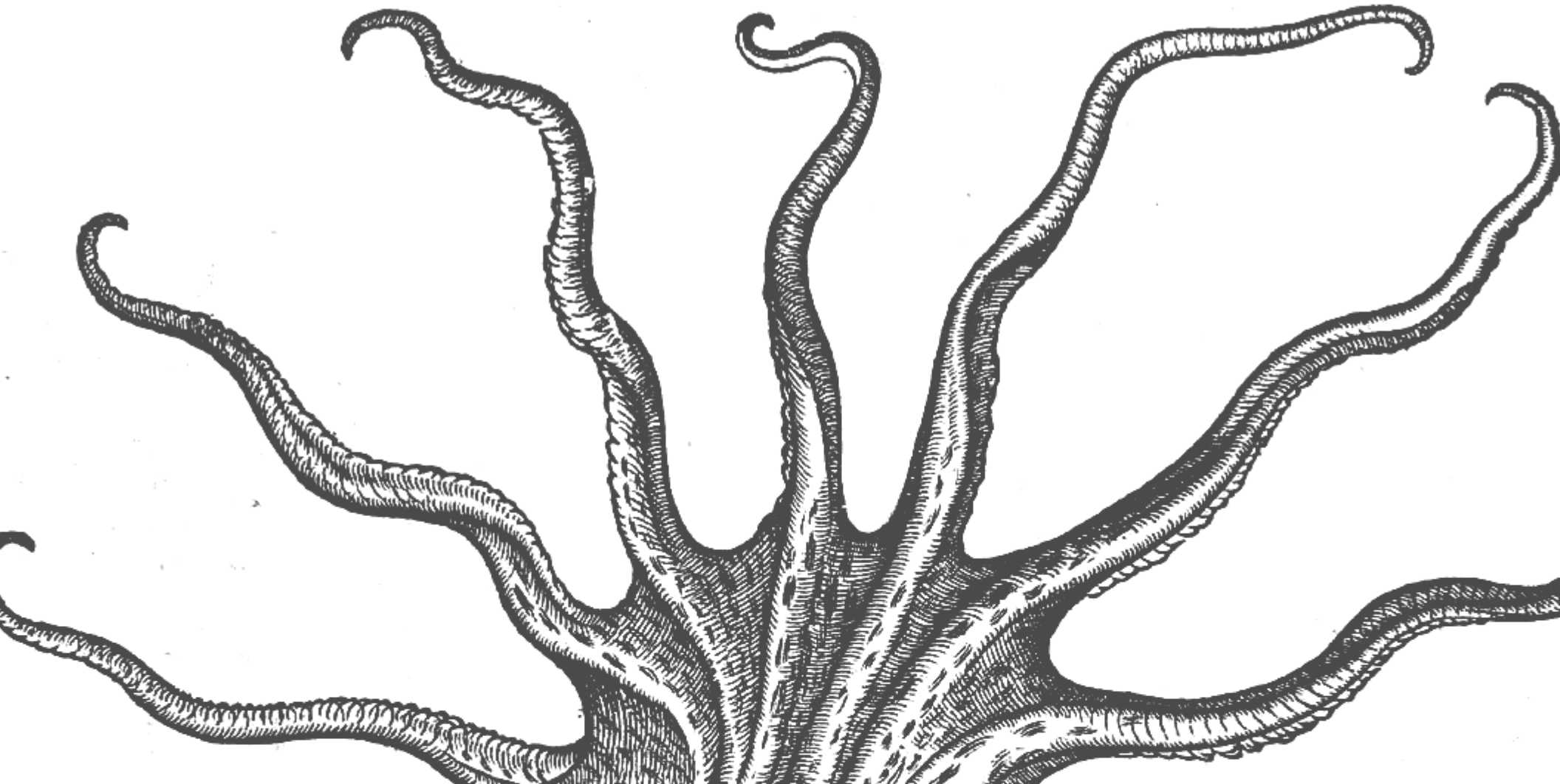




Grell Alchemy

A Roleplaying Game of Alchemical Discovery

by Nick Wedig

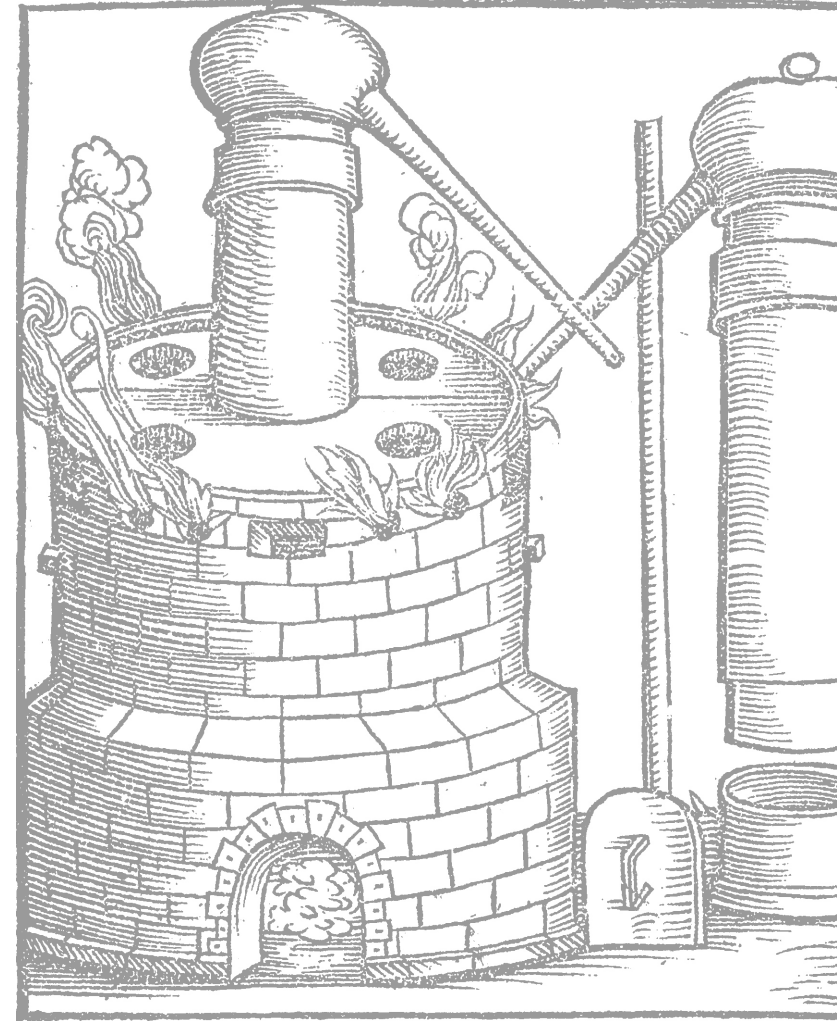


This is a roleplaying game about being a slimy tentacled monster, about using alchemy to investigate the world, and about exploring a massive series of underground tunnels.

