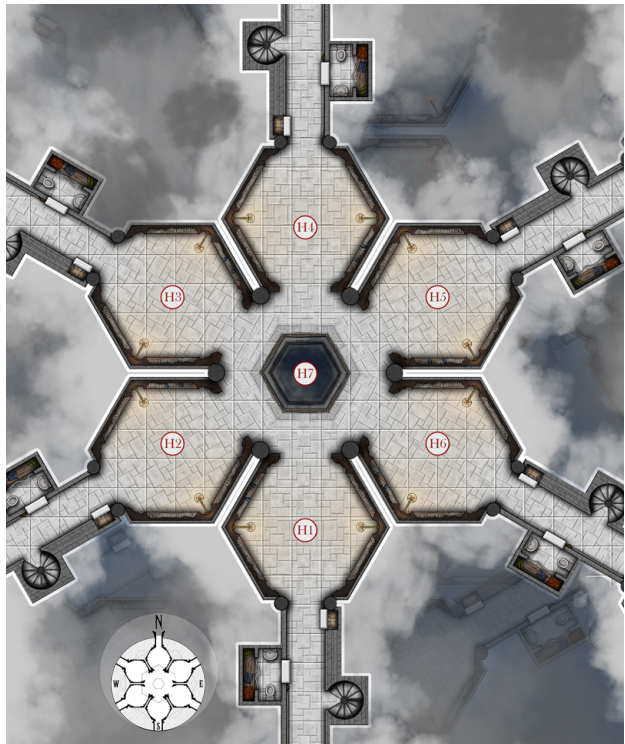
figure. 66
Library of Babel Illustrated D&D Map
A D&D illustrated style map displays the use of grid and perspective,
shadows are layered within the drawing and as a pully illustrated
map, this map is embedded with many illustrated elements.

Gridded Space

The Grid

In both architecture and D&Ds orthographic drawings there is a sense of scaled and gridded space. The grid referred to in architectural discussions, often references a structural grid. A system to uniformly space an intersecting parallel grid, which supports and distributes structural loads as needed. This is not the grid I refer to as a precedent to D&D's grid. Although it is relevant as it is often interwoven with the less rigid grid I do to allude to, the design grid. This grid is one which aids architects to design and organize their projects. Even Neufert comments on the use of grids to aid scaled designing. He comments on the tools of hand drafting, "A4 sketch pads with 0.5cm squared graph paper are ideal for freehand sketches to scale. For more accurate sketches millimetre graph paper with thick centimetre, faint 0.5 cm and even finer millimetre divisions should be used." (Neufert et al. 2019, 19) The standardization of using a grid to design has been used for a large portion of architecture's history but can be tangibly dated back the 1800s in Jean Nicolas Louis Durand's *Precis des Lecons*.

In Jean Louis Durand's *Precis des Lecons* Durand explores his belief that architectural systemization based on the arrangement in a square, is the best form

for architecture to realize it's purpose: its social utility. To this aim he believed to meet measures of suitability and stability of the building itself, alongside economical efficiency, the architectural process must be systematized. Within this, he exalted the merits of using grids and gridded paper to regulate design.

To an extent this systemization of square gridded architecture has endured in the concept of the 9 Square Grid (9SG). This grids use can be observed throughout history, such as those demonstrated in the analysis by Gina Cannistra. To varying different programs and varying different scales the simplicity in the formal organization has persisted to intrigue and inspire architects throughout time. However there has been a recent development which secured a certain notoriety of the 9SG in architectural history, the assignment developed by Architect John Hejduk in mid-1950s, which grew to a common introductory studio assignment in the late 1970s until the early 1990s. As an introduction to "Basic Design" Hejduk introduced a modelling assignment which would familiarize new architecture students with architectural space. In the "nine-square grid problem exercise, students were given a pre-existing nine-square cage within which other architectural elements could be added and arranged." (Love 2003) The assignment was replicated and adapted across many different universities, circulating the grid as method, so much so that

> "…the nine-square grid has become an essential figure in both studio language and art historical language. To address the iconographic content of the nine-square grid in architecture is to reaffirm the autonomy of architecture again… to re-examine the political limits of the language of perceptive formal analysis… Unlike the generative typological diagrams in the tradition of Durand, the nine-square grid emerges only like a surviving Warburgian icon, without content if it happens to be rightly out of time, reworking the communicative language after the arts." (Van Acker 2022,135)

Durand's argument for standardization, the prevalence of the 9 Square grid in history and through Hejduk's assignment, did not end up regulating and standardizing the compositions for *all* architecture to square standard blocks. This is easily observed in our built world not all good buildings follow these principles. However, alongside the tradition of using grid paper, observed by Neufert, they contribute evidence to the continued use of the grid as design. And grid as design has been fundamental in the game which this thesis assert adapts these architectural tools.
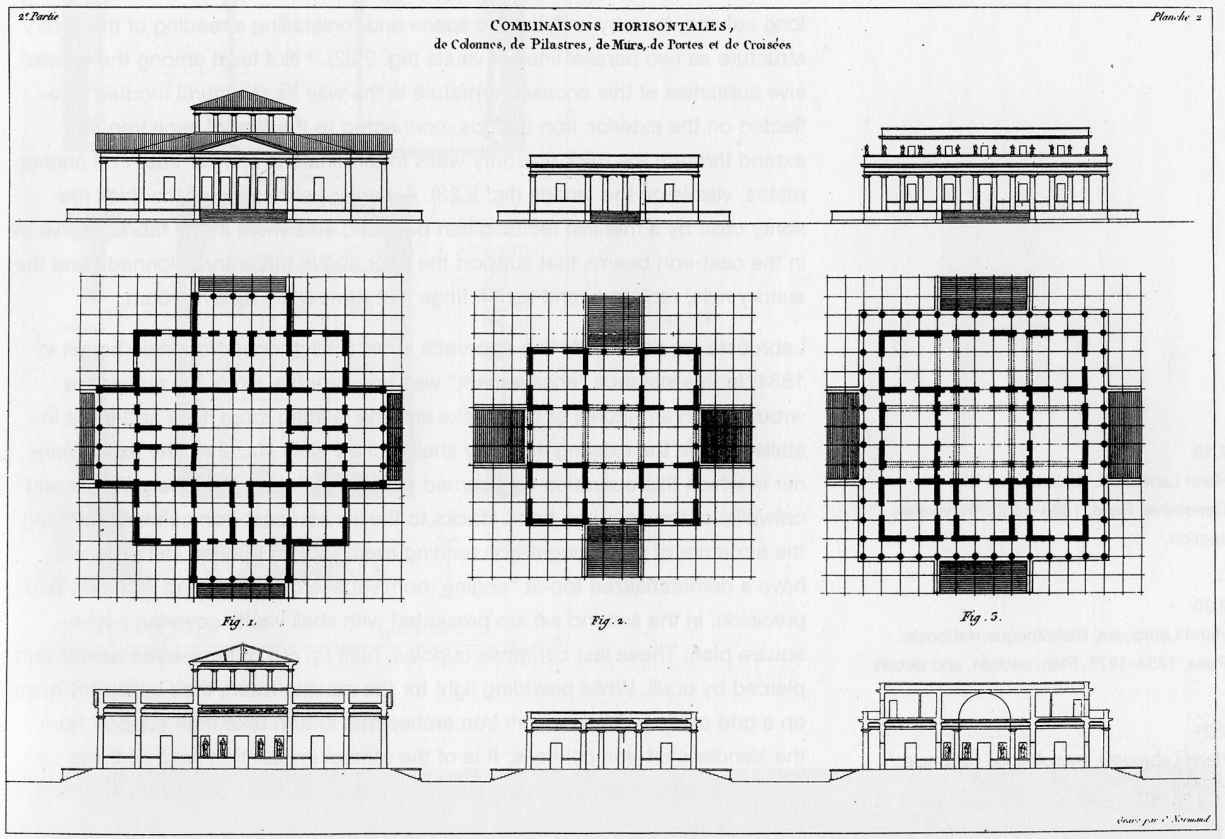
figure. 67
Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Précis des leçons* (1802)
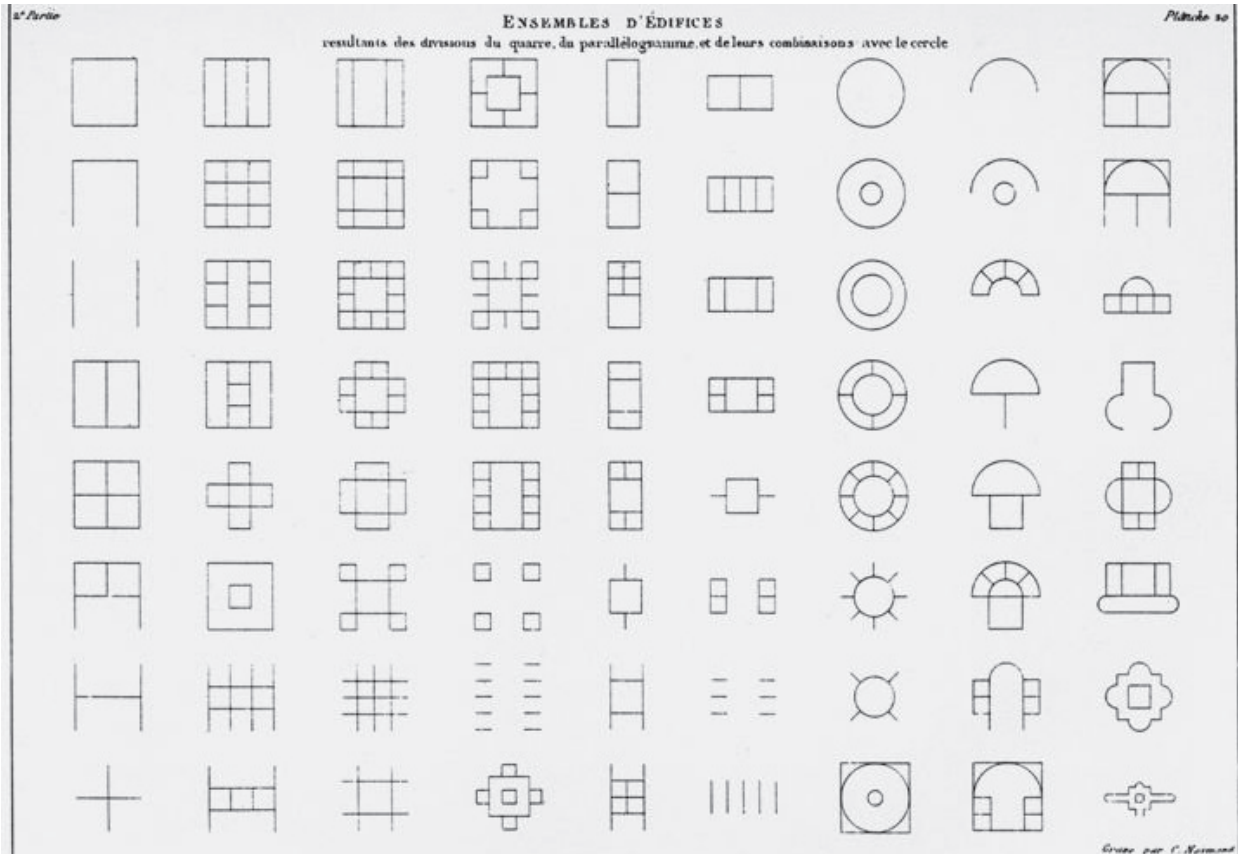
figure. 68
Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Précis des leçons* (1802)
The table displays techniques of outlining square scaled
arrangements developed by Durand in his pursuit of systematization.

TEMPLE OF SOLOMON
JUAN BAUTISTA VILLALPANDO | 1596

LA VILLA CAPRA
ANDREA PALLADIO | 1565

NEW HAVEN MASTER PLAN
JOHN DAVENPORT | 1641

VILLA SAVOYE
LE CORBUSIER | 1931

HOUSE I
JOHN HEJDUK | 1954

PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY LIBRARY
LOUIS KAHN | 1971

HOUSE III
PETER EISENMAN | 1971

TRÈS GRANDE BIBLIOTHÈQUE
OMA | 1989

VILLA
KERSTEN GEERS | 2010
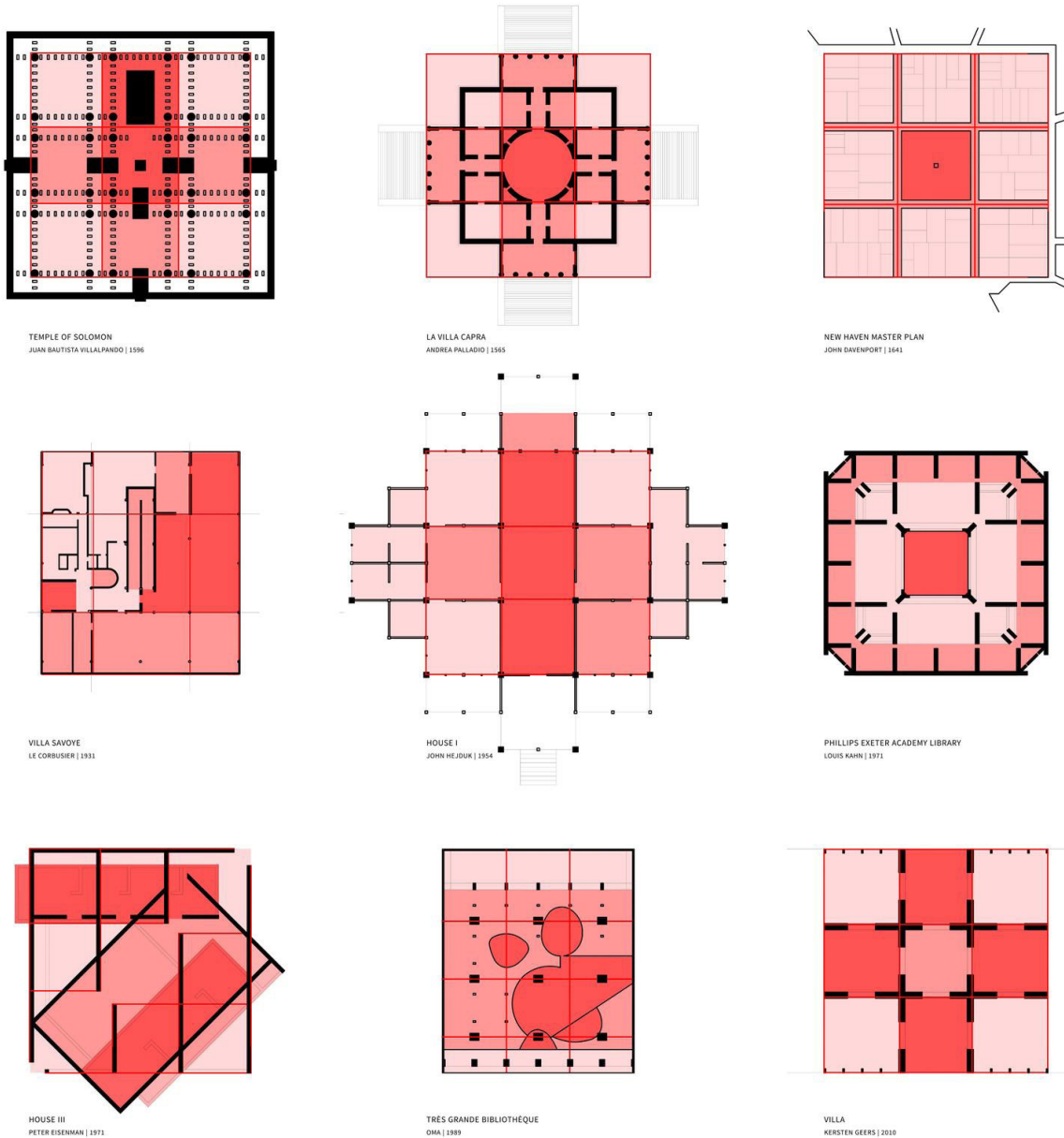
figure. 69
The Nine-Square Grid: History, Exemplars, and Interrogation
Developed by Gina Cannistra at the Yale school of architecture, the analyses were developed to study
the "a microcosm of architectural history at large" through the nine square grid

136

Frame 2   1954–1963

THE NINE SQUARE PROBLEM
Build a model at ¼" = 1'-0 scale of the following: make a
30 / 60 isometric drawing in pencil on tracing vellum of the
following: The constructed model and the drawing will be the
basic working tools for the research and study of the 9 Square
problem.
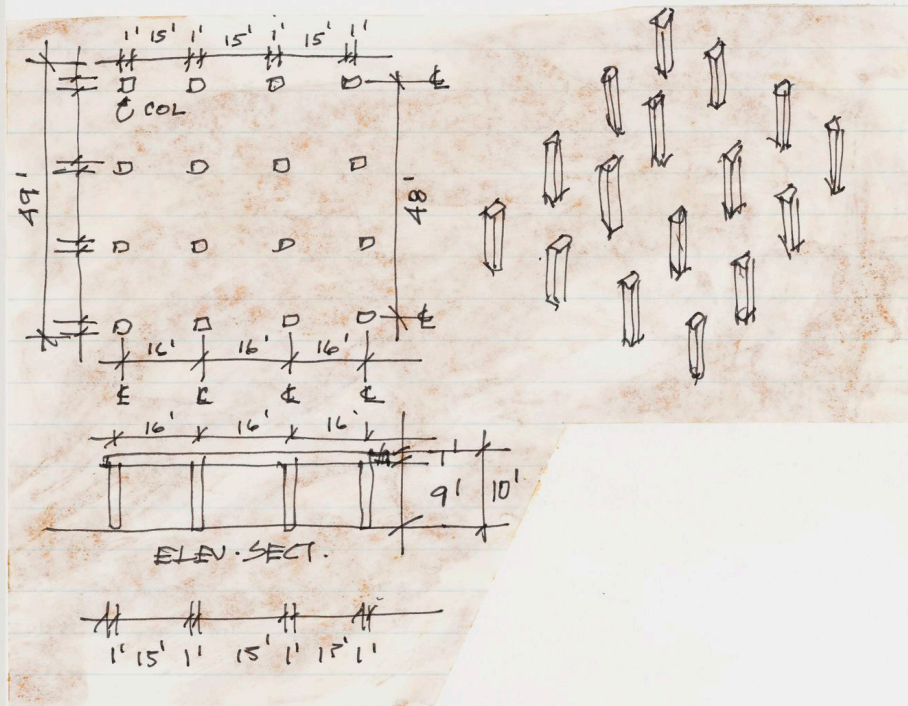
Columns-white, base board-black, panels-gray.
One grid 15' divided into 5's & 3's. One grid 16' divided into
1's & 2's.

figure. 70
The Nine Square Problem Conceptual Drawing with Notes by John Hejduk

137

What is D&D's Grid?

For readers who are not familiar with playing D&D the grid I refer to is core in terms of presenting space in D&D as it is played in in 5e, has its tactical battle maps drawn and displayed on scaled gridded maps. The grid scale standard is 1 square representing 5'x5', occasionally 10'x10' depending on what is being represented. Dungeons and Cities for their larger scale may be 1 square=10'x10' while the typical castle plan is 1 square=5'x5' grid. These maps, as visual aids and tools are printed in official pre-written adventures for the DM to use. Then it is the role of the DM to translate these maps to the players, most commonly in the form of redrawing maps diligently onto large sheets of dry erase 1"x1" laminated gridded sheets[4]. In this translation of space, the grid is such that 1" represent 5'[5].

This tradition of using gridded space has been a part of D&D since the original D&Ds first awkward printing commonly referred to OD&D or 0e, in which Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson admit themselves "There are unquestionably areas

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[4]   Alternatively, these maps can be shown to players in virtual versions when played online, displayed on a screen inserted into tables, or as constructed model miniatures which often have grids scored into their bases.

[5]   Occasionally other scales such as 1 grid =10'x10'20'x 20' exist. Though as movement is always measured in increments of 5, the translated scale to players often requires adjustment to a 1 grid=5'x5'

which have been glossed over." (Gygax and Dave Arneson 1974, 74), yet still, gave significant writing to the map system. Where under the original Dungeons and Dragons required equipment[6] we can observe listed is all the required material for the DM[7] to follow with this instruction: "Before it is possible to conduct a campaign of adventures in the mazey dungeons, it is necessary for the referee to sit down with pencil in hand and draw these labyrinths on graph paper." (Gygax and Arneson 1974, 68)

6   Included in Chapter 1: Overview of D&D – How is it played
7   The term Dungeon Master is not used throughout the first printing of D&D. The term wouldn't be used by TSR until the end of 1975. (Peterson 2012)

140
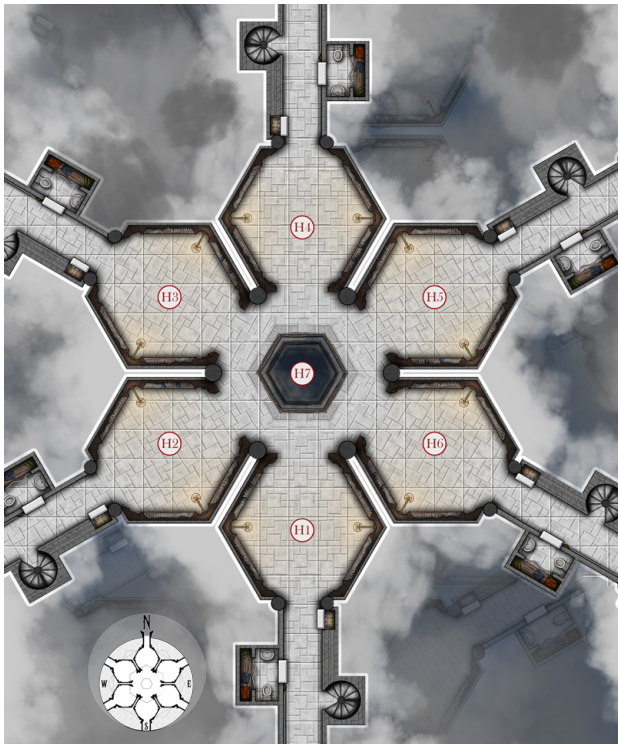
figure. 71
Library of Babel Illustrated D&D Map
This is as the map appears in the D&D adventure. The map was
developed for and appears in the adventure in part 3 of the thesis.
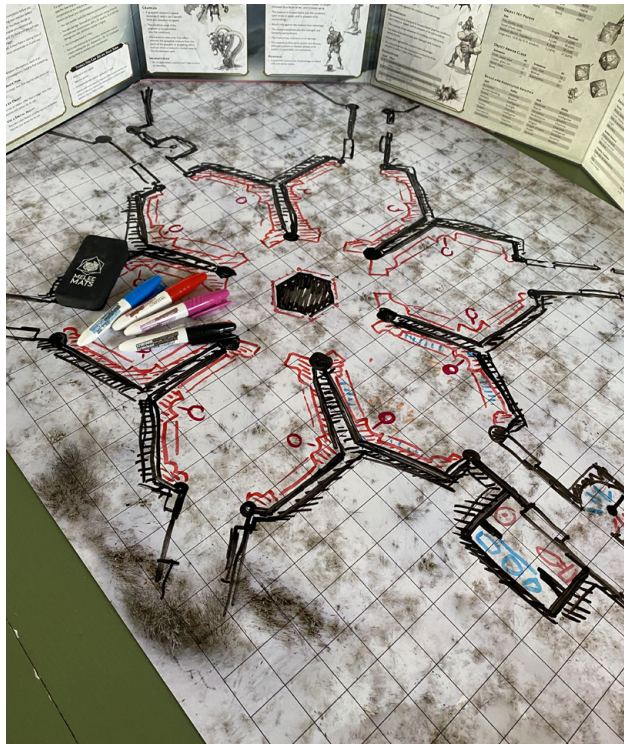
figure. 72
Library of Babel Transcribed D&D Game Map
Copied and drafted from the illustrated map, onto gridded laminated
maps for table-top gameplay. The references of the grid adds further
guidance to DMs of how to draw and copy the drawings. Pictured is
the pre-game set up for a playthrough of the adventure at the end of
the thesis.

How D&D got the Grid?

Now the origin of how D&D adopted the grid in in the first place is twofold.

The Paper

The first explanation is as noted previously, is indicated in that simple equipment list in 0e "Graph Paper (6 lines per inch is best)". Graph paper is a common material and easily sourced, both critical attributes when thinking of material required for a booklet-based game. In these games all that was, and often still is, provided was the printed pages. On which were the text, images, and information enabling the table-top roleplaying game to be played which often required the players to expand beyond the booklet's pages. (Ewalt 2013)

Wargames

The other side of the coin of the grid origin is D&Ds origins. While D&D originated its style of play as the first Role-Playing game, its roots stem from recreational wargames. (Ewalt 2013) Wargames, as the name implies, are games that realistically simulates warfare, first find their roots in the 18th century Prussian Army where they were used in training to teach battlefield tactics to officers.

Utilizing representations of arrangements and terrain, these exercises were treated with reverence and later developed a broad genre of games, played on accurate paper maps, referred to as Kriegsspiel. These games had many variations, but it was in the year 1882 with the American Kriegsspiel by Captain Livermore where added to the map was a grid for players to estimate distances. While previous maps were accurate, the simple layer of grided scale would begin the visual depiction of accurate dimension in military styled games. (Coatney 2018)

The next step, toward significant development of grid and grid-like systems in wargames comes just over seventy years later, and in the realm of modern recreational wargames. For it is Charles Roberts' Avalon Hill company which is often credited with the standardizing of the Hex-Grid in recreational wargames. (Coatney 2018) Roberts' landmark successes began with Tactics in 1954, which was significant as the first successful commercial board wargame. Tactics was a cardboard-counter game, which in a single box presented everything required to play it: game pieces, a rule book set, and most significantly, a self-contained printed board map which utilized a square grid formalizing game movement. It was sometime after Tactics' success, that "he [Roberts] saw a photograph of one of the RAND gaming facilities and noted they were using a hexagonal grid." (Perla 1990, 116) soon after the hex-gird was preferred over the square grid. One can assume for a few reasons this shift occurred and was accepted so quickly. It could be the pride of mirroring 'the real thing' coming from RAND[8], but largely commented on in various sources is the mathematics of movement when it comes to hex-grid vs square-grid.

> "This grid allowed movement between adjacent hexagons (or hexes, as they are more frequently called) to be equidistant, whereas movement along the diagonals in a square grid covered more distance than movement across the sides of the squares." (Perla 1990, 116)

In other words, hex-girds are more accurate, and allows less abuse to the movement system from simplified scaled movement.

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8   RAND Corporation "research and development' created in 1948 worked with the United States Armed Forces as a major post-war defense think tank
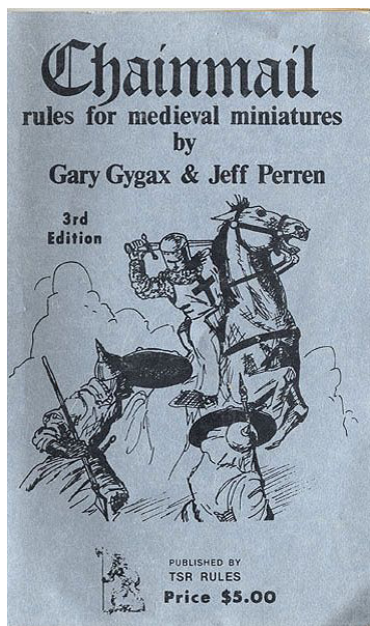
figure. 73
Cover of Chainmail the Medieval
Miniature Wargame (1971)
Chainmail is widely regarded as the
predecessor to D&D.
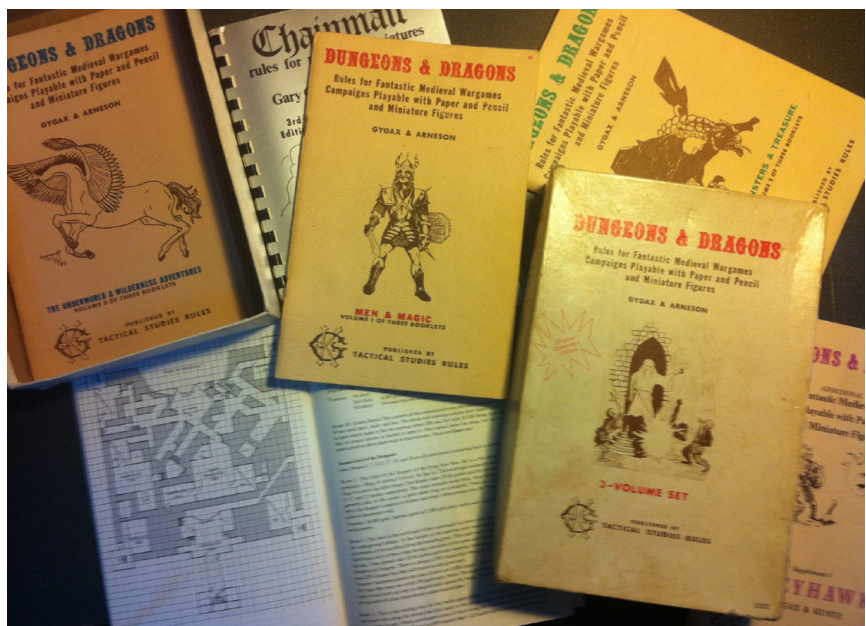
figure. 74
Dungeons and Dragons Original Edition "White Box" and Supplements
Pictured is a collection of the core books from the first printing of D&D referred to as the
Original Edition, OD&D, and oe. Noteworthy is the combat system in this edition explicitly
referenced and relied upon the Chainmail system.
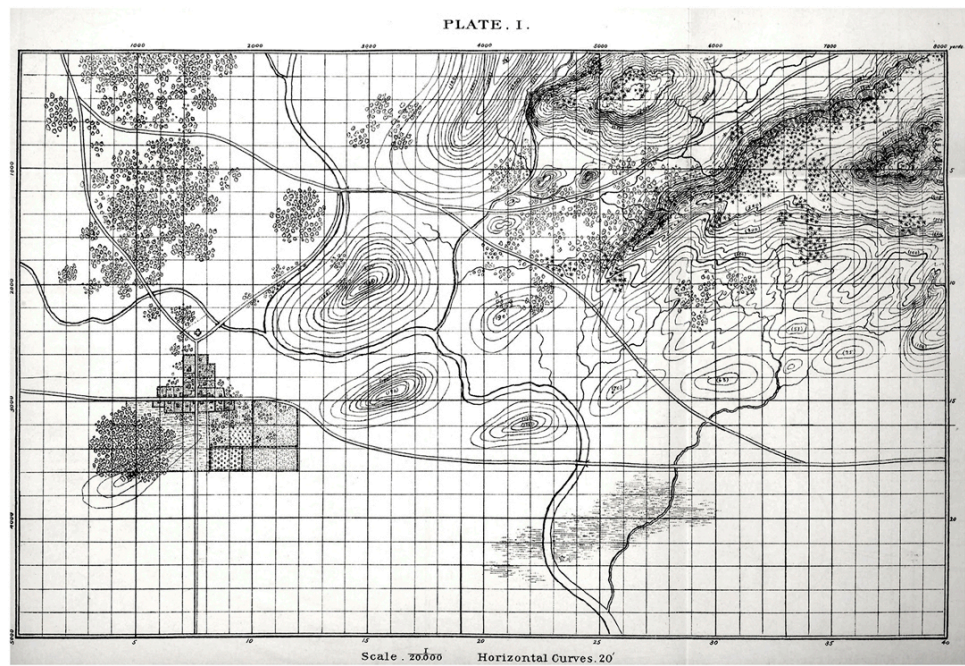
figure. 75
The American Kriegsspiel by Captain Livermore (1882)
Titled "The American Kriegsspiel. A game for practicing the art of war upon a topographical map." added grids to the map for estimating distances and beginning the domino effect that would lead to D&Ds scaled space.

The Grid as Design Method

If the hex grid was deemed more accurate, then why is D&D not played on a hex-grid[9]? As it was first inspired by wargames, specifically building on the medieval-miniatures war game titled 'Chainmail' (Ewalt 2013, 61-64), it would stand to reason the first edition may borrow the method as well. However, as previously commented on, listed in recommended equipment in the original version lays the answer, graph paper. D&D, as written at length relies on the creativity of the DM (referee) in their arrangement of spaces. While in some editions this was more the case, then in others which rely more on using pre-written campaigns, across all editions a DMs composition of dungeons in their weaving of significant spaces has been extremely important. While the first editions of the game presented itself as simple booklets with many pages of text, it needed to be able to rely on materials that could be both easily sourced and used for design. It needed to enable its own instruction of "the referee must draw out a minimum of half a dozen maps of the levels of his "underworld" (Gygax and Arneson 1974, 6) that "it is necessary for the referee to sit down with pencil in hand and draw these labyrinths on graph

9   I want to note, while tactical battle maps can technically be adjusted and drawn on a hex-grid, or even grid-less paper. All 5e official adventures use square grid scaling in their tactical maps. Hex-grids only appear on occasion for large regional maps where 1 hex=5 miles.
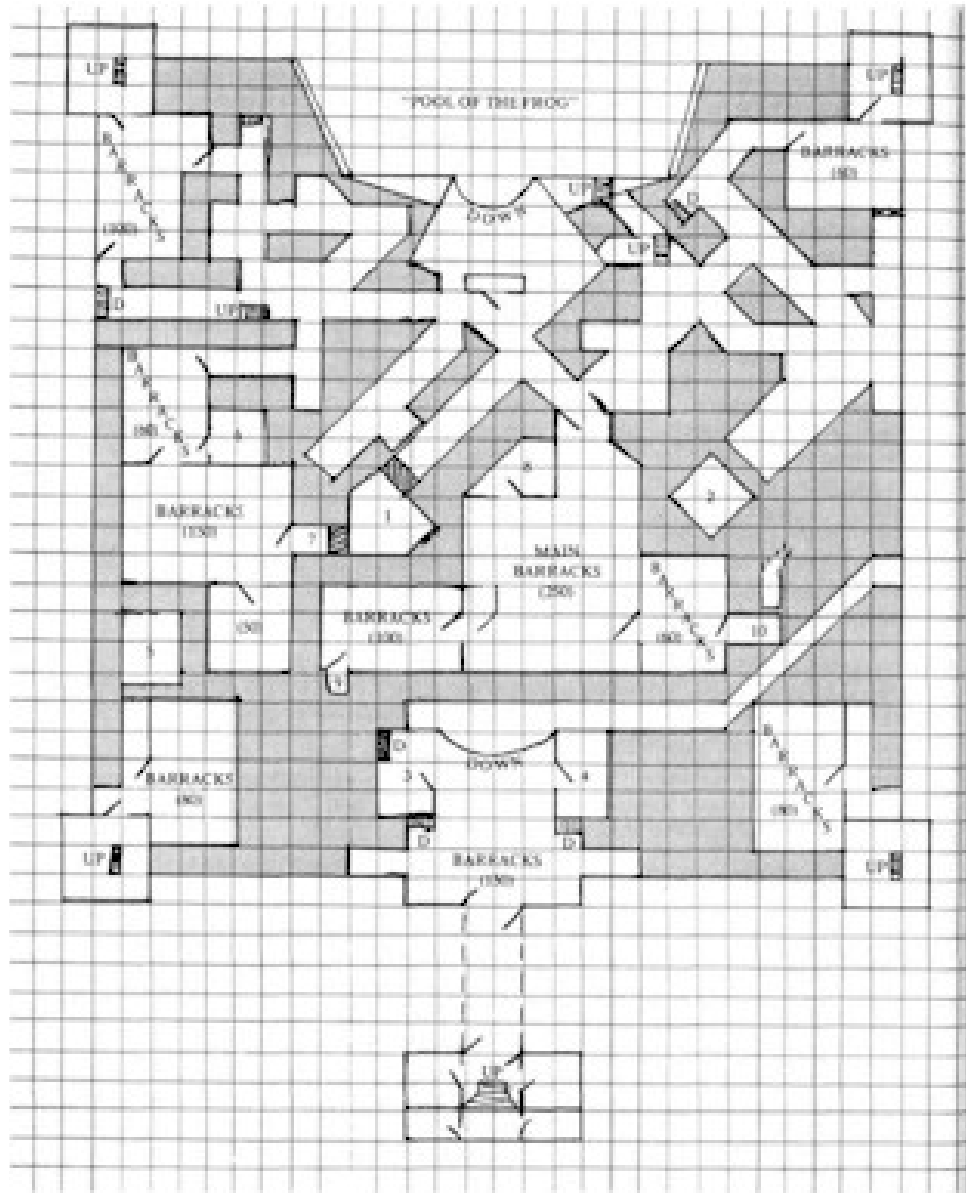
figure. 76
1st Level Dungeon Temple of the Frog *D&D Supplement II Blackmoor by Dave Arneson* (1975)
Originally published by TSR, scans of the Blackmoor supplement now freely exist on Dave Arneson's
website. Published in 1975, it is notable even in these early maps which have inconsistent visuals, the grid is
ever present.

paper." (Gygax and Arneson 1974, 68). It needed to be based on methods similar to architecture. Thus, the grid for D&D has become critical to the game in two aspects.

The first, as established in this chapter that in 0e, and truly since the beginning D&D, the game design leaned more to an adapted form of the architectural method of space design through these grids. It encouraged the DM, and so too the players, to think: "The layout of a level will affect the route most often followed by players. Observation of the most frequently used passages and explored rooms will guide the referee in preparation of successive levels, which, of course, should be progressively more dangerous and difficult." (Gygax and Arneson 1974, 68) Similar to how drawing in grids enables architects to translate and envision unbuilt designs, concepts, and use of space within architecture, it is similarly true for the architects of this imagined space.

The second is to do with game space and specifically movement. Throughout this history of D&D, the grids were used in the forming this game space. It has since grown to further become a core element which the Player interact with in game in their movement, spell casting and general combat. This was not always the case, as presenting the grid to players, and the use of minis only truly came into popularity from 3e onwards. It however has to some degree become commonplace. While most DMs will not use a full expansive set of miniatures to represent every enemy, due in large part of financial restrictions, it is common for there to be some physical proxy on the map when adopting the table-top playstyle. Further minis and even 3D maps visibly present in the two most popular live-play, recorded D&D shows. Critical Role and Dimension20.

figure. 77
Photo of Game Session with partial map and Player Mini's
Photo of miniatures positioned on gridded map. Each player has a miniature associated with
them and in their control, as the DM has all the enemies in their control.
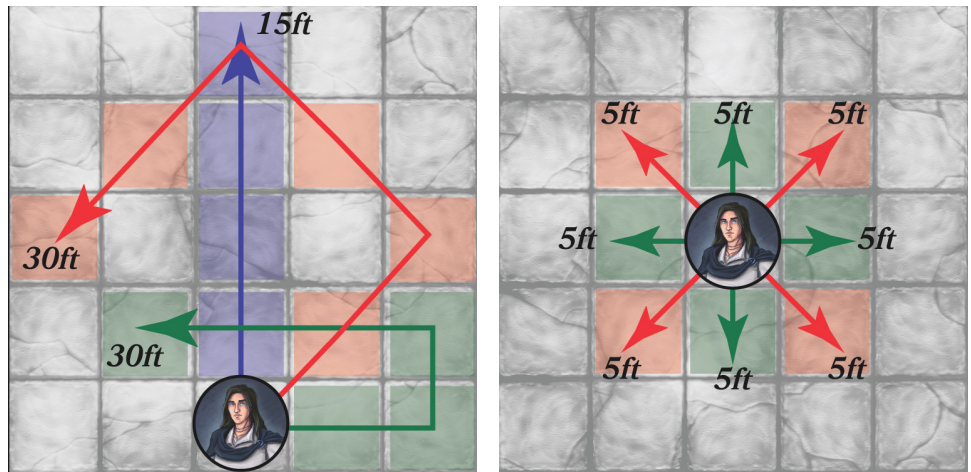
figure. 78
Gridded Movement Diagram

PART 2 - B

HOW D&D CREATES SPACE:

MAPS AS SPACE

VISUALIZING WORLDS

The Imagined Landscapes

Maps as they are considered in our day to day are rather function tools. Ones where every aspect of a localized area is catalogued, itemized, digested, and fed back through visuals on phones or computers, or in increasingly rare instances printed on paper. Maps filter and abstract data to convey information about our immediate surroundings as well as the world at large. Many attempt to be unbiased, but whether deciding what aspect of the worlds' continents are centered and distorted, or what businesses are deemed as holding such importance to become an automatic landmark within an app, biases are brought into the process of mapping by its pure nature.

