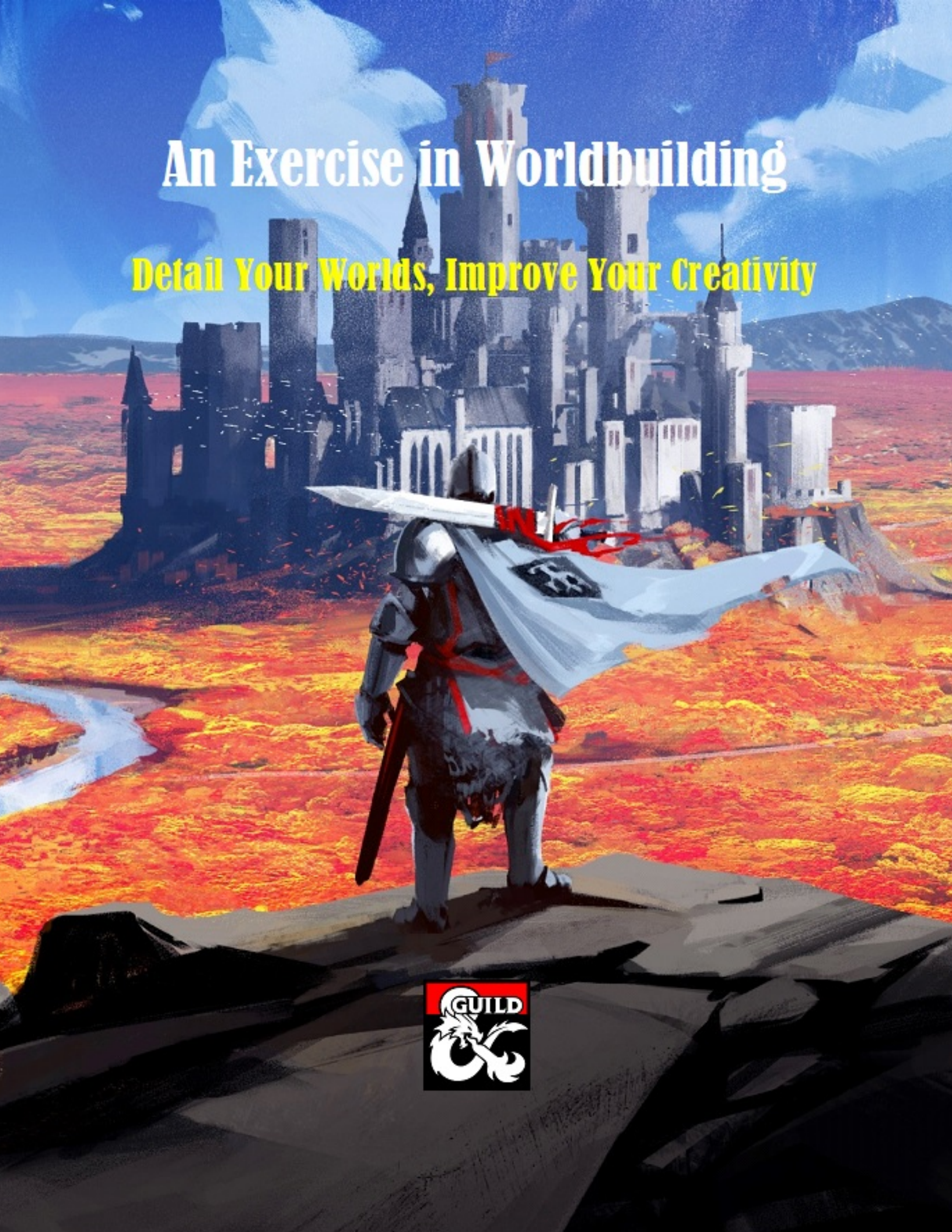


An Exercise in Worldbuilding

Detail Your Worlds, Improve Your Creativity



THE EXERCISE

If you're like me then you constantly find your mind wandering to other worlds. I love fantasy, I love adventure, and I love immersing myself in grand stories and the worlds in which they take place. I also love coming up with my own ideas; designing my own people, places, relics, and worlds. Over the gaming careers of myself and numerous friends, we have come up with several different worlds and enjoy getting together to bounce around new ideas or to flesh out existing ones.