You are a floating brain with tentacles and a beak. You come from an alternate reality where that makes sense. You've come here to learn about this plane of existence through alchemy. You are grell, and through your experiments you will come to understand this strange new world. If you're smarter than your brethren, you can perfect your alchemy and lord it over the other, lesser grells. If you're mistaken, though, you'll be a laughingstock of the ambulatory brain monster community.

Some grell are solitary hunters, who practice no alchemy and don't socialize with other creatures. This isn't a game about those grell, though. This is a game about the smarter grell, who organize into colonies and work their alchemy to understand this world. These grell mostly work together, though they are in constant competition with each other to be the best alchemists at the expense of the other grell.

To play this game, you will need one gamemaster (GM) and one or more players. You'll need at least two decks of ordinary playing cards (no Jokers) and some way to take notes. The GM claims one deck and shuffles it. The players take the other deck and sort it by suit. Then you shuffle each suit, to create four decks, one for each suit.



Dungeon Creation

Grells congregate in colonies, which typically make their lairs deep underground. The grell lair for this game is a small section of a much larger megadungeon. The grell colonists are initially aware of the threats that exist nearby them, but the dungeon stretches on for miles. There could be countless threats out there, and untold riches as well.

Before you begin the game proper, someone needs to create the beginnings of the dungeon map. To do this, they draw cards to determine what threats, resources and exits are in each of the adjacent regions. The GM can populate nearby regions ahead of game time, or the GM and players can collaborate on this process together at the start of play.

If the GM does it ahead of time, you can get to the main gameplay sooner, which is good if you have limited time. On the other hand, if you do it as a group together, then the GM doesn't have to prep anything for the game (good) and you get all the benefit of the player's creativity and imagination (good) and the players will be more invested in these fictional creations (also good). But collaborating can take more time. Do whichever works for your group.

Regions

To keep things simple, this game doesn't map every dungeon room and 10 by 10 stone corridor of the megadungeon. We only track broad regions of the dungeon, and the groups that control those regions. In order to make everything manageable and tidy, we're going to divide the dungeon into a series of squares.

Each square might connect to the squares north, south, east and west (never diagonally). Each square will have a threat to the grell in some form, and supply of valuable alchemical ingredients.

The grell colony is assumed to connect in all four cardinal directions. Before gameplay, the GM and the players (or the GM by herself) will have to populate those four regions.

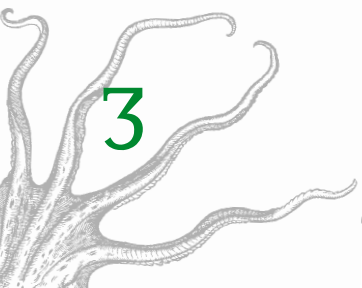
Repeat the following process for each region:

The GM draws 3 cards from the GM deck. Each card represents a different aspect of the dungeon region, depending on whether it is the highest, the middle or the lowest ranked card. (Aces are low, Kings are high.)

The highest ranked card represents the region itself. The rank of the card gives a broad description of the area, according to this chart:

Dungeon Places

- A** *Ruins of an ancient civilization*
- 2** *Cursed by ancient and forbidden sorcery*
- 3** *Extraplanar portal*
- 4** *Catacombs, graveyard or ossuary*
- 5** *Library/observatory/laboratory*
- 6** *A labyrinth of shifting corridors*
- 7** *Hidden temple to a forgotten god*
- 8** *Prison cells, still occupied*
- 9** *Fortification, barracks, or other military outpost*
- 10** *Underground river or lake*
- J** *A series of corridors strewn with traps*
- Q** *Animal den or makeshift camp*
- K** *Natural caves*



The suit of the region card tells you how many exits there are from this region to other regions. Every region you visit has at minimum the exit back to the previous region. Each other cardinal direction may or may not have an exit, leading into additional regions. You can only have one exit in each direction from a region of the dungeon.

- Hearts** *Just back the way you came*
- Spades** *The way you came and one more exit*
- Clubs** *The way you came and two more exits*
- Diamonds** *The way you came and three more exits*

Try to connect tunnels together to make sense. If a new region is directly north of an explored region, and the older region had a tunnel headed north, then you should use one of the new region's exits to connect to the southern region if at all possible. On the other hand, if the old region did not have any tunnel pointing north, then the new region should not have a south-pointing tunnel unless all the unexplored tunnels already have tunnels and you still need to place another tunnel.

Sometimes, you may be forced to connect a tunnel from one region to a region that did not have a tunnel going in that direction. In this case, you should mark it as a secret door, hidden trapdoor, caved-in tunnel, one-way teleportation chamber or other unusual dungeon feature that allows travel from one region to the other but not in reverse.

Threats

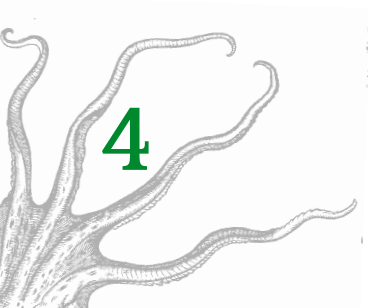
The middle card represents the threat you will find in that region. Higher ranked threats are more dangerous than lower ranked threats. The suit of the threat tells you what sort of creatures you can expect to find in that region:

- Hearts** The Inedible
Spirits, elementals, golems, gargoyles, djinn, ghosts, etc.
- Spades** The Eaters
Monsters like dragons, manticores, flail snails, hydra, etc.
- Clubs** The Meddlers
Surface humanoids like humans, elves, werewolves, etc.
- Diamonds** The Prey
Underground sentients, like drow, beholders, kobolds, etc.

The lowest card represents the resources that can be recovered from the region, provided the grell avoid or defeat the threat found there. The rank determines how plentiful that ingredient is. In each region, the grell can find 1 + the rank worth of ingredients.

- Diamonds** Earth World *Precious gems, lead*
- Hearts** Water Moon *Silver, living flesh*
- Clubs** Air Stars *Copper, magic items*
- Spades** Fire Sun *Gold, sentient brains*

Aces for resources means there are no recoverable ingredients, but you can gain some knowledge from the inhabitants or the environment. By studying there and overcoming the threat, you can learn the rank of one alchemical term (the GM picks one based on the nature of the region).