Maps as they are created and utilized for D&D and architecture are by far not free from these biases. As commented on in The History of Cartography by J.B. Harley and David Woodward maps act

> "As mediators between an inner mental world and an outer physical world, maps are fundamental tools helping the human mind make sense of its universe at various scales." (Harley and Woodward 1987, 1)

In D&D they function as spatial guides, spatial limits, and artifacts of world-building. In architecture they can function as tools to analyze site conditions, outline zoning restrictions, and uncover layered histories. This nature of mapping has evolved from a history of trying to display the breadth of an expansive world beyond the limits our immediate surroundings contain. In this section I explore a breadth of directions of how in D&D maps create navigable spaces beyond the architectural tools it utilizes. I explore how D&D visualizes worlds through map, specifically looking how world building through the fantasy genre calls upon older understandings of story and space. Then evolving from these analyses, I look at how these mapped spaces and visuals have evolved across editions with this genre and history of style in mind. Further, I outline the translation of narrative into space that occurs within the maps. Analyzing how these narratives are then navigated and experienced.

The Legacy of Fantasy

"To be within a place is to find oneself oriented to its currents and directions; in the fullest sense it is to be capable of acting within it and moving through it; it is to gain a feeling for the patterns and rhythms of the place, of its own movements, of the density of the spaces within it, of the possibilities that it enables and the demands that it imposes." Jeff Malpas 1999

Maps in our human history have a rich legacy of story telling as well as cataloguing space, but prior to any outlining of how D&D uses these aspects to create space, there is a crucial factor to outline. Which is, while D&D borrows from our history and our understanding of maps, these maps do not represent our world. As a preface to this section, I outline here the unique genre which D&D finds itself within, and which highly influences its representations of space, fantasy[1]. In lands presided over by queens and kings, with daring tales of knights, the genre of fantasy is often conflated as encapsulating the medieval, but fantasy by definition is not driven by period-accurate representation. While it is common for reflections of medieval culture and settings to appear within the genre, it is more accurate

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1   Though some adventures take place is settings familiar to other genres, such as Spelljammer setting taking place in space, the theme of these settings are very still fantasy. Adapting the flavour, or theme, but still following many of the fantasy genre conventions.

to state that it is a spirit of the history which it draws from. That those medieval aspects are more simply to evoke a sense of familiarity to the alternative worlds which often include new rules of nature such as magic, and fantastical creatures.

Our understanding of fantasy owes much of the credit to Tolkien's The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings series, as it not only popularized the genre but in large part formed our modern understanding of it. Tolkien's high fantasy tales of orcs, elves and hobbits have grown to be ubiquitous with the genre of fantasy, and it was during the 1960s that it became popular in North America. Tolkien's writings, alongside other popular fantasy series such as of C.S Lewis *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Ursula K Le Guin *Earthsea*, cemented the genre in culture during this time. It was works such as these, that directly influenced Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax's D&D released in 1974, so much that in later editions handbooks included an Appendix of inspirational reading. The first time this was printed was in AD&D 1e in Appendix N, in 5e the expanded list is now under Appendix E.[2]

> "All of the above authors, as well as many not listed, certainly helped to shape the form of the game. For this reason, and for the hours of reading enjoyment, I heartily recommend the works of these fine authors to you."   Gary Gygax, Dungeon Masters Guide (1e) (1979)

Yet Tolkien's understanding of storytelling and thus the emergence of the genre of fantasy did not spontaneously appear from the ether. Rather it is another installment and continuation of a cultural fascination, steeped in the practice of mythic storytelling and depictions of fantastical legends. A direct connection being the operatic story of Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* also referred to as *The Ring Cycle*. Since the Lord of the Rings publication, parallels have been drawn between Tolkien's work and this opera, which loosely adapts Norse legendary sagas and Germanic heroic characters. The Ring Cycle presents a tale which woven within is the detailed journey of a magical and powerful ring, those who've discovered it, possessed it, used it, won it, and its vanishing, and to which the Lord of the Rings One Ring parallels[3]. (Arvidsson 2010) As the Ring Cycle directly calls upon German and Scandinavian myths and folktales, this practice of epic cultural

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2   This is also likely due in part to the lawsuit filed against TSR by Tolkien's estate over the use of copyright material.

3   This was quickly refuted by Tolkien, stating the only similarity was the existence and use of a ring, but many authors and academics draw connections through Tolkien's own study of Wagner. As well as the many similarity in their plot points.

story telling evolution continues. Tales of fallible gods and daring heroes endure, calling upon a deeply human affinity for stories including archetypal characters. Current manifestations of this present often, insofar that several popular evocative fantasy epics have been able to cross the boundary of genre fiction to pop-culture, such as George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire and Fire and Blood to their HBO adaptations Game of Thrones and House of the Dragon.

D&D continues and draws upon this history in its world-building, but rather than set the stage for heroes, and tales which echo this tradition, it centers players in the archetypal roles. Necessitating participation and interaction from the players in the pseudo myth, and so too to occupy the fantastical worlds presented by the story and DM. Facilitating these epics unfolding, these worlds and spaces work to convey and canonize "the patterns and rhythms of the place, of its own movements, of the density of the spaces within it, of the possibilities that it enables and the demands that it imposes." (Jeff Malpas 1999) generating a tangible imagined world.

Pauline Baynes
JRR Tolkien

F horizontal?
vertical
map of flora and fauna

NORTHERN WASTE

FORODWAITH

Carnen is mentioned (III 375)

ERED MITHRIN (Grey Mountains)

IRON HILLS

single masted
elven vessels
white or grey sail

small boats
any shape
going eastwards

FORLINDON

EVENDIM

Hills of
Evendim

Here west of old
the Witch-realm of
ANGMAR.

Enter the Lonely Mountain

Esgaroth upon the
Long Lake

R H Ū N

Elven ships
small, white
or grey

Gulf of Lune

HARLINDON

THE SHIRE

Hobbiton

RHUDAUR

MIRKWOOD

RHOVANION

(celduin)

(Dorwinion)

Sea of
RHŪN

MINHIRIATH

Eregion

R. Glanduin

Lothlorien

Cerin Amroth

(WILDERLAND)

[horses]

[kine]

Eryn Vorn [Black Forest]
a forest region of dark pine trees

ENEDWAITH

sparse woodland
could be represented
where I put pencil shade

DUNLAND

FANGORN

WOLD

THE BROWN
LANDS

the undeeps

400 desolate
black brown

black swan

2 towers
teeth of Mordor p 662
haunted pass

Lond Daer
[ruins]

tower of stone
Isengard Orthanc

EAST
EMNET

WEST
EMNET

SARN

Emyn
Muil

DAGORLAD
Battle Plain

grey

ERED LITHUI (Ash Mountains)

Druwaith Iaur
[Old Pukel-land]

ERED NIMRAIS

marshes should be under and about
the junction of Swanfleet (III 263) and
Hoarwell.
The upper part of the Swanfleet is
called Glanduin [Boundary River] III 319
Apply Swanfleet [illegible]ing to lower
part & if possible place R. Glanduin
near mountains,

GONDOR

ITHILIEN

MORDOR

BARAD-DŪR

of GORGOROTH

indigo

Sea of
NÚRNEN

NURN

16"x16"

Could be

7 of which had a single
white star on main sail –
all black 5 masted

as large a pre-steam vessel
as can be drawn ie Columbus type

Planes of Rhovanion between Mirkwood, Rhun
& Mordor had many wild kine & wild horses.

9 weatherbeaten
galleons

PINNATH GELIN

ANFALAS (Longstrand)

Cape Andrast

Andrast

Numemorean (Gondor)
ships black and silver

LEBENNIN

SOUTH
GONDOR

(Harondor)

KHAND

THE
BAY OF
BELFALAS

Vessels of varying sizes from
3 masted to single

(camels)

NEAR HARAD

(Elephants)

Scale
Miles   50 100 150 200 250 300

Corsairs had red sails
with black star or eye.

Elephants appear in the great battle
outside Minas Tirith (as they did in Italy
under Pyrrhus) but they could be in place
in the blank spaces of Harad also camels

Hobbiton is assumed to be approx
at latitude of Oxford. The green vertical
line is marked at distances of 100 miles
(2cms to map scale). So you can roughly
judge the climate and Fauna/Flora etc.
Minas Tirith is about a latitude of Ravenna
(but is 900 miles east of Hobbiton, more
near Belgrade).

Bottom of the Map (400 miles) is about a
latitude of Jerusalem.
Umbar & City of Corsairs - about that
of Cypres

green horizontal is also marked in
100 mile intervals.

UMBAR

Havens of
UMBAR

City of the
Corsairs

H A R A D W A I T H

[SUTHERLAND]

If possible the vale between
Celos and Sirith should be
lettered Tumladen (III 36)

R. Celos

R. Sirith

Tumladen

FAR HARAD

figure. 79
Annotated Map of Middle-Earth
Transcribed by Susan Theobald in 2015, the map of Middle-earth features annotations from J.R.R Tolkien and
illustrator Pauline Baynes. Baynes was the illustrator and artist who produced the poster-map published in
1970 and included in most volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*. Notable she was also the first illustrator of C.S
Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

The Worlds of D&D

As established, the Dungeon Master uses a variety of tools as experiential shorthand to tell players everything they need to know about the fantastical settings, layouts, and conditions to engage in their world's space. In officially published content, this is primarily conducted through various maps at various scales, from that of an individual dungeon to localized regions to full expansive settings. These maps at large scales can facilitate these deep levels of world-building, hinting at both history and embedded story in what information is selectively filtered and presented of the fantastical worlds' geological forms, landmarks, and significant climates. At a smaller scale, regional maps zoom in and expand world-building with increased details adding the contexts of cities, towns, and road systems. In the 219th episode of Dragon Talk, the official D&D podcast sponsored, produced, and published by Wizards of the Coast, D&D map designer and cartographer Deven Rue, comments on the role of these maps in D&D stating:

> "a map should tell a story. It's not just a functional thing to tell people 'There's a road here' it should really inspire your players to want to get out there and do more. And if something isn't working in one area, they can go to another and hopefully move the story along." (Deven Rue Dragon Talk Podcast 2019)

These maps work to inspire the players to engage with the broader story and smaller narratives embedded therein. They can showcase if or where the poles of the world are, if there are deserts, mountains, and forests, how they connect to rivers and lakes. They can cue the tenants of the imagined world, and cue imagery of monsters and climate events. Further they provide soft barriers to this exploration in the selective edges of the maps. Players often understand there is a larger world, or plane of existence, which exists beyond what is shown that they, in theory, could interact with. However, they also understand through a social code of the game that the adventure as intended, is presented in what visuals they are shown.

Medieval Precedents

Historical Connection Medieval

"Medieval maps were often symbolic and decorative in purpose— projecting an ideal Christian cosmos rather than a physical world. These early cartographers were attempting to meet the challenge of representing, in the one schema, both geographical features and an expression of faith" Matthew Ducza, 2013)

Generating a tangible and "real" but imagined vision of a world, not as concerned with geographical accuracy as it is with conveying story and history, is far from unique to D&D. Tangibly observed in the perception of the world of the fantasy genres inspiration, Europe during the Middle Ages, the world was perceived as being much smaller and more contained than we do today. Reflected in the writing, art, and the built forms of a time when threats were more immediate and proximal, anything beyond a defined 'edge' or 'wall' was presented through distinct filters of the dominant culture. In Europe this was Christianity, the filter encouraged a unique perception of the world and spaces beyond through the tool of maps. Medieval maps

"were a means to help people understand the Earth and the cosmos, including information on mythology and religion as well as geography" (Matthew Ducza, 2013). Expanded upon by David Woodward, "the primary function of these maps was to

provide illustrated histories or moralized, didactic displays in a geographical setting... maps may also consist of historical aggregations or cumulative inventories of events in addition to representing objects that exist cosynchronously in space." (David Woodward 1985, 510)

Immediate and accurate scales of space were not the goal of these maps, nor was it possible to convey at the time given technical limitations in surveying methods, but they were to reflect broader knowledge loosely connected to landmarks, destinations, or general placement in the known world. They worked to generate and present the world beyond a viewer's edge of knowledge, not of geographical accuracy, but more similar to world-building, inspiring interest in the presented messages and images. The selective edges of the maps, often surrounded by Christian iconography, presented, allowed information to be layered and built upon it.

"...by exaggerating the spread of time depicted within their borders, the mappamundi also demonstrate that maps in general need not be seen as reflecting only spatial realities and perceptions or pictures of the earth stopped at a given moment in time. They may also consist of historical aggregations or cumulative inventories of events that occur in space. For the mappamundi, this meant a curious melange of both Christian and secular legendary history." (David Woodward 1985, 519)

Worldly Understanding

The purpose and practice of maps from the Middle Ages as a form of knowledge creation, is directly borrowed from and echoed in D&D. Mirroring the medieval practice the visuals and descriptions work together as the primary artifacts to enable the imagined immaterial space as truly 'existing'. With this, it is no surprise how closely the following description on the nature of combining visual and written information in the Middle Ages to understand and navigate a broadly unknown world, could apply to D&D, it approaches the same challenge.

> "Maps made for providing directions would typically be local or regional, whereas world maps normally functioned as schematic diagrams. Written texts had the advantage of being able to contain more information than a visual map. Consequently, there were circumstances under which today we would use a map, when it would have been common (for a literate traveller) to rely upon a written description instead."
> (Matthew Ducza, 2013)

Substitute 'world maps' with settings maps, and omit the comment to literate travellers, and it applies directly to the game where in the small-scale tactical maps 10 feet can be the difference between surviving or failing, while on the large scale a measure of 5 miles is negligible or often ignored if it hinders convenient exploration.

Style & Genre - Medieval Influence

Outlined in other sections of the thesis, the inspiration taken from the Medieval period for D&D is not isolated in the genre of fantasy or similarities of the art or of world creation but is further connected by Chainmail, the fantasy supplement written by D&D co-creator Gary Gygax for a medieval wargame in 1971, and the predecessor to D&D. It directly links medieval inspirations of world-building, and content.
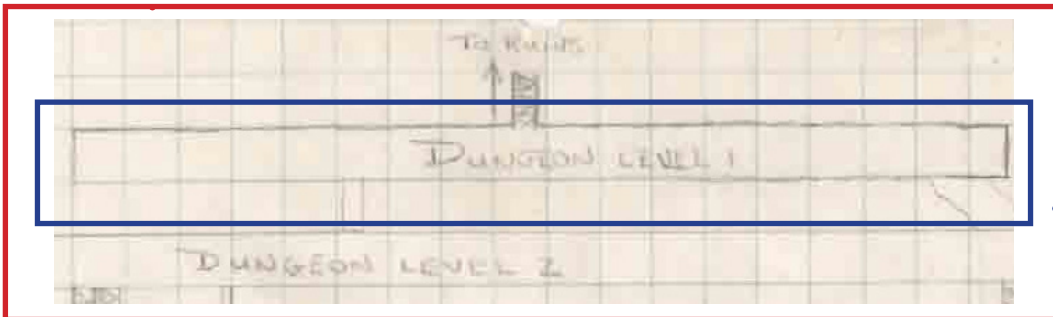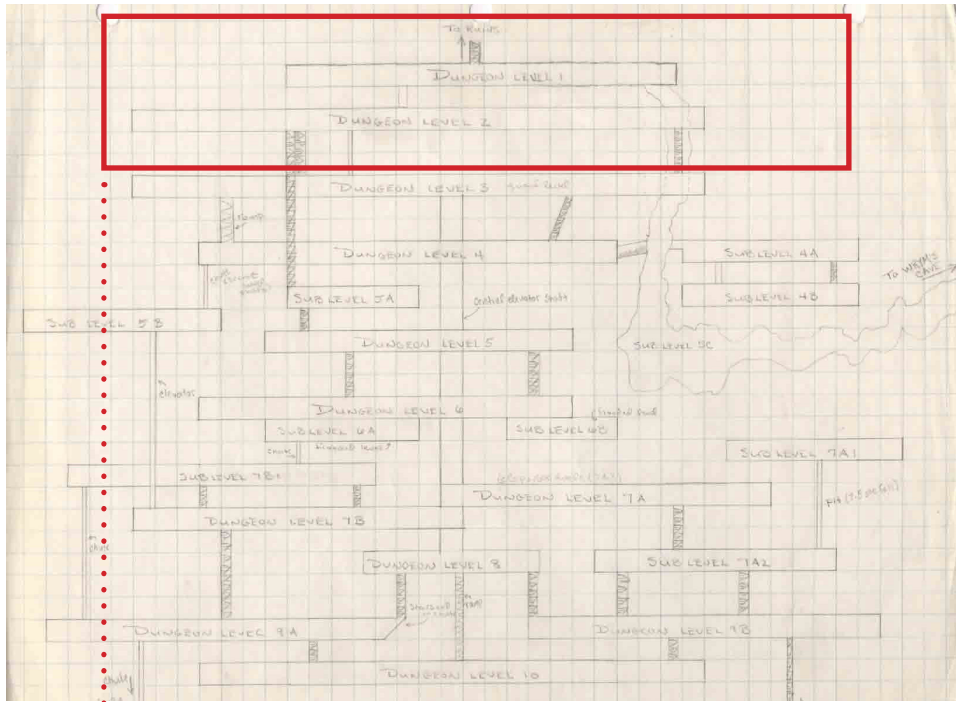
figure. 80
grodog's Greyhawk Castle Dungeon Elevations - Top Levels
Beginning in the 1980s, D&D player known as grodog online felt unsatisfied with the official supplements
outlining Greyhawk Castle and devised to design their own. They created a castle 17 levels deep, with
41 levels and sublevels, lead largely by hints of lore and the evoked type of a medieval fantasy system of
dungeons.
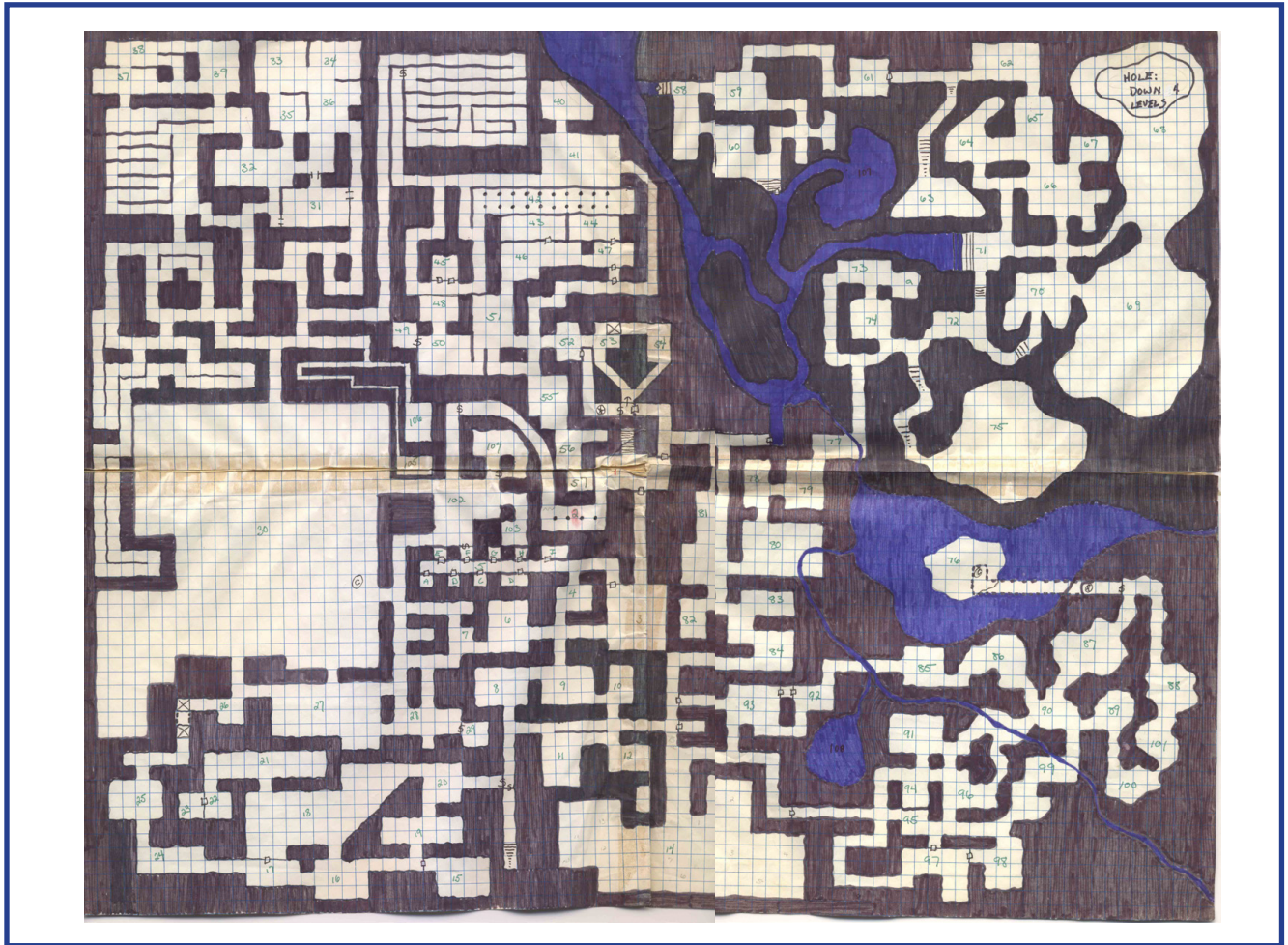
figure. 81
grodog's Greyhawk Castle Dungeon Level 1
Displaying the first level in it's series of rooms indicates just how expansive a dungeon can be even in a single level, with distinguished differences of pathways, large carved out rooms, and natural cavernous forms.

171

Type

The earliest provided settings of the game in 0e, Greyhawk and Blackmoor, clearly demonstrate this throughline of medieval inspirations in their setting creations as well as in their frequently used building types and programs. Greyhawk, which later became more developed in setting supplement books, is broadly associated with Gary Gygax, while Blackmoor was the home-setting of co-creator Dave Arneson. For both, the early settings development was relatively vague. Mentions of the settings acted partially as vehicles for conveying new rules which were needed to make the game more playable, while the settings and world-building relied heavily on evoking pre-existing narrative associations to fantasy and medieval contexts. However, allusions to these settings were used effectively, such as mentioning "the elaborate dungeons of Castle Greyhawk", led Players and Dungeon Masters alike to be inspired and expand their own versions of the castle lead by their assumptions with medieval and fantasy tropes. Even after some official information on this setting was published it failed to evoke "the authentic Gygax & Kuntz Castle" and fan Grodog re-created his image of the dungeon map under Grayhawk map.

Castles, Dungeons, and Temples were often woven with references to medieval architecture. Which build a mental map of place, should a drawn one not yet exist or not yet be revealed to players, as in the earlier editions the 'theatre of the mind' play style was the norm.

Showcasing this is the first ever adventure module published officially by the TSR for Dungeons and Dragon, The Temple of the Frog module in the Blackmoor setting. In it, the party is tasked to rescue a baroness trapped deep in a mysterious swamp that is reveals is controlled by a monstrous humanoid frog race. The party mainly does this by navigating various trials and enemies within an evil "temple". The mission, indirectly assigned by the local king, uses the first 3 pages of full block text to explain critical political and imagined history of Blackmoor the DM would "*need"* to know run the adventure. It is directly reminiscent of both fantasy novels and medieval history books tracking lineages, political zones and political motivations that underscore the narrative. The first map is included following a

MAP 2: TEMPLE OF THE FROG - GROUND FLOOR

Scale: 1 Square = 5 Feet
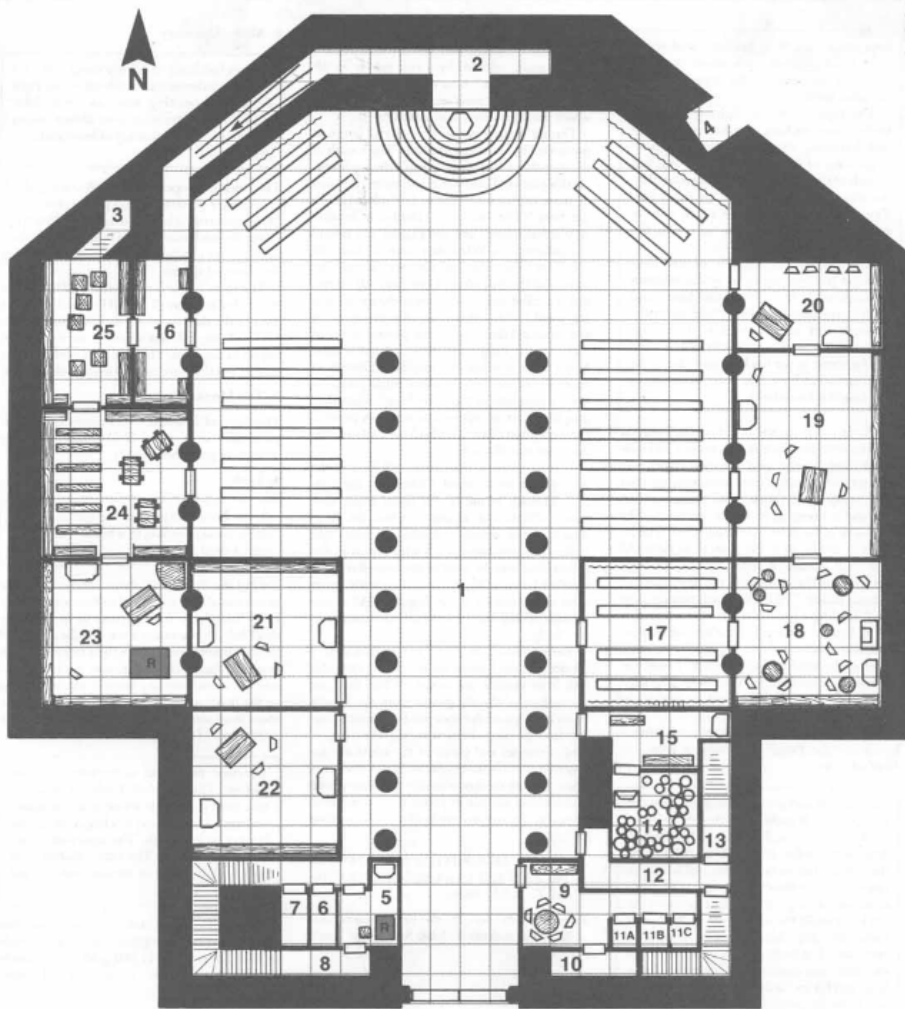
figure. 82
AD&D 1e Dungeon Map *Temple of the Frog* (1986)

journey requiring 19 pages of solid 9pt text, in the form of the titular temple itself. Level one includes an immediately recognizable cruciform worship space.

Ground Floor Room Description 1 Temple Nave, Temple of the Frog

"On either side, the aisle is flanked by ten massive pillars carved with intricate friezes showing frogs and other vaguely slimy things performing a variety of human tasks-from harvesting a crop of reedlike plants to keeping ledgers in an amphibian counting house. These pillars support a 50-foot ceiling cut from the same green stone as the walls and pillars and carved in the same intricate fashion as the latter. The northern half of the hall opens out 35 feet on either side of the aisle to make room for seven 20-foot carved white oak pews that flank the outside of the pillars. Low, broad steps lead to an altar cum pulpit against the rear wall. The flanking walls on either side are covered with huge tapestries that hang from heavy hooks near the ceiling. Three more 20-foot pews are angled beneath each tapestry. Glowing stones set in the ceiling cast a pale light over the room. Stronger beams of warm light from a cupola high above the altar highlight elements of the tapestries and the alter itself. The tapestry to the right of the altar shows a land sinking into the ocean. Terrified humans, elves, dwarves, and halflings cling to the illusory safety of a few islands of dry ground not yet inundated by the all-consuming waves of an angry seas. The turrets of Blackmoor castle can be seen slipping beneath the waves in the background. The tapestry to the left of the altar shows a pastoral scene in which yeoman farmers work their bountiful land and skilled craftsmen ply their trade under the brilliant sun of a new day. The frogshaped outline of the Temple of the Frog can be scene in the background. All of the figured except for a few domestic animals are froglike humanoids." (TSR 1986, 26-28)

The influence of medieval architectural and environmental design is immediately recognizable being borrowed not only as symbols but as spatial story elements. Even the turrets of Blackmoor castle being harkened to for its visibility and stability across the land, reminds the players and characters of their origin and anchor of 'moral good'. It calls upon a knowledge of medieval friezes that were typically cut with stories of the bible, and celebrations of the heroes within, a description outlining the temple friezes displaying amphibian creatures in these positions of reverence, quickly introduces a culture that holds such figures in similar reverence and assumes familiarity with that Medieval tradition. Read to the players as the first significant map, in the first official module, it begins the tradition and history within D&D of embedding narrative into the detailed described environments and evoking medieval cues to do so. Pairing elaborate descriptions with maps and floor plans, creates the game where narrative tangibly engages with and explores a spatial

story. In this way, the Temple of the Frog serves as an example of establishing a tradition of using medieval architectural references as grounding aspects to both further the narrative of the adventure and enable a richer image of space to be constructed.

Map Typology

Additionally, D&D directly borrows the actual types of maps presented from medieval practices, where the intent of the image is not geographic accuracy, but rather to facilitate a perception of a world more generally. The map types Ptolemaic, Quadripartite/O-T, and mappa mundi all originating from the Middle Ages are all used in D&D's pursuit of world-building. In the current edition, 5th edition, they are primarily used to explore the default setting of the Forgotten Realms.

Ptolemaic Maps

Ptolemaic maps as the popular representations of the universe from the 5th century to the 14th century CE where the earth was placed as the center of the cosmos. There exist many maps that adapt and expand this understanding. Centermost in them was the earth, then often the 4 elements of earth, wind, fire, water, then the 7 planets, and finally the Prime Mover. The Prime Mover being the Christian depiction of God, this geocentric model of the universe reinforced the Christian ideal of the cosmos. While they were not be cosmologically accurate, which Copernican and Galilean models would later challenge in the 17th century, they maintained their influence even after the correction for the simple act of illustrating the moralized model of the world.

Dungeons and Dragons directly borrows from this model in its own Cosmological representations. However, differing from the Christian model, it takes those influences and shared concepts, such as the 4 prime elements, and extends them into planes of existence that to a degree are explorable and 'real' places in D&D. The Great Wheel of Cosmology in D&D also highlights key factors in the world-building of the fantastical. With spheres of chaos, and axes of moralities, it notes upper and lower, and inner and outer planes, with familiar names across historical and fantastical religions and existing simultaneously with their own minutia of differences to governance. Its function in service of the game is not necessarily to encourage and propagate a single understanding of power in the universe but sets various base understandings of the world and planes of existence across a multitude of sources of power. This multiplicity of powers is simplified in this model, and functions to set a general cannon of the world(s) in which the various modules and campaigns in D&D take place. It sets a stage for Players and DMs to understand and expand where they see most fruitful to their own narratives and provides a sense of spatial reality to the planes, beyond the material and mortal planes, which otherwise could appear unrelated and too broad and layered in their representations of the domains of deities and power.

Cosmological Diagram of the Spheres Surrounded by Angels.
Matfre Ermengaud, *Breviari d'Amor*, c1375-1400.
British Library MS Yates Thompson 31, f. 66r.

figure. 83
Spheres Surrounded by Angels, Brevari d'amour,14th c.
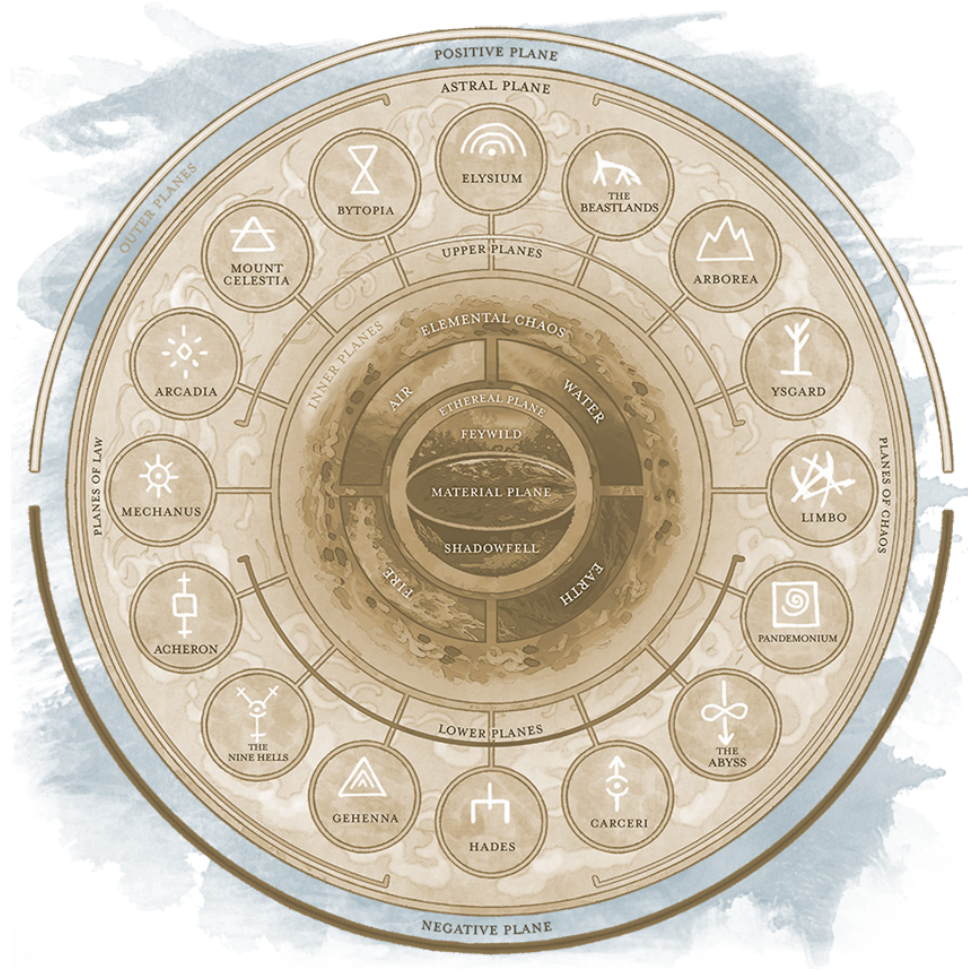
figure. 84
The Great Wheel of Cosmology as in *the 5e Players Handbook*

Quadripartite Maps and O-T Maps

Tripartite Maps, also known as T-O Maps, and Quadripartite maps are notable forms of medieval mapping which approximates the depiction of the medieval world. These maps often represent the world as a disk (O), though Quadripartite map edges occasionally took form of an oval or rectangle as well. These maps subdivided the world space into either 3 or 4 zones respective to their preface tri- and quad. The primary difference of the two is that Quadripartite maps have a 4th zone which is the addition of the "unknown" zone inhabited by Antipodeans. Both types were rendered to varying degrees of details in their representation of the known explored world and include iconography and additional images specific to the intent of the map. The selective inclusions of symbols, denotating locations and landmarks of importance, encouraged an understanding of the world through a Christian lens. They worked not to include every element in space but highlight those selected. In each of these maps these elements would often change but using large the bodies of water as divisions remained consistent and acted as the edge of understanding in these maps.

Similarly, Dungeons and Dragons mapped representation of the Elemental Planes shares some of these characteristics. It took influence of dividing known of

but less explored planes, with canals acting as dividers. The Elemental Planes map divides the inner planes into the 4 elemental planes, with the prime material planes as its core. These divisions are represented as distinct walls of secondary inner planes, function similarly as the bodies of water do in the medieval Tripartite and Quadripartite. As well projecting a limited understanding of the spheres beyond, it displays areas with a significant amount of ambiguity to encourage caution and noting only significant landmarks or locations. Leaving large swathes of space undefined, all these elements harken back to the medieval tradition.

They differentiate however, similar to the cosmological map distinction, is that this map is not used to enforce one specific doctrine. As well that by keeping the edges blurred and undefined, does not encourage an implication of a 'flat world' but instead allows and encourages the imagining and understanding of spaces and planes beyond.

figure. 85
Tabula geographica: Pro ut exitat COD

figure. 86
Figure Elemental Planes Map as seen in *5e Dungeons Master Guide*

Complex Maps / Mappa Mundi

Complex maps of the Middle Ages, referred to as mappa mundi, are a style of cartography which is heavily borrowed from in the setting maps on Dungeons and Dragons. These maps as noted by David Woodward "were not snapshots of the world's geography at a given point in time, but a blending of history and geography, a projection of historical events on a geographical framework" (David Woodward 1985, 514) While they do display coastal details, human settlements (such as cities, towns, and provinces), as well as significant geographical forms, they focus to incorporate bible stories and mythologies as well. They provide an edge to the presented world or territory, not in an essentialist barrier of exploration but as a defined edge of knowledge and doctrine presented. They simultaneously presented the world when "there were certain prescribed constraints within which they had to work" (David Woodward 1985, 513) and expanded immediate knowledge of locations as these maps were displayed to the public often housed in churches.

