

**UNDERMOUNTAIN**

**MESSAGES**

**IN A BOTTLE**





# UNDERMOUNTAIN

# MESSAGES IN A BOTTLE

*A supplement designed for Dungeon Masters, a tool that helps them provide adventurers with enticing entries about lies deeper in Undermountain*

**Requires:** *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*

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Perkins, Christopher and James J. Haeck, James Introcaso, Adam Lee and Matt Sernett, *Waterdeep Dragon Heist*, 2018



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# Always delving deeper

**I**t's a long way from the Yawning Portal to the Mad Wizard's Lair. Counting the entries for Skullport, there are 24 levels of Undermountain in *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*.

That's more than 700 numbered encounter areas, many of which are again subdivided.

Maintaining player interest in a dungeon crawl this vast and deep is a challenge for any dungeon master.

The adventure does an excellent job of encouraging continued exploration, using quests, secrets, Halaster's goals, and the objectives of the dungeon's various inhabitants to move the story along.

The deck of secrets is one of the adventure designers' most effective methods of "salting" the dungeon with additional hooks, giving the adventurers irresistible bits of lore.







## Mystery in a bottle

*Messages In A Bottle* presents a secondary method of providing additional enticements: It is a tool DMs can use to clue the PCs in on what lies ahead, but especially story elements that might increase their interest.

It's a tool that helps a DM perform a randomized survey of the adventure. The DM can sample entries from each level. That information, in a variety of forms, is dropped back into the adventure. The PCs can then discover the information, which appears at locations either selected by the DM or determined randomly.

In this, they are like messages in a bottle tossed into the sea.

Someone's story — a plea to be rescued, a dying wish, a desperate hope, a clue for

compatriots, a signal to strangers — is contained in that floating, stoppered glass. No one knows where it will end up.

But anyone who has come upon a message in a bottle washed up on the beach or fished from the surf is immediately intrigued at its prospects and by the mystery it represents. What does it say? Who sent it? Can we do anything? Should we do anything? Can we avoid the same fate?

In the moment, it gives the PCs something to puzzle out. Some messages might be encoded or encrypted, a secret to be shared among members of the same faction. Others are improvised; for lack of a writing materials maybe they were etched, stamped, or scrawled onto the only available thing. A few are magical in nature; delvers are, by and large, practitioners of magic and their messages should be too.

## Layers of story

The emphasis on enhancing the story is important. By always introducing or emphasizing existing components, the DM is providing a means of combating the rigor of a crawl through a mega-dungeon. Without story, there can be a sameness to clearing out room after room.

The authors of Undermountain products over the years and in various editions have always understood that complication. They have tried to present the dungeon's lore in compelling ways. And *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* works especially hard to address it.

*Messages In The Bottle* doesn't try to introduce additional story elements. In this, it is different than other supplements that add new NPCs and new encounter areas to the adventure.

Rather, it seeks to amplify the story elements that already exist. By turning up the volume on the existing story components, it only seeks to heighten player interest in the existing material — to keep them delving and discovering the richness of each subsequent level.



# What news from below?

The Yawning Portal is filled with a staggering array of curios and trophies, each one retrieved from Undermountain. (See *Tales of the Yawning Portal* for one such list of items).

One curious item that is almost lost among the bar's copious assortment of liquor and wine bottles is the corked bottle resting horizontally in its own wood stand. Usually, it is overlooked because its dark glass lets it blend in.

Occasionally, the bottle turns clear and a message appears inside upon a piece of rolled parchment. Anyone who is standing near the bottle when this transformation takes place sometimes catches the scent of the open sea, hears the sound of surf and then, as if on a faint wind, that of a pirate singing "Yo, ho, and a bottle o' rum!"

The message in the bottle always appears in dwarvish script, the language of the Melairkyn clan that designed the Underhalls.



Most often the message is a plea for divine intervention, a last desperate gasp, a call to one of the powers of Faerun. It's as if someone in their final moments cried out, and the dungeon itself intercepted the message and placed it in the bottle instead of letting it be heard on their patron deity's plane of existence.

After a day, the bottle again turns dark, unless another message appears in its place. There's no



telling how often a message will appear, though, it averages about two for every tenday.

Durnan, The Yawning Portal's proprietor, has no difficulty in translating the message. He dutifully copies it down and posts the translation into the common tongue on the inn's notice board.

Two things then happen. Delvers about to brave Undermountain or those folk always curious about the goings-on in the great dungeon take note. They pass it among their fellows, hoping to glean some information, some clue as to the origin of the message and what it portends. Someone probably died a violent death; but where and how?