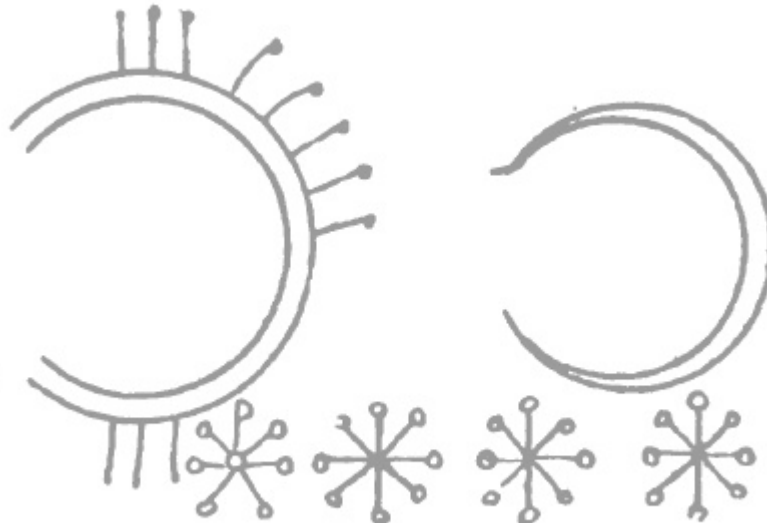
Colony Creation

Grell colonies vary in size, but 3-7 is pretty common. So for this game, every PC is a member of the same colony, and by default there aren't any NPC grell involved.

Grell form their colonies based on elaborate and often bizarre philosophies. Every grell colony belongs to a larger school of thought. These philosophical schools provide a way of understanding an the world and guidance for behavior.

As a group, choose one of the following philosophies. Every grell is a member of this philosophical school. You may have some disagreements over specific interpretations of the central idea, but all the PCs agree with the school's basic premise and work together to achieve the school's goals.

Each philosophy has some information about their beliefs. Each also tells you the suit of one Noun. Each also determines one of the questions you must answer as part of character creation. Finally, every philosophical school has its own conventions for naming grells.



Philosophies

Byoll

"Permission to use"

The Byoll kidnap native sentient beings. Then they work through alchemy and low-level psionics to brainwash their captives. Once their prisoners are psychically enslaved, the Byoll release their thralls into the world to perform tasks the grell see as dangerous or unpleasant.

Noun: Mind

Question: How do you establish a personal connection to your subjects that allows the psychic bond to be formed?

Names: Byoll grell are named after things they wish to acquire, like Knowledge, Respect, Wealth, Power, etc.

Kragg

"Consume the Willing"

The Kragg believe that it is immoral to eat a sentient being, unless that sentient has agreed to being consumed. The Kragg philosophy is a splinter sect from the Byoll school of thought, and they use the same brainwashing techniques to get the permission they desire from their potential food. The Kragg see no contradiction in using mind control to get the agreement they want from their captive food sources.

Noun: Compliance

Question: What prey creatures are you best at brainwashing into being a willing meal?

Names: Kragg grell take the names from descriptions of the most powerful creature they have harvested. Black Dragon, Frost Giant, Elven King, etc. These names are often boastful exaggerations and sometimes they are total lies.

Glatt

“Equanimity of Harm”

The Glatt believe that rewards and harm should be spread as evenly as possible. This means that if they harm any natives, they attack all possible targets equally rather than focusing on a single foe. In theory, this is supposed to create equality among the grell, but in practice it often means that the Glatt are competing in secret for resources and respect while publicly shuffling their problems onto other colony members.

Noun: Pain

Question: What weakness are you careful to hide from the other grell?

Names: By placing something in your name, you can avoid it. So Glatt grell are named after the things they fear most, like Misery, Weakness, Fear and Pain

Jrall

“Feasting in Knowledge”

The Jrall believe that a well-educated person’s flesh is better than an ignorant one. The Jrall believe it is their place in the world to teach its inhabitants the truth, and then to consume those creatures.

Noun: Secrets

Question: What area of knowledge do you prefer to educate your prey on before consuming them?

Names: Jrall grell use natural phenomenon as their names. Each Jrall colony chooses a topic of interest and takes names from that topic’s vocabulary. For example a geology focused conclave might use: Abyssal plain, Stratigraphy, Alkali, Allochthon, Batholith, Breccia, Disconformity, Karst, Pseudomatrix, Vug. Use your internet search engine to find a glossary of an obscure topic and choose some interesting names.

Pzung

“The Unreality of Identity”