Dungeons and Dragons borrowing from this style comes in the forms of their settings maps. Where medieval maps had the "prescribed constraints within which they had to work" (David Woodward 1985, 513) in the context of Christianity, D&Ds map constraints come in the form of the barrier to the fantastical settings and the

campaigns that exist within them. Deven Rue outlines that as "a DM you have to really go over the map because your Players will find what you miss." (Deven Rue Dragon Talk Podcast 2019). These setting maps take on varying scales and level of detail in the context of if they are for a singular campaign, or a setting for multiple tomes of campaigns. However, regardless of scale they borrow many of the conventions of mappa mundi, occasionally differing from their medieval use. For one, representing the known extents of any given world. Where the Medieval examples intent of the author was heavily influenced by the church, D&D is determined and edited through the campaigns journey. In turn presenting differing reasons for where an edge is drawn. Both mappa mundi and D&D setting maps detail significant geographical forms, while also often including representation of beasts and fantastical objects with intent of caution or representing the unknown. Both include cities, towns, and provinces, but with a hierarchy to the authors intents. Naturally, the primary difference between the two representations is the nature of D&D settings maps being of an imagined immaterial geography. D&D are not bound to be holding geographic resemblance like the mappa mundi but exists as the only article of reference for the narrative space.

figure. 87
The Ebstorf Map (1232)

Map labels: EISELCROSS, GREYING WILDLANDS, Crystalsands Tundra, THE FRIGID DEPTHS, DWENDALIAN EMPIRE, Dunrock Mountains, Savalirwood, Pearlbow Wilderness, Rime Plains, THE EMERALD GULCH, XHORHAS, Marrow Valley, MENAGERIE COAST, BLIGHTSHORE, Continent of Wildemount

figure. 88
Map from Explorers Guide to Wildemount Map

187

Illustrative Texts

In another aspect to maps, D&Ds current formatting also pays homage to Medieval illuminated manuscripts. Both their content makes use of symbolic and fantastical imagery, even do far as the mythical creatures portrayed. Both approach the illustrations with highly intricate details per the artist's focus. Scribes and illuminators included ornate details continuously reinforcing and evoking the aesthetics of the dominate culture. Detailed illustrations of characters, settings, and various game elements by highly skilled artists reinforce and evoke the genre of an adventure.

figure. 89
Christine de Pizan (1364-1430) Livre de paix
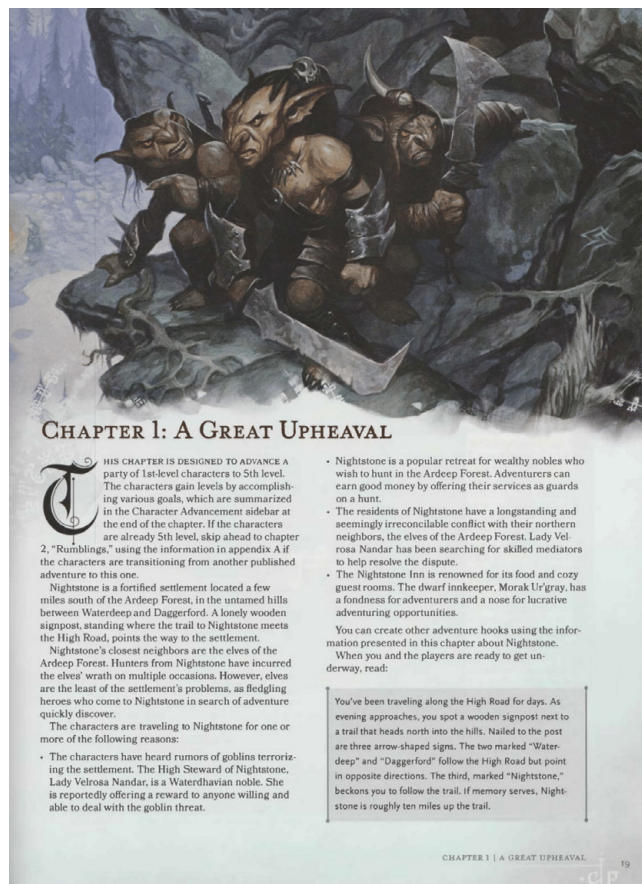
figure. 90
Campaign Adventure Starting Page *Storm Kings Thunder* (2016)

Bestiaries

The medieval bestiaries present another representation mirrored in the fantasy roleplaying game. Bestiaries are illustrated collections from the Middle Ages providing tales and information on various animals, real and mythical. They were presented as spiritual texts, rather than theological, presenting information on the animals through tales from the church rather than observation. (Clark 2006,7). In D&D this is mirrored within the Monster Manuals, also titled Fiend Folio across various editions, as it is a compendium of monsters present and usable in D&D by DMs. The monsters within are drawn from established folklore, mythology, as well as original creatures created for D&D and over the evolution of editions and games. The style of the illustrations themselves have shifted across editions but it is additionally of interest the visual similarities of early D&D monsters, with medieval illustrations depicting demons. While newer illustrations display sophisticated use of colour and rendering stands apart from a medieval influence, earlier illustrations with simple shading highlight similarities of eldritch and demonic elements.

figure. 91
Fountains Abbey bestiary, ca. 1325-1350
A Bestiary entry detailing the fantastical creature the Griffon. Other
entries on the page include a Unicorn, a Lynx, and an Elephant.
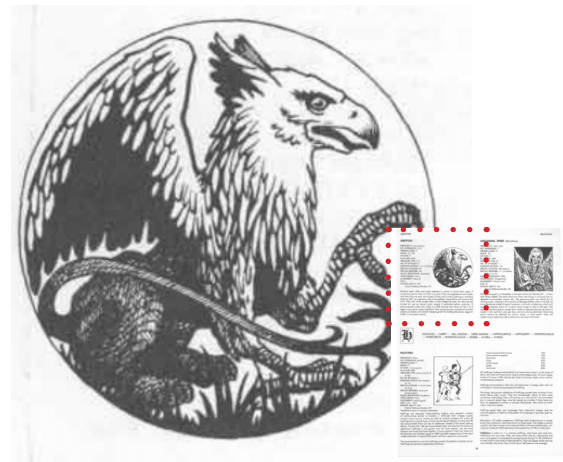
figure. 93
Griffon in AD&D 1e *Monster Manual* (1977)
Entry for the Griffon from the AD&D 1e Monster Manual

figure. 92
Griffon in D&D 3e *Monster Manual* (2004)
Entry for the Griffon from the D&D 3e Monster Manual

figure. 94
Griffon in D&D 5e *Monster Manual* (2004)
Entry for the Griffon from the D&D 5e Monster Manual

figure. 95
Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons 1470-74 Martin Schongauer
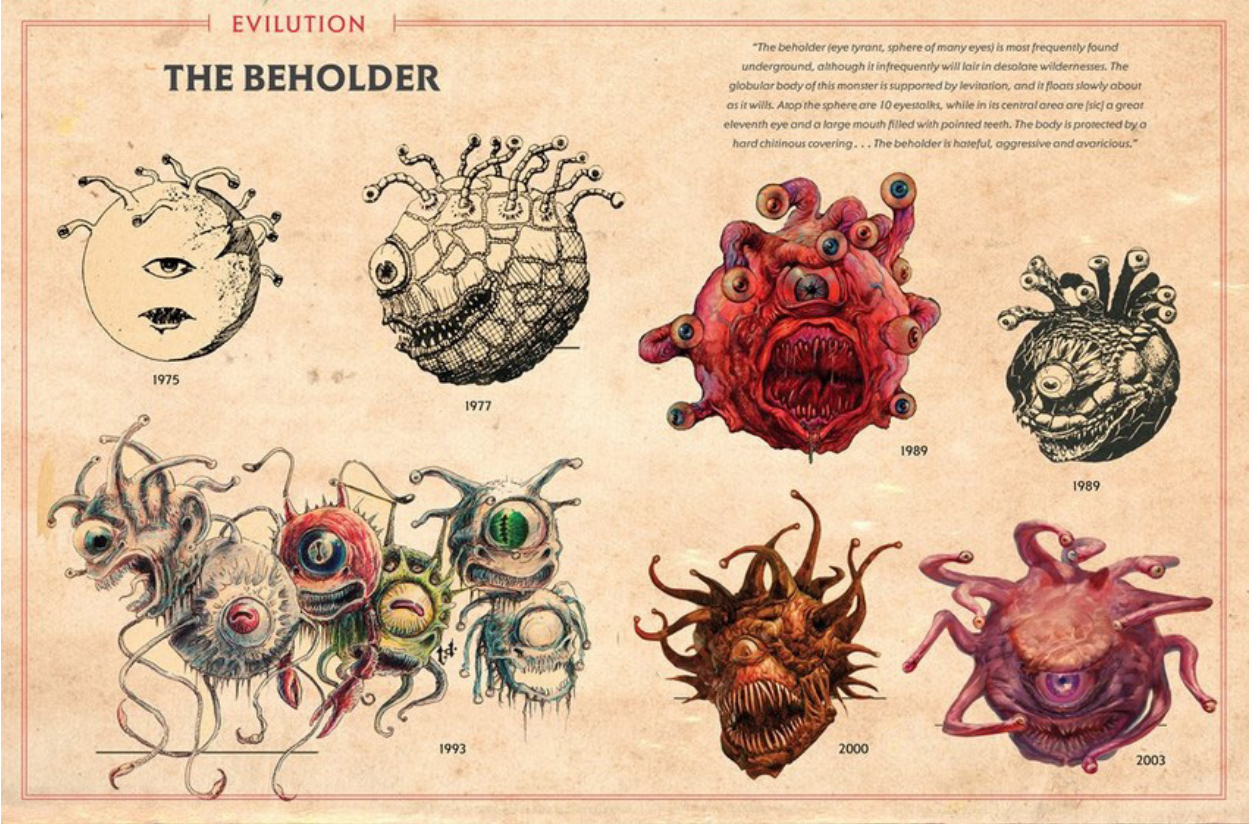
figure. 96
Dungeons & Dragons Art & Arcana, A Visual History

Maps as Presented

Genre and Narrative in Map Style as Space

"...narratives can engage with the medium of space, and form the basis on which architecture can be given meaning." (Henri Lefebvre 2005, 14)

In D&D, tactical battle maps often operate as the only visual associated with in-game spaces, and as such there exists a crucial exchange between Map, DM, and Player. Where an omniscient DM knows the full plot of the adventure, can see the mapped spaces, and understands the end purpose of exploring such spaces, the Player only discovers both plot and space as they explore the maps, and the DM reveals the adventure to them. Sometimes the players miss areas, or elements completely as a result of this freedom. For this exchange to be successful, the DMs initial interpretation and reading of that space from the provided material is a crucial factor. In this interpretation, due to the flexible nature of D&D, a discrepancy of space won't break a game, but it must still serve the same role of program, possess the embedded elements, evoke the same atmosphere, maintain connections to adjoining rooms, etc.

As the rules and content of D&D have evolved since 1974, so too have the style

of the illustrations and maps. Across this evolution certain elements have been present in every edition such as a grid overlay on tactical battle maps. While others, such as aesthetics, have continued to change and evolve. The early editions of D&D presented maps that were starkly contrasted visuals with highly detailed legends, while in the current edition, 5e, it is common for fully rendered maps to be included in published adventures. This evolution of visuals did not solely advance due to new potentials of illustration and printing technology. They were additionally propelled forward by a rising consumer expectation as video games rose in popularity, and video games improving graphics continuously outpaced expectations. As a result, current illustrations of maps in their detail and rendering have, as I observe, also served to ease the reading of these floorplan-like maps. As added detail, rendered colour and atmosphere are more immediately readable then abstracted two-tone floorplans.

Evolution of D&D Styles

The evolution of the D&D map directly mirrors the evolution of the floorplan in Architecture in that they have evolved consistently alongside technology. Though in this evolution the notable difference of the viewer in D&D, and their assumed non-architecture background, presents the unique opportunity to observe how an illustrated plan style has evolved with the goal to articulate space to non-architectural minded players. The evolution of this style is most clearly visible in the adventure which has been the most consistently reprinted across editions, Tomb of Horrors, which I explore in the following section.

THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS OF TEXT ARE FROM 3 PRINTINGS OF THE TOMB OF HORRORS AND FORMATTED AS A REFLECTION OF THEIR FORMATTING IN THEIR RESPECTIVE EDITIONS FOR EASE OF COMPARISON.

AD&D 1978

6. THE FACE OF THE GREAT GREEN DEVIL: The other fork of the path leads right up to an evil-appearing devil face set in mosaic at the corridor's end. (SHOW YOUR PLAYERS GRAPHIC #6). The face has a huge 0 of a mouth; it is dead black. The whole area radiates **evil** and **magic** if detected for. The mouth opening is similar to a (fixed) **sphere of annihilation**, but it is about 3′ in diameter - plenty of room for those who wish to leap in and be completely and forever destroyed.

D&D3.5e 1998

6. The Face of the Great Green Devil

At the south end of the corridor, the red tile path forks. One section trails into an arch of mist (see entry 5). The other leads to the face of the great green devil. Show **graphic #6**

> A fork of the red tile path leads directly to a leering devil face set in the mosaic at the corridor's end. The devil's mouth gapes wide and empty—in fact it is dead black, emitting no hint of light and allowing none entry.

The mouth opening is similar to a sphere of annihilation (page 279 *Dungeon Master's Guide*), but this sphere is permanently fixed in place and yawns a little more than 3 feet in diameter—room enough to accommodate those who, pursuing a false hope, leap in where they are completely and forever destroyed.

The whole area radiates evil and magic (necromancy; CL 20th) if a detection attempt is made.

D&D 5e 2017

6. THE FACE OF THE GREAT GREEN DEVIL

The path of red tiles leads south from the fork. If any character comes within 2 feet of the southern wall, read:

> On the wall before you is a relief sculpture of a devil face formed of mosaic tiles. The face has a huge O of a mouth, inside of which the space is dead black.

Aura. The devil face radiates an aura of transmutation magic if *detect magic* is used on it, and a casting of *detect evil and good* or a paladin's use of Divine Sense reveals it as a desecrated place.

Mouth Trap. The mouth opening is similar to a *sphere of annihilation*, but it is about 3 feet in diame-ter- plenty of room for those who wish to leap in and be completely and forever destroyed. A character who examines the mouth and succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the trap for what it is.

Graphic 6: The Face of the Great Green Devil

ANALYSIS

Clear in the text and immediately visible in their compositions is that the trend of making the game spaces more legible through architectural anchors in the maps follows in the descriptions of the rooms.

While this door, (which has become an icon in its own right, serving as a reference and easter egg in both the book and movie adaptation of Ready Player One by Earnest Cline), serves the same function across editions, it's presentation and text provided has shifted in format in service to ease of use. Where the first printing, requires that the players engaged with the element preceeding in its reference of space, describes it simplistically as a "dead black" opening, and outlines its consequence. The 3.5e description uses cardinal directions, a section of text to read the player, and provides additional text to the consequence itself. The 5e description continues to improve, isolates and provides text to be read directly, and divides the 2 potential sets of additional information that may be needed.

figure. 97
Evolution of Text Representation throughout editions

199

Dungeon Map Evolution Analysis- Tomb of Horrors

AD&D 1978

In the earliest editions of D&D, map style was extremely simplified. Starkly contrasted figure ground drawings, either in blue ink or black included a heavy reliance on the text symbols imposed on the grid. They were reminiscent of architectural plan drawings, both in style and in their heavy reliance on the use of symbols. The symbols do not imitate the represented components but through simplifications enable quick understandings of certain elements. It is in these early editions of D&D where a language of mapped symbols was established to codify spatial story opportunities, for example, that an S on a map cues the placement of a secret door to the DM. The S directly contrasts the symbol of the typical door which are boxes protruding from the walls, and both take up but a fraction of the provided grid allowing quick reading of the map by the DM. It also established through numbering rooms, embedded references to detailed text block room descriptions which were heavily relied upon to describe everything about the room not visible in the simplified maps. These early maps began the tradition of a large layered overall map which details all elements in a space, those which the players know of immediately, as well as hidden elements known only to DMs, unless revealed by players engaging with the space.
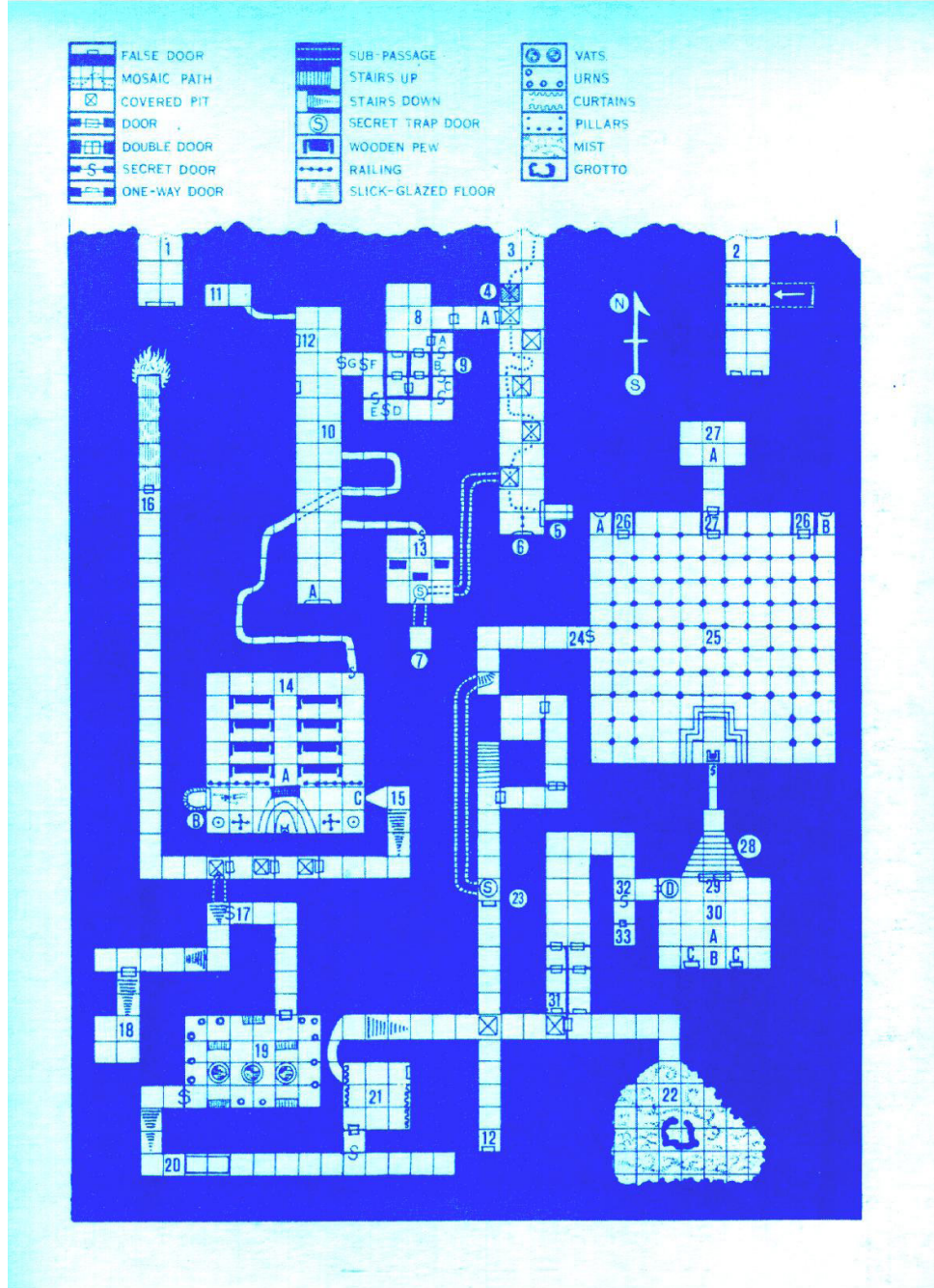
figure. 98
AD&D Dungeon Map the *Tomb of Horrors* (1978)

Dungeon Map Evolution Analysis- Tomb of Horrors

3.5e 2005

In later editions, maps often took on a more illustrated style. This illustrative style, enabled by advances in graphics technology, was seemingly in response to the graphics progress of video games and provide improved legibility of the plans. It employed many illustrated techniques by added texture overlayed on the cut ground, column grids having shadows to imply height, alter pews gaining wood textures, etc. This map style worked to reduce the degree to which the DM must "read" these floor plans. Instead, their illustrated nature enables quick visual understandings of differing spaces, which then are expanded upon room by room by the descriptions rather than entirely explained solely by them.
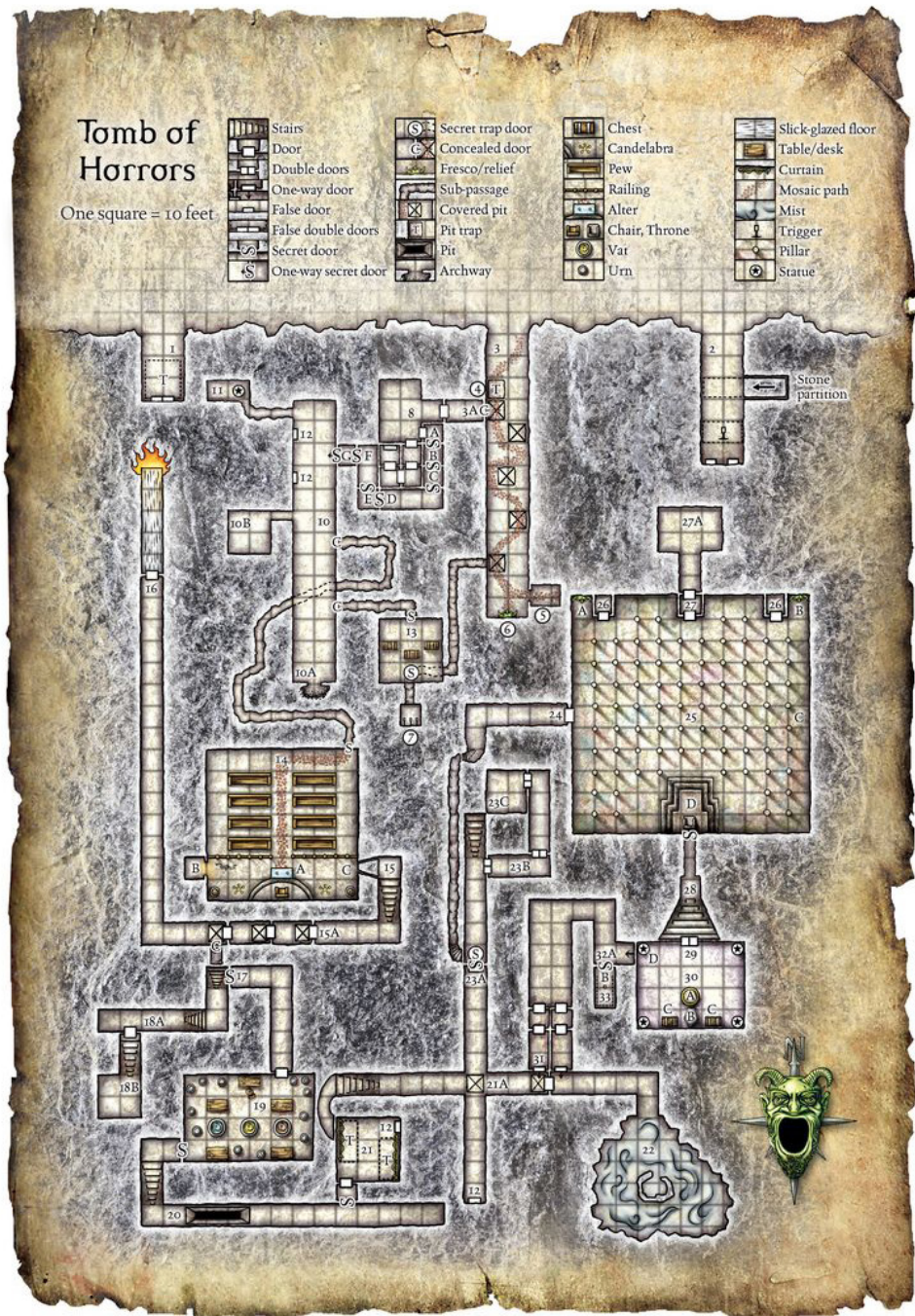
Tomb of Horrors

One square = 10 feet

Legend:
- Stairs
- Door
- Double doors
- One-way door
- False door
- False double doors
- Secret door
- One-way secret door
- Secret trap door
- Concealed door
- Fresco/relief
- Sub-passage
- Covered pit
- Pit trap
- Pit
- Archway
- Chest
- Candelabra
- Pew
- Railing
- Alter
- Chair, Throne
- Vat
- Urn
- Slick-glazed floor
- Table/desk
- Curtain
- Mosaic path
- Mist
- Trigger
- Pillar
- Statue

Stone partition

Dungeon Map Evolution Analysis- Tomb of Horrors

5e 2017

In the most recent edition, the illustration of a map can differ depending on the module's theme and team associated with the project. The 5e Tomb of Horrors map preserves much of the atmosphere of the earlier illustrative version. It is however, presented as a 'cleaned up' version, where textures used are higher quality and more subtle, the colour scheme is more blended and subdued, room markers are placed with intention allowing cleaner legibility of the overall spaces, etc. As well, certain hidden elements do not rely on symbolled legends but are implied differences in illustration such as being white or red in sharp contrast to the rest of the map. Key elements are highly illustrated in clean linework, to the intent that atmosphere is read through the map style primarily, and the spatial descriptions add to the rooms and provides text for the DM to dictate to the players.
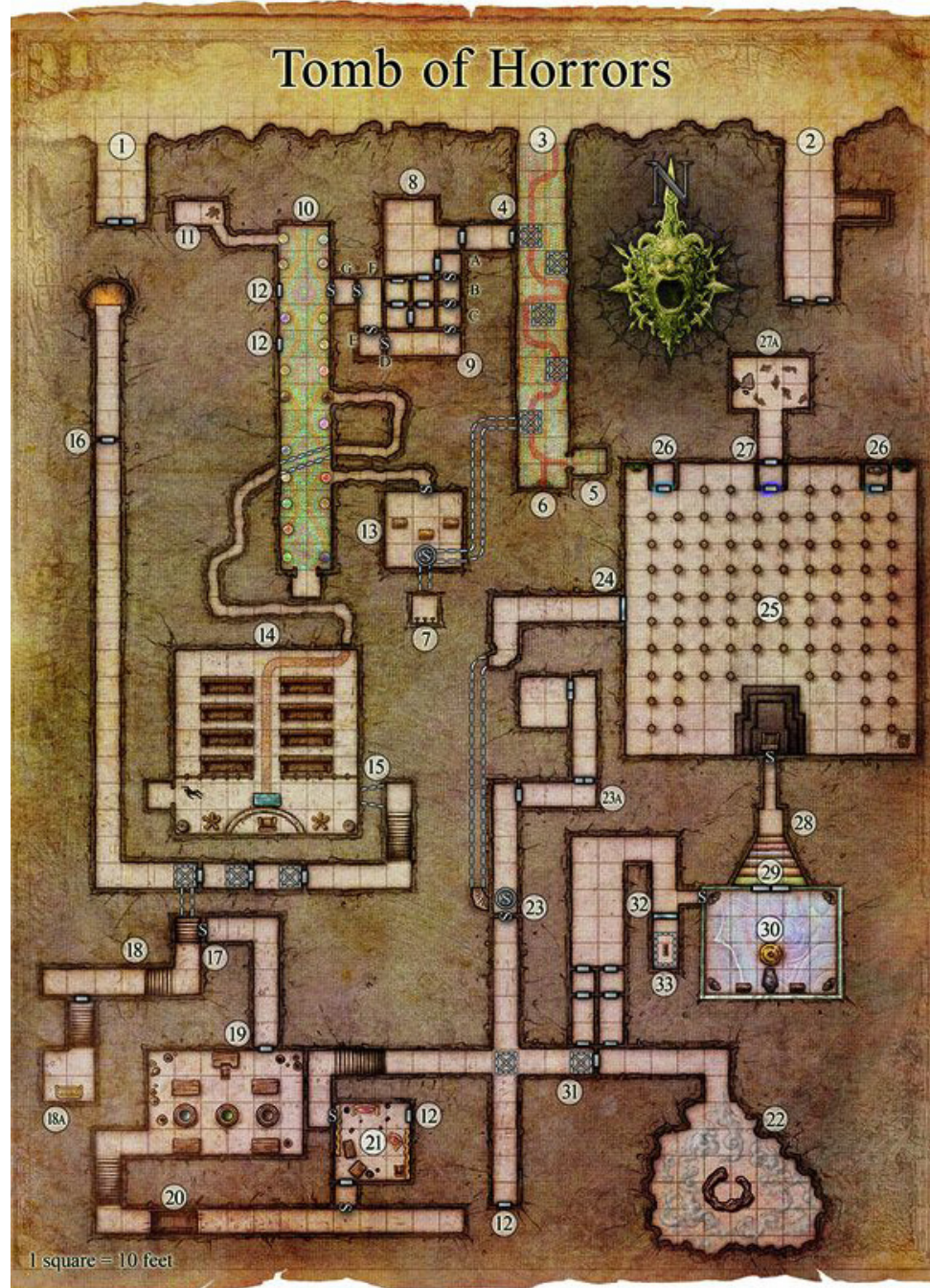
Tomb of Horrors

figure. 100
5e Dungeon Map the *Tomb of Horrors* (2017)

1 square = 10 feet

Illustrations:

As the illustrations of the maps have evolved so too have the supplementary illustrations. As within a D&D adventure, alongside the descriptive text and maps creating immaterial spaces there also exists occasional illustrations. These illustrations may be characters, monsters, or scenes and spaces. While these are not uncommon, nor is it uncommon to hold up the books to the players to display an image for ease of communication, they for the most part, are not referenced by the map or text sections and act as stand-alone aids which are often exclusively for story significant elements.

ACCOMPANYING TEXT

"**The most outstanding feature in this location is actually outstanding! Two jackal-headed human figures are painted so as to appear to be holding a real bronze chest that protrudes from the wall.**"

(Wizards of the Coast 2017)

figure. 101
AD&D Illustration of the Entrance of the Tomb of Horrors
The original images that accompanied the adventure worked well with their use of black and white to add lots of texture and impact to their images.

figure. 102
5e Illustration of the Entrance of the Tomb of Horrors
In 5e images that accompany the adventure are less frequent but highly detailed and rendered in full colour.

Spaces Understood vs Space Drawn

Within a dungeon the occasional visual, the maps and the descriptive text function together as the product of planning and design to put forward tangible immaterial spaces to create an experience that transcends the limits of these tools. The spaces imagined are distinct to their role as they are to each player. While descriptions provided through additional questions to the omniscient DM, detailed texts, images, and maps associated with each numbered room that outline the story embedded in these maps, all coalesce to a singular space it is the players themselves that imagine them. It is for the players to understand these narrative rich spaces and imagined architectures as 'real' and explored within through the proxy of their characters. Mock Man's artist interpretation of Tomb of Horrors presents a version of how one imagines these spaces, the highlighted text, and how it forms the subsequent narratives.
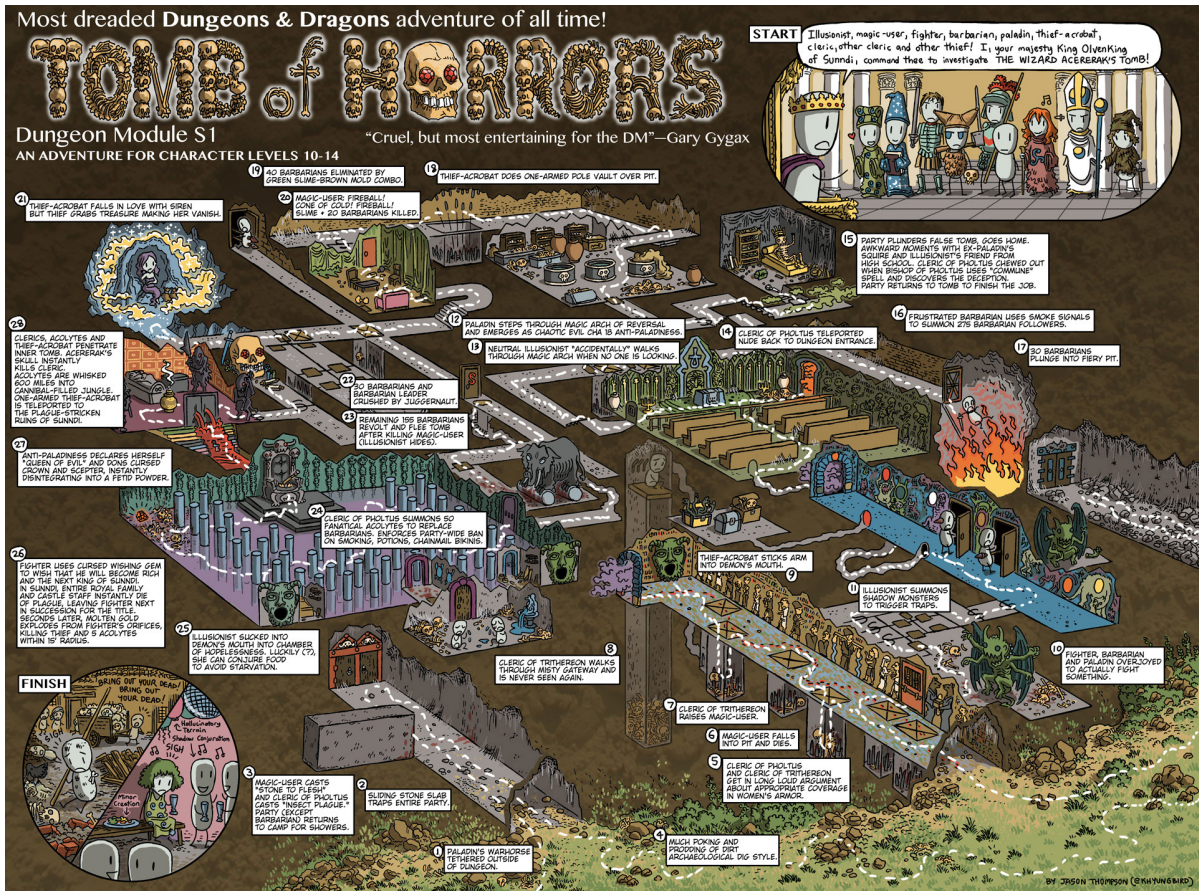
figure. 103
Isometric Tomb of Horrors Walkthrough Illustration
Created by Mock Man Press, the drawing adds notes of the procession of events, while using isometric projection to illustrate and capture all the elements in the dungeons. Displaying the potential of the spaces the dungeon describes.
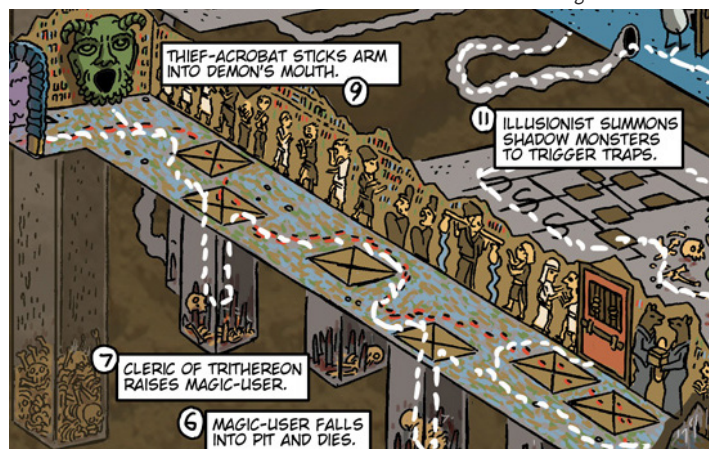
figure. 104
Isometric Tomb of Horrors Walkthrough Illustration Crop
Zoomed in to display the detail in the illustration as well we the section of the map displayed in the text comparison of the great green devil (top left) and the comparative illustration of the Jackals (bottom right).

209

Floorplan Rendering

"Environmental storytelling creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four ways: spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground for narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives." (Jenkins 2004, 123)

Further, the artistic style of the adventure is an element that is utilized to cue immersion into the spaces the maps create. Across many official Wizards of the Coast (WotC) D&D adventures, the medieval fantasy genre is evoked and reinforced the visuals such as within the starter kit Lost Mines of Phendelver (LMoP) adventure. While this fantasy style has become something of a default for the illustration of 5e maps and illustrations at large, it is by far not the only style. The genre of the campaigns and modules often influence visual representations included in official campaigns and modules in that representations of space include cues of atmospheres to be more detailed to the genre. For example, the inclusion of decorative elements being schoolbooks instead of a corpse when detailing a map helps cue the DM what ambiance to communicate to the players. It reinforces any descriptive sections of texts and encourages player immersion into the immaterial space created.

Wizards of the Coast has a history of working with certain artists who specialize in creating maps for their games. The most prominent artist in 5e is Mike Schley, who has become known for his involvement and development of maps for many adventures including Lost Mines of Phendelver, Strixhaven, and Curse of Strahd, has to an extent standardised the fully rendered map style. Schley, alongside the many other artists who have created maps for WotC, not only add aesthetic appeal to the game's visuals, but also add to the immersion and sense of place. These maps serve as a crucial tool for players to navigate and explore the worlds, and the varying styles has become an anchor within the adventures of Dungeons and Dragons.

Unofficial third-party and fan-made maps take this to an entirely new level of customization to evoke genre. This is encouraged by the increasing popularity of playing virtually, where maps can be shared in text chats, or on uploaded to be played directly on in virtual tabletops (VTT) such Roll20, Foundry, and D&D Beyond's VTT. This growing popularity of directly playing on the map, rather than the DM transcribing it to another surface brings the additional ability for players to have direct readings of spaces perhaps not yet mentioned or translated by the DM. They are enabled to notice the any minute details themselves, as they interact with the original authors and illustrators' intent rather than exclusively the DMs.

figure. 105
Cropped Dungeon map from D&D adventure *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)
Part of a classic fantasy setting, for the adventure included with the 5e Starter set.
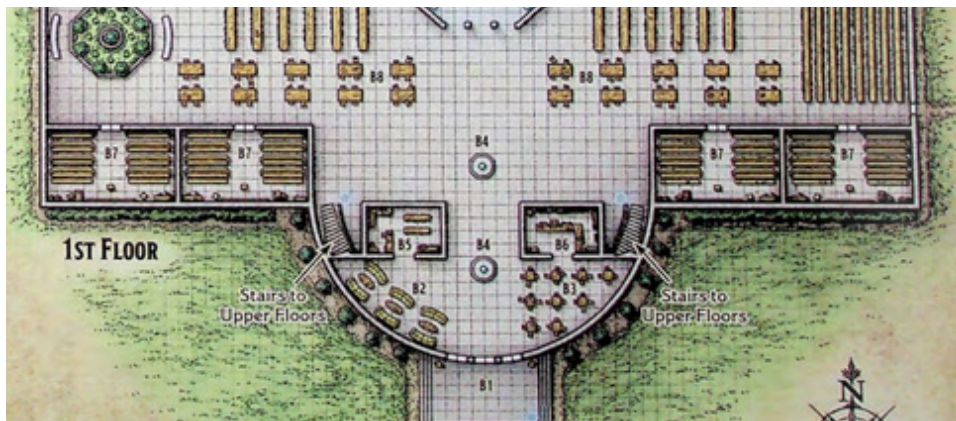
figure. 106
Cropped Dungeon map from D&D adventure *Strixhaven* (2021)
Part of an academic fantasy setting. The setting focuses on instilling a bright and excitable atmosphere layered with secrets.
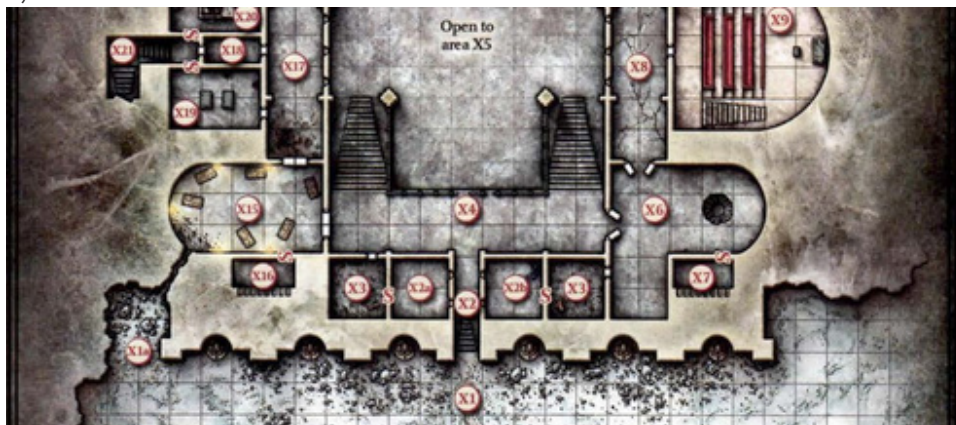
figure. 107
Cropped Dungeon map from D&D adventure *Curse of Strahd* (2016)
Part of a gothic horror setting. Curse of Strahd relies heavily on roleplay and instilling an empty, melancholic and foreboding atmosphere throughout the maps.

figure. 110
Setting map from D&D adventure *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)
The town map portrays a small area but is the central setting reference as the home base for players.
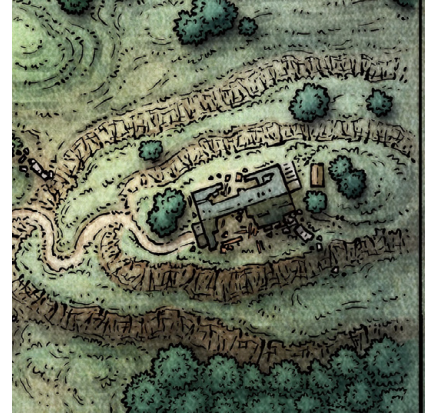
figure. 113
Cropped Setting Map *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)

figure. 108
Setting map from D&D adventure *Strixhaven* (2021)
The Strixhaven campus is far less about calculating distances or travel, but inspiring excitement at the possibilities of the magic school.
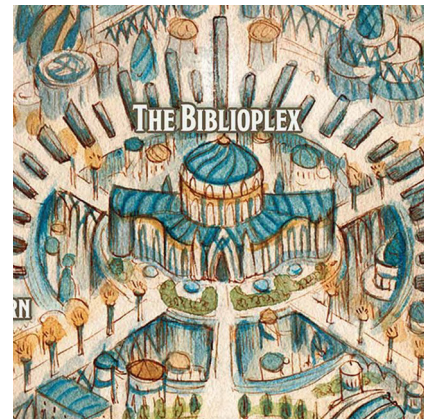
figure. 112
Cropped Setting Map *Strixhaven* (2021)

figure. 109
Setting map from D&D adventure *Curse of Strahd* (2016)
Located in a different plane then where adventurers start, the map of Barovia is set to inspire cautious exploration of an expansive but dangerous plane.

figure. 111
Cropped Setting Map *Curse of Strahd* (2016)

Dungeon Sequence

Melan Diagram

"Performance theorists have described role-playing games (RPGs) as a mode of collaborative storytelling, but the Dungeon Master's activities start designing the space - the dungeon - where the players' quest will take place... centered around enabling players to move through narratively compelling spaces" (Jenkins 2004, 121)

When considering these visual and illustrative elements of D&D maps, the essence in which they translate narrative can sometimes be lost. This translation follows where a narrative and adventure must be transformed into a sense of space, then this space is in turn imagined and detailed into a map, with supplementary text and visuals supporting what the map cannot express. When looking at the final map alone, this original core of narrative can too often be simplified into a dungeon and searching for it's 'end'. However, in these maps there is often a "seeding of interesting and or essential narrative information along the spine with less relevant information forming the side alleys of the narrative architecture." (Schallegger 2018, 187) As well, that often these 'side alleys' can be paths that loop to the same goal, while other times they are simply a path of interest that may lead to reward, challenge, information, or any other interests the DM has to add to a dungeon. In essence they are aiming to create what Jenkins observed as

"narrative compelling spaces", which in an objective manner is hard to distil as it brings up many questions. What spaces in a dungeon are deemed compelling? What spaces are necessary? How many paths can the narrative have? Is there a point these spaces become repetitive?