A while back my brother and I put our heads together to come up with a short world building exercise that would help get the creative juices flowing. It took us several months to finally complete (and we still toy with it now and then), but now we have created what I think is a fun way to add things to an existing world, come up with an idea for a new world, or to just warm up the brain and have fun. We sincerely hope you enjoy the exercise!

STEP 1: CHOOSE A CATEGORY

There are 12 different categories to choose from. The category will represent the broad "thing" you will focus on creating. You can choose the category you want, or you can roll a d12 to choose a category at random.

CATEGORIES

d12	Creation
1	City
2	Monster
3	Religion
4	Planet
5	Monument
6	Plant/Material
7	Race
8	Hero
9	Villain
10	Weapon/Item
11	Biome/Environment
12	Culture

STEP 2: DETERMINE SEEDS

Once you've got your category, you then determine two of the category's associated seeds. Seeds are the focus, theme, or most notable characteristics of your category. Your two seeds are determined at random, rolling again for any duplicates. There are 40 different seeds for each category, so there are a huge amount of possible seed pairings.

For example, I could have the "City" category with the seeds "Island" and "Underground." This does not mean my city must be on an island nor that it must be underground, it simply means that "Island" and "Underground," however you choose to interpret them, must be somehow included in the city's design. The two seeds can be connected or entirely separate from each other, as long as they are both somehow present in the design of your creation.

STEP 3: GET CREATIVE

Once you have your category and your seeds, you are ready to create something! Using your seeds as inspiration, write, type, or draw something in your chosen category. You can tell a story, give a detailed description or summary, or even write about your creation as though it were a journal entry. We originally designed this exercise as a competition with a 15 minute timer in mind. If you want to challenge yourself, you can time yourself for 15 minutes right after finding out what your seeds are to see what you can come up with under pressure. However, we obviously encourage you to use this exercise however it most benefits your worldbuilding.

The goal is to come up with something original, so we recommend not settling for the first thing that pops into your mind. In fact, sometimes I try to think "What would somebody expect me to make with these seeds?" then I try to think of something that takes those seeds in a different direction. However, the muses speak differently to everyone, so do whatever works for you!

WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

The rest of this text contains the 12 category tables with 40 seeds each, as well as a few example entries going through each step of the exercise. To further show how this exercise can add to/inspire your campaigns, the example for "Monster" has an original 5e statblock.



FEEDBACK

Do you have an awesome idea for another category or seed? Do you have further questions about how the exercise works or advice on how to improve it? Did you make an awesome creation that you want to share? Drop a comment on the DMs Guild page and we'll try to respond when we can!

D&D HOMEBREW

CREDITS

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Art Credits: All art featured in this text is from the hero-crafting game Ivion with the express permission of the creators. You can learn more at: <https://www.playivion.com/>