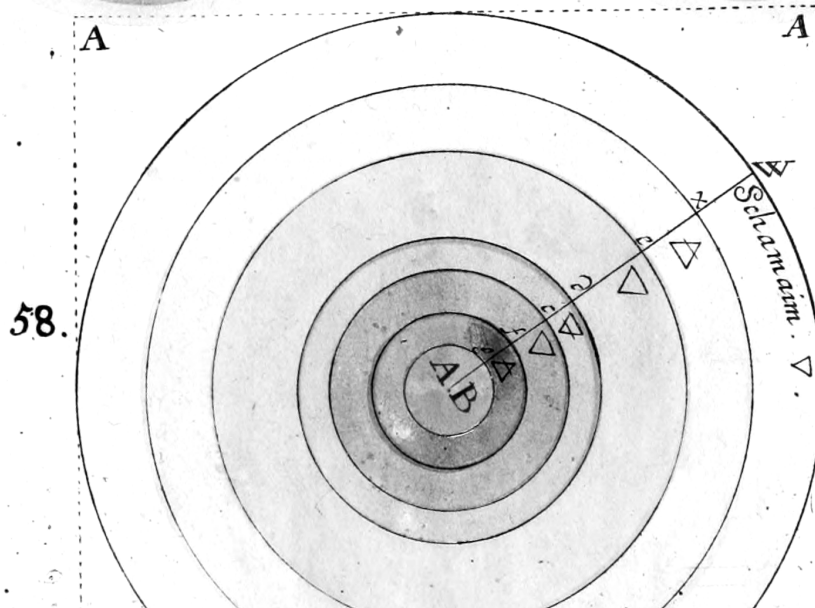
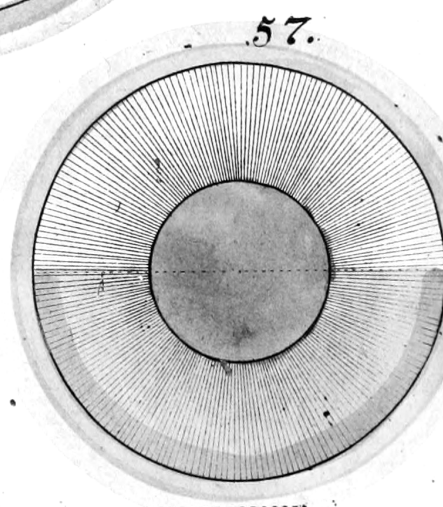
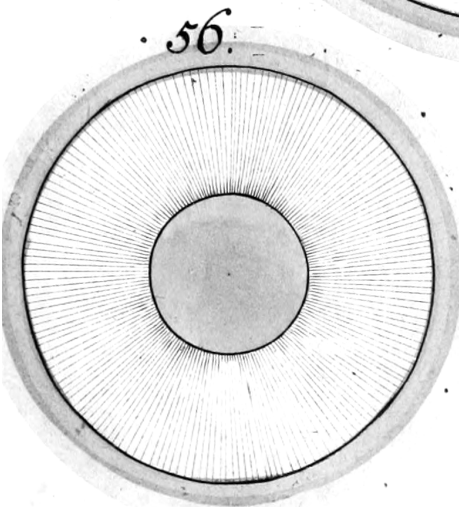
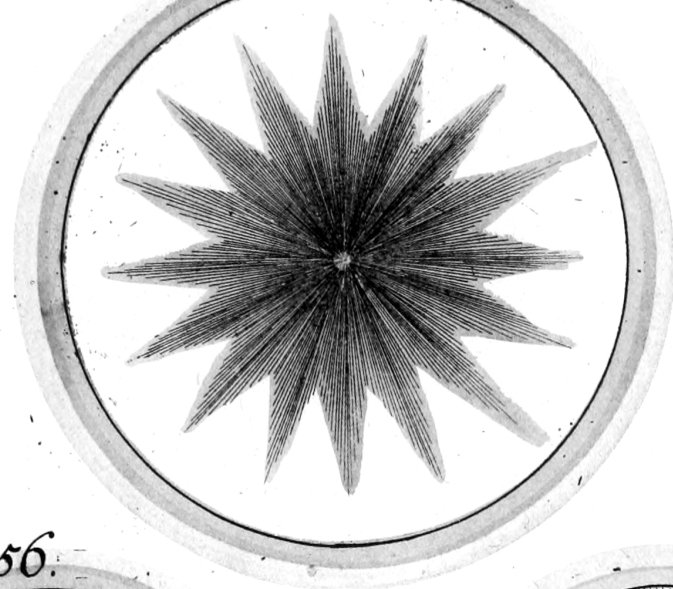
These grell philosophers have studied the nature of the universe, and they have determined that this world, the physical realm, is the real world. What, then, of the Far Realm, the place you call home? It doesn’t exist. Grell, and similar abominations, cannot exist. You’re merely figments of the imagination. Grell don’t exist, but with the right arcane secret, they could. By stripping this world of resources, you hope to discover the truth.

Noun: Self

Question: What essential aspect of existence do you believe that the grell lack?

Names: Pzung use their names to remind others of the illusory nature of the world. Names usually are like small sermons on the inevitability of death, of the nature of uncertainty. “Remember that you will die” is a common and popular name. “Sensory input is unreliable”, “Everything you know is wrong”, “Reality is impossible”, “No one in the world ever gets what they want”, “Your Senses Deceive You”.



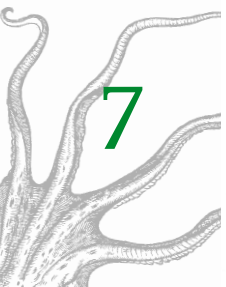


Research Target

Once you agree on a philosophy, decide what your specific colony is researching. You are all competing to be the first to identify the recipe for one alchemical creation. Though the colony mostly works together, you each want individually to be the grell that first determines the recipe for that creation.

Decide on a Verb and Noun combination that all the grell are attempting to identify. If you are the first to figure out the signifiers for both alchemical terms, then you will gain much prestige among the grell back in the Far Realm. If you incorrectly identify the signifiers, though, you'll be treated as a fool and cast out of grell society.

All players must agree on what this goal phrase is. The Verb and Noun combination could use one or more words from the philosophy or from roles. Using these words will make for a shorter game (if you take a word from the philosophy) and might favor certain roles over others.



Character Creation

Choose a role. Each role tells you something about what you do in the colony, a question to define your character's skills, and defines how skills work for you. In addition, you begin knowing the rank of one Verb based on your role.

It's fine if there are several PCs of some roles, and no PCs of other roles. Some colonies have many philosophers and harvesters and no masterminds. Others have many masterminds and soldiers, but no philosophers. Every colony has a different arrangement. Choose the role that seems appealing to you.

Once the players have chosen roles, the GM should secretly convey to them the rank information on the Verbs associated with their role.

Soldier

Military Might: Aces count as 14 for you when using your skills for non-chemical actions.

Verb: Destroy

Question: What method do you most enjoy using to destroy your prey?

Philosopher

Knowledge Arcana: When using your skills, if your alchemical creation matches a term's color but not suit, you add +2 points to your total.

Verb: Scry

Question: What threat to the colony worries you most? How do you plan to defeat it?

Mastermind

All According to Plan: When using your skills, add +1 to the rank of any card you draw for non-chemical actions.

Verb: Control

Question: How do you manipulate your enemies to their own destruction?

Harvester

Thorough Scavenger: When you harvest resources related to your skills, you gain double the number of resources as normal.

Verb: Create

Question: What are you most skilled at stripping for resources?



Suits and Skills

The four suits of the deck represent four ways the grell interact with the world. each grell is particularly skilled in some way in each suit. For each, answer the question associated with the suit. When that answer is relevant to your actions, you get a mechanical bonus. (The specific bonus is determined by the your role.)

Diamonds Hunger
Desire, gluttony, greed, enviousness, treachery, betrayal
Determined by your role

Hearts Curiosity
Experimentation, openness to new ideas
What are you most curious about in this new world?

Clubs Pride
Superiority, determination, willpower, ego
Why are you better than all other creatures (grell or non-grell)?

Spades Cruelty
Violence, intimidation, destruction, lack of empathy
Determined by your philosophy

Alchemical Secrets

Choose one Noun or Verb that is not part of the colony's goal phrase. You can either know the rank or suit of that word's signifier, your choice. The GM secretly determines that, and passes a note (or otherwise secretly conveys that knowledge) to you so that you know that and no one else does.

Everyone else learns what word you chose, but they don't get to know the secret rank or suit information you received.

Choose two suits of cards and draw them, add them to your personal resource pool.