Ultimately, a lot of the questions build to the chief concern explored in a post to ENWorld titled "Dungeon layout, map flow and old school game design" by user Melan where they ask if "designing a good dungeon also involves creating a good map...What makes a map good or bad?" In the post, Melan presents a method to reduce a dungeon to its narrative paths in an effort to get to the core of a dungeon and be able to visually assess if its map is successful.

What makes a good dungeon according to Melan

Early in their post user Melan concedes there are many more elements that can save a dungeon map that is poorly designed. While they point to combat encounters specifically as an element that can redeem an adventure, I would add a game with a poor map could be saved by a general sense of adventure, by a rewarding roleplay, compelling visuals, or a well-expressed narrative overall. However, as it translates the narrative to a usable spatial experience a good map undeniably contributes to enjoyable play.

> To Melan "Fundamentally, a good map should enhance the factors which make dungeon crawling enthralling: for instance, exploration, player decision making, uncovering hidden areas and secrets, as well as maintaining the pace of action" (Melan 2006)

As a "old school gamer" Melan wrote this post in an effort to demonstrate how newer modules, as they saw them, didn't encourage this. In this spirit they write that

> "these modules miss "something" many classics have, something which is closely linked with avoiding railroading - constructing a map which isn't a straight line, but rather one which has side-tracks, circular routes, opportunities to approach a given location from multiple directions, opportunities to demonstrate one's mapping skills" (Melan 2006)

As a DM and Player, I do not share such a focus on "old-school" vs "new" when it comes to the spatial arrangement of a map, nor do I believe that a linear spatial narrative in a dungeon would be lesser for the simple fact of being linear.

However, in this effort to express his frustration with the analyzed modules Melan developed a unique method through which to analyze D&D's spatial arrangements. It is one that directly expresses maps in terms of their core spatial narratives.

Melan as Spatial Narrative

In their post after stating their view on a good dungeon, and their personal preference for non-linear dungeons, Melan dives into a simple explanation that the diagrams are created in a way that "'distils' a dungeon into a kind of decision tree or flowchart by stripping away 'noise'... the image doesn't create an 'accurate' representation of the dungeon map, and is by no means a 'scientific' depiction, it demonstrates what kind of decisions the players can make while moving through the dungeon." (Melan 2006) They outline 4 base path structures which a dungeon can be made up of:

> A. being a dungeon "without any real branches", B. having some misleads that "looks slightly hairy", C, where it's a "bundle of straight lines (often with sidetracks), sometimes resembling trees", and finally D. where circular routes "are the most complex, especially when these routes interlock and include the third dimension". (Melan 2006)

These path structures visually present as the spatial narrative paths, each with a definitive beginning and a definitive end. These are both purposefully similar and visually similar to story structures similar and their treatment of rising and falling action, and especially reflective of videogames narrative structures, as Melan comments their post visualizes an aspect in video games referred to as 'map flow'.

A. Linear **B. Linear with sidetracks** **C. Branching** **D. Circular routes**
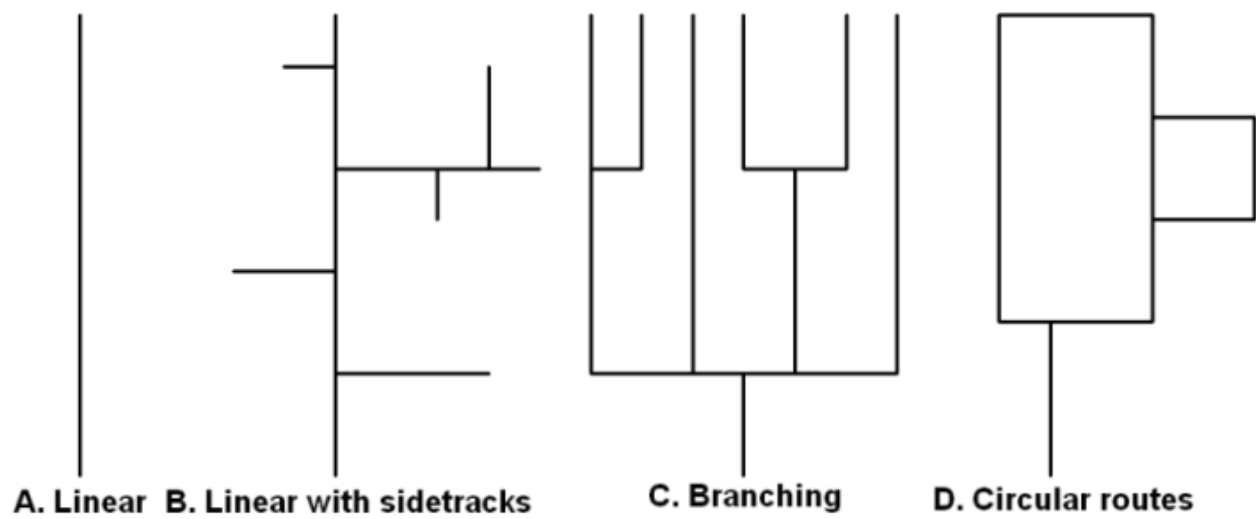
figure. 114
Dungeon Form Types
Outlined by Melan in *Dungeon Mapping* "a dungeon may look like any of the following, or be made up of several such basic elements"

Story Structures

Literature

Extremely familiar to most are the various manners in which to structure of a story. Where story structure "is the organizational framework of a story. Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end." (Masterclass 2021) we often think of the three-act-structure where "the first act, introduce your reader to the world of the novel... The second act is a series of events meant to challenge... The third act is where all that resulting build-up of pressure leads to the big final climax, and the eventual fall-out and resolution." (Masterclass 2021) There are many more forms these structures take, such the well-known Hero's Journey where Joseph Campbell presents a wheel with 12 rough steps which all "begins with a call to adventure" (Masterclass 2021). As well as Freytag's Pyramid, which "19th-century German novelist and playwright, Freytag's Pyramid is a five-point dramatic structure that's based on the classical Greek tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides".

As non-spatial narratives it is logical that these are visually distinct from the paths and flows in D&D and videogames in that they present narratives within stories and novels and as such have the limit of their mediums. They are missing an aspect that transforms narratives into something distinct: interactivity and audience agency.

ACT 1   ACT 2   ACT 3

CLIMAX

MIDPOINT

INCITING
INCIDENT

RISING
ACTION

PRE
CLIMAX

PLOT
POINT 1

PLOT
POINT 2

EXPOSITION

THREE ACT STRUCTURE

CLIMAX

RISE, OR
RISING ACTION

RETURN,
OR FALL

INTRODUCTION

CATASTROPHE

FREYTAG's PYRAMID

A FORMULA FOR TRAGEDY

RETURN WITH
THE ELIXIR

ORDINARY WORLD

12

1

RESURRECTION

11

CALL TO
ADVENTURE

2

ACT 3

THE ROAD
BACK

10

ACT 1

3

REFUSAL OF
THE CALL

REWARD

9

ACT 2

MEETING THE
MENTOR

ORDEAL

8

4

7

5

CROSSING THE
FIRST THRESHOLD

INNERMOST
CAVE

6

TESTS, ALLIES,
ENEMIES

THE HERO's JOURNEY

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER'S TAKE ON THE MONOMYTH

figure. 115
Literary Narrative Types Diagram

Video Games

Chris Stone in his exploration of narrative in video games defines it as having 2 parts, the structure, and the portrayal. Here he describes "...the structure, referring to the progression of the story, the different sections and subsections, and how they are connected and interconnected to form a plot..." (Stone 2019) he then outlines and explores the "three main types of narrative structures that are usually found in [video] games". The three types which Stone outlines as linear, string of pearls, and branching, are displayed visually on the opposite page. Linear being the most intuitive and shared with Melan's description, where a linear narrative progresses in a linear series of events which the players engage directly with from beginning to end. String of Pearls, where while a narrative is presented and followed in a linear path of progression through the story, more freedom is presented and enables player freedom. Branching allows extreme player freedom, enabling character choices to have tangible effects in the game with multiple endings. These naturally differ from the visualizing of D&D's narratives as video games are large pre-defined productions, they do not present paths with the assumptive real-time adaptability of D&D.

BOOKS   MOVIES   GAMES
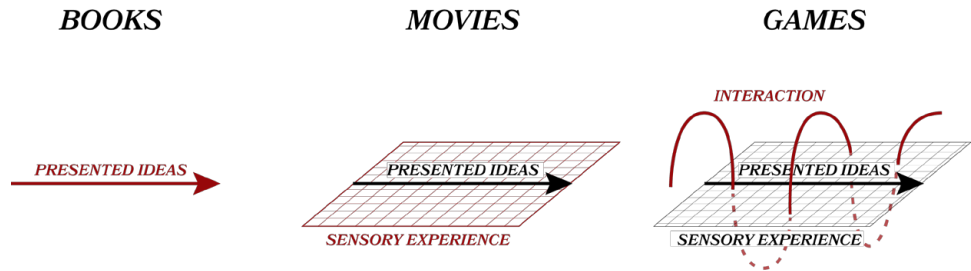
figure. 116
Narrative Interaction Diagrams
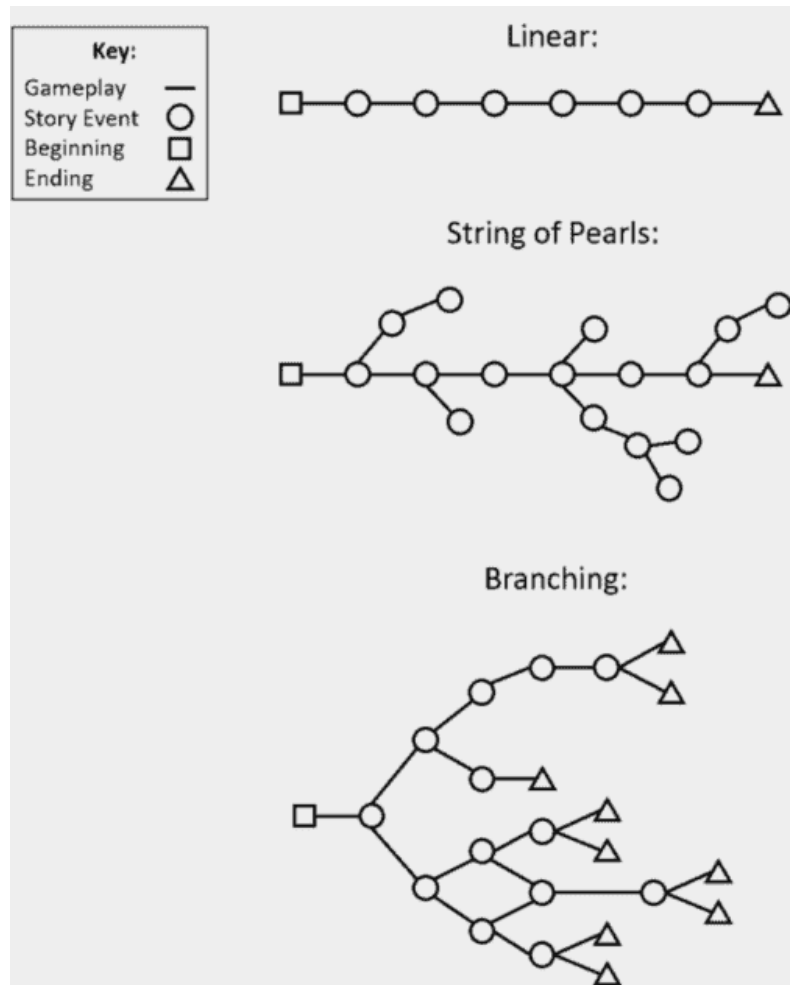
figure. 117
Video Game Narrative Paths

Melan Method

Melan's method itself to analyze dungeons through the spatial narrative paths of Linear, Linear with Sidetracks, Branching and Circular routes is rather simple. As stated in the post, the diagrams work that "...meandering corridors and even smaller room complexes are turned into straight lines ... dashed lines represent secret passages/connections and broken lines represent 'level transitions'." (Melan 2006) As well, they add small notes of annotations indicating important events in a dungeon, grounding the diagrams to the narrative itself.

One of the dungeons explored and distilled by Melan in his effort to showcase how a seemingly complex dungeon is actually a Linear Narrative, was further explored by Justin Alexander on The Alexandrian Blog to walk through and explain the Melan Diagram Method. That Dungeon is the Sunless Citadel, the plot of which is expanded upon on the following spread. This distillation summarizes the spatial narrative of these complex maps. This translation of narrative space is rather abstract in its details as Justin Alexander comments in his article Jaquaying the Dungeon - Addendum: How to Use a Melan Diagram they are "...unfortunately, not immediately intuitive to everyone looking at them..." (Alexander 2021). This this article Justin Alexander breaks down the Melan method into steps, walking through his understanding of the process for the Sunless Citadel by overlaying the spatial simplifications.

ORIGINAL MAPS: SUNLESS CITADEL

ADVENTURE SUMMARY:

In the adventure module, the Sunless Citadel is a fortress buried
underground that houses a cursed Tree spawning evil monsters.
The adventure involves the characters exploring the citadel,
encountering malign creatures such as kobolds and goblins, and
eventually confronting the druid Belak and the cursed Tree.

MELAN'S CRITIQUE:

"Sunless citadel's layout is the perfect example of an almost completely linear dungeon.
This isn't apparent on first sight, because Bruce Cordell introduced a lot of twists to the
corridors so they would look more organic, but in the end, it is still a straight line with the
"choice" of either going through the kobolds or goblins, woo hoo." (Melan 2006)
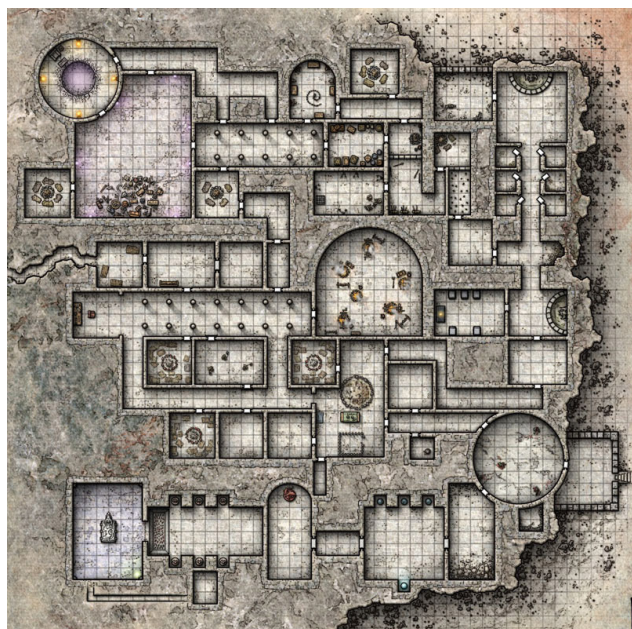
figure. 119
First Level Map of the Sunless Citadel
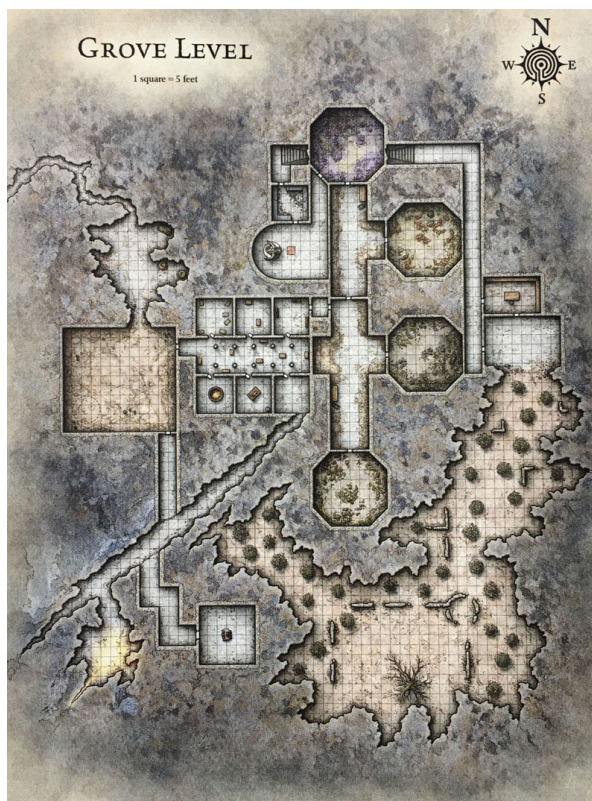
figure. 120
Grove Level Map of the Sunless Citadel

MELAN DIAGRM: SUNLESS CITADEL
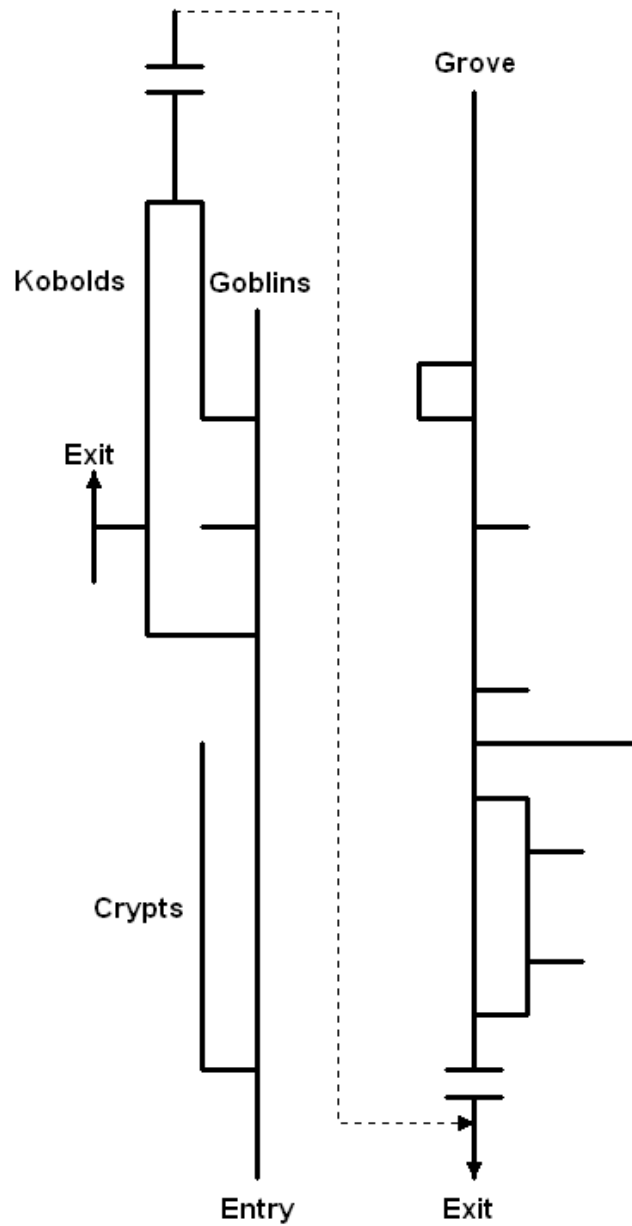
figure. 121
Melan Diagram Map of the Sunless Citadel

227

ORIGINAL MAPS: SUNLESS CITADEL

"...MEANDERING CORRIDORS AND EVEN SMALLER ROOM COMPLEXES ARE TURNED INTO STRAIGHT LINES."
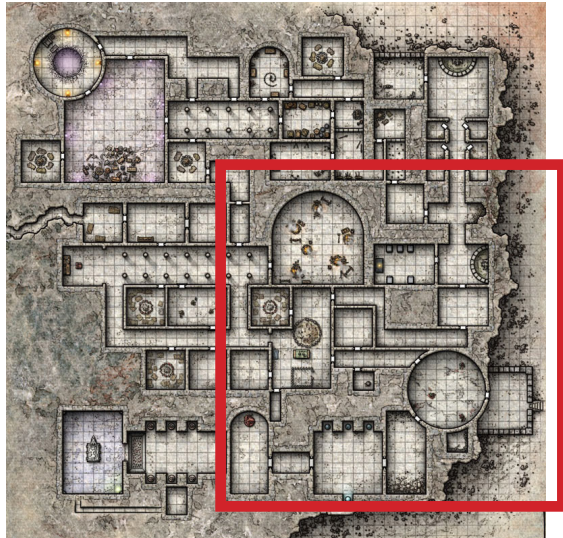
figure. 122
First Level Map of the Sunless Citadel

figure. 123
First Level Map of the Sunless Citadel Melan Diagram Translation Branch

These straighten lines often have branches (highlighted red) for significant side paths.

MELAN DIAGRM: SUNLESS CITADEL

"...The method straightens path, but when it connects later it is simplified to a loop (below)."
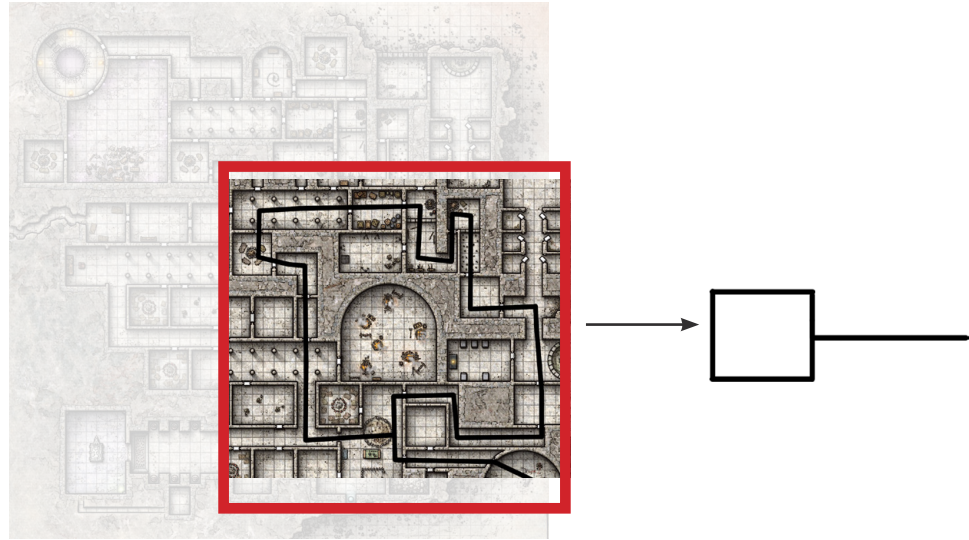
figure. 124
First Level Map of the Sunless Citadel Melan Diagram Translation Loop

This breakdown of Melan's method by Justin Alexanders resulted in the diagram below for his level 1 re-creation, slightly differing from Melan's.
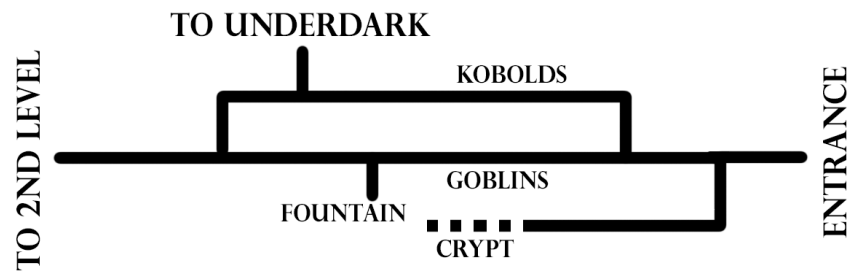
figure. 125
Melan Style Diagram by Justin Alexander - First Level Map of the Sunless Citadel

EXPERIENCE OF MAPPED SPACE

Melan Method In Practice

The Lost Mines of Phendelver

To showcase how to distil any dungeons' spatial narrative with this method, I apply and in steps demonstrate the method with the dungeon the Redbrand Hideout. The Redbrand Hideout, experienced very early on the in the 5e Starter Set adventure The Lost Mines of Phendelver, is a much simpler dungeon created with new players in mind. The dungeon gives many players their first experience of a dungeon-like map in D&D and thus their first tangible experience of their spatial narrative paths.

Description provided of the Hideout:

"The Redbrands' base in Phandalin is a dungeon complex under Tresendar Manor. Before the manor was ruined, its cellars served as safe storage for food and water in the event that the estate was attacked, while an adjoining crypt provided a resting place for the deceased members of the Tresendar family. The Redbrands have since expanded the cellars to suit their own purposes, adding slave pens, workshops, and barracks." (WotC 2014.20)

MELAN DIAGRAM STEP 1

"...MEANDERING CORRIDORS AND EVEN SMALLER ROOM COMPLEXES ARE TURNED INTO STRAIGHT LINES."

As well in the Melan diagramming, spaces significant to plot are highlighted while anything non-essential to a movement path of the dungeon is omitted. The highlighted moments or rooms are represented as text along the relevant path.

Focused area within Map
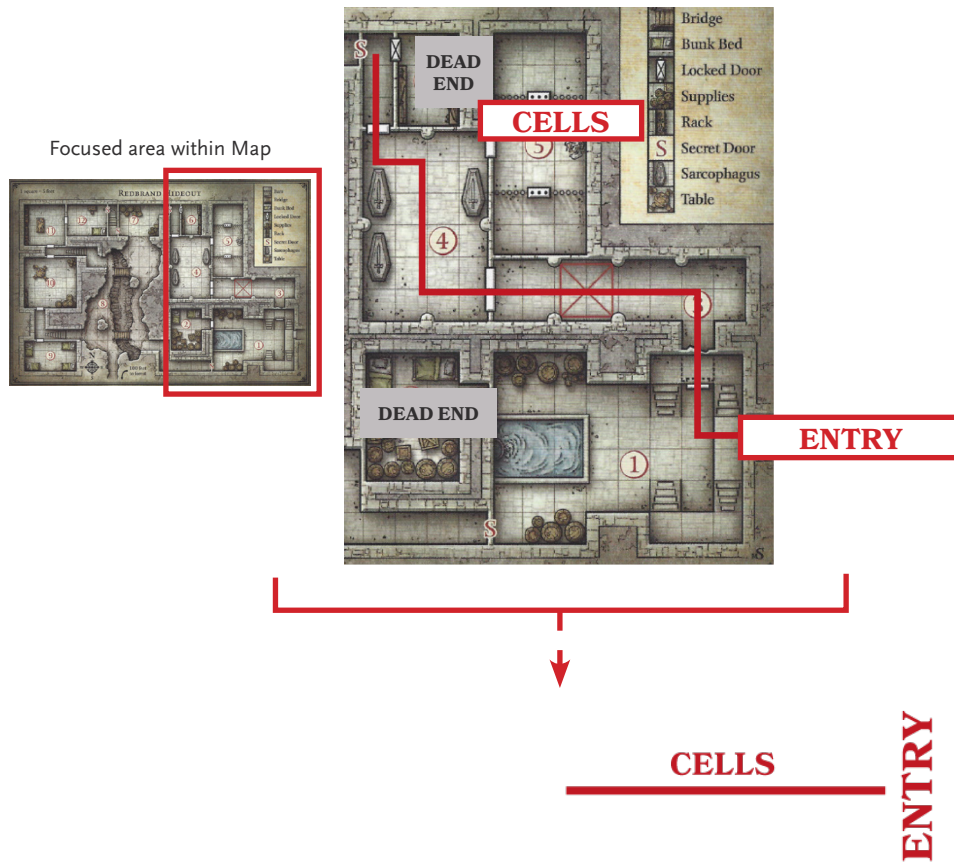
figure. 126
Melan Diagram of Redbrand Hideout- Step 1

MELAN DIAGRAM STEP 2

"...DASHED LINES REPRESENT SECRET PASSAGES/CONNECTIONS..."

Both paths have a hidden connection to progressing in the dungeon.
However, as one has a plot point connected and the other is staggered
out of the way, for the diagram I continue the main path through the
hidden connection.
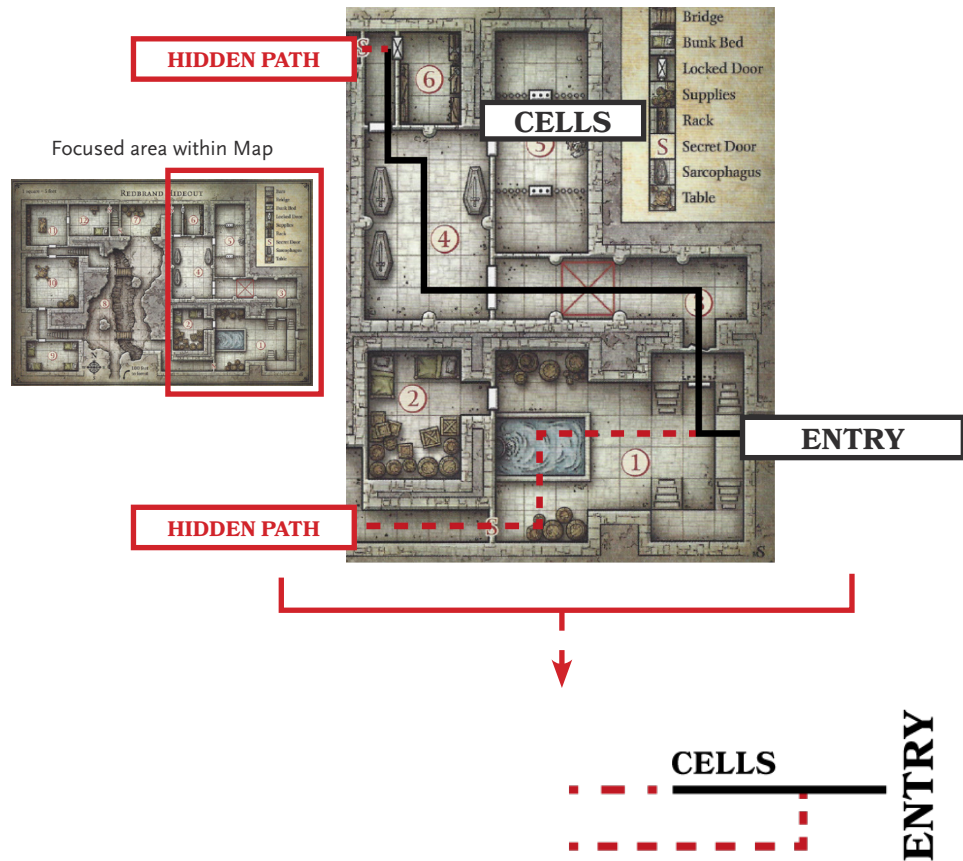
figure. 127
Melan Diagram of Redbrand Hideout - Step 2

MELAN DIAGRAM STEP 3

Continuing paths and making connections where significant.

Focused area within Map
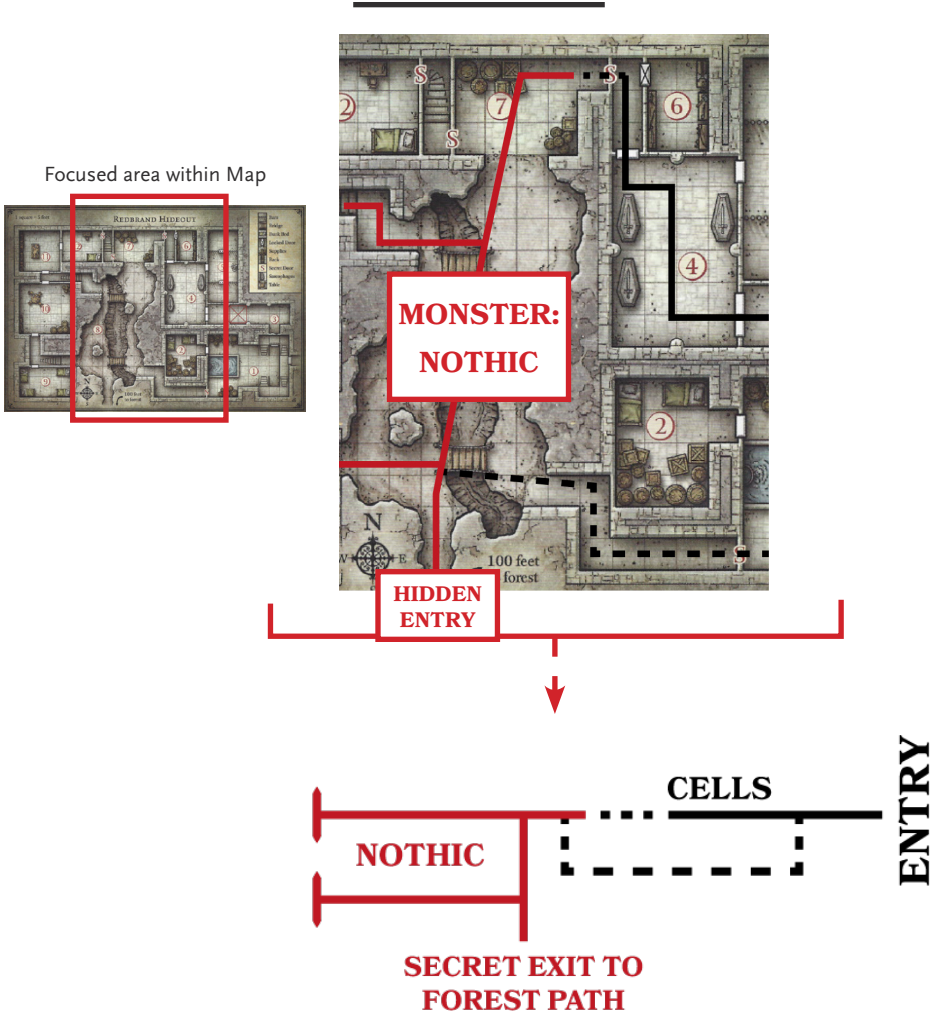
figure. 128
Melan Diagram of Redbrand Hideout - Step 3

MELAN DIAGRAM STEP 4

"...AND BROKEN LINES REPRESENT 'LEVEL TRANSITIONS'."

Focused area within Map
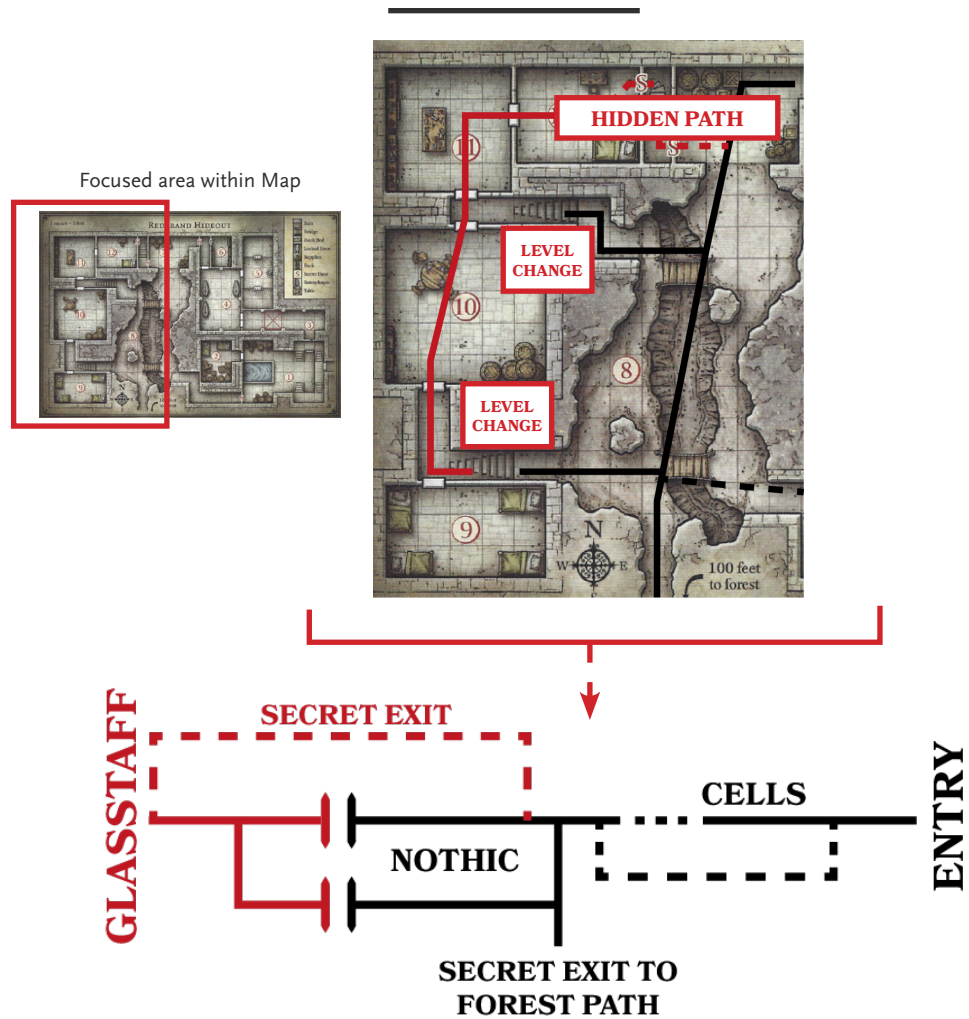
figure. 129
Melan Diagram of Redbrand Hideout - Step 4

The resulting diagram displays the small dungeon is mostly linear, with a few interesting uses of secret doors and linked paths. It is also visible in this that the linear path and small form of the Redbrand Hideout it does not meet Melan's measure of a "good dungeon" which would "allow failure, as in certain areas being missed." (Melan 2006). However, as an introduction to dungeons it functions well and allows players to interact with the narrative space very differently.

SECRET EXIT

GLASSTAFF

NOTHIC

CELLS

ENTRY

SECRET EXIT TO FOREST PATH

1 square = 5 feet

REDBRAND HIDEOUT

Bars
Bridge
Bunk Bed
Locked Door
Supplies
Rack
S   Secret Door
Sarcophagus
Table

N
W · E
S

100 feet
to forest
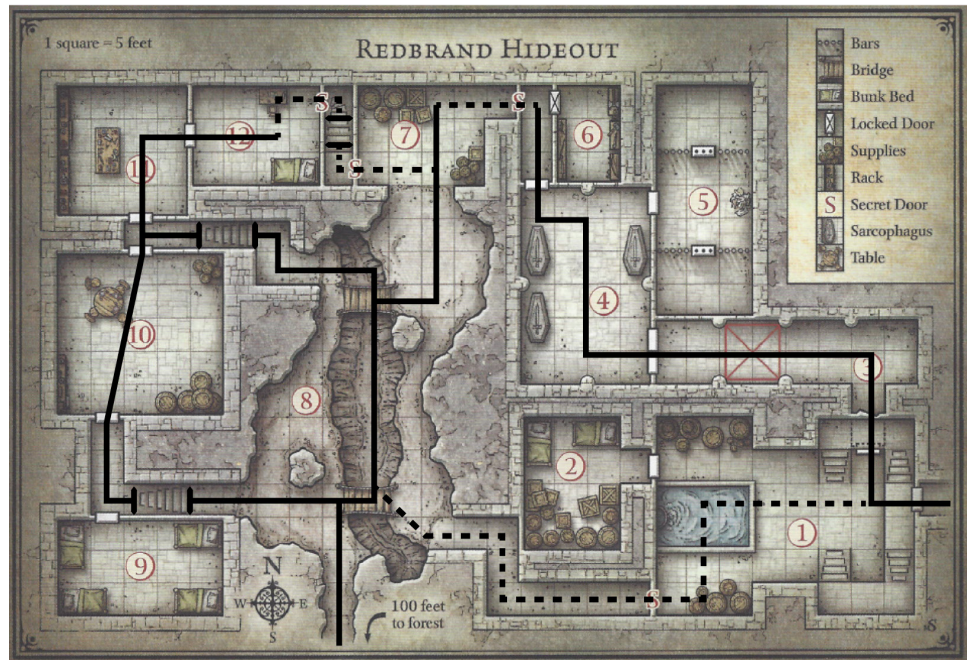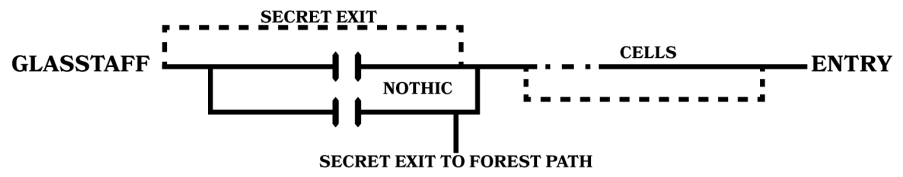
figure. 130
Melan Diagram of Redbrand Hideout Final

Explorations by Different Groups

To further explore how these spatial narratives are explored in game, I've created a visual analysis of how I as a DM ran and observed three different groups explore this game map in 3 different campaigns preceding the writing of the thesis[4]. Naturally with 3 different compositions of players and player characters, the exploration of a dungeon will differ for any number of factors. However, of notable interest is how in these 3 different explorations, all 3 interact with the space of the dungeon quite differently. This exploration further embodies the pattern Essen Aarseth observed in his essay Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation, "In simulations, knowledge and experience is created by the players actions and strategies, rather than re-created by a writer or moviemaker." (Aarseth 2004, 52)

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[4] Prior to even considering this thesis I ran this module as a baseline introduction to D&D on three separate occasions with three different groups. The noted paths taken are arranged in chronological order of when the adventure was played.