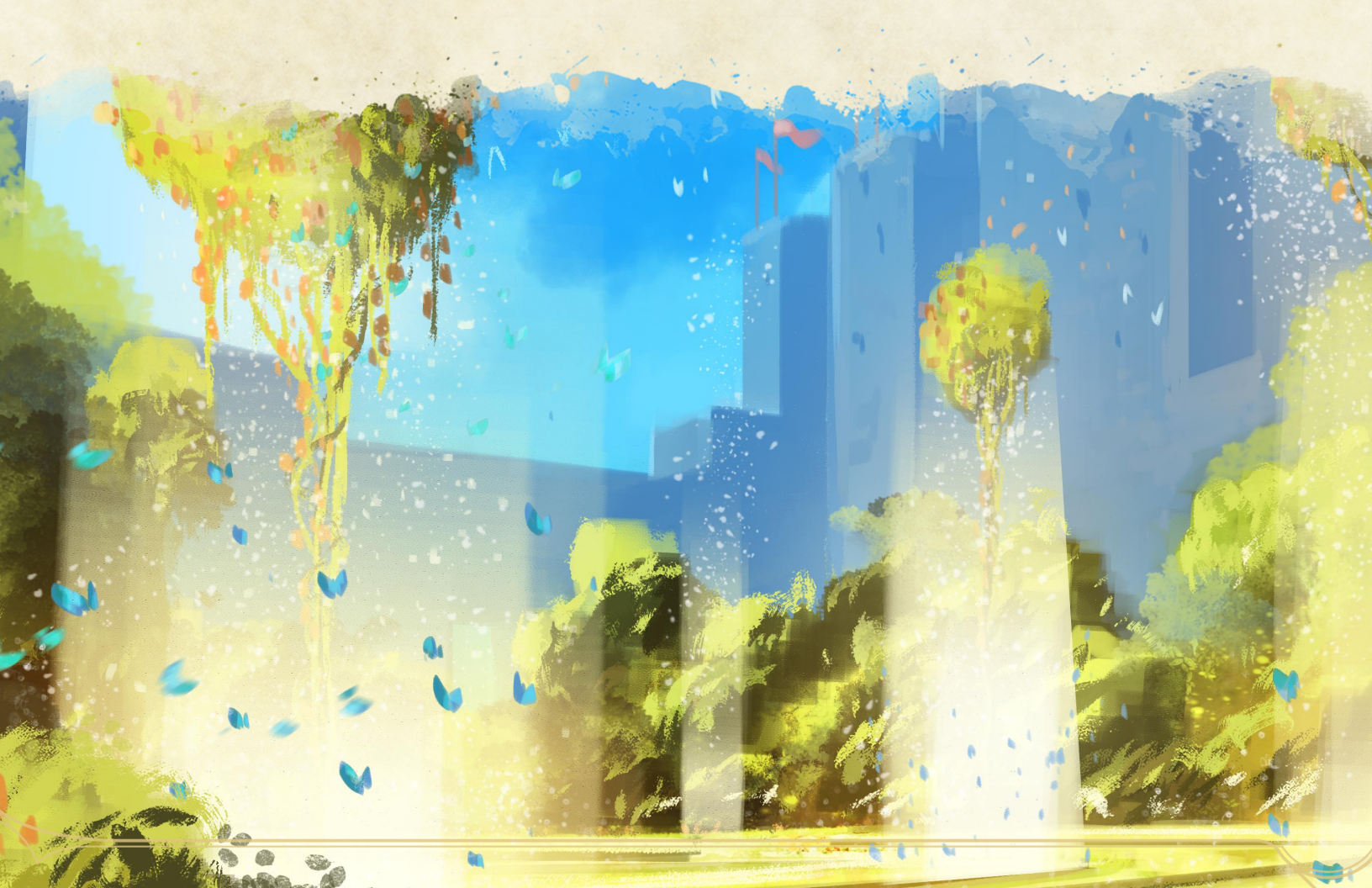
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CITY SEEDS

1-10	City Seed	11-20	City Seed	21-30	City Seed	31-40	City Seed
1	Steam	11	Mobile	21	Natural	31	Poor
2	Water	12	Haunted	22	Isolated	32	Wealth
3	Island	13	Holy	23	Color	33	Dangerous
4	Underground	14	Metropolis	24	Stone	34	Pollution
5	Sky	15	Cold	25	Tree	35	Multicultural
6	Industry	16	Ruins	26	Cliff	36	Volcanic
7	Rural	17	Bridge	27	Animal	37	Fortification
8	Tribal	18	Ancient	28	Segregation	38	Crossroad
9	Wall	19	Militant	29	Agriculture	39	Dock
10	Tower	20	Death	30	Otherworldly	40	Glass

MONSTER SEEDS

1-10	Monster Seed	11-20	Monster Seed	21-30	Monster Seed	31-40	Monster Seed
1	Fire	11	Flight	21	Rot	31	Construct
2	Cold	12	Blood	22	Wild/feral	32	Aquatic
3	Fear	13	Teeth	23	Bones	33	Stealth
4	Death	14	Noise	24	Eggs	34	Weapon
5	Eye	15	Clever	25	Armor	35	Color
6	Tail	16	Poison	26	Life	36	Minions
7	Wind	17	Growth	27	Demonic	37	Rage
8	Spiritual	18	Hunger	28	Horn	38	Pain
9	Appendage	19	Lair	29	Secretion	39	Shapeshift
10	Head	20	Rock/stone	30	Ooze/slime	40	Speed