Name your grell

Grells give themselves names based on their philosophy. Grell names are usually a combination of electrochemical signals and sounds produced by an inhuman beak. So they are difficult or impossible for humans to pronounce. Most grell names are common words, though, so you can refer to them by the English translation of their name.



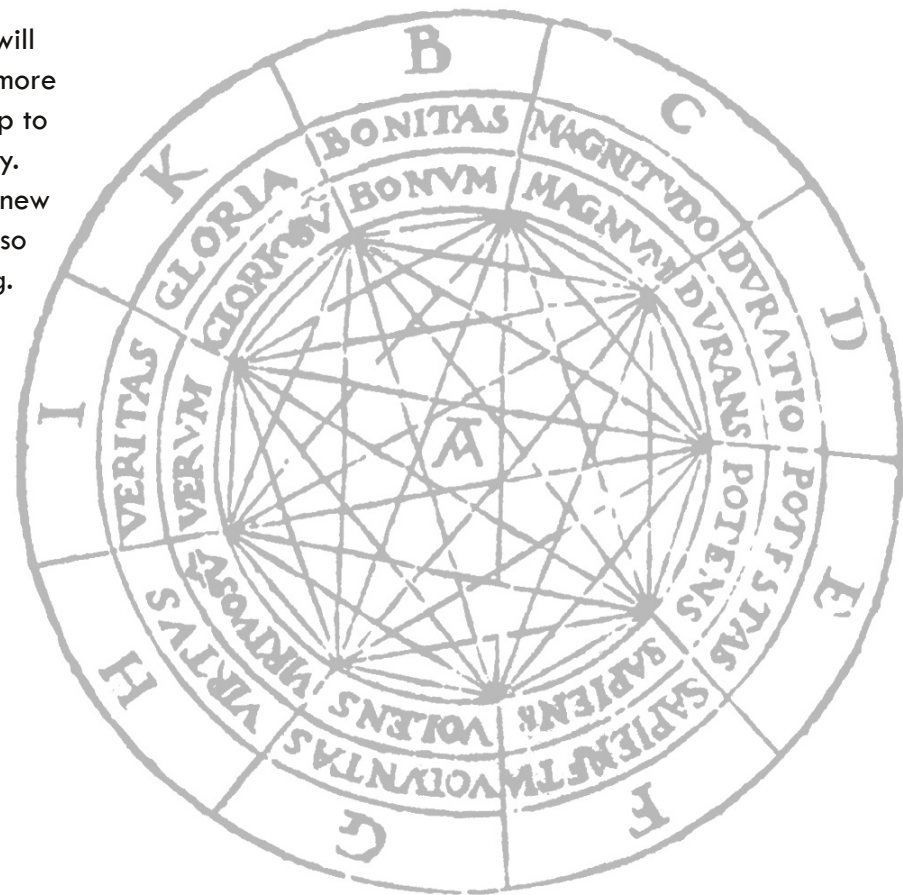
Rounds and actions

The main body of the game is divided into rounds.

During each round, every grell will have a brief scene where they can accomplish one task: interacting with a threat, creating an alchemical creation, exploring new regions of the dungeon, etc. In general, once a grell has drawn one or more cards or created an alchemical item, it is probably time to move on to another grell.

(Ordering the scenes isn't hugely important, so you could go around the table in seating arrangement order. Or you could just have each grell volunteer who goes next, as long as each grell only gets one scene per round.)

After each grell takes one action, the gamemaster will have a turn. During their turn, they increase one or more threats in the dungeon. Any threat that increments up to rank 14 will do something terrible to the grell colony. Once the GM is finished enacting this plot, then the new round begins, the grell each get a brief scene, and so forth. Repeat until you decide you are done playing.



Alchemy

Alchemy is inherently tied into the fundamental nature of the universe. By understanding the rules of alchemy, you better comprehend the underlying truths of existence.

The grell were expert alchemists within the Far Realm, operating according to the rules of that place. But the mortal world is not the Far Realm. The rules that worked there do not work in this place. What you knew of alchemy is not true here. And if you were to travel to another plane of existence, the Nine Hells or the Elemental Chaos or the Feywild, then the knowledge that is true in the mortal world would no longer apply either.

You will have to learn the rules of alchemy anew once more. You understand the broad outlines of how alchemy works, but you lack the specific knowledge of how to create specific effects here in the mortal world.

To create an alchemical effect always follows the same structure:

- The player describes the effect they wish to accomplish, by combining a Noun and a Verb.
- The player chooses one or more cards from their resource pool to spend toward this alchemical effort.
- The GM checks the the Noun and Verb's signifiers and compares them to the resource cards spent toward the effort.
- For each term, the GM looks to see if the signifier's suit and rank are present among the resource cards spent on the effort.
- If the suit is present, the alchemical effort gains +4 points
- If the rank is present, the alchemical effort gains +3 points
- Since 7 points are possible for the Verb and 7 points for the Noun, the effort will score somewhere between 0 and 14 points.
- The GM tells the player the point total of the alchemical effort. The GM does not tell the players which cards scored point and which did not.
- The more points you earned, the better. 0 points is terrible, 14 is amazingly good.
- If the grell were attempting to use alchemy to overcome and obstacle or defeat an enemy, compare the alchemy's final score to the obstacle's card rank to determine its effectiveness.
- Otherwise, the GM and player collaborate to describe the alchemy's effective results.



Let us examine and explain each of those steps in detail:

The player describes the effect they wish to accomplish, by combining a Noun and a Verb. When a player wishes to accomplish something with alchemy, they describe the effect they have in mind. The GM and other players can ask questions and give suggestions on how the effect might work. The GM or other players may suggest how the effect could be created with a different Noun or Verb.

Once everyone is satisfied with the alchemical effect, you can proceed to the next step. Most of the time, ideas will be accepted with no discussion at all, but you can always suggest alternate ways an effect might work.

Every effect must be the combination of a Noun and a Verb. So to produce flame, you might use Create and Fire. Later, you might decide to use the same Create Verb, but with Fear to scare away some annoying gnomes.

There is no set list of Nouns or Verbs. You will create those as you go (see below for defining new Nouns and Verbs). It usually is to your advantage to work with Nouns and Verbs you used previously, because you'll have more information about how they work. Sneaky players will find it especially advantageous to work with words they know about and the other players do not.