Map labels: 1 square = 5 feet · REDBRAND HIDEOUT · Bars · Bridge · Bunk Bed · Locked Door · Supplies · Rack · S Secret Door · Sarcophagus · Table · 100 feet to forest
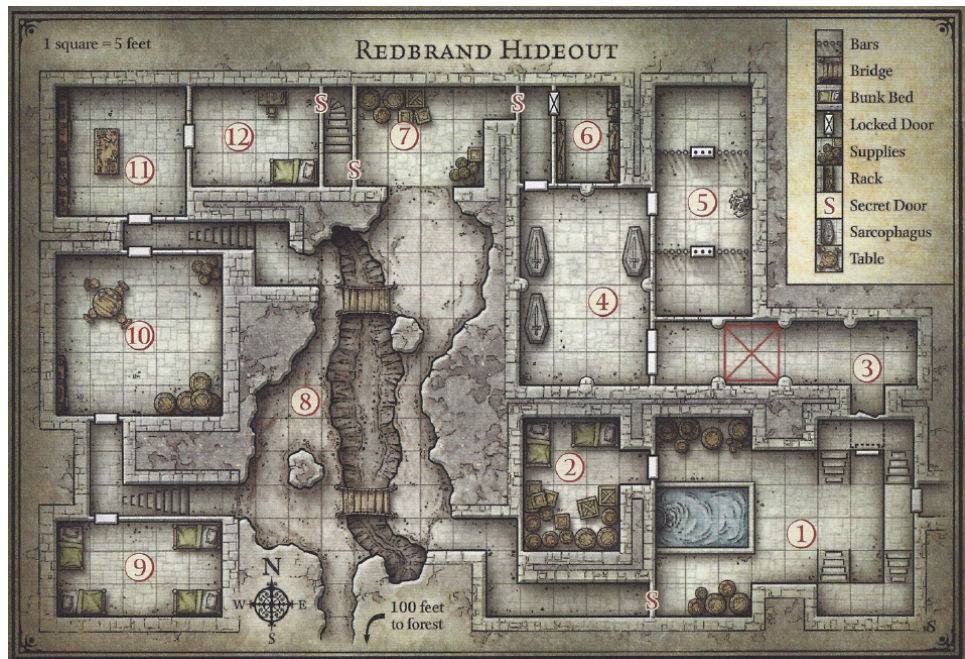
figure. 131
Redbrand Hideout Dungeon Map *Lost Mines of Phendelver* (2014)

Group 1:

This group of 4 players was composed of people who went to film school or worked in the film industry. This campaign was played primarily online.

Despite being the group that explored the most side rooms, concerned with not missing any potential underlying narratives or hints available, this group interacted with the spatial narrative the most linearly of the three. They rescued a captured family, interacted with many of the 'set pieces', but ultimately had a focus of following the "flow of action" of the dungeon. Challenges encouraged them they were on the right path and as such had the most combat encounters of the 3 groups.
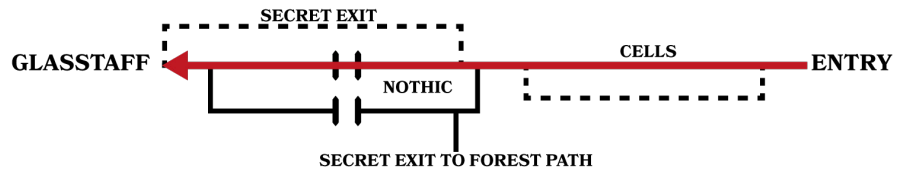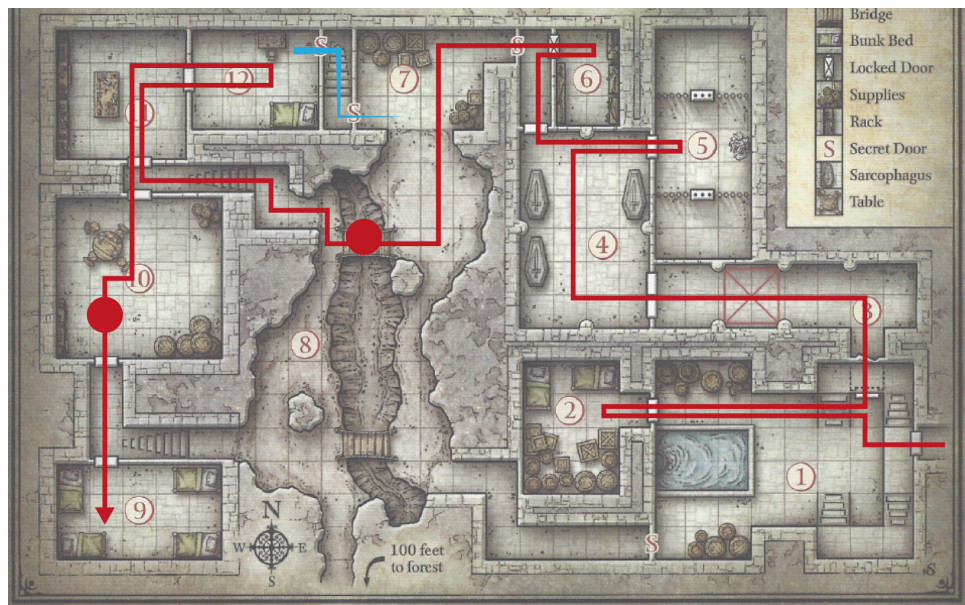
figure. 132
Dungeon Experience Analysis Group 1
The group composed of primarily those with an understanding of film space tended to
want to explore everything but in a direct and action forward manner.

Group 2:

This group of 4 players was composed of people who studied Architecture. This campaign was played entirely in person.

This group is so far the only group I have ran the dungeon for to discover the secret escape. Having focused initially on the main monster- the Nothic, the group was cautious of needless exploration that could tire them out. Looking for clues of how to proceed, one player directly noticed the "oddity" of a flat solid wall in the center of a map with no "purpose". In the flow of the floorplan and map it struck them as odd enough to investigate and thus found the secret staircase which allowed them to bypass much of the dungeon to directly confront the primary enemy.

Bridge
Bunk Bed
Locked Door
Supplies
Rack
S Secret Door
Sarcophagus
Table

SECRET EXIT

GLASSTAFF

CELLS

ENTRY

NOTHIC

SECRET EXIT TO FOREST PATH
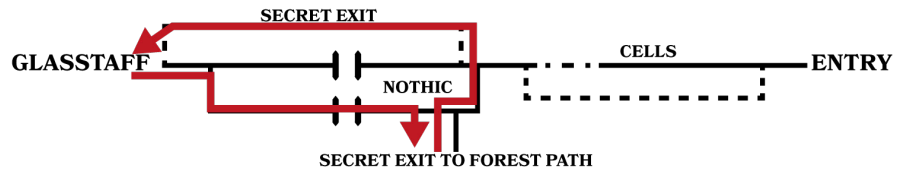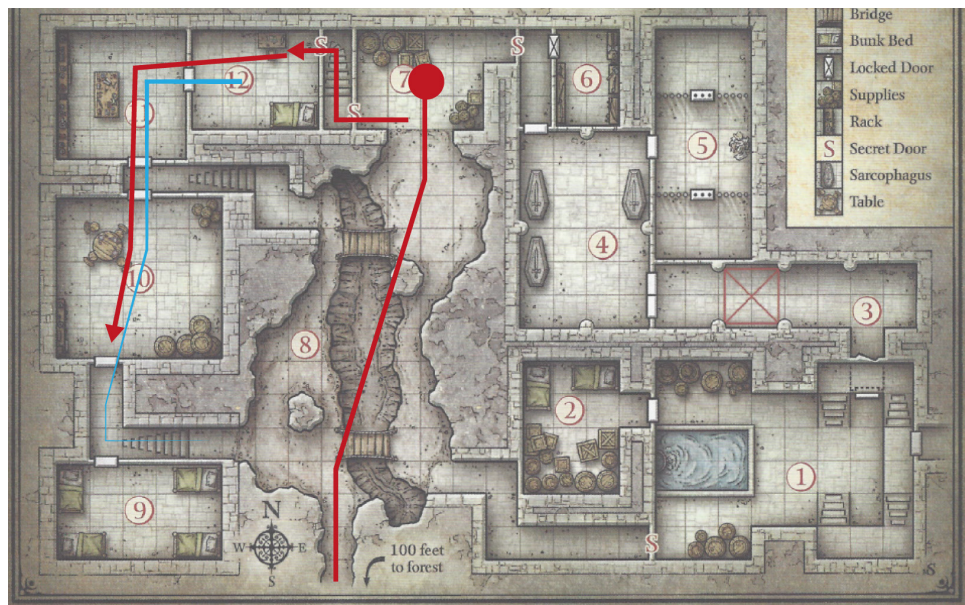
figure. 133
Dungeon Experience Analysis Group 2
The group composed of primarily those with an understanding of architectural space were
more open to exploring the dungeon slowly, and seeing where different rooms potentials might
guide them.

Group 3:

This group of 4 players was composed of people who connected online through an appreciation of art. This campaign was played entirely online, across 5 different time zones, with 1 player's interactions entirely typed in chat due to accessibility.

This group worked cohesively together where decisions were extremely collective and democratic. In the spatial narrative while they also follow the narrative rather linearly, they uniquely look to their surrounds as alternatives to combat. Utilizing a pit trap, they fell into previously, they repurposed it to push the guards into which they later similarly utilized the Crevasse. This simple pit trap further cues them not to circle back to room 1 looking how to progress. In that moment the inconvenience of clearing a 10ft jump, spatially cueing there must be a different way forward.
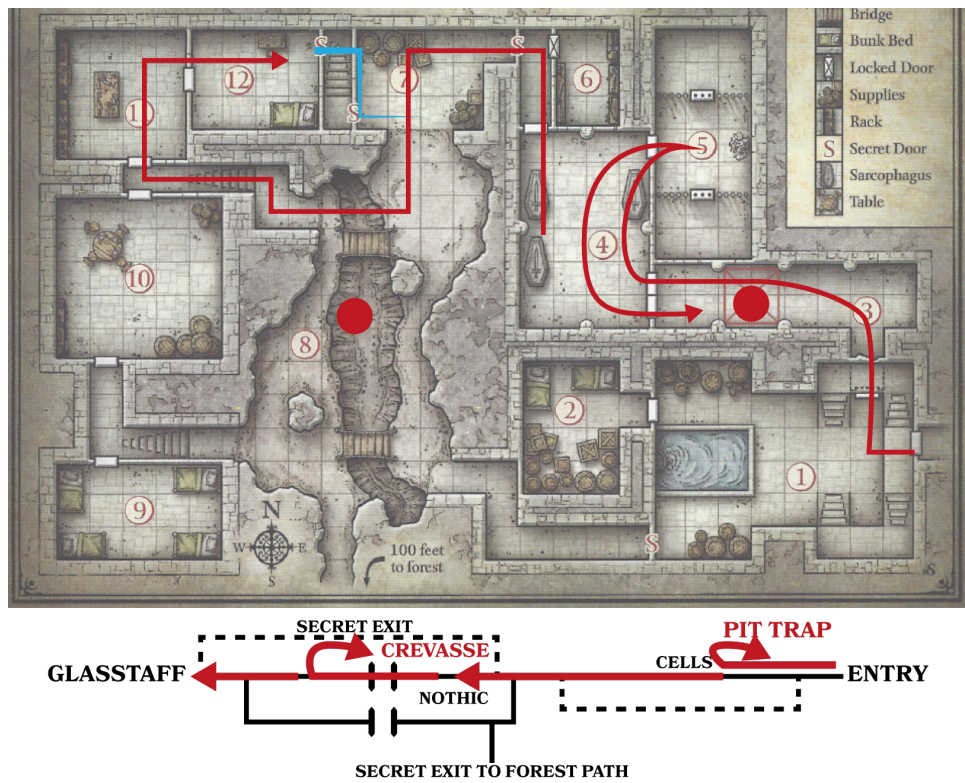
figure. 134
Dungeon Experience Analysis Group 3
The group met and played online working extremely collaboratively, and were most excited when they
interacted socially in game, and re-used aspects of the dungeon that targeted them previously.

Observation

In outlining the different groups of players and differing experiences, it is intriguing how each enables unique reading and expectations of space. The group primarily composed of people working in film, followed the flow of interest. Encountering a plot which was spatialized, and interactive, they explored each side room not wanting to miss a moment intended for them to explore. The Architecture students could see the map like a floorplan and intuitively understand and read it. When they encountered a dead end without narrative purpose, they interpreted there must have a spatial purpose and found a path intended only for the enemy to escape through. The third group of online artists enjoyed how to repurpose elements on the map. Sharing the spotlight enabled different 'forks' in the path to be followed or ignored by virtue of if someone had or hadn't had a 'star moment' in recent memory. When considering tabletop roleplaying games spatial narratives, it is important to remember that a groups experience of the space is ultimately a direct outcome in how they navigate the game map. How their understanding and use of space shapes their experience, and whether a focus on narrative or space, the balance of the two presents a new way to engage. In general, the group of architecture students were pre-disposed to see organizing principles of space, knowing already how to read a floor plan. While the group of artists experienced the maps as the narrative space, were learning the space as they made immediate use of the three-dimensional space that harmed them, the trap. In that spirit that when encountering another space with height differences they knew opportunities existed within it and were intrigued to explore them.

Player vs DM Experience of Space

Of note following these analyses of dungeon experiences is the experience of the generated spatial narratives being deeply distinctly different between Player and DM. The player experiences the space in a film-like manner where each room and scene are described and revealed to them sequentially. They explore the map, and move though a sense of discovery and progress, much like how a viewer is taken on a journey through a film, their experience will always be selectively framed. The Dungeon Master on the other hand, is the one in control of what is revealed. They have a bird's eye view of the entire map, they observe the paths taken, knows which were not and may be revisited, determine if what beyond the immediate space occupied by the players shift as result of actions. When given material through the adventure, it is the DM to interpret it. And in areas less defined, they add and adapt in the spirit of understand what they wish to gain from it. In essence while players experience the spaces sequentially, as the actors of the space. The DMs observe, react, and create the spaces.

POTENTIAL NEXT PLOT POINT

SEARCH FOR BOOKS - GHOSTS OF THE LIBRARY- THE MIRROR

Books

"...There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say."

Table 1 Finding Messages in Books

d20	Contents
1-19	No discernible message is present in the pages.
20	A message seems to appear to you, roll on the following table.

Table 2 Language of the Message

d6	Language		
1	Dwarvish	4	Goblin
2	Giant	5	Orc
3	Gnomish	6	Primordial

Table 3 the Message

d4	Contents
1	Oh time thy pyramids
2	The Library is a sphere, its center - any hexagon
3	Life itself is a quotation
4	Command "**Ileuthra**" when assailed upon, and call for aid from the Man of the Book.

GHOSTS OF THE LIBRARY

In any gallery other then the first there is a high chance of a ghost being present.

d100	Contents
1-70	A ghost is present.
71-100	The gallery is ghost free

If the result is an even number they are an Inquisitor, if it is odd they are a purifier.

THE MIRROR

When players show interest in the mirror they notice the faint shadows of creatures in its reflection. A DC10 Arcana Check reveals the mirror to be magical, specially the mirror of Life Trapping (See "Magic Items" at the end of adventure). Note this is but one in a network of mirrors. As such destroying one mirror does not release the occupants. While within 5 feet of the mirror, if the players speak the name of one creature trapped in it or call out a particular cell by number, such as "the Author".
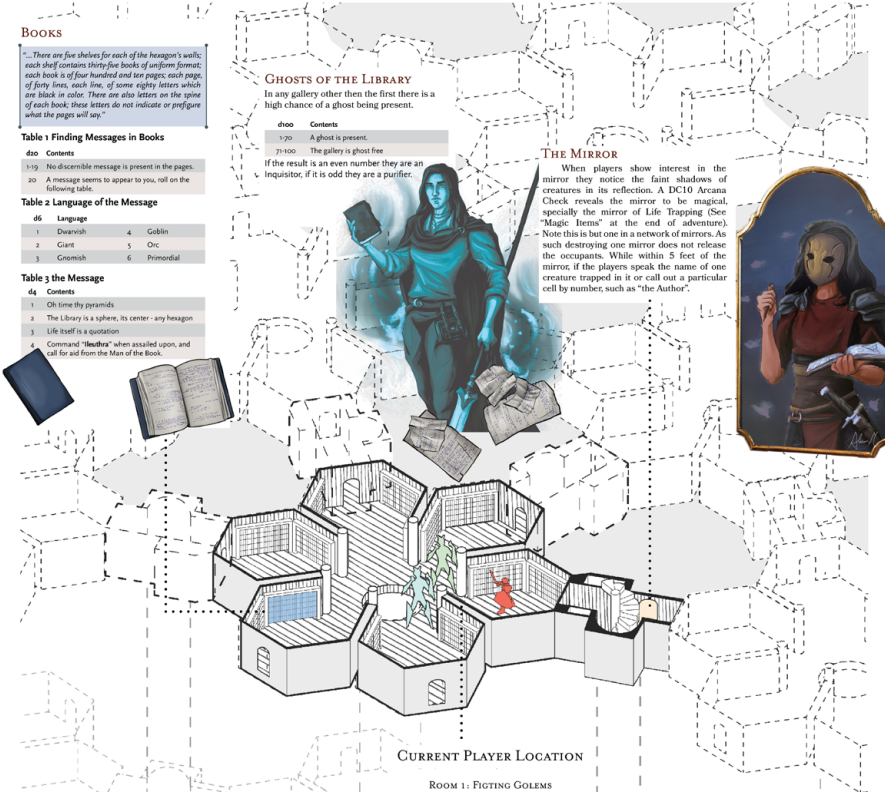
CURRENT PLAYER LOCATION

ROOM 1: FIGTING GOLEMS

TURN TRACKER:
1. GOLEM 1 (28HP)
2. PLAYER 3
3. PLAYER 1
4. GOLEM 2 (28HP)
5. PLAYER 4

PAPER GOLEM
Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit points 28 (6d8)
Speed 30 ft.
Initiative +0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	6 (-4)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws INT -1, WIS +2
Damage Vulnerabilities Fire
Damage Immunities Poison, Psychic
Condition Immunities Blinded, Charmed, Deafened, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned
Senses Blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), Passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 2 (450 XP)   **Proficiency Bonus** +2

False Appearance. If the Golem is dispersed as a stack of papers and motionless at the start of combat, it has advantage on its initiative roll. Moreover, if a creature hasn't observed the Golem move or act, that creature must succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern that the Golem is animate.

Immutable Form. The Golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Regeneration. The Golem regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the Golem takes fire, slashing or force damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Golems next turn. The Golem is destroyed only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Unusual Nature. The Golem doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. The Golem makes two Paper Cut attacks.

Paper Cut. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Pages Form (Recharge 5-6). The Golem briefly unfolds into a undefined cloud of pages, teleporting up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

THE LIBRARY

PLAYER MAP
Slowly Revealed

MAGE JOURNAL

DM MAP
Full scope with added detail to be communicated

figure. 135
Game Experience Research Drawing - Dungeon Master

Player One

Acevedo

Gave mission.
Friend turned evil
not always evil.
Staff??? Turning
them bad?
Library of Babel
Contact the Author?

Player Two

Can my Rogue help figure out the area?
Sneak around??? Climb Bookshelves?

The Rogue Table

Player Three

NOTES:

Open Floors: While the height to the next circuits floor is never less then 7', there are no ceilings in the library other then in the closets.

Openings: Each central hexagon is bisected by a opening, with 5' of movement around it.

Light: Each hexagon has two fixed spheres, transversely placed, with the light spell cast on it.

Bookcase: Each bookshelf has five shelves. With each shelf containing thirty-five books of identical size and thickness.

Paper Golems: 20< HP > 35. Weak to fire, Immune to poison. Regens HP except for fire and slashing *(Scissors beats paper??)*

The DM

Dice

Character Sheet

Adventure Handout
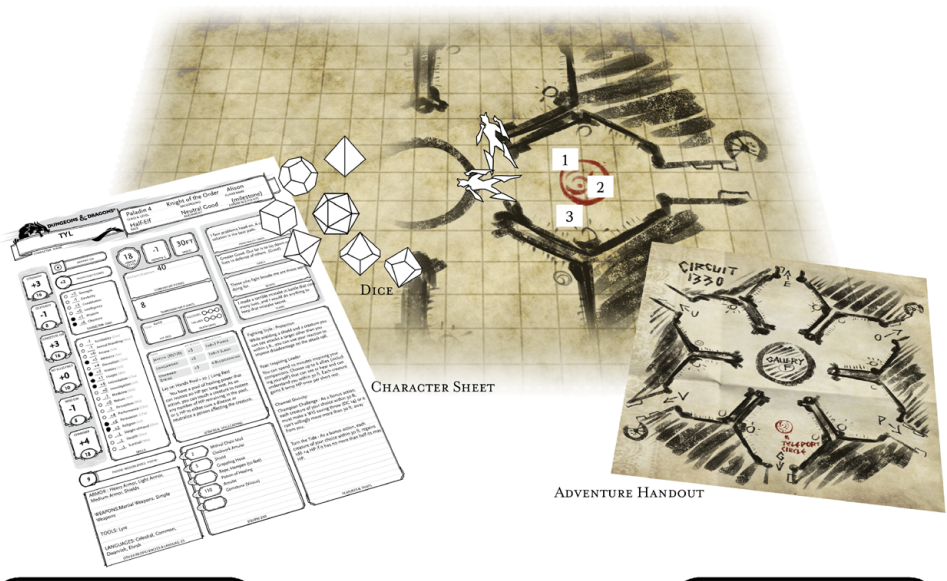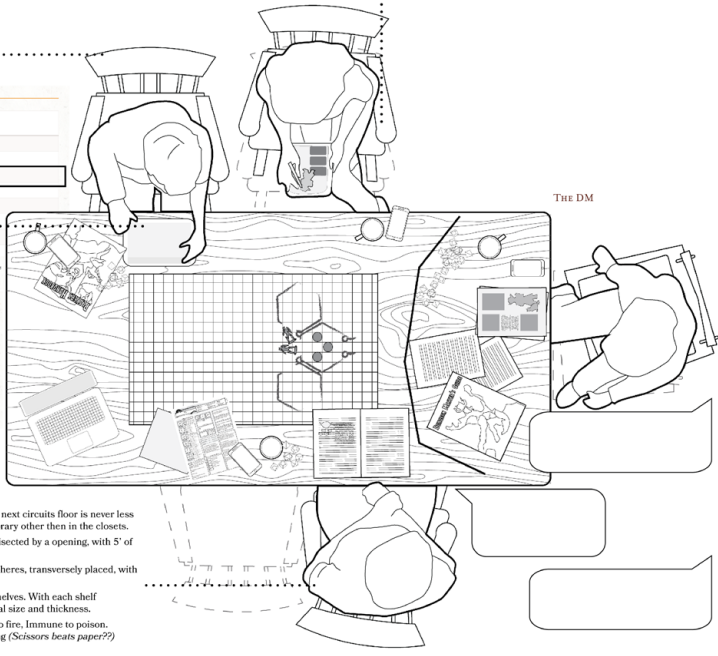
figure. 136
Game Experience Research Drawing - Player

LIBRARY OF BABEL: THE ADVENTURE

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The Library of Babel

Why the Library of Babel

Before beginning the design exercise of the D&D adventure there is a critical consideration to weigh; demonstrating to the uninitiated what a D&D adventure looks like, and to showcase to the experienced the use of the D&D spatial tools 'in action'. Some questions to consider include, what story am I telling in this one-shot? Is it an adventure of my own writing or is it a narrative I adapt? Further, if it is an established narrative, what narrative?

There are pros and cons for both options. Firstly, if I construct a narrative of my own writing, it enables me the freedom to design and the ability to explore the virtues of spatial exploration and expression described throughout this thesis. Writing a unique store opens many opportunities however with itself determined variables, it misses the opportunity for a comparative exercise. The juxtaposition of original text with the Dungeon Master's interpretation, demonstrates how the game of D&D affords players a unique experience to engage with immaterial spaces in intimate ways. Thus, I selected a pre-established, and architecture-based narrative, for the final direction.

Following these considerations, was the selection of the narrative and Jorge Luis

Borges' short stories emerged as the first choice. In his collection of short stories titled "Fictions," the narratives take place in fantastic, fictitious architectures. These settings presented a unique opportunity to explore narrative styles in relation to imagined spaces. Others interested in these writings include Professor of architecture Sophia Psarra at Bartlett School of Architecture, who studied the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, dedicating a full chapter of her book Architecture and Narrative, to the Library of Babel. In it, she specifically outlines and notes its architecture-like narrative. It is clear how the fictions of Jorge Luis Borges are unique for many architects. The evocative and intriguing stories express highly architectural spaces and provoke complex relationships between the spaces and stories presented.

Other Explorations of the Library

Mentioned previously, Sophia Psarra analyses the fictions of Jorge Luis Borges in *Architecture and Narrative*, specifically noting how narratives in literature may present with similar structures to architecture. She outlines this in her early studies by stating,

> "The reason for analyzing works of literature is because, similar to the sequential motion of perception through language, buildings are experienced gradually through movement. Borges used architectural models as symbols of knowledge and of the mind...he also employed conceptual strategies, such as fictions contained within fictions, reflections, symmetries, doublings and bifurcations in space and time. These strategies resemble the conceptual mechanisms used to organize spatial relations in architecture. Together with the sequential unfolding of his text, they serve as a basis for exploring whether the architectural construction of experience can be informed by the construction of experience in a literary work." (Psarra 2009, 5)

Further outlining how the use of language mirrors space she prefaces explorations as a look to

> "...how architecture and literature order experience. The former organizes a set of abstract relations and visual fields that we explore through movement. In the latter space is represented rather than being physical. However, similar to architecture where

conceptual codes articulate spatial relations, conceptual relations in the text gives the discourse an abstract spatial dimension..." (Psarra 2009, 5)

Notably many other architects and artists celebrate the merits of studying the Library of Babel and have visualized the library. One such artist includes Erik Desmazières in his series of engravings titled *La Bibliothèque de Babel*. These etchings are extremely popular for their evocative and volumetric construction of the space, so popular in fact in the edition published in 2000 by David R Godine Pub, was accompanied by these etchings. There are many others such visualizations, such as architects Rice and Lipka *Fairy Tale Architecture: The Library of Babel*, and illustrator Andrew DeGraff's drawings that appear in 'Plotted: A Literary Atlas'. However, visualizations have not remained illustrative. libraryofbabel.info is a website which explores the library conceptually by generating a seeming infinite set of books which would appear in the library. Jamie Zawinski who outlines the spaces in the 3D software SketchUp with extensive consultation on forum posts. Notably, each of the exercises visualize the arrangements so uniquely that almost none agree completely with one-another in how the rooms within the library, are arranged. Rather, similarities lay in the individual elements that are included and in how each visualization presents an ambition to showcase the expansive network of spaces.
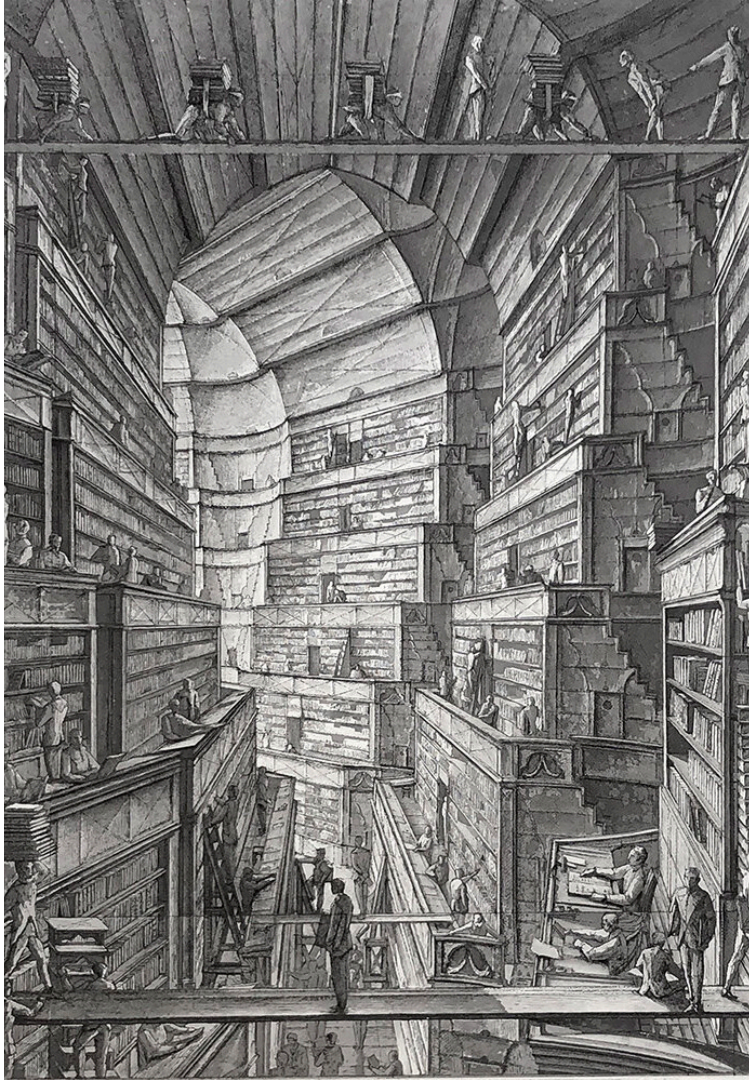
figure. 137
La Bibliothèque de Babel Etching

figure. 138
La Bibliothèque de Babel Etching

What is the Library of Babel

The story that inspired these visualizations, the Library of Babel, endures as one of Jorge Luis Borges[1] most well known and popular short stories. Originally published in Spanish in 1941, The Library of Babel is the story of a single character's catalogue of the library where they have lived their entire life. The story is told by an unnamed author who describes their universe, also known as the Library. This author now as an old man, chronicle many of truths and tales of the library, moments within its history, and outlines its architectural form. In the authors' description, the Library of Babel immediately presents as a highly architectural narrative with its firsts lines as follows:

> The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors. The distribution of the galleries is invariable. Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase. One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery, identical to the first and to all the rest.   The Library of Babel by Jorge Luis Borges 1941. Translation by James E. Irby

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1   Whose full name is Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges Acevedo

Throughout the short story the author describes the Library of Babel's spatial arrangements and architectural elements, giving attention to each element and architectural feature within. For example, a mirror exists in the connecting halls and Borges writes of occupants questioning their existential beliefs when faced with its simple existence, "Men usually infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite (if it were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite..." (Borges 1941)

In the story spatial organisation serves as a tangible manifestation for philosophical contractions. Subjects discussed include the paradox of infinite and eternal, and the existence of truth or meaning. In addition, characters confront the existence of a God-like figure, termed a Man of the Books. These listed are a few such philosophical questions present in the original story and are expressed through a guided tour of the Library whereby readers explore unique manifestations, events, characters and elements.

Outlining the Library of Babel

The Library of Babel exists as a matrix of interconnected hexagonal rooms filled with books.

Infinitely repeating galleries disappearing to the horizon. It is important to recognize previous artistic efforts to visualize the library, however when translating these ideas into a D&D adventure, this thesis focuses on the descriptions from the original text. In the Library of Babel, it is stated that in a hexagon 4 of 6 sides have shelves filled with books while one of the free sides of the hexagon leads to the hallway, notably leaving one of the 6 sides undefined. This mystery 6th side brings added interest when one notices the distinction between the use of words gallery and hexagon. These terms are used in conjunction in the term "hexagonal gallery" in the stories first line. As a result, I outline an arrangement of a gallery resembling a flower, composed of a central hexagon, through which the airshaft passes, and connected on each side to other hexagons which hold the books, altogether forming a gallery.
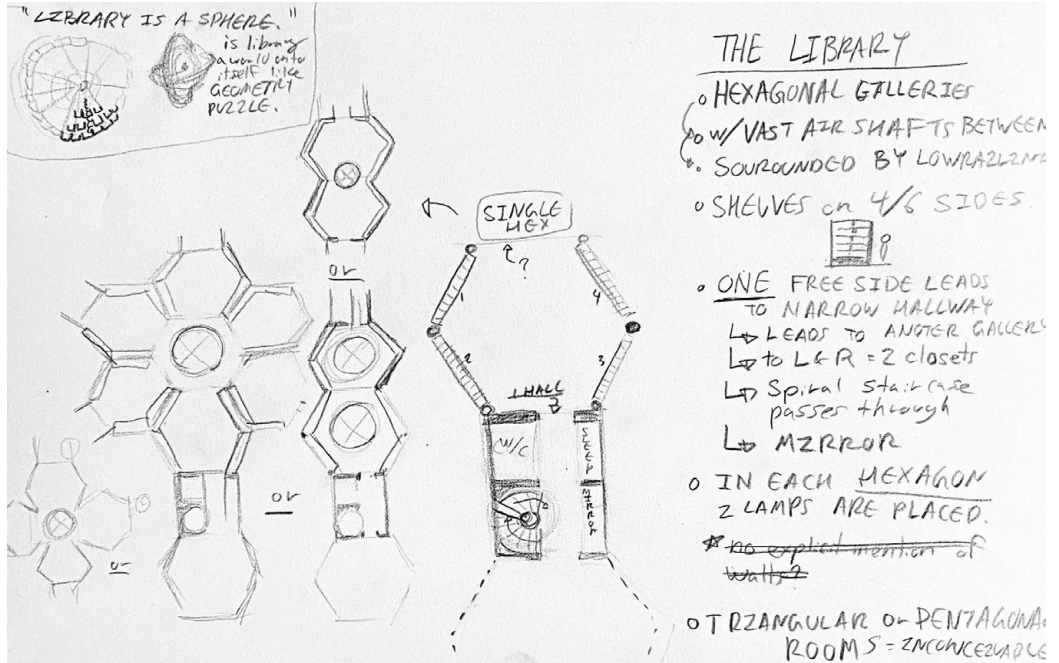
figure. 139
Library of Babel Arrangement Sketch
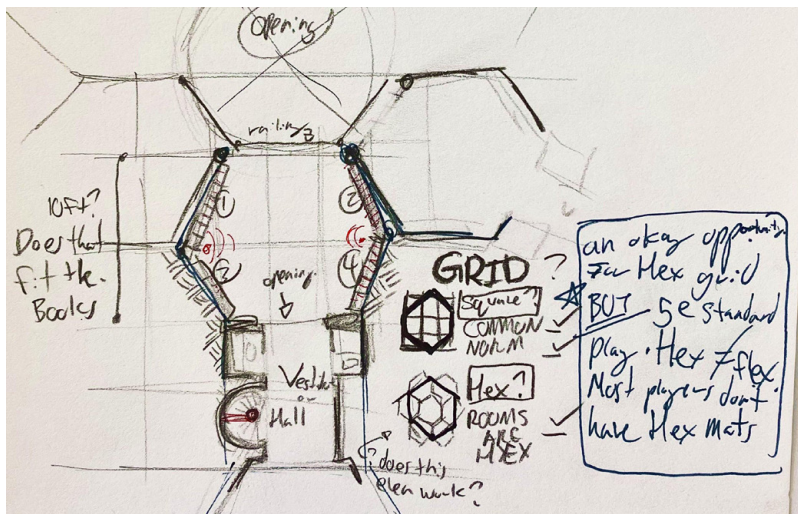
figure. 140
Library of Babel Grid Sketch
In the process of arranging a library where the galleries are composed of hexagonal
rooms, the use of the Hex Grid was strongly considered. Ultimately, I decided to move
forward using the standard square grid for ease of use and to follow 5e conventions.

265
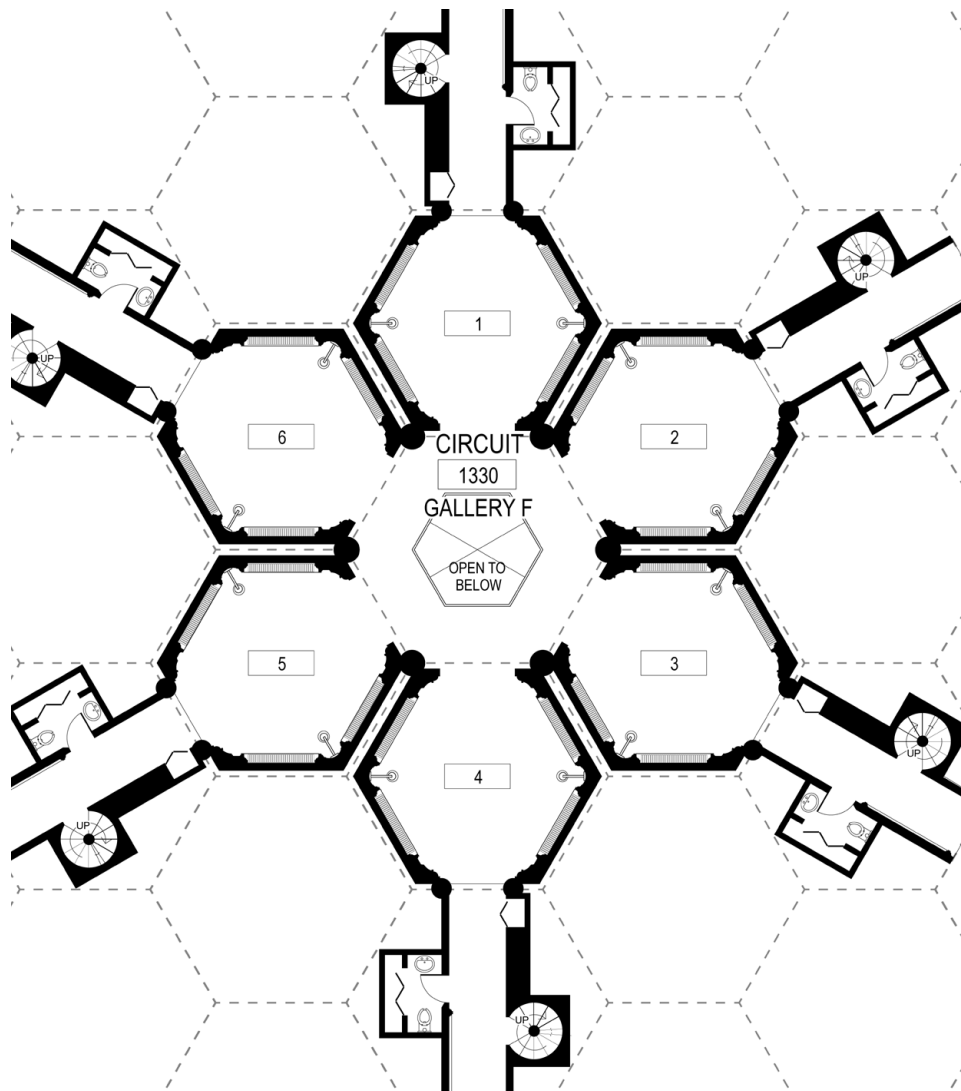
figure. 141
Library of Babel Drafted Architecture -D&D Map
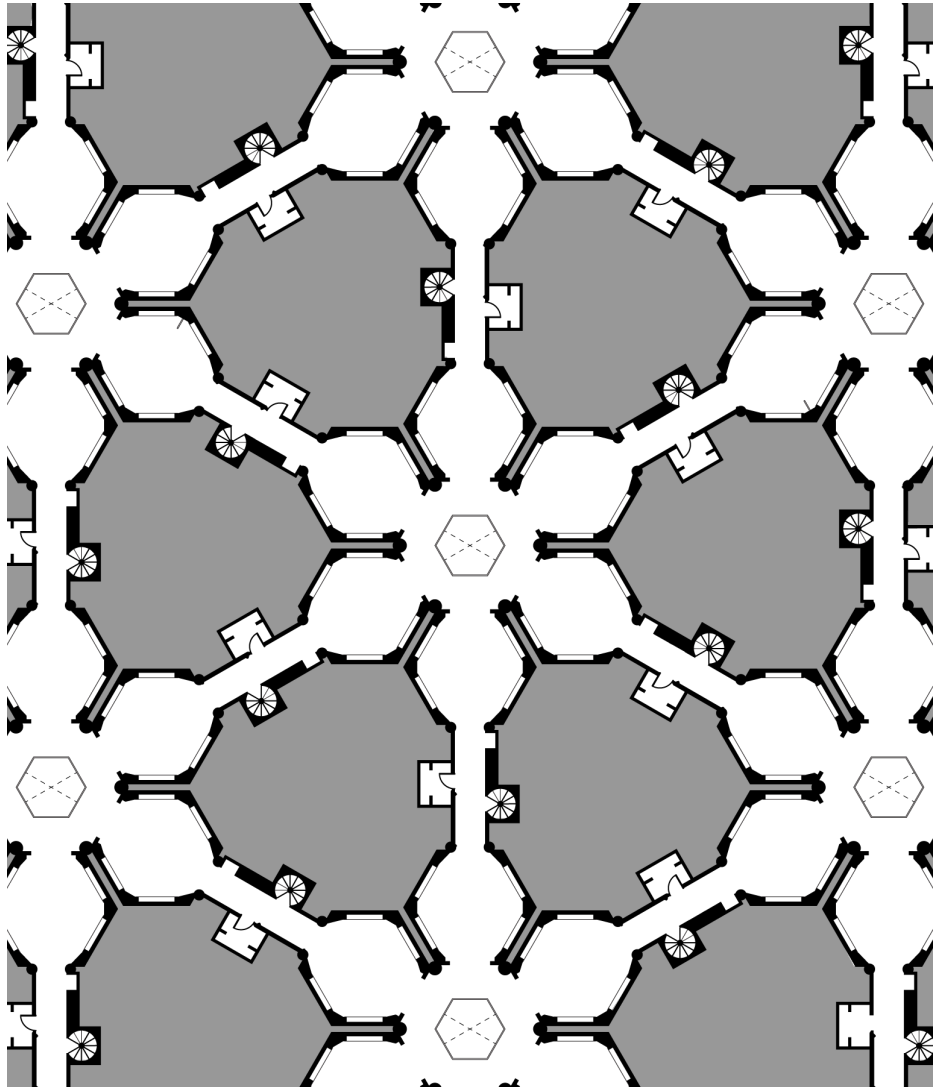
figure. 142
Library of Babel Drafted Gallery Network Map

ELEMENT TRANSLATIONS TO D&D

Core Story Elements

Within the story of the Library of Babel, many aspects of the library are explored and outlined for the reader not of Borges' universe.