Another macabre ritual takes place. Durnan is always running a betting pool on the message from the bottle. The payout goes to those who've laid coin down on the god whose name or moniker is invoked in the message.

As expected, a widely worshipped god such as Lathander gets mentioned often, and there's only a modest amount of money that goes out for that. A few well-known gods see a lot of betting action, however, so their pots grow quickly, even though they payout often. More obscure gods haven't been named for years, and the accumulated pot on those is several hundred gold. The gods that monstrous beings pray to are also common occurrences. (Koa-toa are an exception. There is a standing bet on the piscine creatures, who invent new gods all the time. If Durnan doesn't recognize the name of the god being named, he assumes it is a new kuo-toa god and distributes the pool as such).

For convenience, here are the next 20 messages from the bottle and their payouts. They can be determined by a random d20 roll or taken in order.

No.	Message	Betting pool
1	Pity us Maglubiyet!	5 sp
2	Durmathoin, take me to the gem mines of paradise.	40 gp
3	It is ecstasy, Keptolo!	82 gp
4	All is darkness, Merrshaulk.	30 gp
5	By Maglubiyet's choppers!	3 sp
6	Ah Spitswallows! I'm yours Maglubiyet!	1 sp
7	We starve, oh great and mighty Laogzed! Feed us the flesh we require!	4 gp
8	By Thrym! This is the glorious end!	97 gp
9	All is bleak and the void. I see that now, Panzuriel.	1,001 gp
10	Save us, Oghma. Give us the wisdom to escape this foul trap!	43 gp
11	Beshaba's got us for sure, tossed against a rocky shore!	73 gp
12	Am I not faithful, Malar?	6 gp
13	Hahahahahahaha! All is a joke, Ladguer!	4 gp
14	Pricked by a poison needle. That beats all, Mask!	29 gp
15	What despair! The end is near and I have not even a pen and ink to scratch out my final plea, Deneir!	338 gp
16	Bane, it was fun while it lasted!	10 gp
17	Lolth, your caress is sweet, your bite, .... agh!	3 gp
18	I don't fear death! I don't fear you, Hruggek!	4 gp
19	Well, by Moradin's beard, I never expected that!	26 gp
20	What a pity, Talos, to die in the dark, never to see your mighty bolts race across the sky.	286 gp



# Creating a message matrix

d20 Type of messages

1 Animated Objects

2 Arcane

3 Container

4 Directional signs

5 Elemental

6 Etchings

7 Faction cyphers

8 Graffiti

9 Nested container

10 Paper bird

11 Pressed nib

12 Puzzle box

13 Stamped leather

14 Talking animal

15 Vocational jargon

16-20 Written languages

\*See descriptions for above entires on pages 9-10.

## Step 1

Use the worksheet on the following page.

## Step 2

For each level of Undermountain, select or randomly determine a room location that the message will be about.

## Step 3

Read the entry from the published adventure, then compose a message related to it. Be mindful of spoilers. Yet, this should be a clue with utility (even if sometimes, it is a misleading one).

## Step 4

Randomly determine the type of message using the d20 chart on this page. Some types have subcategories that also must be determined. These can be found in the descriptions following the chart.

## Step 5

After doing that for each level, randomly determine which level above the current one the message will be placed in. (For the first level, place it in the Yawning Portal.)

## Step 6

Randomly determine the numbered encounter area on that level that the message will be found in. Record the entry.



## Step 7

During play, reveal the message at the appropriate time.



Level	# of entries	Room	The Message	Type of Message	Where to place message	
					Level	Room
1	41					
2	26					
3	23					
4	24					
5	24					
6	48					
7	47					
8	24					
9	49					
10	30					
11	17					
12	19					
13	12					
14	41					
15	40					
16	32					
17	20					
18	33					
19	16					
20	23					
21	24					
22	41					
23	36					
Skull-port	36					





These are descriptions for the types of messages that can be found in Undermountain and shared with adventurers who discover them.

## Animated objects

Although animated objects such as animated armor, a flying sword, or a rug of smothering do not speak, they can be instructed to carry messages or make motions in an attempt to communicate. In the case of the latter, deciphering an animated object's intentions is a DC 15 Wisdom/Insight check. The check can be made at advantage if the creature that originally instructed the object has an Intelligence of 15 or greater.