Nouns can be things like: *Time, Snow, Glass, Apples, Fear, Water, Logic, Death, Animals, Caves, Ghosts, Entropy, Mind, etc. etc.*

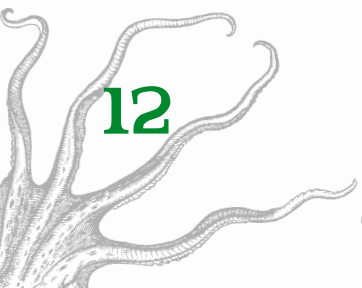
Verbs can be things like: *Scry, Conjure (spirit of), Create, Destroy, Enhance, Control, Imbue aspect of, Transform (into something else), Curse, Beguile, etc.*

The player chooses one or more cards from their resource pool to spend toward this alchemical effort. To produce an alchemical effect always consumes some ingredients. You must select at least one card from your resource pool to discard. You may select more than one. If you spend more than one, you increase the chance of the effect producing the result that you want, but you may not learn as much in the process. (See Determining Signifiers below.) Spending more resources burns through your supplies faster, as well.

The GM checks the the Noun and Verb's signifiers and compares them to the resource cards spent toward the effort. For each term, the GM looks to see if the signifier's suit and rank are present among the resource cards spent on the effort. The signifier of an alchemical term acts as a target. The closer the alchemist is able to match that target, the better their result. The GM checks for the Noun and Verb separately, then combines the two.

If the suit is present, the alchemical effort gains +4 points. It does not matter which card matches the suit. As long as at least one card of the appropriate suit is present, the player gets those points. If both noun and verb share the same suit, then the player gets points for both Noun and Verb.

If the rank is present, the alchemical effort gains +3 points. It does not matter which card matches the rank. As long as at least one card of the appropriate rank is present,



the player gets those points. If both noun and verb share the same rank, then the player gets points for both Noun and Verb.

Since 7 points are possible for the verb and 7 points for the noun, the effort will score somewhere between 0 and 14 points. Some possible point totals are impossible to achieve (e.g. 9 or 2). Some combinations have multiple different ways to achieve them (like 7). Careful players will work to keep track of the scores of different experiments, to determine what is going on in each.

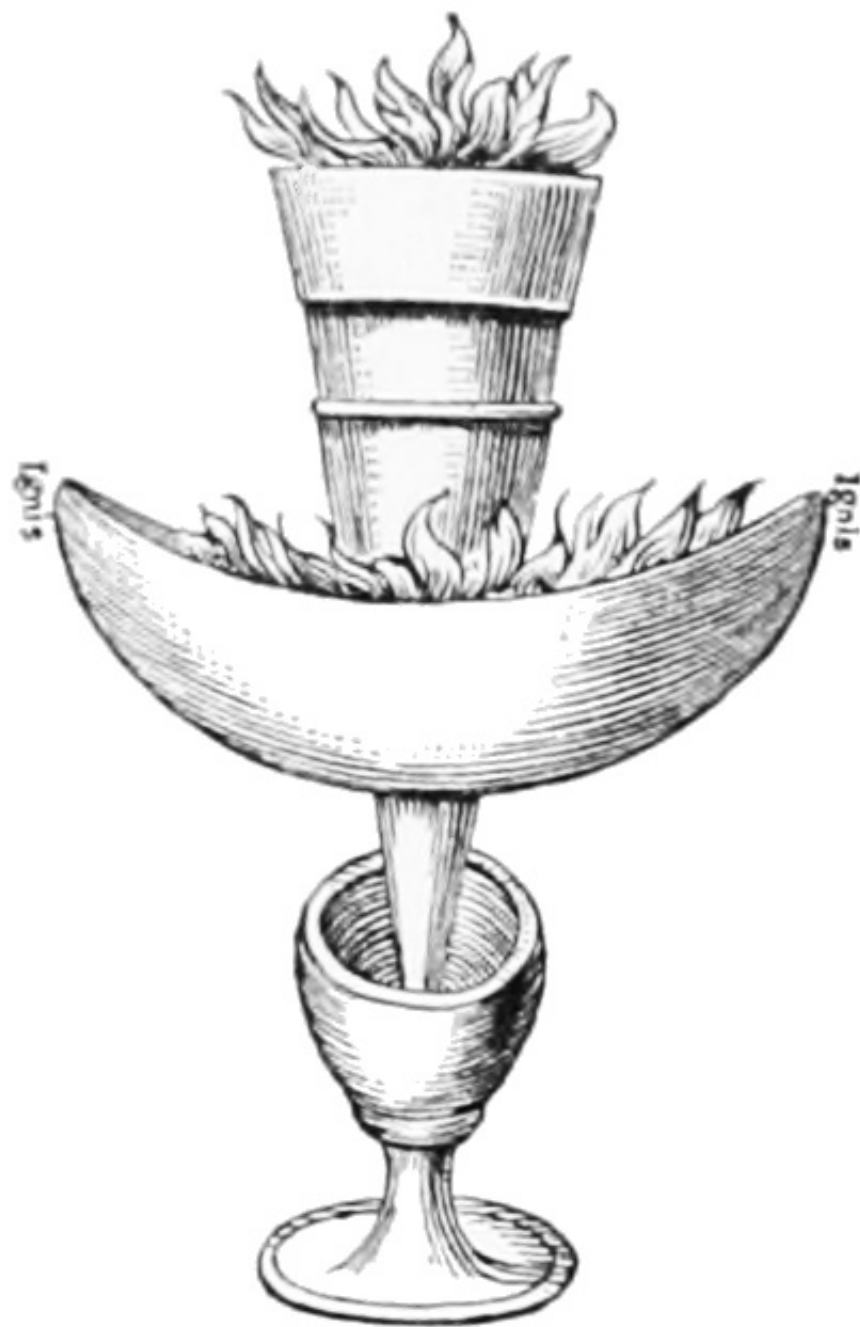
The GM tells the player the point total of the alchemical effort. The GM does not tell the players which cards scored point and which did not.

All players get to hear the experiment's point total. The results of experiments are always public knowledge. But each player has secret knowledge in addition to this public information, and clever players will set up their experiments to use their secret knowledge to their advantage.

The more points you earned, the better. 0 points is terrible, 14 is amazingly good. If the grell were attempting to use alchemy to overcome and obstacle or defeat an enemy, compare the alchemy's final score to the obstacle's card rank to determine its effectiveness. Otherwise, the GM and player collaborate to describe the alchemy's effective results.

The final score of the alchemical experiment is treated the same as a rank of a drawn skill card would be.

(If you ever travel to a different plane of existence, then the Nouns and Verbs will have different signifiers there, so your research would have to start over altogether.)



Creating new Nouns and Verbs

In general, the grell can begin studying new Nouns and Verbs at any time. Nouns and Verbs may have some overlap. Discuss with the other players and the GM about what your new Noun/Verb will cover. It is often to your advantage to work more with known Nouns and Verbs rather than creating new ones.