RELIGION SEEDS

1-10	Religion Seed	11-20	Religion Seed	21-30	Religion Seed	31-40	Religion Seed
1	Polytheism	11	Fate	21	Music	31	Avatar
2	Monotheism	12	Greed	22	Conversion	32	Radical/Fanatical
3	Wrath	13	Prosperity	23	Tithe	33	Prophecy
4	Creation	14	Time	24	Covenant	34	Heaven
5	Destruction	15	Love	25	Purpose	35	Hell
6	Life	16	Cult	26	Enlightenment	36	Exclusive
7	Race	17	Sin	27	Meditation	37	Transformation
8	Reincarnation	18	Ritual	28	Pilgrimage	38	Water
9	Earth	19	Prayer	29	Relic	39	Apocalypse
10	Vengeance	20	Sacrifice	30	Temple	40	Animals

PLANET SEEDS

1-10	Planet Seed	11-20	Planet Seed	21-30	Planet Seed	31-40	Planet Seed
1	Lake	11	Ring	21	Empty	31	Color
2	Moon	12	Comet	22	Valuable	32	Mountain
3	Non-spherical	13	Alien	23	Fertile	33	Valley
4	Inhospitable	14	Size	24	Waste	34	Island
5	Non-rotational	15	Contested	25	Wind	35	Ocean
6	One biome	16	War torn	26	Magic	36	River
7	Sun/star	17	Abandoned	27	Rain	37	Tree
8	Gravity	18	Monster	28	Storm	38	Fire
9	Divided	19	Core	29	Construction	39	Orbit
10	Gas	20	Used up	30	Disaster/calamity	40	Hazard

MONUMENT SEEDS

1-10	Monument Seed	11-20	Monument Seed	21-30	Monument Seed	31-40	Monument Seed
1	Hero	11	Glory	21	Bone	31	Glass
2	Villain	12	Greed	22	Wood	32	Light
3	Bravery	13	Narcissism	23	Animal	33	Defeat
4	Peace	14	Tyranny	24	Forgotten	34	Victory
5	Charity	15	Achievement	25	Love	35	Gift
6	Kindness	16	Defense	26	Height	36	Broken
7	War	17	Natural	27	Landmark	37	Magic
8	Mourning	18	Practical	28	Divine	38	Agony
9	Death	19	Gold	29	Disaster/calamity	39	Mobile
10	Sacrifice	20	Stone/rock	30	Rebellion	40	Public

PLANT/MATERIAL SEEDS

1-10	Plant/Material Seed	11-20	Plant/Material Seed	21-30	Plant/Material Seed	31-40	Plant/Monument Seed
1	Poison	11	Consumable	21	Trickery/deceit	31	Sound
2	Healing	12	Malleable	22	Permanent	32	Vision
3	Strength	13	Composite/hybrid	23	Weight	33	Rampant/plentiful
4	Art	14	Ointment	24	Incapacitation	34	Injection
5	Defense	15	Luck	25	Otherworldly	35	Rot/decay
6	Construction	16	Ritual	26	Comfort	36	Drawback/tradeoff
7	Mind	17	Divine	27	Pain	37	War
8	Hallucination	18	Difficult to acquire	28	Time	38	Sentient
9	Addiction	19	Growth	29	Cosmetic	39	Overused/extinct
10	Legendary	20	Monster	30	Worn	40	Gas

RACE SEEDS

1-10	Race Seed	11-20	Race Seed	21-30	Race Seed	31-40	Race Seed
1	Scar	11	Death	21	Communication	31	Sixth sense
2	Sight	12	Water	22	Spirit/soul	32	Age
3	Skin	13	Organ	23	Fire/heat	33	Transformation
4	Alternate form	14	Speed	24	Mix-breed	34	Breath
5	Mate	15	Cursed	25	Substance-bond	35	Waste
6	Consumption/diet	16	Blessed	26	Flight	36	Secretion
7	Growth/size	17	Fuel	27	Blood	37	Disease/infection
8	Craft	18	Strength	28	Protection	38	Artificial
9	Mount	19	Purpose	29	Marking	39	Magic
10	Reproduction/birth	20	Travel	30	Talent	40	Darkness