## Arcane

While they cannot convey an exact message, a glyph of warding spell or a programmed illusion spell are examples of magic that can be used as a signal for others. More often, an arcane message is delivered by an sentient magic item.

## Container

This represents messages placed in bottles, jugs, or boxes. Often requires destroying the container to get to the message, as the neck or slot is too small to retrieve the paper otherwise. While less secure than other things, it can be overlooked in a casual investigation.

## Directional signs

The proverbial breadcrumbs. These can be chalk lines or arrangements of stones on the floor, usually temporary and easily manipulated by others with malicious intent. Can be effective in some situations, especially if they include another symbol that conveys information or message.

## Elemental reveals

Objects can be magically encoded to reveal messages based on the element used to embed them. Examples include:

**1 Fire:** An inscription on a ring revealed only when placed in a flame.

**2 Air:** An auditory or visible message on the wind revealed by breath or a breeze.

**3 Water:** An auditory message that can only be heard when a pearl or shell and the listener are submerged.

**4 Earth:** A chiseled message that can only be read when covered in dust or the object is placed in the earth.

## Etching

For want of writing materials, sometimes messages are etched upon the flat blade of a metal weapon, such as a sword or an axe, then left for others to find and decipher.

## Faction Cypher

These are usually small, tightly wound parchments left in an index-finger sized cylinder. A PC member of the same faction can read the coded message without difficulty. Anyone else must make a DC 15 Intelligence check to identify the faction and a DC 20 Intelligence/Investigation check to decipher the message. A PC with the Linguist feat can make all the checks at advantage.

Faction cyphers found in Undermountain are:

**1 Bregan D'Aerthe**

**2 Emerald Enclave**

**3 Force Grey**

**4 Harpers**

**5 Lords' Alliance**

**6 Order of the Gauntlet**

**7 Xanathar Guild**

**8 Zhentarim**





## Graffiti

Oftimes the last resort of clever adventurers — or the first option for inexperienced ones — nothing beats writing on the walls or the floors to send a message to those behind you. Notes written on other materials and posted on the wall — such as a notice board, also fall in this category.

## Nested container

The box within a box, or nesting dolls, can be a unique way of securing a message from casual investigations. Written pages tucked into a book fall in this category.

## Paper Bird

A paper bird with a message (a wondrous item described in *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*). Sometimes it can be left behind (without it turning to ash) for others to find.

## Pressed nib

A copper coin can be pressed flat to form an irregular plate that can be engraved with a sharp edge.

## Puzzle box

An object that looks like an ordinary object, such as a treasure chest, but has a false lid. Only by taking apart the interlocking pieces of the object can the message held inside be found.

## Stamped leather

Some part of leather attire, such as a belt or vest, can be stamped with characters or symbols to convey a message. Ofttimes this is incorporated with a class-specific language or a faction cypher.

## Talking animal

Spellcasters, especially druids, can use animals to send messages. Sometimes, the animal is actually another creature polymorphed into

that form. A few birds, such as ravens, are intelligent and can repeat phrases.

## Vocational jargon

Classes have specific means of communicating with others of their same vocation. These are:

**1 Barbarian totems**

**2 Bardic notes**

**3 Clerical divine allegories**

**4 Druidic**

**5 Battlefield Codices** (fighters, monks, paladins)

**6 Primeval awareness** (rangers)

**7 Thieves' cant**

**8 Eldritch notations** (sorcerers, warlocks, wizards)

## Written languages

These messages are usually written on parchment or vellum in the standard languages and left for others to find.

Roll d20: 1-15 Standard languages, 16-20

Exotic languages

Standard languages in Undermountain are:

**1 Common**

**2 Dwarvish**

**3 Elvish**

**4 Giant**

**5 Gnomish**

**6 Goblin**

**7 Halfling**

**8 Orc**

Exotic languages found in Undermountain are:

**1 Abyssal**

**2 Celestial**

**3 Draconic**

**4 Deep speech**

**5 Infernal**

**6 Primordial**

**7 Sylvan**

**8 Undercommon**





# Sample message matrixes

The following are two examples of the types of messages that might be created using the above system. Feel free to use them in your game of *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, altering any aspect of the message as best fits.

Each entry includes where the message is to be found, the type of message it is, the message itself, and for the DM's reference, the location the message refers to.

They are arranged by their found location from highest level to deepest.

## MESSAGE SET A

### Message 1

**Where:** Yawning Portal

**Type:** Arcane message

"In the hallway of heraldry, the mad mage watches!"