Books: The Author writes of the primary contents of the library, its books. He outlines the major discovery five hundred years ago that the library contains every possible combination of twenty-five orthographic symbols (twenty-two letters of the Spanish language, in addition to the comma, the period, and spaces) across four-hundred and ten pages. With that truth, he outlines how every possible book of this format exists in the library. While the vast majority of tomes contain no discernable message, there will be some with tangible words, and even further that some would then include 'impossible', even prophetic texts. He writes of the conflict between joy and hopelessness that many felt learning of this potential. For if a tome containing your own future exists, there also exists a near infinite variations that do not contain anything.

Galleries: The author writes of the galleries, and their unique visual connections which strengthen an impression of the infinite. Borges writes of the connections between these galleries where hallways contain mirrors, a connective staircase, as

well as closets fulfilling basic human needs like sleep. He writes that the nature of the staircases is simultaneously infinite in the imagination, connecting the many circuits of galleries, and dangerous, by accounts of inquisitors who call them deadly.

Character: On the subject of occupants, the main character, its narrator, does not encounter any other people in the text provided, despite transcribing tales of other occupants of the hexagons, such as his father and implied mother. A selection of these unnamed characters includes the official Inquisitors who understand how searching with a specific goal in mind is fruitless. In addition, there are Explorers who yearn and search for their own specific valediction. Then, the Purifiers who work through the library's catalogues hexagon by hexagon and destroy books with no discernible message, believing this to be an honourable duty.

These notes are not an extensive description of all elements described in the story. For Borges writing has no single focus beyond presenting the peculiar nature of his universe, the Library of Babel. This summarized list form the basis of elements to be translated into a D&D game.

Translation of Story into D&D

The Library of Babel centers on a single character, their experiences, and understandings of the library where they have lived their entire life, and now write about. To transform the spatial narrative into an interactive one for D&D, the setting of the narrative must be interpreted and drawn as a real space and the elements for the game must be outlined. In addition, and of utmost importance, is to define a goal and way to "win" this single session game. This enables a sense of completion for players and a shared goal for the session. There are a few ways to define a goal or the end of game, the following exploration outlines a few different approaches and elements to consider.

Goal Considerations

Books

The Library of Babel centers on the nature of the library and its books. Borges write how most occupants search for books which are their

> "Vindications: books of apology and prophecy which vindicated for all time the acts of every man in the universe and retained prodigious arcana for his future. Thousands of the greedy abandoned their sweet native hexagons and rushed up the stairways, urged on by the vain intention of finding their Vindication." (Borges 1941)

This is an attractive goal in the original text but in a world where magic like divination is real, these future-seeing books are not of equal interest. To retain the same gravitas as the original story, the sought-after books must present something different, and be similarly difficult to find. In the event where a player succeeded in finding this book, the philosophical questions around the infinite would be ruined. Therefore, for the D&D campaign, we must explore a different goal for the narrative.

Exit

Another potential storyline could be tied to the infinite, it's lack of start or end, and with that the players might be trapped, having to work to find and exit. In the story, it is implied that full, organic lives take place from birth to death in the library, but there is no mention of an exit. Borges implies that an exit does not exist, stating "Let it suffice now for me to repeat the classic dictum: The library is a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible." (Borges 1941) Once again, a world where the magic of teleportation and plane shifting exists challenges this existence of a place without an exit.

Person:

The goal which quickly presents with the most promise, is one tied to a person. Many explorers and general character descriptions are mentioned in the Library of Babel, despite none interacting with the author in text. Some mentioned character types include idealists, mystics, and wandering decoders. This theme of tracking a person is common within medieval fantasy with bounty hunters and is well recorded with D&D lore. In addition, the story provides many rich characters to further develop and interpret for the D&D game.

Finalized Non-Player Character Goal:

The initial goal will be searching for a person within the library. This person will be an NPC (non-player character) for the players to search for and potentially interact with. Next, we must give this person their own goals and incentives. They likely go to the library for its unique offerings and must search for something divination cannot provide. This something, likely does not exist outside of the infinite library. Thus, the adventure hook will stem from searching for a person, who in turn is searching for something likely dangerous within the library.

Translation of Narrative into D&D

The Library Conceptually

As a setting in D&D, the library takes on an interesting form. In the story a Man of the Book, is an abstract God-like figure. In D&D however, gods are tangible entities, and it is common for them to construct their own existence and domains in other planes of existence. They are worshiped in the material plane and lend some of their power to the devotee that reside there. In D&D the god that most logically fits the role for creating a place such as the library and having the title of Man of the Book is Oghma. Also called the Lord of Knowledge or the Binder of What is Known, Oghma was a neutrally aligned God and "the leader of the Deities of Knowledge and Invention"(Forgotten Realms Wiki). The creation of the library suits how the Lord of Knowledge does -" not stand the suppression of any original thought, regardless of whether the consequences were good or bad," and his belief that "Knowledge must be free to travel where it is desired." (Forgotten Realms Wiki)

With the note that "He often concocted convoluted schemes in his head and implemented those rather than simply act directly"(Forgotten Realms Wiki) the

creation of such a maddening library aligns with his canon behavior and one I use in the creation of library purpose. This library serves as a trial for prospective acolytes aiming for the highest-ranking title for the Church of Oghma, the Divine Hand of Oghma. These acolytes search for a specific tome within the stacks.

Magic

The nature of magic within the D&D world further complicates a plot related to searching for an object. In D&D there are spells for locating objects[1]. I insert in the setting, a solution. For the one-shot the nature of the library is in the spirit of Oghma who prefers "to use his spells in combat but was incredibly capable as a warrior." (Forgotten Realms Wiki) This is adapted so that his Divine Hands must be similarly skilled as warriors and prove themselves without the aid of magic within the library. Therefore, no spells belonging to Oghma's preferred schools of magic, Divination and Abjuration, can be used within the library.

Monsters

Monsters are crucial to most D&D sessions. The type of adventure, its genre, and the implications of characters of the narrative influence the type of monsters encountered in the session. For example, the presence of Devils or Demons implies an infernal connection, while the presence of a Tree Monster imply proximities to a forest. For the library selected monsters are guided by those favored by Oghma (with some adaptations from the list based on equivalents present in D&D 5e) such as golems, metallic dragons, watchers, etc. In addition, to those relevant to the history of the library as written by Borges whereby the recognition of full lifecycles implies a presence of Skeletons, Specters, and Ghosts makes thematic sense.

Books

In the Library of Babel, the Author writes of a discovery five-hundred years ago describing that the library contains every possible combination of twenty-five orthographic symbols Every possible combination of these symbols exists in the library. He writes of the task as near impossible, musing about eternal travellers

1 The spell Locate Object where: "Describe or name an object that is familiar to you. You sense the direction to the object's location, as long as that object is within 1,000 feet of you".

whose eternal existence may allow a discovery, though this is not guaranteed. This infinite quality is translated to D&D in the form of random rolling tables, making the locating of messages possible in theory, but unlikely to achieve.

The Mirror

The mirror represents a finite library to some, however to others it promises the infinite. I translate the dangers of the space and interactions of infinite possibilities to a magic item, a Mirror of Life Trapping, embedded into the space.

Characters

While the story itself does not encounter any other characters, the author transcribes tales of the various explorers within the hexagons. When organizing nonplayable characters (NPCs) for D&D it is important that there are enough to breathe life into a story, but not overwhelm players with information. In a one-shot, in my experience, this ranges from one to five named and 'designed' NPCs. Of interest to the story, and in order of how they adapt to a game are:

Official Searchers

"There are official searchers, inquisitors. I have seen them in the performance of their function: they always arrive extremely tired from their journeys; they speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them; they talk with the librarian of galleries and stairs; sometimes they pick up the nearest volume and leaf through it, looking for infamous words. Obviously, no one expects to discover anything." (Borges 1941)

False Searchers

Purifiers believe "that it was fundamental to eliminate useless works...condemned whole shelves: their hygienic, ascetic furor caused the senseless perdition of millions of books...urged on by the delirium of trying to reach the books in the Crimson Hexagon: books whose format is smaller than usual, all-powerful, illustrated and magical..." (Borges, 1941)

"The Author"

The Author is the unnamed author from the original texts of the Library of Babel. For the one-shot I insert them in the form of an NPC trapped in the Mirror of Life Trapping. They act as the primary guide in the circuitous space.

Galleries

Beyond simply designing the hexagonal gallery arrangement, Borges writes of the galleries, and their unique visual connections that strengthen an impression of the infinite. Hallways which connect each gallery, contain mirrors as well as closets which fulfill human needs such as sleep. There are also connective staircases running vertically, and "From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors..." (Borges, 1941).

Application of D&D Design Strategies

The 5 Room Dungeon

The library has continuous repetitions of galleries; therefore, players will explore many rooms with identical arrangements. However, employing the 5 Room Dungeon scheme, the elements within them are unique in their purpose. I continue here outlining the plan to address each element, not including the game writings such as dialogue and rolls.

The 5 Room Dungeon - Entrance & Guardian

The existence of official and false searchers or inquisitors implies that any adventuring party entering the library would be unofficial. To dissuade unwanted guests, a guardian is situated at the entrance. Considering Oghma's favoured monsters, the natural choice is a Golem of some form.

The 5 Room Dungeon - Trick or Setback

Ghosts are another monster well suited to this quest, as previously discussed. They can manifest in any gallery. Ghosts take on certain tasks from their past lives, and so if adventurers aid the ghost, they gain advantage on their next roll to search the shelves for books with recognizable words within. Searching for specific books is a near impossible task, so this acts as a setback, distracting players from their primary mission.

The 5 Room Dungeon - Puzzle or Roleplay Challenge

Within each connecting hallway there is a mirror, specifically a Mirror of Life Trapping. Within which, I present the Author of The Library of Babel trapped in the mirror. This character is willing to tell everyone all he has learned of the library in his many years there. Through the network of mirrors the author knows the location of the NPC the party seeks and offers to help if they answer riddles and complete tasks.

One such riddle written by Jorge Luis Borges, in *The Garden of Forking Paths* goes, "In a riddle whose answer is chess, what is the only prohibited word?"

The 5 Room Dungeon - Boss Fight/Climax

The "Boss" fight, as a fight with an opponent stronger then any opponent the player have faced across the session, is as may be expected with the NPC they've been tracking down in a Gallery that The Author leads them to.

The 5 Room Dungeon - Reward

The reward should be inherently tied to the adventure. Thus, a magic item in the form of a tome or book is logical. Both the Manual of Bodily Health and Manual of Quickness of Action are canonic magical items suitable for this role. The potential reward are variations of these items, in the **Index of the Library** which improves Wisdom, or its' counterpart, the **Catalogue of the Library** improves Intelligence. Catalogues are records for documents with shared locations, while indexes are records for documents with common attributes like subject matter. The key to locating one versus the other is related to the central question of the library of Babel: "Do you believe the library to be infinite?" If they answer yes, they receive the Index if they answer no, they receive the Catalogue.

In a way, both responses are correct. Borges Library of Babel presents the paradox that functionally the library is infinite with so many permutations of all the letter combinations. The eternal adventurer would spend eternity to reach the conclusion of explorations, and therefore with the response that the library is infinite, adventurers are rewarded an item of Wisdom, the Index of the Library. However, mathematically the library is finite. For eventually, there is an end reached by the number of permutations possible, in which case the players are rewarded an item of Intelligence, the Catalogue of the Library.

Dungeon Design Checklist

With the guidance of using the checklist: "Read it once before you write you dungeon. Then read it again when you're done, to make sure you got everything." This operates as a check-in and elaborating where I add things missing from the outline of the 5-room dungeon outline.

1. **Something to Steal:** They can easily steal any book, pages, or the staff the mage carries.

2. **Something to be Killed**: The NPC.

3. **Something to Kill You:** Also, the NPC, as well the staircase that "almost killed" inquisitors.

4. **Different Paths:** While the repetitive rooms are prescriptive in a sense, each will be different. To accomplish this, a random atmosphere table is included with differing elements, decor, and architecture details making each room distinct.

5. **Someone to Talk To:** The author of the Library of Babel.

6. **Something to Experiment With:** The book generator tables which present very small potentials for coherent messages.

7. **Something the Players Probably Won't Find:** Again, tied to the books table,

there is the potential for a creature connected to Oghma to help the party with the final fight. The chances of the party receiving this message in a language they speak is so small it's unlikely they will find it. But it's extremely useful if they do.

Threat, Timer, Treat

Timer

> "Some kind of doom that's approaching. E.g., a goblin army that will march in. The room will get flooded etc." (Hankerin 2019)

The NPC must not escape into the stacks, as the library is infinite, and an NPC can be easily lost. If the NPC has eternity to find the book that they search for the undefined evil will be released through them and undoubtably would bring hardships to the lands. I determine this evil that the NPC searches for as information to turn into the most powerful form of undeath, a Lich. As Liches are immensely powerful, evil arcane spellcasters, if the NPC succeeds there will be dire consequences.

Threat

> "Threat is the immediate danger they are in. Monsters, traps, etc." (Hankerin 2019)

Upon entering the first room, the players will be made aware they are being watched The stairs, and watchers threaten them, in addition to purifiers and the potential of other librarians.

Treat

> "Is stuff the players can find and use. Treasure, loot, tools that can turn a situation into their favor." (Hankerin 2019)

Information and potential guidance from the trapped NPC The Author, and information from the books or ghosts act as treats for the players. Ultimately all information they collect will determine how they answer the final question and what reward they receive as a result.
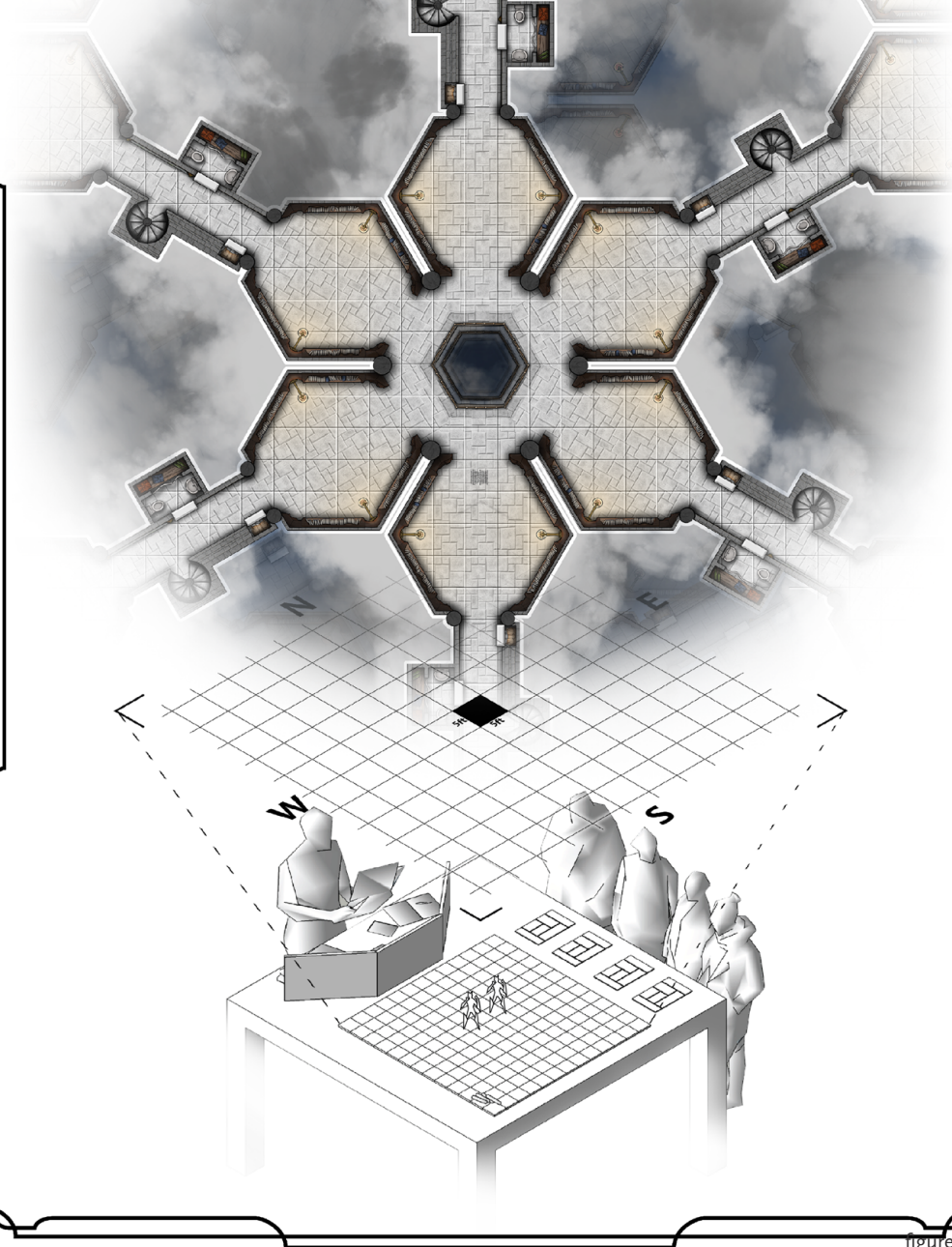
figure. 143
Illustration of Game Play Library of Babel

The One-Shot

THE LIBRARY OF BABEL
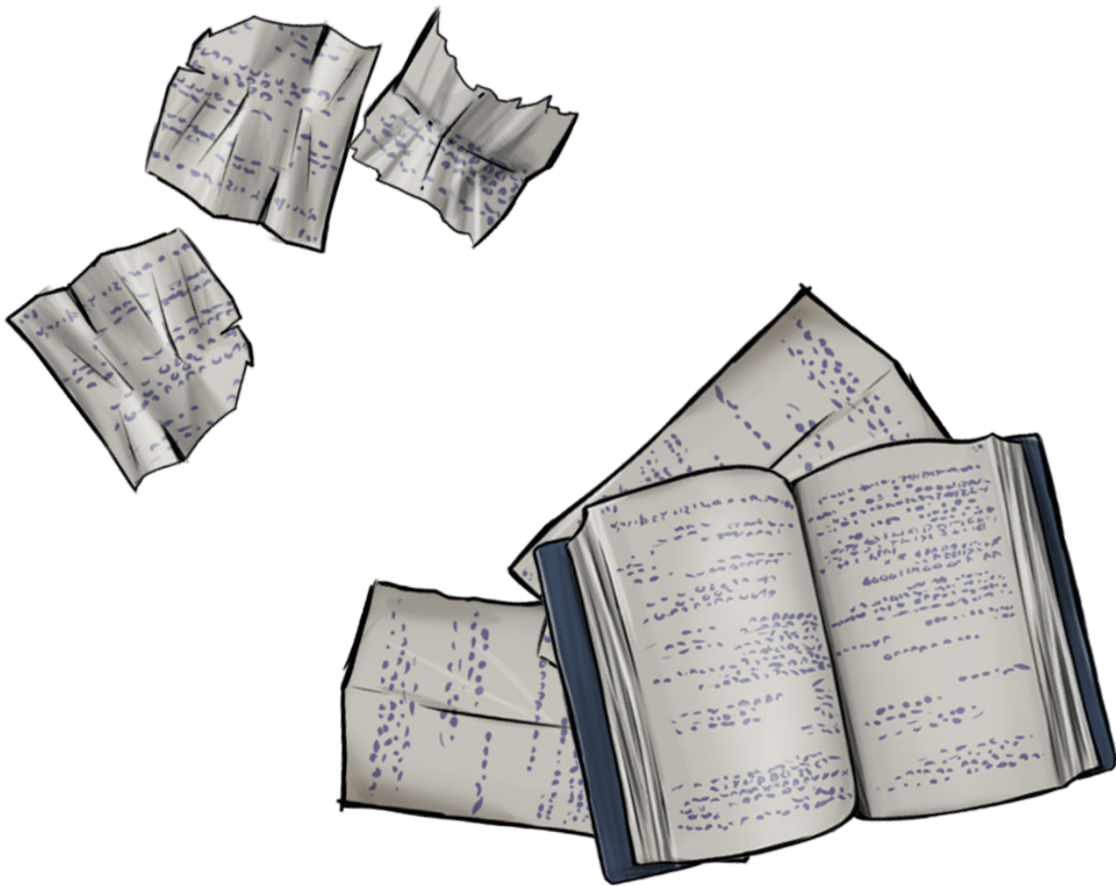
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
ALISON MCNEIL

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page predominately contains information only the DM will know to be canon to the adventure. This information lets DMs to better prepare and understand the context and parameters to improvise in session.

About the Library:

This section of text exists to quickly catch any interested Dungeon Master's up to speed on the nature of the location and setting the adventure takes place. Written in a story-like manner, it usually serves to generate excitement for the DM. Here I write about the D&D adaptation of the Library of Babel, and its mysterious nature.

Entering the Library:

This subtitle to the descriptive text of the library serves to highlight the unique nature of the library. Earlier I entertained the potential lack of exit or entrance to the library as a potential plot for the one shot., here I canonize this difficulty and outline how one would find a way to enter the library.

Library Locations:

Primarily using quotes from the Library of Babel, I employ Borges words to describe the built forms of his Library.

The Galleries:

Established gallery description, outlining them as potentially infinite.

The Hexagons:

Description of primary element of the hexagons, the bookshelves.

The Books:

Description of primary element of the Library of Babel, the books.

The Library of Babel

The universe (which others call the library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries.....the library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols...it was proclaimed that the library contained all books..."

FORMATTING NOTE

All italicized quotes ex: *"Lorem Ipsum"* are from Jorge Luis Borges 1941 "The Library Of Babel" translated by James E. Irby which the adventure is adapted from.

About the Library

The Library of Babel is a location shrouded in mystery. Scholars claim it to exist in Oghma's divine realm. A plane dedicated to all forms of knowledge known as the House of Knowledge, would logically house a location known for containing an endless number of texts. The library however, in its stone stairs, and hexagonal galleries, does not resemble what is known of this realm. As accounts of the House of Knowledge report it to be a plane covered in old oaks and clear pools, with harmonious echoes of harps, the Library is anything but.

Thus pessimists claim the Library is a place of false hope. Even so far as claiming its true nature is malicious, the domain of a Lich made to torture those foolish enough to enter and sacrifice their souls to them. Others claim it's 'neutral' nature is a rouse. That in fact it was created by the trickster god Loki, playing a trick on mortal creatures with chaotic fallacies of knowledge and instead lies hidden in the realm of Asgard.

Regardless of what belief someone holds what remains as truth is that those who gain entry, if they return, they return with stories of infinite hexagonal galleries. They speak of a library where there is no trace of an exit, where endless shelves of books and pages are filled with incomprehensible mixes of letters, and that within these galleries, there are restrictions on magic. That casting any spell from the schools of Divination or Abjuration will not work.

Entering the Library

Entering the library face a unique task, for there is no door to the library. In fact, all entrants must do so through magical means. There is a small group of clerics and guild leaders who are known to be approved guides to the library, and send select groups of approved mages to explore the library known as Inquisitors. Those that enter through other means are confronted by the overseers of the library, the Homunculus and Golems of the stacks.

Library Locations

The Galleries

"The universe (which others call the library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors."

The Hexagons

"Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase. One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery..."

The Books

"...There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say."

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues to contain information likely only the DM will know to be canon to the adventure. However, some sections, outlined with the red boxes further cue writings they might read to players in certain situations.

Lights:

Description of the secondary element of the hexagons, the lights. Followed by the D&D mechanic that makes it work.

The Hallway:

Here again, Borges words are used to describe the base architecture of the space.

The Stairs:

The description outlines the stairs as infinite, as well as tells the DM of the nature they might be trapped, as inspired by the Borges quote.

The Mirror:

The description outlines the mirror as noteworthy in the original text. This is emphasized by making it a rare magic item and through D&D mechanics giving it further importance.

Orders of Conduct:

This is purely a D&D aspect. As prompted by the 5-Room Dungeon tool, a guardian to entering the Library of Babel was introduced. These guardians logically would offer another role, such as enforcers. This outlines what potential offence exist in the library. In game this also works to guide players to explore trying to find a solution rather than cause chaos for the simple reason that they can.

LIGHTS

"..Light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps. There are two, transversally placed, in each hexagon. The light they emit is insufficient, incessant..." These lights, these fruits, are unique objects enchanted with the light cantrip.

THE HALLWAY

"One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery, identical to the first and to all the rest. To the left and right of the hallway there are two very small closets. In the first, one may sleep standing up; in the other, satisfy one's ... Necessities. Also through here passes a spiral stairway, which sinks abysmally and soars upwards to remote distances."

THE STAIRS

Spiral stairways pass through the vestibules connecting the endless series of floors in the library. These smooth stone steps are often trapped, prompting Inquisitors to *"speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them."*

THE MIRROR

"In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Men usually infer from his mirror that the library is not infinite (if it were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite..."

In truth these mirrors are not so simple as a reflection, but hold many of the souls who have explored the library in times past. The reasoning for trapping these souls is unclear. Some have said it is a punishment for violating the Orders of Conduct. Others have said it is a blessing from the creator of the library, to aid other adventurers. Regardless of the reason,

the nature of the mirrors is that they are linked as a network of Mirrors of Life Trapping. (See "Magic Items" at the end of adventure)

MIRROR OF LIFE TRAPPING

In the Library the mirrors act as a network. With this destroying one mirror will not release the occupants. As well there is no limit to the number of souls trapped in the mirror. Inside of the mirrors is a humanoid creature known as "the Author". The author does well to observe the goings on of the library through the mirror, but is very selective in who they share their information with. (See "The Author")

ORDERS OF CONDUCT

Orders of Conduct:
All who enter the Library agree implicitly to the rules set forth in the library. Violating these rules will cause the Homunculus observers to set off alarms and one of the guardians will respond.

No Summoning: No unapproved creatures are permitted within the Library.

No Fighting. Violent altercations between the Libraries visitors is not tolerated.

No Removing Books. Attempts to remove any books will not be tolerated, any knowledge or items found will be revoked as a result.

Punishment: The degree of punishment varies with the severity of the offense.

2 Paper Guardians will appear 3 rounds or 18 seconds, after a Homunculus rings their bell. If the offending parties cease wrong behaviour they will un-form. If the party continues the party will be imprisoned in the mirror for 1 week, after which they will be released. 2 offenses issues 1 year. 3 offenses and the offending party will be trapped indefinitely.

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page begins information intended to be shard with players. Though, only the text in the blue boxes is read aloud to players. The other text is for the DM to read beforehand and understand the deeper context of the story presented.

Beginning the Adventure

This section of text exists to quickly bring interested adventurers into the one shot. With a fantasy genre classic "call for help" the adventurers are given general information and motive to help the character. Added is the layer of something to discover wherein the evil mage is attempting to find and acquire great power as a Lich which is all powerful, evil, undead sorcerer.

Beginning the Adventure

The adventure begins as the characters walk down a long road, in the distance they can see someone cast polymorph 4 times, followed by plane shift. Shortly after an older female goblin named Acevedo, flocked by and carrying 4 white cats will approach the characters. These cats are her party members which were transformed into the creatures. She needs to keep watch of her party so that they don't get into trouble and can eventually revert to their regular forms but the one who changed them escaped. This creature, an evil mage, was previously their lawful companion Isidoro. However they have been cursed by a magical staff they acquired. This mage has now escaped to the Library of Babel in pursuit to escape into the stacks and become a Lich.

> You set off for your day, to travel well worn roads. You quickly settle into routine, passing by various other travellers without issue. Until 300ft in the distance you spot a collection of shadowed of figures. Soon after noticing them you see one figure fire off four flashes of bright white light. Watching on, the air shimmers beside one of them as an opening appears which they then step through. As the air settles into calm silence, processing what just occurred you think you can hear stifled sobs in that direction

Once the characters approach they see Acevedo surrounded by 4 white cats meander around her.

> The crying gets louder as you approach. Getting closer to where you saw the portal you notice the crying coming from a goblin with hair the colour of ash. She is dressed in tanned leather explorers clothes, surrounded by a cluster of snow white cats she struggled to keep track of.
>
> When she notices you approach she immediately appeals for help. "Please you must help me, that mage, they can't be allowed to find what they search for or their destruction will descend upon us. I- I want to help but -" gesturing to the cats her shoulders fall and she looks to the ground "Please I- I cannot follow them, I must take care of our other party members"

Acevedo will tell the party that the mage was previously her party member, Isidoro. Isidoro is normally kind-hearted and generous, but in a recent mission after acquiring a new staff their alignment shifted and they had been cruel in their words and opinions. Acevedo had 'borrowed' Isidoro's journal that morning searching for answers.

An Insight check DC 12 reveals Acevedo is keeping something back. That she knows the Valediction Isidoro seeks - the method to become a **Lich**.

The journal contains the following:

- Isidoro wrote notes about needing to travel to off to the Library of Babel
- They outline it is only accessible with the spell Plane Shift
- A general description of the Library (see description of the Library)
- "Seek and speak to the Author"
- "To be free from the shadow of death, to endure forever, the infinite is an equal"
- A rough drawing of a space indicating the location of a teleportation circle

Acevedo
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. Here the red text box is placed as a piece of information like is likely to come up within the role-play of the session but it not firmly tied to any specific moment.

Finding the Library:

As previously outlined it is not easy to travel to somewhere without an entrance. This outlines the mechanics and items included to enable travel to the unique location.

The Library:

This header denotes specifically that the text which follows is within the Library of Babel location.

The Gallery:

This section outlines what occurs once the players arrive. What happens is the first room and encounter of the adventure, and where per the 5-Room Dungeon exercise I have placed a entrance guardian of Paper Golems.

Homunculus:

Mentioned while decided the monsters of the dungeon, Homunculus are constructs that are favored by Oghma as his watchers. They act as monitors of the party, observing and following them throughout the gallery.

H1-H6 The Hexagons:

This section provides a general itemized description of general space and elements of the dungeon as is common in D&D adventures. The note at the top of H1-H6 are rooms markers. In a typical adventure, each space or room would have their own heading but as each hexagon is identical in built architecture in the Library of Babel I consolidate them.

FINDING THE LIBRARY

Acevedo possesses a spell scroll with the spell Plane Shift inscribed and is willing to cast it for the party. She promises that once her party returns to normal, they will follow and be able to bring both parties back to the material plane.

THE LIBRARY

THE GALLERY

Accepting the mission from Acevedo brings the characters to the Library of Babel. Specially to a teleportation circle in circuit 1330- gallery.

As you step from the teleportation circle, you feel the rush of energy dispel and find yourselves in the Library. Before you can take in the hexagonal your attention is drawn up by a flying creature ringing a bell. Chimes echoing through the chamber, you notice movement out of the corner of your eye and two humanoid figures made entirely of paper appear at both of the openings of the hexagon. These are paper Golems, and they don't look too happy to see you.

Once the characters arrive at the teleportation circle, they will see a Homunculus flying overhead, ringing a bell. 2 Paper Golems (see end of adventure under "Monsters" for stat block) quickly materialize and initiate combat as the adventurers are not official inquisitors. These Golem guardians cannot be reasoned with. The Homunculus flies overhead, avoiding combat. Every turn taking the dodge action and observing the party. After the party defeats the Golems the Homunculus hovers above continuing to watch the party.

HOMUNCULUS

If the Homunculus is destroyed in combat, another identical one flies down from the opening above. If the players try to appease the Homunculus a DC20 Perception check reveals it to be amused, otherwise it remains stoic and impassive. The Homunculus follows the party though at a distance.

When the papers settle you take in hexagonal room you stand in. Four of its six walls lined with bookshelves, filled completely with books, uniform in size and thickness. One of the free sides of the hexagon leads to a narrow hallway. The remaining size opens up to a central chambers. The light within the hexagons is provided by illuminated spheres emitting a faint and barely sufficient light that allows shadow to quickly settle beyond your vision. the air is still and heavy with the scent of old paper, and looking out from the hexagons, you can see glimpses of the upper and lower floors, hinting at an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of galleries.

H1–H6 THE HEXAGONS

The hexagons of the Library of Babel have the following features.

Open Floors: While the height to the next circuits floor is never less then 7', there are no ceilings in the library other then in the closets.

Openings: Each central hexagon is bisected by a opening, with 5' of movement around it.

Light: Each hexagon has two fixed spheres, transversely placed, with the light spell cast on it.

Bookcase: Each bookshelf has five shelves. With each shelf containing thirty-five books of identical size and thickness.

Messages: A successful **DC 12 Perception or Investigation** check reveals writings carved into the end of a bookcase. On it is inscribed the rules of conduct. (refer to orders of conduct)

Debris (see table)

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. New on this page is the use of roll tables. These custom tables list items or events that might occur but are randomly chosen by the rolled number.

H7-The Air Shaft:

Including a description by Borges of the air shaft, this is the central hexagon of the flowered arrangement.

Elements of the Library:
Debris:

When in a location where a goal isn't immediately clear such as fighting an enemy or solving a puzzle, players are likely to look around for clues and hints. This curiosity there should be something to discover and be rewarded with, such as with 1 and 4.

Books:

The vast majority of books within the Library of Babel are incoherent and unintelligible. Even fewer that have anything meaningful To reflect this the tables under books present a reward that is highly unlikely to come about. As 1/20 possible rolls produce a message, likely only 1/6 successful rolls are in a language the character understands, and then 1/4 is useful, the resulting percentage of roll sequences to be successful is fairly in the spirit of the Library of Babel original text.

H7 The Air Shaft

"The universe...is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors.."

Within the central hexagon, you can see a vast air shaft passes through its centre. Connecting it above and below to an endless number of galleries that stretch out into darkness. The six sides of the central hexagon connect to hexagons with shelve of books similar to where you started. A hallway continues on from each of these hexagons leading deeper into the Library.

ELEMENTS OF THE LIBRARY

DEBRIS

As each gallery is identical in form and composition, only minor characteristics change from gallery to gallery. To determine what is in the room, use the following table.

DC 15 Perception or Investigation check roll to see what wasn't immediately noticeable in the gallery.

Debris

d4	Contents
1	Hidden in the dark corner of many hexes are scattered bones, belonging to ghosts of the library. If they collect all the bones and place them somewhere in the library refer to "Ghost of the Library" reward.
2	Around the edges of the central chamber are torn pages from discarded books. None of them seem to have any meaning.
3	Along the edges of many of the bookshelves in this gallery there seems to be scratches of words. Unconnected and repeated they are all scratched out.
4	Players notice that there is something unique with the lights. (See section "lights of the gallery")

BOOKS

"...There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say."

Table 1 Finding Messages in Books

d20	Contents
1-19	No discernible message is present in the pages.
20	A message seems to appear to you, roll on the following table.

Table 2 Language of the Message

d6	Language		
1	Dwarvish	4	Goblin
2	Giant	5	Orc
3	Gnomish	6	Primordial

Table 3 the Message

d4	Contents
1	Oh time thy pyramids
2	The Library is a sphere, its center - any hexagon
3	Life itself is a quotation
4	Command "**Ileuthra**" when assailed upon, and call for aid from the Man of the Book.

NOTE MESSAGE 4: COMMAND "ILEUTHRA"

When spoken if being attacked, a proxy of the brass dragon Ileuthra a dragon Loyal to Oghma appears in the library. Using the stats of an adult brass dragon, this dragon takes position and uses their sleep breath until all creature's hostile to the speaker of the word are indisposed. Note that commanding Ileuthra when not being attacked will do nothing.

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. New on this page is the Non-Player Character (NPC) for players to interact with.

Ghosts of the Library:

Connected to the characters of the Inquisitors and Purifiers from the original text, these ghost are past explorers of the stacks whom cannot seem to continue to the other side until their task is complete. They are largely outlined and included for the 5-Room Dungeons Trick or Setback. For if players aid the ghosts their reward is advantage, rolling a d20 twice, on their next attempt to find a book with a discernible meaning. Something which is nearly impossible.

Ghosts of the Library

In any gallery other then the first there is a high chance of a ghost being present.

d100	Contents
1-70	A ghost is present.
71-100	The gallery is ghost free

If the result is an even number they are an Inquisitor, if it is odd they are a purifier.

These ghosts are not aggressive, and ignore adventurers. If attacked the ghost runs, moving through the bookshelf and the Homunculus observer rings their bell. Papers swirl forming 1 paper golem.

Ghost of a Inquisitor

As you enter this hexagon you notice that the floor is covered with fallen books that appear to have been knocked off their shelves. A strange sensation fills the air of this gallery, as if the space around you is becoming heavier, oppressive. In the dim light, you see a ghostly figure, working diligently. It seems to be unaware of you, seeming lost in thought as it silently moves about the room, reaching out to pick up fallen books and placing them back onto the shelves.

As the ghost continues its task, you notice that many other books fall from a nearby shelf. The ghost ignores this as it completes its present task, before quickly moving to the new location to try to restore order to the chaos. Another force continually undoing their work.

Ghost of a Purifier

As you enter this hexagon you notice that many of the books have been removed from the shelves. Some are piled up near the opening in the central hexagon where a ghostly figure haphazardly picks up books, checks them, and then hurls them into the air shafts with a sense of urgency. You can hear the ghost repeating to itself *"the empty messages must be purged; the crimson hexagon must be reached..."*

As the ghost continues its task, you notice that volumes of books slowly appear back on the shelves. The ghost ignores this as it completes its present task.

Results: If adventurers aid the ghost in either of their missions read the following text:

When you complete the task the ghost turns to face you, emanating a feeling of profound peace that breaks the spell of unfulfilled yearning and loneliness. The atmosphere in the room shifts, and all unsettling sensations fade away.

Reward: If adventurers aid the ghost in either of their missions, each party member gains advantage on their next roll to search the shelves for books with recognizable words.

Ghost of the Library
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. New on this page is the inclusion of an environmental puzzle and trap.

The Lights of the Gallery:

Connected to the characters of the Inquisitors and Purifiers from the original text,

The Hallway:

This header denotes a space separate from the galleries and their flower-like arrangement of hexagonal rooms.

The Sleeping Pod:

A space mentioned in the original text of the Library of Babel. The space within the original text is fairly straightforward and function driven, I reflect that in the one-shot for this reason in addition to the fact that a interesting use of the room did no emerge while using the D&D design strategies of the 5-Room Dungeon, Dungeon Checklist or Threat, Timer, Treat.