HERO SEEDS

1-10	Hero Seed	11-20	Hero Seed	21-30	Hero Seed	31-40	Hero Seed
1	Bravery	11	Death	21	Exploration	31	Protection
2	Vow/oath	12	Punishment	22	Race	32	Leader
3	Honor	13	Love	23	Mercy	33	Teacher
4	Peace	14	Faith	24	Charity/kindness	34	Prophecy
5	War	15	Magic	25	Charisma	35	Art
6	Trickery	16	Revenge	26	Strength	36	Heritage
7	Local	17	Justice	27	Destruction	37	Journey
8	Redemption	18	Savior	28	Rebuild	38	Preservation
9	Sacrifice	19	Wisdom	29	Unlikely	39	Chosen
10	Mystery	20	Intellect/cunning	30	Weapon	40	Rebellion

VILLAIN SEEDS

1-10	Villain Seed	11-20	Villain Seed	21-30	Villain Seed	31-40	Villain Seed
1	Hate	11	Chaos	21	Defilement	31	Misguided
2	Cruelty	12	Law/order	22	Greed/covetous	32	Obsession
3	Treachery	13	Myth	23	Lust	33	Hidden
4	War	14	Fear	24	Envy	34	Plan
5	Anger/rage	15	Torture	25	Monstrous	35	Pestilence
6	Destruction	16	Cursed	26	Boredom	36	Eldritch
7	Vengeance	17	Radical/fanatical	27	Madness/insanity	37	Beauty
8	Unholy	18	Leader	28	Pride/ego	38	Comical
9	Trickery/guile	19	Rebellion	29	Forbidden	39	Legacy
10	Merciless	20	Omnipresent	30	Pact	40	Titan

WEAPON/ITEM SEEDS

1-10	Weapon/Item Seed	11-20	Weapon/Item Seed	21-30	Weapon/Item Seed	31-40	Weapon/Item Seed
1	Standard issue	11	Divine	21	Ornate	31	Command
2	Siege	12	Versatile	22	Ritual	32	Training
3	Set	13	Primitive	23	Repurposed	33	Riot
4	Wearable	14	Aquatic	24	Messy	34	Psionics
5	Material	15	Stealth	25	Pain	35	Defense
6	Broken	16	Sentient	26	Fragile	36	Hunting
7	Biologic	17	Fuel	27	Weight	37	Discipline
8	Light	18	Mount	28	Alien	38	Fear
9	Bane	19	Nature	29	Purpose	39	Sound
10	Taint/curse	20	Element(s)	30	Duel	40	Deception

ENVIRONMENT SEEDS

1-10	Environment Seed	11-20	Environment Seed	21-30	Environment Seed	31-40	Environment Seed
1	Grass	11	Growth	21	Mountain	31	Separation
2	Tree	12	Dark	22	Damp	32	Noise
3	Cliff	13	Nest	23	Tropic	33	Filth
4	Ravine	14	Harvest	24	Plateau	34	Grave
5	Burn/scorch	15	Fog/mist	25	Animal	35	Alive
6	Frozen	16	Food	26	Light	36	Battle
7	Water	17	Hazard	27	Rock	37	Guard
8	Sand	18	Ruin	28	Hole	38	Lost
9	Vine	19	Air	29	Oasis	39	Power
10	Fungus	20	Cave	30	Trail/path	40	Paradise

CULTURE SEEDS

1-10	Culture Seed	11-20	Culture Seed	21-30	Culture Seed	31-40	Culture Seed
1	Music	11	Execution	21	Beauty	31	Worship
2	Dance	12	Love	22	Water	32	Celebration
3	Coming of age	13	Family	23	Ancestry	33	Induction
4	Birth	14	Marking	24	Trade	34	Agriculture
5	Mourn/funeral	15	Game	25	Order	35	Weaponry
6	Hunt	16	Tribute	26	Technology	36	Time
7	Feast/food	17	Home	27	Work	37	Clothing/fashion
8	Gathering	18	Architecture	28	Travel	38	Substance/material
9	Battle/war	19	Animal	29	Dependent	39	Power
10	Elder	20	Punishment	30	Artifact	40	Conflict/dispute

EXAMPLES

In this section we provide a few example walkthroughs of the exercise. These examples are not trying to show the "correct" way to do the exercise, but rather a few common ways they can be applied to campaigns.