If you do create a new alchemical term, make sure it is clearly distinct from the ones already established in the game. When you propose a new term, anyone else at the table can point out that it is a synonym of an existing word. In that case, you can instead use that Noun or Verb. In some cases, you might have suggested a word that was more narrow or broad in definition than the existing word (e.g. using Cats instead of Animals) in which case you can proceed with the new word. As with everything, discuss with your GM and fellow players. Seek compromises and alternative solutions until everyone at the table is satisfied with the result.

When you declare that you are researching a new Noun or Verb, the GM shuffles their discard pile into the GM deck. Then they draw a card to be the signifier for that new alchemical technique. The GM secretly notes down the suit and rank for the word. (They should ensure that the signifier for the new term is unique. No two terms can share the same signifier. If you duplicate a signifier already drawn, draw again until you get a new one.) The GM should keep all these card hidden from the players, of course.

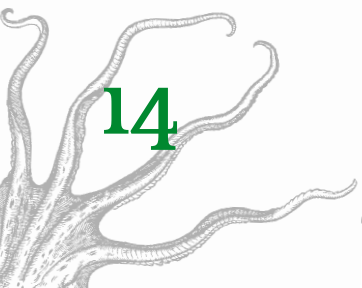
Determining Signifiers

The Grell's goal is to understand how alchemy works on this plane of existence. This is reflected in the mechanics. If you know a Noun or Verb's signifier, then you can be more focused in how you expend resources. You will know the effectiveness of a technique before spending the resources.

If you strategically play your resource cards, you can determine the suit and rank of a card over time. First make a hypothesis on what the signifier may be, and expend cards that match that hypothesis (or would disprove the hypothesis). See the results and revise accordingly.

Your investigation is complicated slightly, because you always combine a Noun and Verb. So you will not know at first if you identified the rank for the Noun or the Verb, for example. In that case, switching one term for another and producing a new effect. E.g., instead of Creating Fire, you might Create Shadow, or Detect Fire. The new combination can help you isolate which alchemical term is associated with that rank you discovered. With careful play and consideration, you should be able to learn a card's signifier after a few attempts.

In the process, you will likely learn that some Verbs combine more readily with certain Nouns than others (and vice versa). If the signifiers of two cards share the same suit or rank, then that means that one card can pull double duty.



Symbolic Astrology

Grell are blind and live deep underground. But through their alchemical experiments, they can still learn the astrological effects the stars have upon this world. Every alchemical term is associated with a sign of the zodiac and with one of the heavenly bodies, based on the rank and suit of the signifier.

Rank / Constellations

A	<i>The Bull</i>
2	<i>The Twins</i>
3	<i>The Crab</i>
4	<i>The Lion</i>
5	<i>The Maiden</i>
6	<i>The Judge</i>
7	<i>The Scorpion</i>
8	<i>The Serpent Bearer</i>
9	<i>The Archer</i>
10	<i>The Sea-Goat</i>
J	<i>The Water-Bearer</i>
Q	<i>The Fish</i>
K	<i>The Ram</i>

Suits Elements Planet

Diamonds	Earth	World
Hearts	Water	Moon
Clubs	Air	Stars
Spades	Fire	Sun

This is a tool for the players to talk about alchemy without breaking character. The playing cards don't exist in the game world, but you can talk about how you think that Echoes has the aspect of the Moon in the Archer, but it might be the Moon in the Ram as well. Or

two grell can argue over whether Creating is an act associated with Air or Fire, or the Stars or the Sun. Much of the game involves making guesses and thinking strategically about alchemical experiments. It's helpful and more fun to be able to have those conversations in character, so these associations exist.

The Hated Day Star

Why do grell hate sunlight when they are blind? Because it exerts such a strong astrological force on the world that it interferes with their alchemical experiments. That is why they hate the sun, despite being blind. That is why they do all their experiments deep underground. If you do a project above Earth's surface, the sun interferes with the alchemy.

If the grell ever reach the surface and see sunlight, then they have a more difficult time doing research. When they first find the surface, the GM secretly draws one random card that represents the current date. During each time of year, certain tasks are more difficult. If there is one card of the suit or rank in the ingredient spend, it doesn't count. If you have two, then it counts. But you have to spend more resources to get the same effect. And if you don't know that task's signifiers, then you might not know to add extra to make it work

Each card is symbolic of roughly one week of game time. At the end of each round, GM should advance the date, increasing the effective rank of the date by 1. If the date is a King, the date becomes an Ace of a different suit, following this pattern: Clubs > Hearts > Spades > Diamonds > Clubs.

Ingredients

Resources are divided into 4 decks. Whenever you acquire resources of an elemental nature, you draw one or more cards from that deck.

Ingredients can be traded between grell in exchange for favors. Or they can steal from each other, share ingredients, pool them together for a project, etc.

At the start of each gaming session after the first, each grell draws a card from the suit of their choice and

Gathering ingredients

You add cards to your the resource pool when you gather specific categories of alchemical supplies.

Diamonds	Earth	World	<i>Precious gems, lead</i>
Hearts	Water	Moon	<i>Silver, living flesh</i>
Clubs	Air	Stars	<i>Copper, magic items</i>
Spades	Fire	Sun	<i>Gold, sentient brains</i>

Lead into Gold

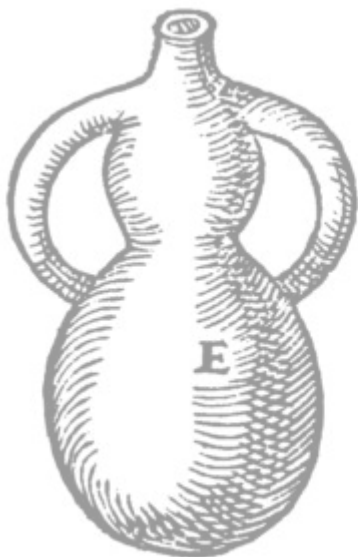
You can use alchemy to produce new ingredients out of existing ingredients, but the system is unreliable. The grell perform this the same as any other alchemical experiment: Combine a noun and verb, spend some ingredients and the GM will tell you the result.

Depending on the score produced, you can draw resource cards from the appropriate suit's deck:

- 0-3** *Failure. You get nothing*
- 4-6** *Draw 1 resource card*
- 7-8** *Draw 2 resource cards*
- 9-10** *Draw 3 resource cards*
- 11+** *Draw 5 resource cards*

Note that each ingredient is associated with a suit of cards, but that that material's signifier might not fall in that suit. For instance, Gold is useable as a Spades ingredient for alchemical creations. When a grell gains gold, they draw a Spades card and add it to their resource pool. But if the grell attempt to Create Gold, then the GM secretly draws a card for Gold's signifier, for example the 4 of Clubs. Thus, to create gold, the grell would have to experiment for a while to determine that gold was signified by Clubs. Knowing that copper is the metal associated with Clubs, the grell then could spend Clubs cards to create some amount of gold. In this way, a grell can find methods of producing specific resource types, but they may not know what sort of ingredient fuel that transformation.