The Necessities:

In terms of plot and game use this room serves the same function as The Sleeping Pod.

The Stairs:

Mentioned in the original text, the stairs in the Library of Babel have the potential to be deadly. Interpreting this, I outline a simply trap within the stairs, which a commoner, or non-adventurer, would likely be mortally wounded by. This additionally responds to the prompt in the Dungeon Design Checklist of "Something to Kill You" and in Threat, Timer, Treat, responds to the threat prompt.

The Lights of the Gallery

Indicate the lights as they appear in every gallery are present in this one as well, but not every light is illuminated. Point and show the outlined lights are on or off per the map below. If players make it so that only the yellow remain illuminated, and thus form a hexagon in their placement, read the following text and refer to "Ghost of the Library" reward.

X = OFF

The Hallway

The Sleeping pod

DC 10 Perception check reveals worn out patterns in the stone to indicate people spending lots of time in the closet. Seemingly a place for sleeping, these markings indicate that one may have to sleep standing up.

The Necessities

The room contains a sink which flows with fresh water, and facilities to care for a creature's basic necessities.

The Stairs

Dim light casts long shadows on the rough stone walls of the staircase, creating an eerie and unsettling atmosphere but visible enough. The spiral staircase descends deeply to the circuit below and winds upwards to the upper hexagons, beckoning further exploration. Beside it, etched in the walls indicate this is the current circuit.

Stair Trap

Inquisitors "speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them"

Trigger: Any creature stepping on the steps topmost steps of a staircase fall into the opening.

Effect: The stone steps fall from under the triggering creature as they fall onto rubble and tumble down the staircase below. The triggering must make a DC15 Dexterity saving throw. Taking 10(3d6)bludgeoning damage from the fall on a failed save, or half as much on a successful on.

Countermeasures: A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals small footholds on the edge of the steps where it is safe to step.

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. This page introduced the core role-play challenge of the one-shot and puzzle in the form of a riddle.

The Mirror:

Mentioned earlier, in the original text of the Library of Babel special significance was given to the mirror present in the hallways of the Library of Babel. When adapting to D&D the simplest way to add this important by making it a magic item. The most well known magic mirror in D&D being the Mirror of Life trapping presented unique story opportunities. I elected to first make the mirrors connected as a series, and second put a guiding figure withing the reflective plane, as the mechanics of the mirror can be tricky to navigate the aspect of being to call someone forward with simply their name is a fairly straight forward one.

The Author:

A curiosity while reading Borges original text is "who is writing this?". Electing to make this a character in the story, and presumably knowing many of the answers to questions wandering adventurers may have, The Author presented as a clear response to the prompt of the 5-Room Dungeon of Puzzle or Role-play challenge.

The Trials:

Adding to this further, I felt it appropriate that the Author would not simply give players a direct path to what they seek without a challenge.

The Mirror

When players show interest in the mirror they notice the faint shadows of creatures in its reflection. A DC10 Arcana Check reveals the mirror to be magical, specially the mirror of Life Trapping (See "Magic Items" at the end of adventure). Note this is but one in a network of mirrors. As such destroying one mirror does not release the occupants. While within 5 feet of the mirror, if the players speak the name of one creature trapped in it or call out a particular cell by number, such as "the Author".

The Author

The Author of "The Library of Babel" lies trapped in the mirror. Musing endlessly and circuitously on the nature of the library and the infinite. He entertains all subject from the adventurers, telling everyone all he's learned of the library in his many years there often repeating himself.

THE AUTHOR
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

The Author knows everything included in "About the Library" and "Library Locations" at the beginning of the adventures. As well through the mirrors The Author knows where the mage has escaped to as he watched her pass by him.

He however doesn't immediately see why he should help the adventurers track down of stop Isidoro.

"While this mage seeks knowledge, exploring the library as is intended, you wish to capture them? The one pursuing knowledge?"

The author cocks their head considering the proposition. "I am not skeptical of this proposition, but to help you I would require you to demonstrate the spirit of the Library."

Trials:

If the players have not yet interacted with **Ghosts** in the hexagon, the Author requests the party demonstrate how genuine their motivations are by lending aid to the 'eternal residents' of the galleries.

Then The Author flips through his journal he keeps before landing on a page, satisfied he poses one of the following questions.

Q: "I have a spine, front, and back, But bones and face are what I lack. What am I?"   A: 'A Book'

or

Q: "In a guessing game to which the answer is chess, which word is the only one prohibited?"
A: 'Chess'

Once the players answer the riddle correctly, The Author nods their head in approval and tells the characters where they last saw the mage Isidoro Pass through.

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. This page sets forth the final combat.

Isidoro:

The at once good, now turned evil by a cursed staff, seeks to become an undead being of immense power, a Lich. Within the scheme of the 5-Room Dungeon, her encounter fulfills the role of Boss Fight/ Climax. As she explores the library in search of a book she won't immediately attack adventurers but will do what is needed to so she may continue on her mission.

The Evil Mage – Isidoro

As you follow the directions of The Author, you can sense a shift within the Library, the air is thick with the smell of old books and ancient magic. The gallery you enter seems identical to the other galleries, though you immediately see many of their tomes lay scattered on the ground. It is eerily quiet here, making the occasional scraping sound of something against stone to be sharp as it echoes in the gallery. Looking across the gallery you see Isidoro, the Heart-horned Tiefling mage, where she stands next to the low railings flipping through a book as she hums in disapproval. Two animated skeletons follow her. Their bony feet scraping against the floor as they scan the dimly lit rooms for potential threats.

Isidoro, the evil mage, (see the accompanying stat block) is accompanied by 2 **Skeletons** she animated from the bones of dead explorers of the library. She is unaware of the adventurers pursuing her, thinking only her party or Acevedo would follow her. The curse that has turned her evil has made her arrogant in this regard.

If she or one of the skeletons notices the adventurers read:

The skeletons clack their teeth together loudly, as Isidoro's posture stiffens. She turns to address the adventurers unimpressed, "I advise you to turn back now. This gallery is mine for the time being, and I will not hesitate to defend it." Her grip tightens on her snake headed staff as locks eyes with each of you. "Your search for whatever tome you desire will be better served elsewhere."

Isidoro will speak with the adventurers so long as she finds them entertaining, but if they refuse to leave her in peace she commands the Skeletons "They bore me now, get rid of them would you?"

The Skeletons will immediately charge into battle against the adventurers, Isidoro staying back preferring to use ranged attacks.

ISIDORO-THE EVIL MAGE
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

Staff. Isidoro carries a Staff of the Python. If the adventurers kill the skeletons quickly she uses her action to speak the command word and launch her Staff towards the party as she tries to run into the library.

Homunculus. In the first round of combat the Homunculus which follows the group will ring their bell. In round 3 of combat 3 Paper Golems appear. In round 5 of combat 2 more appear restraining anyone fighting.

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page continues with game information intended to be discovered by players. This page presents the conclusion of the oneshot.

The Man of the Books:

"We also know of another superstition of that time: that of the Man of the Book. On some shelf in some hexagon (men reasoned) there must exist a book which is the formula and perfect compendium of all the rest: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god." (Borges, 1941)

I make a connection through the figure of the Man of the Books, and the god of knowledge Oghma. Oghma is known to have many identities and one of this nature projects a logical connection for me to make within this one-shot adding it as an adapted lore not canon to official D&D knowledge.

Fulfilling the remaining room of the 5-Room Dungeon the Reward, he willing presents and offers an exchange of questions where his is predefined and taken from one of the final quandaries Borges puts forward in his text.

"Do you believe the Library to be infinite?"

Conclusion
Man of the Books

The battle fades away, the sound of the ringing bell echoes in the gallery as a familiar flying creature emerges from the shadows. Suddenly, a group of six paper golems materialize at each exit, standing still and silent. From behind one of them, a sharp-featured man walks towards you. You can't help but notice his sharp features and fashionable clothing, which seems more appropriate for a grand stage than a dusty library. His brightly coloured outfit contrasts with his dark skin, giving him an air of confidence and elegance.

He greets you with a wide smile and a carefree tone, "My congratulations are in order. For so few find what they search for in my Library, ''tis well done." He pauses, looking at each of you in turn, his eyes filled with amusement. "But I must ask you now to leave it. Although, I am sure you have questions. So as a gesture of goodwill, before returning you to your realm, I offer an exchange of one question."

The man elegantly takes a seat, a lute appearing in his hands as he strums it softly. "I know what I wish to ask you, so please take a moment to choose your question from the creator of the Library."

The Man of the Books will answer any question the characters pose openly and truthfully to his ability.

Though he will not answer a question too similar to his own and request the character revise theirs.

His question is as follows:

"Do you believe the Library to be infinite?"

To the man of the books there is no correct or incorrect answer, but he will not accept any answer other then yes or no. No matter what the characters response is he smiles knowingly and responds:

"Well said"

If they respond:
Yes

They receive Index of the Library

If they respond:
No

They receive Catalogue of the Library

Reward. Depending on the characters answer present them with the respective reward either **Index of the Library or Catalogue of the Library** (see 'Magic Items')

After receiving the tome the Library fades away in a swirl of light as the characters are returned to the Material Plane.

Understanding the Adventure

Below is an adapted collection of notes, outlining the sections of text on the page opposite. The appendix includes the one-shot laid out in booklet format appropriate for print.

This page and those that follow are for the DM to use.

Mage Journal:

This is a simple annotated map that the players come across early in the one-shot.

The Library and The Gallery:

These pages and images present fully illustrated maps, intended to be used during combat encounters or exploration. They are appropriate to be configured and used in a Virtual Table-Top, or transcribed onto a gridded sheet for an in-person game.

The Library Network Map:

This map displays a simplified configuration of multiple galleries connected, and is but a small sample of the infinity of the library.

Magic Items and Monster Descriptions:

These listed items and their effects, and monsters and their abilities, are intended for DM use. They are game elements and their game mechanics which support the game play of the one-shot.

Mage Journal

The Library is comprised of an infinite number of hexagonal galleries, connected by air-shafts, hallways, and staircases. The library contains all possible books, though most do not have words. Each book combine the same 26 symbols, in every possible combination, across 410 pages.

Seek and speak to the Author

To be free from the shadow of death, to endure forever, the infinite is an equal

The Library

1 Square = 5 feet

The Gallery

1 Square = 5 feet

The Library

Network Map

Magic Items

Index of The Library

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

This book contains a hidden, coded index of the books in Library of Babel. If you spend 48 hours over a period of 6 days or fewer studying the book's contents and decoding its pages, your **Wisdom score increases by 2**, as does your maximum for that score. The index then loses its magic, becoming an undecipherable mess of letters, a random combination of 26 symbols.

Catalogue of The Library

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

This book contains a hidden, coded catalogue of books in the library of Babel. If you spend 48 hours over a period of 6 days or fewer studying the book's contents and decoding its pages, your **Intelligence score increases by 2**, as does your maximum for that score. The catalogue then loses its magic, becoming an undecipherable mess of letters, a random combination of 26 symbols.

Staff of the Python

Staff, Uncommon (requires attunement by a cleric, druid, or warlock)

You can use an action to speak this staff's command word and throw the staff on the ground within 10 feet of you. The staff becomes a giant constrictor snake under your control and acts on its own initiative count. By using a bonus action to speak the command word again, you return the staff to its normal form in a space formerly occupied by the snake.

On your turn, you can mentally command the snake if it is within 60 feet of you and you aren't incapacitated. You decide what action the snake takes and where it moves during its next turn, or you can issue it a general command, such as to attack your enemies or guard a location.

If the snake is reduced to 0 hit points, it dies and reverts to its staff form. The staff then shatters and is destroyed. If the snake reverts to staff form before losing all its hit points, it regains all of them

Mirror of Life Trapping – Library of Babel Variant

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

When this 4-foot-tall mirror is viewed indirectly, its surface shows faint images of Creatures. The mirror weighs 50 pounds, and it has AC 11, 10 Hit Points, and vulnerability to bludgeoning damage. It shatters and is destroyed when reduced to 0 Hit Points.

If the mirror is hanging on a vertical surface and you are within 5 feet of it, you can use an Action to speak its Command word and activate it. It remains activated until you use an Action to speak the Command word again.

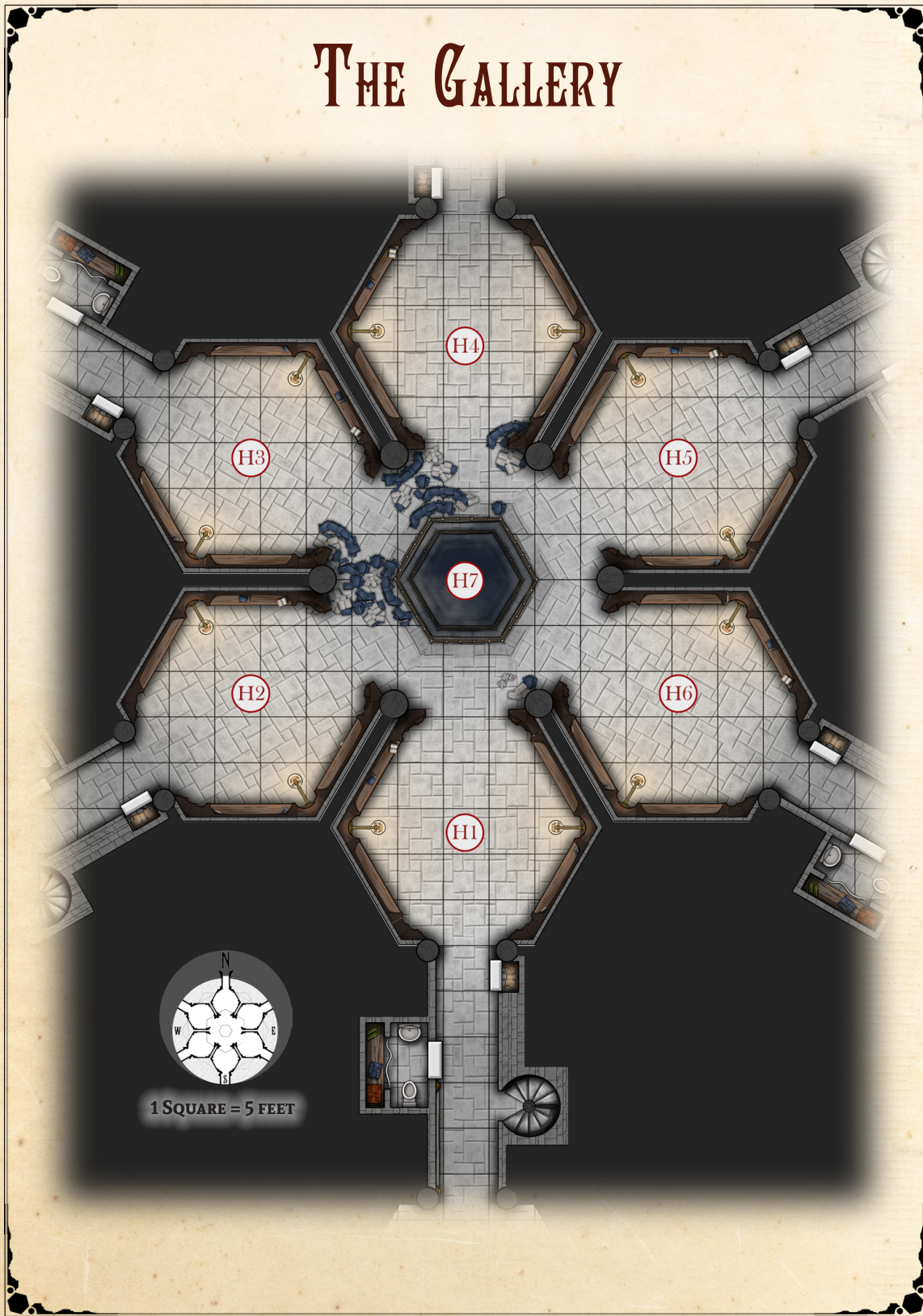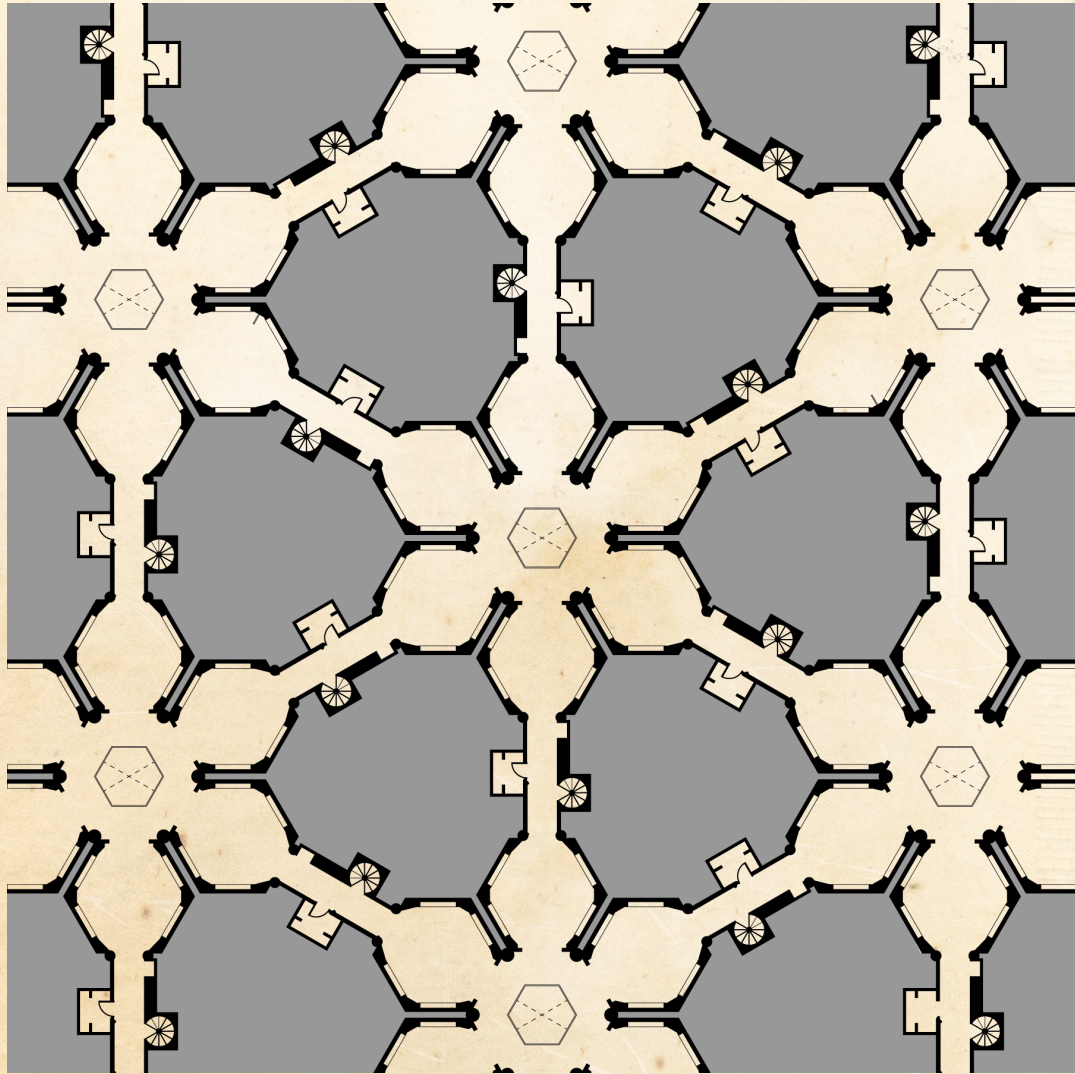Any creature other than you that sees its reflection in the activated mirror while within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be trapped, along with anything it is wearing or carrying, in one of the mirror's twelve extradimensional cells. This saving throw is made with advantage if the creature knows the mirror's Nature, and constructs succeed on the saving throw automatically.

An extradimensional cell is an infinite expanse filled with thick fog that reduces Visibility to 10 feet. Creatures trapped in the mirror's cells don't age, and they don't need to eat, drink, or sleep. The creature is confined to the cell until freed.

While within 5 feet of the mirror, you can use an Action to speak the name of one creature trapped in it or call out a particular cell by number. The creature named or contained in the named cell appears as an image on the mirror's surface. You and the creature can then communicate normally.

In a similar way, you can use an Action to speak a second Command word and free one creature trapped in the mirror. The freed creature appears, along with its possessions, in the unoccupied space nearest to the mirror and facing away from it. The mirrors act as a network, with this destroying one mirror will not release the occupants. As well there is no limit to the number of souls trapped in the mirror.

Monsters Descriptions

Paper Golem
Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit points   28 (6d8)
Speed   30 ft.
Initiative   +0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14(+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	2(-4)	10 (+0)	1(-5)

Saving Throws INT -2, WIS +2
Damage Vulnerabilities Fire
Damage Immunities Poison, Psychic
Condition Immunities Blinded, Charmed, Deafened, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned
Senses Blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), Passive Perception 10
Languages --
Challenge 2 (450 XP)   **Proficiency Bonus** +2

False Appearance. If the Golem is dispersed as a stack of papers and motionless at the start of combat, it has advantage on its initiative roll. Moreover, if a creature hasn't observed the Golem move or act, that creature must succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern that the Golem is animate.

Immutable Form. The Golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Regeneration. The Golem regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the Golem takes fire, slashing or force damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Golems next turn. The Golem is destroyed only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Unusual Nature. The Golem doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. The Golem makes two Paper Cut attacks.

Paper Cut. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Pages Form (Recharge 5-6). The Golem briefly unfolds into a undefined cloud of pages, teleporting up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Giant Constrictor Snake - Staff
Huge Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit points   26 (4d12)
Speed   30 ft.
Initiative   +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19(+4)	14(+2)	12(+1)	1(-1)	10(+0)	3(-4)

Skills Perception+2
Senses Blindsight 10 ft., Passive Perception 12
Languages -
Challenge 2(450 XP)   **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the snake can't constrict another target.

Isidoro- Evil Mage
Medium Construct, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 14
Hit points   30 (7d8)
Speed   30 ft.
Initiative   +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9(-1)	14(+2)	11 (+0)	17(+3)	12(+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws INT +6, WIS +4
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Infernal, Elvish, Orcish
Challenge 4 (1100 XP)   **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Spellcasting. The mage is a 6th-level spellcaster that uses Intelligence as its spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The mage knows the following spells from the wizard's spell list:

Cantrips (at will): *Mage Hand, Fire Bolt, Chill Touch, Mending*

1st level (4 slots): *Disguise Self, Illusory Script, Sleep, False Life*

2nd level (3 slots): *Misty Step, Suggestion, Web*

3rd level (3 slots): *Animate Dead, Bestow Curse*

Undead Thrall. Whenever you create an undead using a necromancy spell, it has additional benefits:

   The creature's hit point maximum is increased by an amount equal to your wizard level.

   The creature adds your proficiency bonus to its weapon damage rolls.

Actions

Quarterstaff Staff of the Python. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d8 - 1) bludgeoning damage. You can use an action to speak this staff's command word and throw the staff on the ground within 10 feet of you it becoming a giant constrictor snake under Isidoro's control.

Skeleton - Minion of Isidoro
Medium Undead, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)
Hit points   19 (2d8+4+6)
Speed   30 ft.
Initiative   +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14(+2)	15 (+2)	6(-2)	8(-1)	5(-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities Bludgeoning
Damage Immunities Poison
Condition Immunities Exhaustion, Poisoned
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 9
Languages Understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 1/4 (150 XP)   **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

CONCLUSION

———

Space and Story looks to Dungeons and Dragons to observe and explore what insights a game predicated on the creation and development of an imagined second reality can provide. The research conducted in the completion of this thesis was inspired and driven by a simple observation; that readings and understandings of the immaterial spaces within Dungeons and Dragons, in essence a game played out within a series of floorplans, are not hindered by aptitude to read a floor plan. Rather a variety of players are able to work together to explore space and story, collaboratively building, interpreting, and interacting with a narrative space that is both designed and open-ended.

In pursuit of understanding how architects and non-architects alike engage with spatial narrative, Space and Story looks to architecture, film, and ludic studies to establish the academic territory. The types of narratives reflected spatially in D&D, while immaterial, lend insight into how we can identify and understand narratives which generally exist within 'real' space. As a game that relies on the use of evoked, enacted, embedded, and emergent spatial narratives, D&D can offer new frameworks from which to view how architecture uses narrative.

Placing D&D within a storied tradition of interpreting and reinterpreting conventions of representing space, this research then looks to the rich history of spatial translation and how space has been abstracted and communicated to different audiences over time. From the representation of the ideal within the bounds of the real in medieval map making, to the integration of gridded guides, to

the communication through systems of symbols and relational spaces, Dungeons and Dragons has borrowed and reinterpreted architectural language to create its sense of space in a way that makes design accessible. As this thesis research presents the reinterpretation of architectural method, formal and informal tools for constructing imagined space, such as establishing a sense of scale and movement through the grid or differing drawing convention for elements such doors and stairs, begins to contrast what is or isn't a coherent expression of spatial practices for the non-architect. Outlining dungeon design strategies and guidelines in D&D, such as the 5-Room Dungeon, unique methods emerge whereby non-architects generate intuitive design exercises using or stating a narrative purpose, standing in for a rooms program. Further in this examination of creating space, the thesis looked to how D&D calls upon a longer history of storytelling and invocation of genre to further inform its expression and rendering of the imagined spaces in the minds of its players. Wherein maps envision and create a particular reality for the D&D spaces to exist, unconventional methods of analyzing space have also been observed within this thesis, as it looks to the spatial knowledge and assessment created by players of the game who may not have any architectural background at all—yet they are deeply engaged in the experience of these imagined spaces. In exploring tactics for assessing the quality of imagined spaces, the Melan diagram presents a new way of codifying dungeon designs and their interactive narrative paths as a means of evaluation. This diagramming method presents a unique circulation analysis method—one that would not exist without the game D&D, and the studies created its fans.

The analysis and multidisciplinary research conducted above is then tested in the design and experience of a one-shot designed for this thesis. Looking to the Library of Babel as a well-known architecturally informed short story, Space and Story lays out an experiential exercise whereby both I, as the DM, and the players collaboratively engage with the narrative to create new visuals of an architectural text in a way that is more immersive, collaborative, and representative of how people experience space differently. Designing such an adventure engages with a balance between representing space and translating story aspects to compelling game elements. One which by being a student of architecture, I naturally center on space, while another adventure designer may center on the villain, or compelling god motif. That said regardless of who the adventures' architect is, D&D offers a rich exercise in communicating several ways of experiencing narrative space, and the one shot provides an opportunity to explore more direct interactions with readers of space. As the game is not isolated in one's single understanding of a text or space, D&D facilitates different experiences of spaces in the minds of each player, building a more accurate interpretation of space than any one representation.

I acknowledge that some will not understand 'the D&D thesis', as I present the

experience of Dungeons and Dragons as a spatial practice. To this reality I will echo Norwegian Academic and Researcher of videogame studies Espen Aarseth who asserts "If [they] have not experienced the game personally, [they] are liable to commit severe misunderstandings, even if [they] study the mechanics and try [their] best to guess at their workings." Nonetheless a hope pervades that a few non-players may happen upon the pages of Space and Story and, looking to the spatial exercises therein, will leave open minded that D&D and other spatially focused table-top roleplaying games present opportunities for collaborative and communicative play in design.

Further, this aspect of play within immaterial imagined worlds reminds us that we can understand the spaces we occupy as having latent potential to host a multiplicity of narratives within. The unseen narratives within the built world may not involve dragons, and they may not be set within a dungeon, however, the spaces designed and formed by architects in our world can still benefit from thinking about other expressions of space and spatial practices. As the discipline operates often in intentionally separated spheres of interests, it is prudent to revisit play in order to let go of the barriers such a specialized practice creates, so architects can allow themselves to experience what it is like to design or be led through a sequence of imagined, layered, and narrative-driven spaces.

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APPENDIX

Library of Babel One-Shot

THE ONE-SHOT GAME ELEMENTS

figure. 144
Collection of Illustrated Book Assets

Illustrated Elements:

Bookshelves
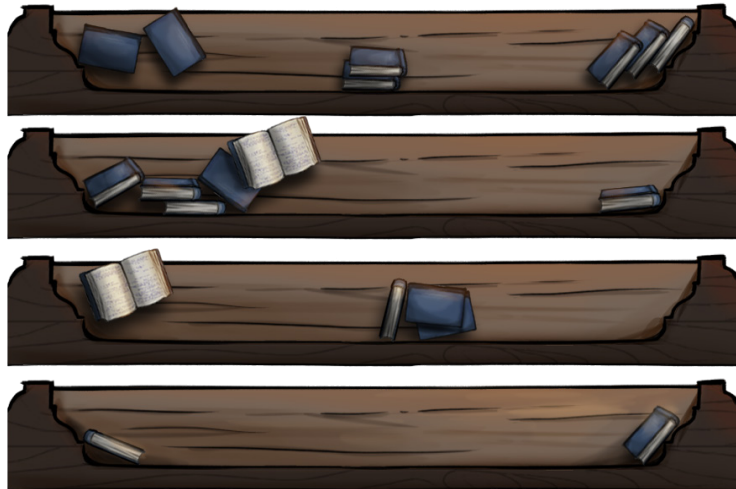
figure. 145
Illustrated Bookshelf Assets- Without Books

figure. 146
Illustrated Bookshelf Assets- With Books

figure. 147
Bookshelf Ends

figure. 148
Additional Illustrated Assets
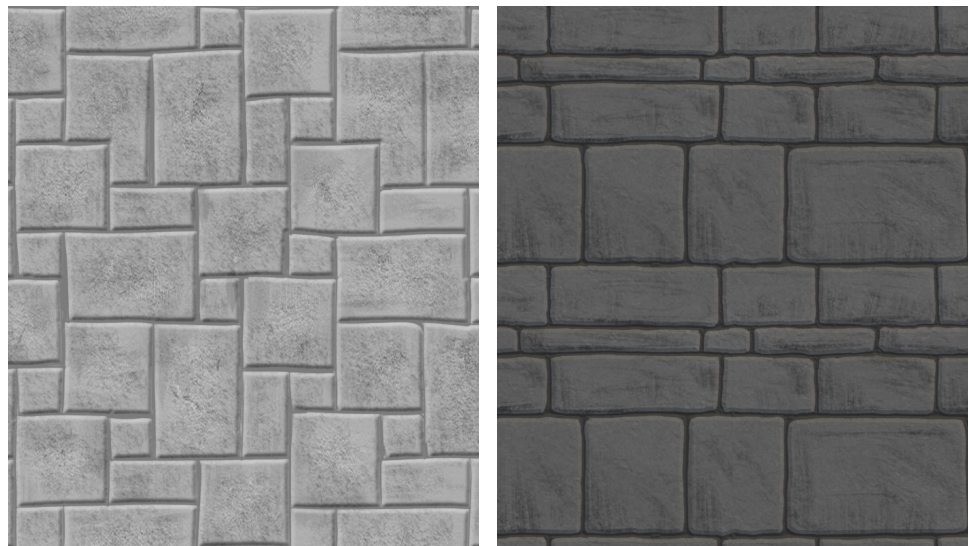
figure. 149
Surface Textures

Illustrated Elements:

Character Art

figure. 150
NPC Illustration Acevedo

figure. 151
NPC Illustration Isidoro

Illustrated Elements:

Character Art

figure. 153
NPC Illustration Ghost

figure. 152
NPC Illustration The Author

Map Details

figure. 154
Library of Babel Illustrated D&D Map Crop Details
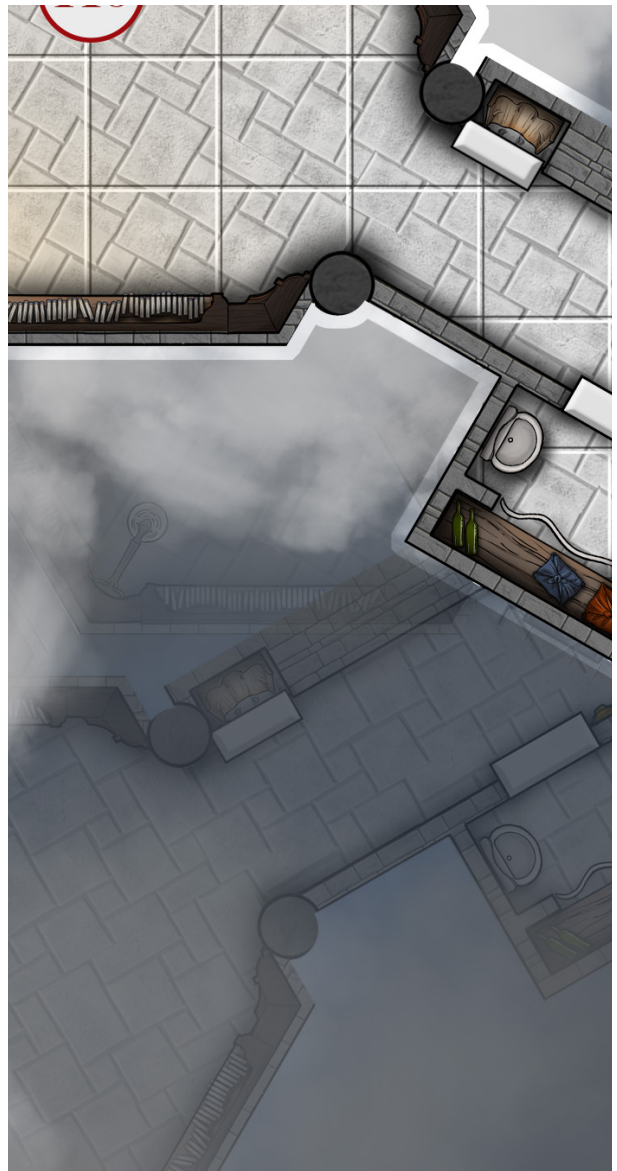
figure. 155
Library of Babel Illustrated D&D Map Crop Details

Map Details

figure. 156
Library of Babel Illustrated D&D Map Crop Details
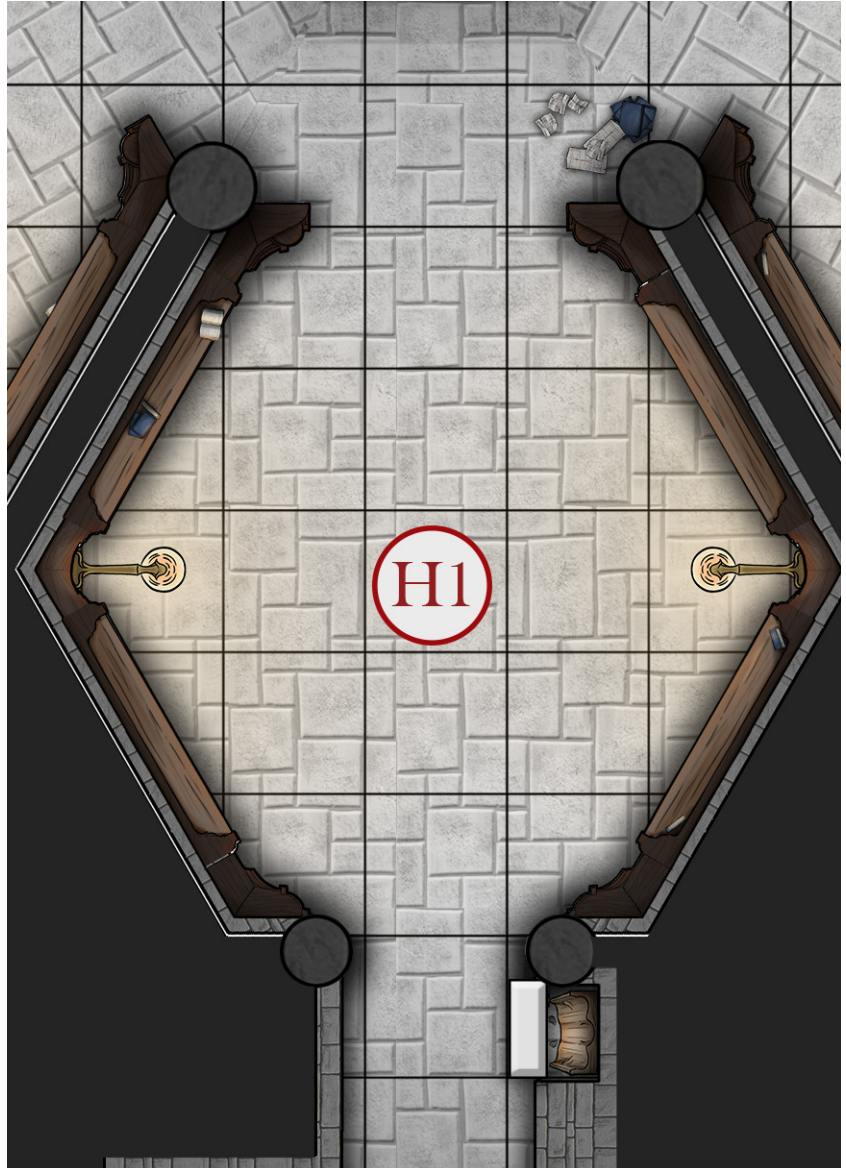
figure. 157
Library of Babel Illustrated D&D Map Crop Details

One-Shot In Session
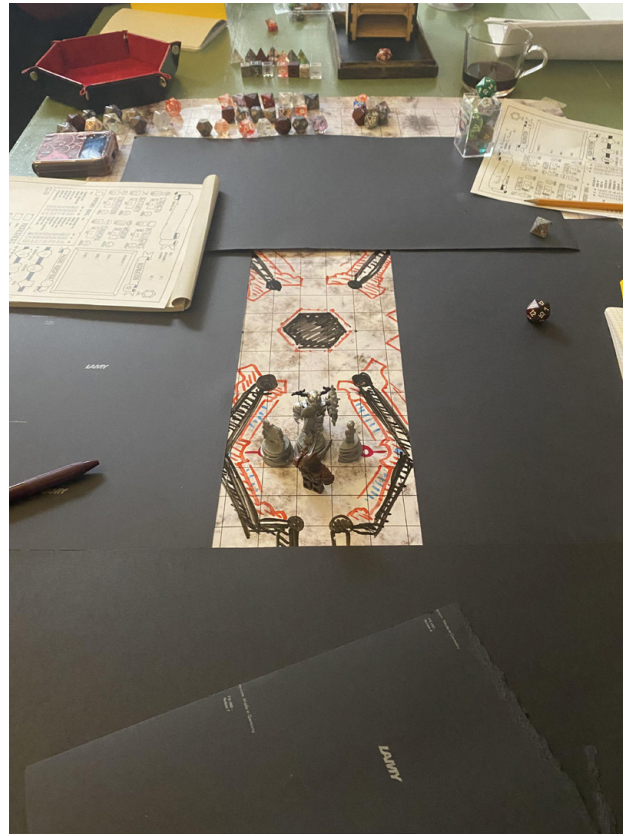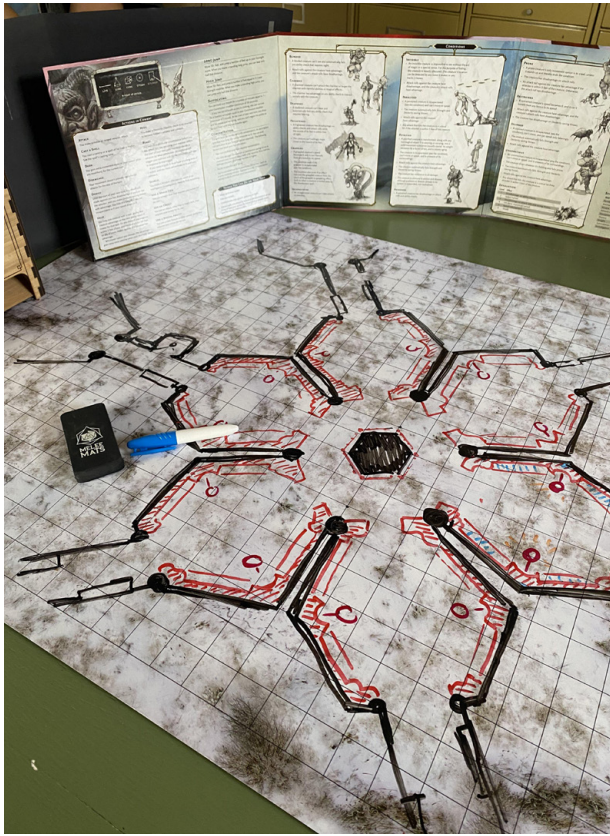
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Photos of Library of Babel one-shot in session
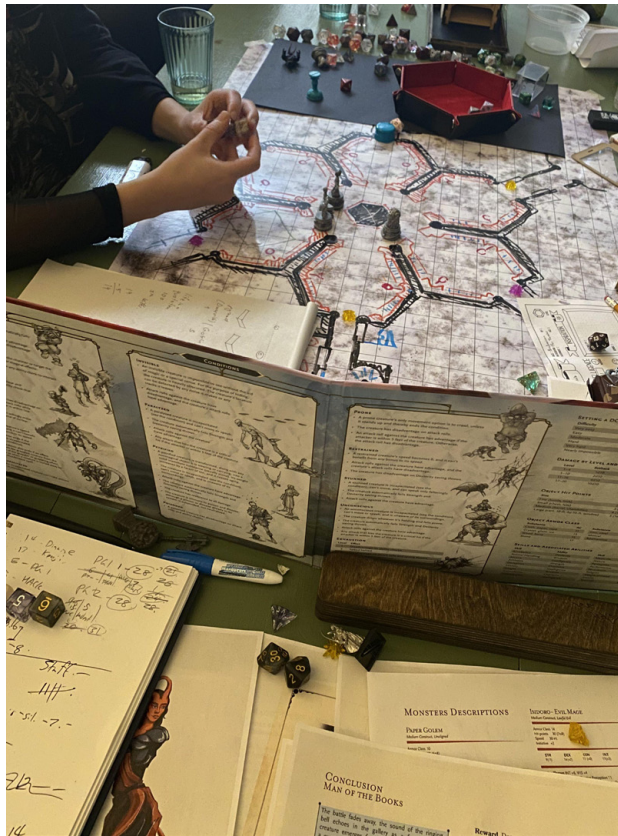
figure. 159
Photos of Library of Babel one-shot in session

Based off the short story
The Library of Babel by Jorge Luis Borges

The Library of Babel

Written and Illustrated by
Alison McNeil

THE LIBRARY OF BABEL

T *he universe (which others call the library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries.....the library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols...it was proclaimed that the library contained all books..."*

FORMATTING NOTE

All italicized quotes ex: "*Lorem Ipsum*" are from Jorge Luis Borges 1941 "The Library Of Babel" translated by James E. Irby which the adventure is adapted from.