EXAMPLE 1: FLATRAFT

It was Claire's first time DMing when her players decided to ignore her carefully crafted plot and head off in a random direction. She wanted to acknowledge their agency but also needed a location they could visit that she hadn't originally planned.

Step 1: Knowing she wanted to make a town for the PCs, Claire chooses the "City" category instead of rolling randomly.

Step 2: Claire then rolls 2d40 to randomly determine her two seeds, rolling "Poor" and "Dock."

Step 3: Claire thinks about her seeds and category and types up a brief description of her creation, hoping to use it in her next session(s):

Flatraft used to be part of a large, rich port city. As the city grew, the nobility welcomed more and more trade. The builders tried to keep up with the increasing demand for dockage, but eventually the city's horizon was replaced by a cluster of ships idling off the coast in a ramshackle que, waiting to be admitted to sell their goods. Nobody seemed to mind the unorthodoxy, not until a massive storm obliterated the fleet of trade vessels. The dawn of the following day, hundreds of poor dock workers raced on 10-minute rafts to the wealth-infused wreckage.

In an effort to discourage the looting, the nobility decreed that the wreckage belonged to them and any man who returned with trade goods would be criminally charged. In response, none of the treasure-hunters returned. Instead, they lashed their rafts and dinghies to the wreckage and floated into the sunset. However, over time the lavish, exotic foods spoiled, the spices were used up, and regal fabrics were torn and lost in petty squabbles. Now the floating city of Flatraft is desolate, poor, and filled with desperate criminals... and the occasional treasure.

EXAMPLE 2: BREATHERS

Jason DMs for a group of players who are currently travelling through a dark forest. He wants to really spook them with a monster none of them expect or have heard of, so he decides to try creating his own.

Step 1: Jason chooses the "Legendary Monster" category, knowing that's what he wants to add to his world.

Step 2: Jason is looking for a spooky, horror themed monster. Jason first rolls his seeds randomly, getting "Appendage" and "Aquatic." However, Jason knows his players are nowhere near water, so he decides to reroll his second seed, instead getting "Rot."

Step 3: Jason thinks about his seeds and category in terms of a dark forest encounter, then types up a brief description and takes it a step further by making an associated statblock:

Many predators lurk in the dark woods, though none are as eerie as the Breather. If one were to see this creature in broad daylight, it would look the stuff of nightmares: gray-skinned, tall, gaunt, and with six long needle-like spindles where fingers should be. The tips of the spindles instantly rot whatever they touch, though the effect seems amplified on wood. The creatures use this to hollow out trees and crawl inside them, standing motionless for hours to days. To avoid them, listen for the creature's strained, heavy breathing emanating from trees.

When prey is near, they burst from the weak-wood with a signaling screech, rallying all nearby breathers to do the same. Though somewhat fast, the true danger lies in their ability to launch and regrow their spindles. The trajectory of the launch is akin to a bow, and when it pierces flesh it magically infects the area, making it difficult to heal.

BREATHER

Medium monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 42 (6d8 + 12)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Senses blindsight 25 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages -

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Motionless. The breather is incredibly thin and able to stand completely still. This allows it move through and occupy a space as narrow as 6 inches wide without squeezing, and confers advantage on Stealth checks opposed by sight-based Perception checks.

Actions

Multiattack. The breather makes two attacks using its spindle, kick, or both.

Spindle. Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 60/120 ft., one target. *Hit* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage plus 6 (1d12) poison damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the poison damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest or until they receive a DC 12 Medicine check during a short rest. The target dies if its hit point maximum is reduced to 0.

Kick. Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.