**DM's reference:** Level 1, Room 29

### Message 2

**Where:** Level 1, Room 2 Hall of Many Pillars

**Type:** Graffiti

"(obscured section) is the Black Network's friend and ally."

**DM's reference:** Level 2, Room 14

### Message 3

**Where:** Level 1, Room 15 Armory

**Type:** Etching

"The untouched painting of the dwarf wedding was too beautiful to swipe."

**DM's reference:** Level 6, Room 5

### Message 4

**Where:** Level 1, Room 18 Troll's Den

**Type:** Stamped on leather

"The deep gnome of the zurkwoods is a true and faithful friend."

**DM's reference:** Level 4, Room 13

### Message 5

**Where:** Level 1, Room 26 Clean Tunnels

**Type:** Written (draconic)

"The last time I saw my partner she had all our gear and was headed toward the river."

**DM's reference:** Level 3, Room 9

### Message 6

**Where:** Level 2, Room 7 Shocking

Discoveries

**Type:** Container

"If you see a halfling answering to Haddon, send word to YP."

**DM's reference:** Level 5, Room 3

### Message 7

**Where:** Level 2, Room 9 Spider Eyes Watch

Post

**Type:** Written (goblin)

"Mage pictures scary!"

**DM's Reference:** Level 9, Room 19

### Message 8

**Where:** Level 3, Room 8, Wailing Tunnels

**Type:** Faction cypher (Bregan D'Aerthe)

"Yes, my lord! I hear Undermountain's call!"

**DM's Reference:** Level 18, Room 8



### Message 9

**Where:** Level 3, Room 15 Way to Willowwood

**Type:** Paper bird

“The drow are employing demons to fight their civil war.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 11, Room 12

### Message 10

**Where:** Level 4, Room 23 Hook Horror Larder

**Type:** Pressed nib

“In the echoing cave, give a shout. I dare you.”

**DM’s reference:** Level 7, Room 5

### Message 11

**Where:** Level 4, Room 24 Troglodyte Takeover

**Type:** Arcane

“They say drow are allied with yuan-ti in the swamp, but I don’t believe it.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 8, Room 11

### Message 12

**Where:** Level 5, Room 3 Guardhouses

**Type:** Faction cypher (Xanathar Guild)

“Dare not stand in the shadow of Trobriand’s marvel.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 13, Room 4

### Message 13

**Where:** Level 5, Room 21, Abandoned Barracks

**Type:** Faction cypher (Emerald Enclave)

“The blind eye of Ghaunadaur will stop your heart.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 19, Room 12

### Message 14

**Where:** Level 7, Room 21, Northeast Storeroom

**Type:** Vocational jargon (Barbarian totems)

“I kneeled before the toothy maw, afraid to enter.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 20, Room 22

### Message 15

**Where:** Level 8, Room 2 Bullywug Sentries

**Type:** Written (elvish)

“I must be going mad! The voice of Lolth echoed through the halls.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 10, Room 4

### Message 16

**Where:** Level 8, Room 21 Lord of Fetid Obliteration

**Type:** Container

“Good fortune graces the one who passes the rusted head.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 12, Room 1

### Message 17

**Where:** Level 10, Room 1

**Type:** Puzzle box

“Trust not doors that close of their own accord.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 17, Room 11

### Message 18

**Where:** Level 10, Room 15 Screaming Skulls

**Type:** Written (halfling)

“I have seen creatures materialize out of midair.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 14, Room 5



### Message 19

**Where:** Level 11, Room 4 Loathsome Limbs

**Type:** Animated object

“A wonder! The woman encased in crystal!”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 16, Room 6

### Message 20

**Where:** Level 13, Room 1, Tunnels and Trenches

**Type:** Written (Deep Speech)

“Drifting lights are the sign of the enemy.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 22, Room 9

### Message 21

**Where:** Level 13, Room 4 Pretty Big Hate Machine

**Type:** Directional signs

“Harden your heart against the sound of children playing.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 15, Room 20

### Message 22

**Where:** Level 14, Room 10, Dwarves’ Den

**Type:** Puzzle box

“The Gargoyle Towers are well named.”

**DM’s Reference:** Skullport, Room 8

### Message 23

**Where:** Level 19, Room 4, The Weeping Eye

**Type:** Animated object

“Like magic, the poisonous air of the dwarven mine was made clear.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 21, Room 22

### Message 24

**Where:** Level 19, Room 16, Tunnel to Level 20

**Type:** Container

A spirit of truth resides within the countenance of a devil.