ABOUT THE LIBRARY

The Library of Babel is a location shrouded in mystery. Scholars claim it to exist in Oghma's divine realm. A plane dedicated to all forms of knowledge known as the House of Knowledge, would logically house a location known for containing an endless number of texts. The library however, in its stone stairs, and hexagonal galleries, does not resemble what is known of this realm. As accounts of the House of Knowledge report it to be a plane covered in old oaks and clear pools, with harmonious echoes of harps, the Library is anything but.

Thus pessimists claim the Library is a place of false hope. Even so far as claiming its true nature is malicious, the domain of a Lich made to torture those foolish enough to enter and sacrifice their souls to them. Others claim it's 'neutral' nature is a rouse. That in fact it was created by the trickster god Loki, playing a trick on mortal creatures with chaotic fallacies of knowledge and instead lies hidden in the realm of Asgard.

Regardless of what belief someone holds what remains as truth is that those who gain entry, if they return, they return with stories of infinite hexagonal galleries. They speak of a library where there is no trace of an exit, where endless shelves of books and pages are filled with incomprehensible mixes of letters, and that within these galleries, there are restrictions on magic. That casting any spell from the schools of Divination or Abjuration will not work.

ENTERING THE LIBRARY

Entering the library face a unique task, for there is no door to the library. In fact, all entrants must do so through magical means. There is a small group of clerics and guild leaders who are known to be approved guides to the library, and send select groups of approved mages to explore the library known as Inquisitors. Those that enter through other means are confronted by the overseers of the library, the Homunculus and Golems of the stacks.

LIBRARY LOCATIONS

THE GALLERIES

"The universe (which others call the library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors."

THE HEXAGONS

"Twenty shelves, five long shelves per side, cover all the sides except two; their height, which is the distance from floor to ceiling, scarcely exceeds that of a normal bookcase. One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery..."

THE BOOKS

"...There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say."

Lights

"..Light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps. There are two, transversally placed, in each hexagon. The light they emit is insufficient, incessant..." These lights, these fruits, are unique objects enchanted with the light cantrip.

The Hallway

"One of the free sides leads to a narrow hallway which opens onto another gallery, identical to the first and to all the rest. To the left and right of the hallway there are two very small closets. In the first, one may sleep standing up; in the other, satisfy one's ... Necessities. Also through here passes a spiral stairway, which sinks abysmally and soars upwards to remote distances."

The Stairs

Spiral stairways pass through the vestibules connecting the endless series of floors in the library. These smooth stone steps are often trapped, prompting Inquisitors to *"speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them."*

The Mirror

"In the hallway there is a mirror which faithfully duplicates all appearances. Men usually infer from his mirror that the library is not infinite (if it were, why this illusory duplication?); I prefer to dream that its polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite..."

In truth these mirrors are not so simple as a reflection, but hold many of the souls who have explored the library in times past. The reasoning for trapping these souls is unclear. Some have said it is a punishment for violating the Orders of Conduct. Others have said it is a blessing from the creator of the library, to aid other adventurers. Regardless of the reason,

the nature of the mirrors is that they are linked as a network of Mirrors of Life Trapping. (See "Magic Items" at the end of adventure)

Mirror of Life Trapping

In the Library the mirrors act as a network. With this destroying one mirror will not release the occupants. As well there is no limit to the number of souls trapped in the mirror. Inside of the mirrors is a humanoid creature known as "the Author". The author does well to observe the goings on of the library through the mirror, but is very selective in who they share their information with. (See "The Author")

Orders of Conduct

Orders of Conduct:
All who enter the Library agree implicitly to the rules set forth in the library. Violating these rules will cause the Homunculus observers to set off alarms and one of the guardians will respond.

No Summoning: No unapproved creatures are permitted within the Library.

No Fighting. Violent altercations between the Libraries visitors is not tolerated.

No Removing Books. Attempts to remove any books will not be tolerated, any knowledge or items found will be revoked as a result.

Punishment: The degree of punishment varies with the severity of the offense.

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2 Paper Guardians will appear 3 rounds or 18 seconds, after a Homunculus rings their bell. If the offending parties cease wrong behaviour they will un-form. If the party continues the party will be imprisoned in the mirror for 1 week, after which they will be released. 2 offenses issues 1 year. 3 offenses and the offending party will be trapped indefinitely.

Beginning the Adventure

The adventure begins as the characters walk down a long road, in the distance they can see someone cast polymorph 4 times, followed by plane shift. Shortly after an older female goblin named Acevedo, flocked by and carrying 4 white cats will approach the characters. These cats are her party members which were transformed into the creatures. She needs to keep watch of her party so that they don't get into trouble and can eventually revert to their regular forms but the one who changed them escaped. This creature, an evil mage, was previously their lawful companion Isidoro. However they have been cursed by a magical staff they acquired. This mage has now escaped to the Library of Babel in pursuit to escape into the stacks and become a Lich.

> You set off for your day, to travel well worn roads. You quickly settle into routine, passing by various other travellers without issue. Until 300ft in the distance you spot a collection of shadowed of figures. Soon after noticing them you see one figure fire off four flashes of bright white light. Watching on, the air shimmers beside one of them as an opening appears which they then step through. As the air settles into calm silence, processing what just occurred you think you can hear stifled sobs in that direction

Once the characters approach they see Acevedo surrounded by 4 white cats meander around her.

> The crying gets louder as you approach. Getting closer to where you saw the portal you notice the crying coming from a goblin with hair the colour of ash. She is dressed in tanned leather explorers clothes, surrounded by a cluster of snow white cats she struggled to keep track of.
>
> When she notices you approach she immediately appeals for help. "Please you must help me, that mage, they can't be allowed to find what they search for or their destruction will descend upon us. I- I want to help but -" gesturing to the cats her shoulders fall and she looks to the ground "Please I- I cannot follow them, I must take care of our other party members"

Acevedo will tell the party that the mage was previously her party member, Isidoro. Isidoro is normally kind-hearted and generous, but in a recent mission after acquiring a new staff their alignment shifted and they had been cruel in their words and opinions. Acevedo had 'borrowed' Isidoro's journal that morning searching for answers.

An Insight check DC 12 reveals Acevedo is keeping something back. That she knows the Valediction Isidoro seeks - the method to become a **Lich**.

The journal contains the following:

- Isidoro wrote notes about needing to travel to off to the Library of Babel
- They outline it is only accessible with the spell Plane Shift
- A general description of the Library (see description of the Library)
- "Seek and speak to the Author"
- "To be free from the shadow of death, to endure forever, the infinite is an equal"
- A rough drawing of a space indicating the location of a teleportation circle

ACEVEDO
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

FINDING THE LIBRARY

Acevedo possesses a spell scroll with the spell Plane Shift inscribed and is willing to cast it for the party. She promises that once her party returns to normal, they will follow and be able to bring both parties back to the material plane.

THE LIBRARY

THE GALLERY

Accepting the mission from Acevedo brings the characters to the Library of Babel. Specially to a teleportation circle in circuit 1330- gallery.

As you step from the teleportation circle, you feel the rush of energy dispel and find yourselves in the Library. Before you can take in the hexagonal your attention is drawn up by a flying creature ringing a bell. Chimes echoing through the chamber, you notice movement out of the corner of your eye and two humanoid figures made entirely of paper appear at both of the openings of the hexagon. These are paper Golems, and they don't look too happy to see you.

Once the characters arrive at the teleportation circle, they will see a Homunculus flying overhead, ringing a bell. 2 Paper Golems (see end of adventure under "Monsters" for stat block) quickly materialize and initiate combat as the adventurers are not official inquisitors. These Golem guardians cannot be reasoned with. The Homunculus flies overhead, avoiding combat. Every turn taking the dodge action and observing the party. After the party defeats the Golems the Homunculus hovers above continuing to watch the party.

HOMUNCULUS

If the Homunculus is destroyed in combat, another identical one flies down from the opening above. If the players try to appease the Homunculus a DC20 Perception check reveals it to be amused, otherwise it remains stoic and impassive. The Homunculus follows the party though at a distance.

When the papers settle you take in hexagonal room you stand in. Four of its six walls lined with bookshelves, filled completely with books, uniform in size and thickness. One of the free sides of the hexagon leads to a narrow hallway. The remaining size opens up to a central chambers. The light within the hexagons is provided by illuminated spheres emitting a faint and barely sufficient light that allows shadow to quickly settle beyond your vision. the air is still and heavy with the scent of old paper, and looking out from the hexagons, you can see glimpses of the upper and lower floors, hinting at an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of galleries.

H1–H6 THE HEXAGONS

The hexagons of the Library of Babel have the following features.

Open Floors: While the height to the next circuits floor is never less then 7', there are no ceilings in the library other then in the closets.

Openings: Each central hexagon is bisected by a opening, with 5' of movement around it.

Light: Each hexagon has two fixed spheres, transversely placed, with the light spell cast on it.

Bookcase: Each bookshelf has five shelves. With each shelf containing thirty-five books of identical size and thickness.

Messages: A successful **DC 12 Perception or Investigation** check reveals writings carved into the end of a bookcase. On it is inscribed the rules of conduct. (refer to orders of conduct)

Debris (see table)

H7 The Air Shaft

"The universe...is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors.."

Within the central hexagon, you can see a vast air shaft passes through its centre. Connecting it above and below to an endless number of galleries that stretch out into darkness. The six sides of the central hexagon connect to hexagons with shelve of books similar to where you started. A hallway continues on from each of these hexagons leading deeper into the Library.
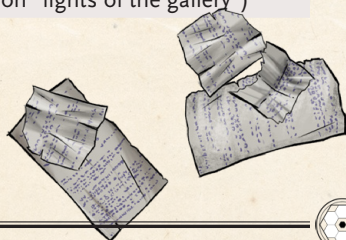
Elements of the Library

Debris

As each gallery is identical in form and composition, only minor characteristics change from gallery to gallery. To determine what is in the room, use the following table.

DC 15 Perception or Investigation check roll to see what wasn't immediately noticeable in the gallery.

Debris

d4	Contents
1	Hidden in the dark corner of many hexes are scattered bones, belonging to ghosts of the library. If they collect all the bones and place them somewhere in the library refer to "Ghost of the Library" reward.
2	Around the edges of the central chamber are torn pages from discarded books. None of them seem to have any meaning.
3	Along the edges of many of the bookshelves in this gallery there seems to be scratches of words. Unconnected and repeated they are all scratched out.
4	Players notice that there is something unique with the lights. (See section "lights of the gallery")

Books

"...There are five shelves for each of the hexagon's walls; each shelf contains thirty-five books of uniform format; each book is of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines, each line, of some eighty letters which are black in color. There are also letters on the spine of each book; these letters do not indicate or prefigure what the pages will say."

Table 1 Finding Messages in Books

d20	Contents
1-19	No discernible message is present in the pages.
20	A message seems to appear to you, roll on the following table.

Table 2 Language of the Message

d6	Language		
1	Dwarvish	4	Goblin
2	Giant	5	Orc
3	Gnomish	6	Primordial

Table 3 the Message

d4	Contents
1	Oh time thy pyramids
2	The Library is a sphere, its center - any hexagon
3	Life itself is a quotation
4	Command "**Ileuthra**" when assailed upon, and call for aid from the Man of the Book.

Note Message 4: Command "Ileuthra"

When spoken if being attacked, a proxy of the brass dragon Ileuthra a dragon Loyal to Oghma appears in the library. Using the stats of an adult brass dragon, this dragon takes position and uses their sleep breath until all creature's hostile to the speaker of the word are indisposed. Note that commanding Ileuthra when not being attacked will do nothing.

Ghosts of the Library

In any gallery other then the first there is a high chance of a ghost being present.

d100	Contents
1-70	A ghost is present.
71-100	The gallery is ghost free

If the result is an even number they are an Inquisitor, if it is odd they are a purifier.

These ghosts are not aggressive, and ignore adventurers. If attacked the ghost runs, moving through the bookshelf and the Homunculus observer rings their bell. Papers swirl forming 1 paper golem.

Ghost of a Inquisitor

As you enter this hexagon you notice that the floor is covered with fallen books that appear to have been knocked off their shelves. A strange sensation fills the air of this gallery, as if the space around you is becoming heavier, oppressive. In the dim light, you see a ghostly figure, working diligently. It seems to be unaware of you, seeming lost in thought as it silently moves about the room, reaching out to pick up fallen books and placing them back onto the shelves.

As the ghost continues its task, you notice that many other books fall from a nearby shelf. The ghost ignores this as it completes its present task, before quickly moving to the new location to try to restore order to the chaos. Another force continually undoing their work.

Ghost of a Purifier

As you enter this hexagon you notice that many of the books have been removed from the shelves. Some are piled up near the opening in the central hexagon where a ghostly figure haphazardly picks up books, checks them, and then hurls them into the air shafts with a sense of urgency. You can hear the ghost repeating to itself "*the empty messages must be purged; the crimson hexagon must be reached...*"

As the ghost continues its task, you notice that volumes of books slowly appear back on the shelves. The ghost ignores this as it completes its present task.

Results: If adventurers aid the ghost in either of their missions read the following text:

When you complete the task the ghost turns to face you, emanating a feeling of profound peace that breaks the spell of unfulfilled yearning and loneliness. The atmosphere in the room shifts, and all unsettling sensations fade away.

Reward: If adventurers aid the ghost in either of their missions, each party member gains advantage on their next roll to search the shelves for books with recognizable words.


GHOST OF THE LIBRARY
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

The Lights of the Gallery

Indicate the lights as they appear in every gallery are present in this one as well, but not every light is illuminated. Point and show the outlined lights are on or off per the map below. If players make it so that only the yellow remain illuminated, and thus form a hexagon in their placement, read the following text and refer to "Ghost of the Library" reward.

X = OFF
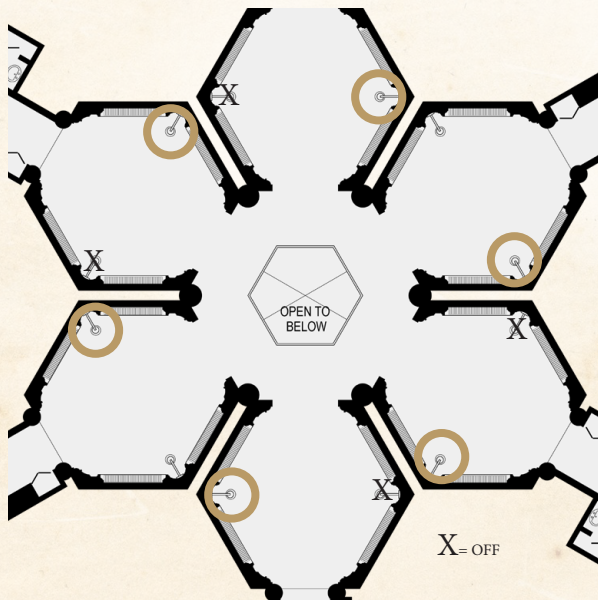
The Hallway

As you step into the dimly lit narrow hallway that connects the galleries, you notice to your left and right closet doors. As you glance around the hall, despite the fact that dim light from the spheres barely reaches the corners of the hall, your eyes fall upon a mirror on one of the walls. Within the mix of shadows reflected in it, ultimately showing what is opposite to it, you see connected to the hallway, a spiral staircase.

The Sleeping pod

This closet is so small it would barely contain a tall humanoid.

DC 10 Perception check reveals worn out patterns in the stone to indicate people spending lots of time in the closet. Seemingly a place for sleeping, these markings indicate that one may have to sleep standing up.

The Necessities

This closet is large enough, caring to one's personal necessities.

The room contains a sink which flows with fresh water, and facilities to care for a creature's basic necessities.

The Stairs

Dim light casts long shadows on the rough stone walls of the staircase, creating an eerie and unsettling atmosphere but visible enough. The spiral staircase descends deeply to the circuit below and winds upwards to the upper hexagons, beckoning further exploration. Beside it, etched in the walls indicate this is the current circuit.

Stair Trap
Inquisitors "speak of a broken stairway which almost killed them"

Trigger: Any creature stepping on the steps topmost steps of a staircase fall into the opening.

Effect: The stone steps fall from under the triggering creature as they fall onto rubble and tumble down the staircase below. The triggering must make a DC15 Dexterity saving throw. Taking 10(3d6)bludgeoning damage from the fall on a failed save, or half as much on a successful on.

Countermeasures: A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals small footholds on the edge of the steps where it is safe to step.

The Mirror

When players show interest in the mirror they notice the faint shadows of creatures in its reflection. A DC10 Arcana Check reveals the mirror to be magical, specially the mirror of Life Trapping (See "Magic Items" at the end of adventure). Note this is but one in a network of mirrors. As such destroying one mirror does not release the occupants. While within 5 feet of the mirror, if the players speak the name of one creature trapped in it or call out a particular cell by number, such as "the Author".

The Author

The Author of "The Library of Babel" lies trapped in the mirror. Musing endlessly and circuitously on the nature of the library and the infinite. He entertains all subject from the adventurers, telling everyone all he's learned of the library in his many years there often repeating himself.

THE AUTHOR
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

The Author knows everything included in "About the Library" and "Library Locations" at the beginning of the adventures. As well through the mirrors The Author knows where the mage has escaped to as he watched her pass by him.

He however doesn't immediately see why he should help the adventurers track down of stop Isidoro.

"While this mage seeks knowledge, exploring the library as is intended, you wish to capture them? The one pursuing knowledge?"

The author cocks their head considering the proposition. "I am not sceptical of this proposition, but to help you I would require you to demonstrate the spirit of the Library."

Trials:

If the players have not yet interacted with **Ghosts** in the hexagon, the Author requests the party demonstrate how genuine their motivations are by lending aid to the 'eternal residents' of the galleries.

Then The Author flips through his journal he keeps before landing on a page, satisfied he poses one of the following questions.

Q: "I have a spine, front, and back, But bones and face are what I lack. What am I?"   A: 'A Book'

or

Q: "In a guessing game to which the answer is chess, which word is the only one prohibited?"
A: 'Chess'

Once the players answer the riddle correctly, The Author nods their head in approval and tells the characters where they last saw the mage Isidoro Pass through.

The Evil Mage - Isidoro

As you follow the directions of The Author, you can sense a shift within the Library, the air is thick with the smell of old books and ancient magic. The gallery you enter seems identical to the other galleries, though you immediately see many of their tomes lay scattered on the ground. It is eerily quiet here, making the occasional scraping sound of something against stone to be sharp as it echoes in the gallery. Looking across the gallery you see Isidoro, the Heart-horned Tiefling mage, where she stands next to the low railings flipping through a book as she hums in disapproval. Two animated skeletons follow her. Their bony feet scraping against the floor as they scan the dimly lit rooms for potential threats.

Isidoro, the evil mage, (see the accompanying stat block) is accompanied by 2 **Skeletons** she animated from the bones of dead explorers of the library. She is unaware of the adventurers pursuing her, thinking only her party or Acevedo would follow her. The curse that has turned her evil has made her arrogant in this regard.

If she or one of the skeletons notices the adventurers read:

The skeletons clack their teeth together loudly, as Isidoro's posture stiffens. She turns to address the adventurers unimpressed, "I advise you to turn back now. This gallery is mine for the time being, and I will not hesitate to defend it." Her grip tightens on her snake headed staff as locks eyes with each of you. "Your search for whatever tome you desire will be better served elsewhere."

Isidoro will speak with the adventurers so long as she finds them entertaining, but if they refuse to leave her in peace she commands the Skeletons "They bore me now, get rid of them would you?"

The Skeletons will immediately charge into battle against the adventurers, Isidoro staying back preferring to use ranged attacks.

ISIDORO-THE EVIL MAGE
ILLUSTRATION BY ALISON MCNEIL

Staff. Isidoro carries a Staff of the Python. If the adventurers kill the skeletons quickly she uses her action to speak the command word and launch her Staff towards the party as she tries to run into the library.

Homunculus. In the first round of combat the Homunculus which follows the group will ring their bell. In round 3 of combat 3 Paper Golems appear. In round 5 of combat 2 more appear restraining anyone fighting.

Conclusion
Man of the Books

The battle fades away, the sound of the ringing bell echoes in the gallery as a familiar flying creature emerges from the shadows. Suddenly, a group of six paper golems materialize at each exit, standing still and silent. From behind one of them, a sharp-featured man walks towards you. You can't help but notice his sharp features and fashionable clothing, which seems more appropriate for a grand stage than a dusty library. His brightly coloured outfit contrasts with his dark skin, giving him an air of confidence and elegance.

He greets you with a wide smile and a carefree tone, "My congratulations are in order. For so few find what they search for in my Library, 'tis well done." He pauses, looking at each of you in turn, his eyes filled with amusement. "But I must ask you now to leave it. Although, I am sure you have questions. So as a gesture of goodwill, before returning you to your realm, I offer an exchange of one question."

The man elegantly takes a seat, a lute appearing in his hands as he strums it softly. "I know what I wish to ask you, so please take a moment to choose your question from the creator of the Library."

The Man of the Books will answer any question the characters pose openly and truthfully to his ability.

Though he will not answer a question too similar to his own and request the character revise theirs.

His question is as follows:

"Do you believe the Library to be infinite?"

To the man of the books there is no correct or incorrect answer, but he will not accept any answer other then yes or no. No matter what the characters response is he smiles knowingly and responds:

"Well said"

If they respond:
Yes
They receive Index of the Library

If they respond:
No
They receive Catalogue of the Library

Reward. Depending on the characters answer present them with the respective reward either **Index of the Library or Catalogue of the Library** (see 'Magic Items')

After receiving the tome the Library fades away in a swirl of light as the characters are returned to the Material Plane.

Mage Journal

The Library is comprised of an infinite number of hexagonal galleries, connected by air-shafts, hallways, and staircases. The library contains all possible books, though most do not have words. Each book combine the same 26 symbols, in every possible combination, across 410 pages.

Seek and speak to the Author

To be free from the shadow of death, to endure forever, the infinite is an equal

The Library

1 Square = 5 feet

1 Square = 5 feet

The Library

Network Map

Magic Items

Index of The Library

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

This book contains a hidden, coded index of the books in Library of Babel. If you spend 48 hours over a period of 6 days or fewer studying the book's contents and decoding its pages, your **Wisdom score 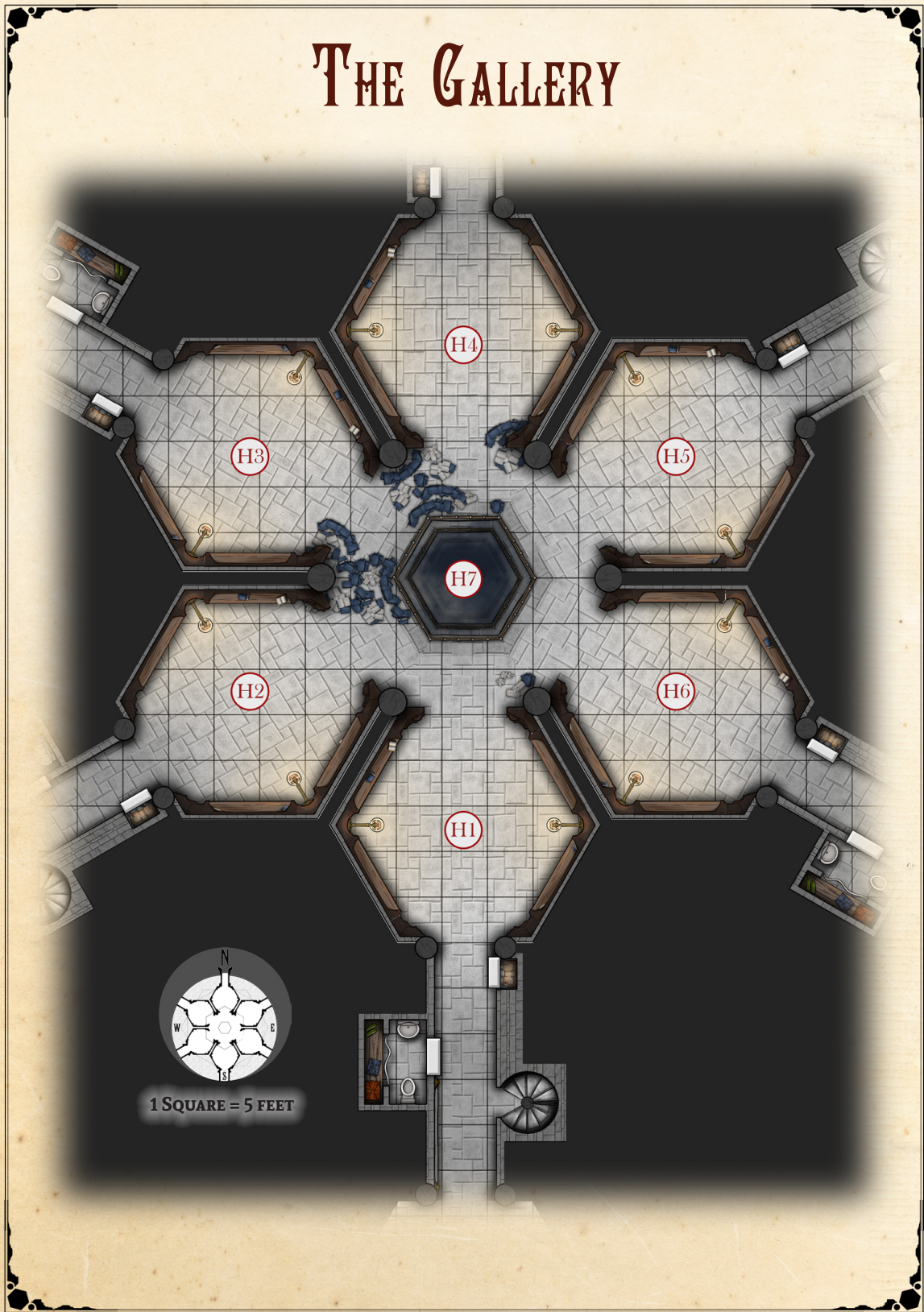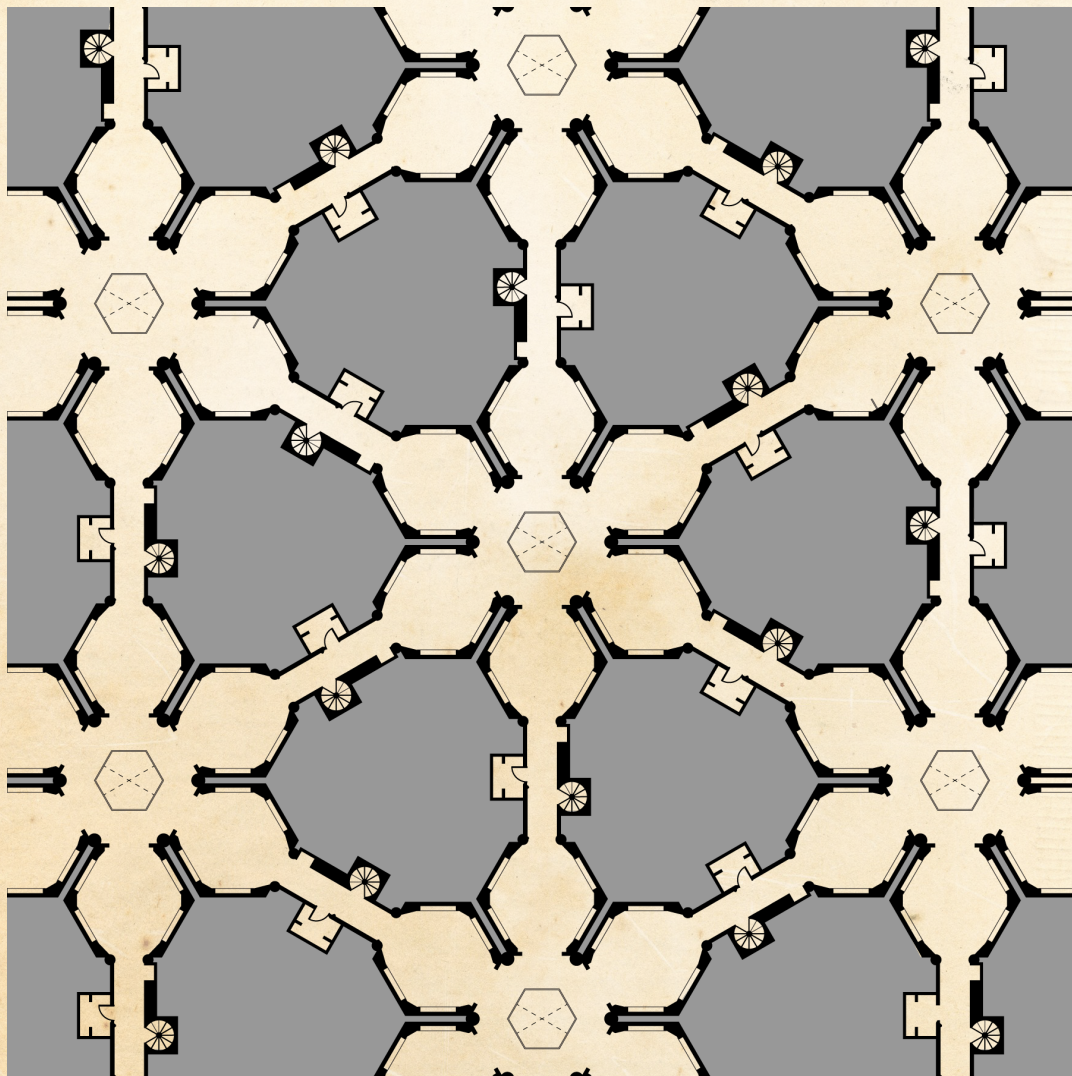increases by 2**, as does your maximum for that score. The index then loses its magic, becoming an undecipherable mess of letters, a random combination of 26 symbols.

Catalogue of The Library

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

This book contains a hidden, coded catalogue of books in the library of Babel. If you spend 48 hours over a period of 6 days or fewer studying the book's contents and decoding its pages, your **Intelligence score increases by 2**, as does your maximum for that score. The catalogue then loses its magic, becoming an undecipherable mess of letters, a random combination of 26 symbols.

Staff of the Python

Staff, Uncommon (requires attunement by a cleric, druid, or warlock)

You can use an action to speak this staff's command word and throw the staff on the ground within 10 feet of you. The staff becomes a giant constrictor snake under your control and acts on its own initiative count. By using a bonus action to speak the command word again, you return the staff to its normal form in a space formerly occupied by the snake.

On your turn, you can mentally command the snake if it is within 60 feet of you and you aren't incapacitated. You decide what action the snake takes and where it moves during its next turn, or you can issue it a general command, such as to attack your enemies or guard a location.

If the snake is reduced to 0 hit points, it dies and reverts to its staff form. The staff then shatters and is destroyed. If the snake reverts to staff form before losing all its hit points, it regains all of them

Mirror of Life Trapping – Library of Babel Variant

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

When this 4-foot-tall mirror is viewed indirectly, its surface shows faint images of Creatures. The mirror weighs 50 pounds, and it has AC 11, 10 Hit Points, and vulnerability to bludgeoning damage. It shatters and is destroyed when reduced to 0 Hit Points.

If the mirror is hanging on a vertical surface and you are within 5 feet of it, you can use an Action to speak its Command word and activate it. It remains activated until you use an Action to speak the Command word again.

Any creature other than you that sees its reflection in the activated mirror while within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be trapped, along with anything it is wearing or carrying, in one of the mirror's twelve extradimensional cells. This saving throw is made with advantage if the creature knows the mirror's Nature, and constructs succeed on the saving throw automatically.

An extradimensional cell is an infinite expanse filled with thick fog that reduces Visibility to 10 feet. Creatures trapped in the mirror's cells don't age, and they don't need to eat, drink, or sleep. The creature is confined to the cell until freed.

While within 5 feet of the mirror, you can use an Action to speak the name of one creature trapped in it or call out a particular cell by number. The creature named or contained in the named cell appears as an image on the mirror's surface. You and the creature can then communicate normally.

In a similar way, you can use an Action to speak a second Command word and free one creature trapped in the mirror. The freed creature appears, along with its possessions, in the unoccupied space nearest to the mirror and facing away from it. The mirrors act as a network, with this destroying one mirror will not release the occupants. As well there is no limit to the number of souls trapped in the mirror.

Monsters Descriptions

Paper Golem
Medium Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit points 28 (6d8)
Speed 30 ft.
Initiative +0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14(+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	2(-4)	10 (+0)	1(-5)

Saving Throws INT -2, WIS +2
Damage Vulnerabilities Fire
Damage Immunities Poison, Psychic
Condition Immunities Blinded, Charmed, Deafened, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned
Senses Blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), Passive Perception 10
Languages --
Challenge 2 (450 XP)   Proficiency Bonus +2

False Appearance. If the Golem is dispersed as a stack of papers and motionless at the start of combat, it has advantage on its initiative roll. Moreover, if a creature hasn't observed the Golem move or act, that creature must succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern that the Golem is animate.

Immutable Form. The Golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Regeneration. The Golem regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the Golem takes fire, slashing or force damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Golems next turn. The Golem is destroyed only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Unusual Nature. The Golem doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. The Golem makes two Paper Cut attacks.

Paper Cut. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Pages Form (Recharge 5-6). The Golem briefly unfolds into a undefined cloud of pages, teleporting up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Giant Constrictor Snake - Staff
Huge Beast, Unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit points 26 (4d12)
Speed 30 ft.
Initiative +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19(+4)	14(+2)	12(+1)	1(-1)	10(+0)	3(-4)

Skills Perception+2
Senses Blindsight 10 ft., Passive Perception 12
Languages -
Challenge 2(450 XP)   Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Constrict. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the snake can't constrict another target.

Isidoro- Evil Mage
Medium Construct, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 14
Hit points 30 (7d8)
Speed 30 ft.
Initiative +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9(-1)	14(+2)	11 (+0)	17(+3)	12(+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws INT +6, WIS +4
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Infernal, Elvish, Orcish
Challenge 4 (1100 XP)   Proficiency Bonus +3

Spellcasting. The mage is a 6th-level spellcaster that uses Intelligence as its spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The mage knows the following spells from the wizard's spell list:

Cantrips (at will): *Mage Hand, Fire Bolt, Chill Touch, Mending*

1st level (4 slots): *Disguise Self, Illusory Script, Sleep, False Life*

2nd level (3 slots): *Misty Step, Suggestion, Web*

3rd level (3 slots): *Animate Dead, Bestow Curse*

Undead Thrall. Whenever you create an undead using a necromancy spell, it has additional benefits:

The creature's hit point maximum is increased by an amount equal to your wizard level.

The creature adds your proficiency bonus to its weapon damage rolls.

Actions

Quarterstaff Staff of the Python. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 3 (1d8 - 1) bludgeoning damage. You can use an action to speak this staff's command word and throw the staff on the ground within 10 feet of you it becoming a giant constrictor snake under Isidoro's control.

Skeleton - Minion of Isidoro
Medium Undead, Lawful Evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)
Hit points 19 (2d8+4+6)
Speed 30 ft.
Initiative +2

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14(+2)	15 (+2)	6(-2)	8(-1)	5(-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities Bludgeoning
Damage Immunities Poison
Condition Immunities Exhaustion, Poisoned
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 9
Languages Understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak
Challenge 1/4 (150 XP)   Proficiency Bonus +2

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

3rd-Party: A company that produces D&D content, often 5E products, which is not WotC.

Adventure: A story arc the player characters play through which takes several sessions. The story has an overarching plot, side characters, and a few subplots. One adventure can be your entirety of the game with those characters or it can be added to with other adventures forming a longer campaign.

Battle Mat: Used for in person table-top play, it is a rolled surface, usually a dry erase vinyl or simply paper, with marked gridlines typically used for combat, or exploration of smaller maps.

Campaign Setting: A secondary world, separate from our own, where the game and universe is set.

Campaign: A wider story/overall game you play with your character. Each campaign can consist of multiple adventures. The length of a campaign varies wildly across the player base.

Canon: Refers to the official narrative of a given published setting.

Dungeon Crawl: A specific style of map and play which is combat-heavy and the party works through exploring a 'dungeon'. A dungeon presents as a set complex of rooms and connections with many challenges and dangers.

Dungeon Master (DM): This is the person running the game. The DM controls everything that is not the players. Their purpose is to arbitrate the rules, play side characters and narrate the game. Game Master (GM) and Referee are other common terms used for similar roles.

Dungeon: A general complex arrangement of spaces, often rooms, where combat or exploration occurs in game. A dungeon does not always an underground labyrinth, but instead refers to a complex of many spaces.

Encounter: A situation where players need to solve a problem in order to proceed. Often in the form of combat, though social and exploration encounters are also common.

Game Session: A D&D session is akin to a single 'episode' of D&D usually ranging from 3-5 hours, though each group will be different.

Grognard: A term referring to "the old guard", refers to older players that started likely with 1st or 2nd edition. They have a set expectation of difficulty and combat as a result of earlier edition mechanics.

Homebrew: A game option that is created by a DM or player, not by Wizards of the Coast. To be successful they heavily focus on the official rules and mechanics so that it is not overpowered in comparison.

Mechanics: Strict rules of the game that distinguish it from simply playing pretend. Mechanics set the rules of the games content, making combat, role-play, and the "math" of the game function.

Non-Player Character: (NPC): Non-Player Character and means anyone controlled by the DM, not another player.

One-shot: A short adventure intended to be played over one game session.

Party: The adventuring group of player characters is known as a party. A group of players can also be referred to as a party.

Player Character (PC): Player Character; the character a player has created and controls and takes on the role of in-game.

RAI: Rules as Interpreted - refers to interpreting the rules as they are 'intended' to be used, rather than just how they're worded.

RAW: Rules as Written - refers to interpreting the rules of the game strictly by how they're written in the official books. Often focusing on and manipulating grammar conventions

Role-play (RP): The main way of engaging in D&D and interacting between characters. This acting as a character that is not you, where you speak, take actions and make decisions based on the character motivations.

RPG: Role-playing game.

TSR: Tactical Studies Rules. Original publishers of D&D from 1973-1997.

TTRPG: Tabletop RPG. Differentiating games from other fantasy role-playing such as RPG Video Games or LARP, live-action role-play.

VTT: Virtual Tabletop. Differentiating games from other Tabletop by virtual of the tabletop being online.

WotC: Wizards of the Coast. Publishers of Dungeons and Dragons since 1997.