In some rare cases, the associated suit and signifier's suit may be the same. In those cases, the grell might be able to transform small amounts of an ingredient into large amounts, provided they have material of the appropriate rank/astrological aspect.



Non-chemical Actions

For non-chemical tasks the grell draw from the 4 player decks. Each suit represents a different way of interacting with the world. The deck you draw from is determined by the actions you take and how you describe them. You describe how you're doing something, and the GM and you agree on what suit that would fall under. You then draw a card from that suit's deck. Compare to a target to determine success or failure.

To overcome an obstacle, your card must be higher than the obstacle's difficulty value. If you beat a threat's difficulty, you can either steal resources from them or do them harm. When you do harm to the threat, their difficulty value is lowered by the amount you beat them by. If it reaches zero, you've defeated them. If you choose to steal resources, you can take resources equal to the amount by which you beat the difficulty.

If the obstacle doesn't have an established difficulty, the GM draws a card at random. If it sounds easy, then they draw two and use the lower one as the difficulty. If it sounds hard, they draw two and use the higher one.

If you fail, the GM can impair one of your abilities, usually the one of the suit of the card they played. While impaired, all tasks using that ability are difficult (GM draws two cards and takes the higher). If you would impair the same ability again, your grell dies.

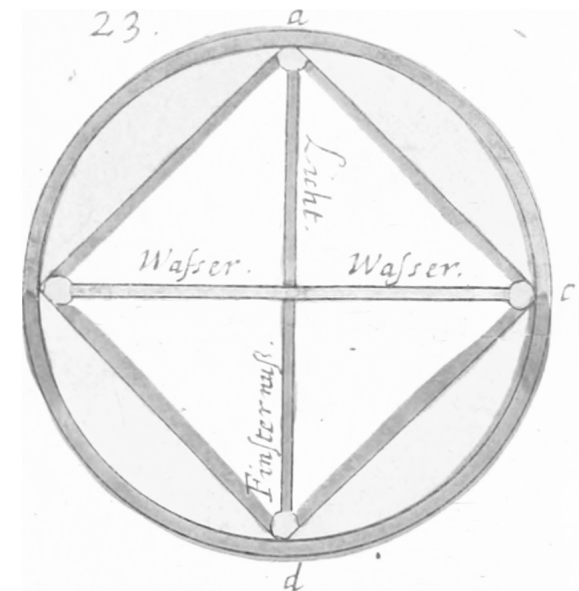
(If you're impaired or at a disadvantage when attempting something against a known difficulty threat, the GM draws a card and uses either that or the established difficulty of the threat, whichever is higher.

Similarly, if you have some advantage against your threat, the GM draws a card and uses either that or the established difficulty, whichever is lower.)

If you fail at something that isn't immediately dangerous, the GM can add 1 or more to some threat countdown clocks, increasing their threat value. Bad things looming on the horizon might be coming sooner because of what you did, or maybe just what you discovered.

On a tie, something unexpected happens. Maybe threats attack each other, or the conflict is interrupted. Maybe you succeed, but with a cost, complication or compromise. Maybe some weird magic activates

Tasks you might try: explore for new source, find new items that might work as a source for one category of stuff.



Threats

Alchemy takes time. Threats are looming dangers. After each grell has one chance to act, one or more threats will increase in strength. Those that the grell ignore for too long will eventually reach a rank of 14, when they attack the colony.

After each round of actions, the GM draws one card from their deck. Depending on the suit, one or more threats will increase in value.

Clubs	No threats advance
Spades	Lowest threat and highest threat advance
Hearts	One threat advances (GM's choice)
Diamonds	All known threats advance

If a threat's value reaches 14, then something bad happens. For each threat, the GM decides what bad thing they'll do. Define these things based on the fiction of the monster. The GM can decide this when the threat is created, or when the threat actually acts.

- Steal all the ingredients of a certain suit from the grell (add them to the threat's resources)
- destroy all the ingredients of a certain suit from the grell
- Consume the resources the threat already controls
- Attack the grell
- Split into two threats (draw two cards for new strength)
- Create/destroy/tunnels or otherwise change the dungeon map
- Strange magick rewrites reality (draw a new signifier for a Noun or Verb)

Most of these threats should be easy enough to handle. The only complex procedure as a result is when a threat attacks the grell. The grell could never defeat a rank 14 card, so instead the attacking threat is divided into multiple smaller attacks.

The GM repeatedly draw cards until they total more than 14, making that many attacks against one or more grell. After that many attacks, the threat leaves the grell lair, but they may have harmed or killed some grell.

After a threat carries out its threat, you draw a new card and reset it to that value. So if that nest of manticores gets out of hand and attacks the colony, then after the grell fight them off, the GM will draw a new card. If they draw a 2, then the manticore threat is reset to 2. Plenty of time before they get restless again. On the other hand, if the GM drew a Jack, then those manticores will be a danger again in the near future.



Further Dungeon Exploration

If the grell later explore the megadungeon, then they can discover additional regions beyond the initial known areas. When a grell first enters an unexplored region, the GM and players should work together to populate those regions as well. This follows the same process of drawing 3 cards as the initial dungeon creation, except for one change. But for later exploration, the ordering of cards works differently: the highest card is now the threat signifier. The middle card is the resources signifier, and the lowest card is the region signifier. You still determine the location's description, variety of threat, strength of threat, variety of resource and quantity of resource using the same charts.

Changing the ordering of cards makes it so that the deeper into the megadungeon you explore, you find bigger threats and rewards. You get a different mix of locations as well.

What if there are no exits?

When placing exits from a region, you must connect tunnels leading into that region first. This might, after some time, lead to a situation where there are no tunnels to the larger megadungeon.

In this case, it becomes a priority of the grell to create new tunnels or discover secret paths. The grell always could attempt to create new tunnels (usually extremely difficult, but some alchemical methods will likely help).

Another option: leaving this plane. Using alchemical techniques, the grell could Create a Portal or otherwise move from the mortal Underdark to some parallel dimension. This would mean starting over with your research, but it would give you another shot at exploration and conquering.



Endnotes

Once you're done playing the game, tell me how it went:

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Or check out other games I made:

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