**DM’s Reference:** Level 23, Room 9

## MESSAGE SET B

### Message 1

**Where:** Yawning Portal

**Type:** Pressed nib

“The throne of bone is treacherous.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 1, Room 8

### Message 2

**Where:** Level 1, Room 2, Hall of Many Pillars

**Type:** Faction cypher (Zhentarim)

“The answer lies cloaked in death.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 2, Room 24

### Message 3

**Where:** Level 1, Room 13, Empty Room

**Type:** Puzzle box

“I fled in dread at sight of the skull with the ebony sapphire eyes.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 20, Room 15

### Message 4

**Where:** Level 1, Room 17, Stone Temple Pileup

**Type:** Animated object

“Fishbone Jim nearly frightened me to death.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 3, Room 12

### Message 5

**Where:** Level 1, Room 18, Troll’s Den

**Type:** Puzzle box

“Reaching the end of my resolve, I sheltered in a miner’s privy and wept.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 21, Room 12

### Message 6

**Where:** Level 2, Room 5, Arch Gate

**Type:** Pressed nib

“Beyond the great organ, the floors are untrustworthy.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 6, Room 42



### Message 7

**Where:** Level 2, Room 14, Base de Resistance

**Type:** Etchings

“Traverse cavern of dagger rocks at own risk.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 11, Room 6

### Message 8

**Where:** Level 2, Room 20, Dead Eyes Watch Post

**Type:** Vocational jargon (Clerical divine allegories)

“There is a lost adventurer wandering the academy halls. I called to her but she did not answer.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 9, Room 10

### Message 9

**Where:** Level 2, Room 23, Ruined Dwarven Temple

**Type:** Written (Halfling)

“Beware the drow with the scarab”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 4, Room 11

### Message 10

**Where:** Level 3, Room 21, Azrock’s Hold

**Type:** Paper bird

“Obsidia and Rhodos are kind to small folk.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 7, Room 13

### Message 11

**Where:** Level 4, Room 1, Fungus Forest

**Type:** Faction cypher (Lord’s Alliance)

“I have seen pools that reflect only souls of iron.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 13, Room 9

### Message 12

**Where:** Level 4, Room 22, Hook Horror Homestead

**Type:** Nested container

“Don’t trust signs written in goblin.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 5, Room 1

### Message 13

**Where:** Level 4, Room 23, Hook Horror Larder

**Type:** Paper bird

“What treasure can satisfy the greed of the dark oracles?”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 22, Room 24

### Message 14

**Where:** Level 5, Room 11, We All Float Down Here

**Type:** Written (Elvish)

“I saw a magnificent statue of a winged serpent while a captive of the yuan-ti.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 8, Room 19

### Message 15

**Where:** Level 5, Room 13, Dining Cave

**Type:** Written (Primordial)

“Cast not your eyes upon the obscenities of drow and their demon consorts!”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 15, Room 17

### Message 16

**Where:** Level 5, Room 21, Abandoned Barracks

**Type:** Pressed nib

“No one leaves the nexus.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 17, Room 15



### Message 17

**Where:** Level 6, Room 27, Arch Gate

**Type:** Nested container

“I was unworthy. I could not read the inscription of the bronze dragon.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 18, Room 18

### Message 18

**Where:** Level 6, Room 35, Black Cloak

**Type:** Nested container

“Outworlder kitchens run day and night.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 16, Room 26

### Message 19

**Where:** Level 7, Room 25, Xorta’s Flute

**Type:** Written (Goblin)

“Skulls scream in sleep pictures!”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 10, Room 15

### Message 20

**Where:** Level 9, Room 20, Lecture Hall

**Type:** Faction cypher (Harper)

Need porters for the journey? Olive’ll dig some up.

**DM’s Reference:** Skullport

### Message 21

**Where:** Level 10, Room 5, Dilapidated Rooms

**Type:** Faction cypher (Order of the Gauntlet)

“The eyes of Halaster’s statues are as mad as he is.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 14, Room 7

### Message 22

**Where:** Level 11, Room 16, Arch Gate

**Type:** Directional signs

“In the realm of the horned king, there is only the stench of death.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 12, Room 8

### Message 23

**Where:** Level 16, Room 19, Warehouse

**Type:** Etchings

“A great ship without rudder or sails!”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 19, Room 6

### Message 24

**Where:** Level 19, Room 4, The Weeping Eye

**Type:** Elemental (Water)

“Trobriand is shattered. Long live Trobriand.”

**DM’s Reference:** Level 23, Room 13