Schweig's
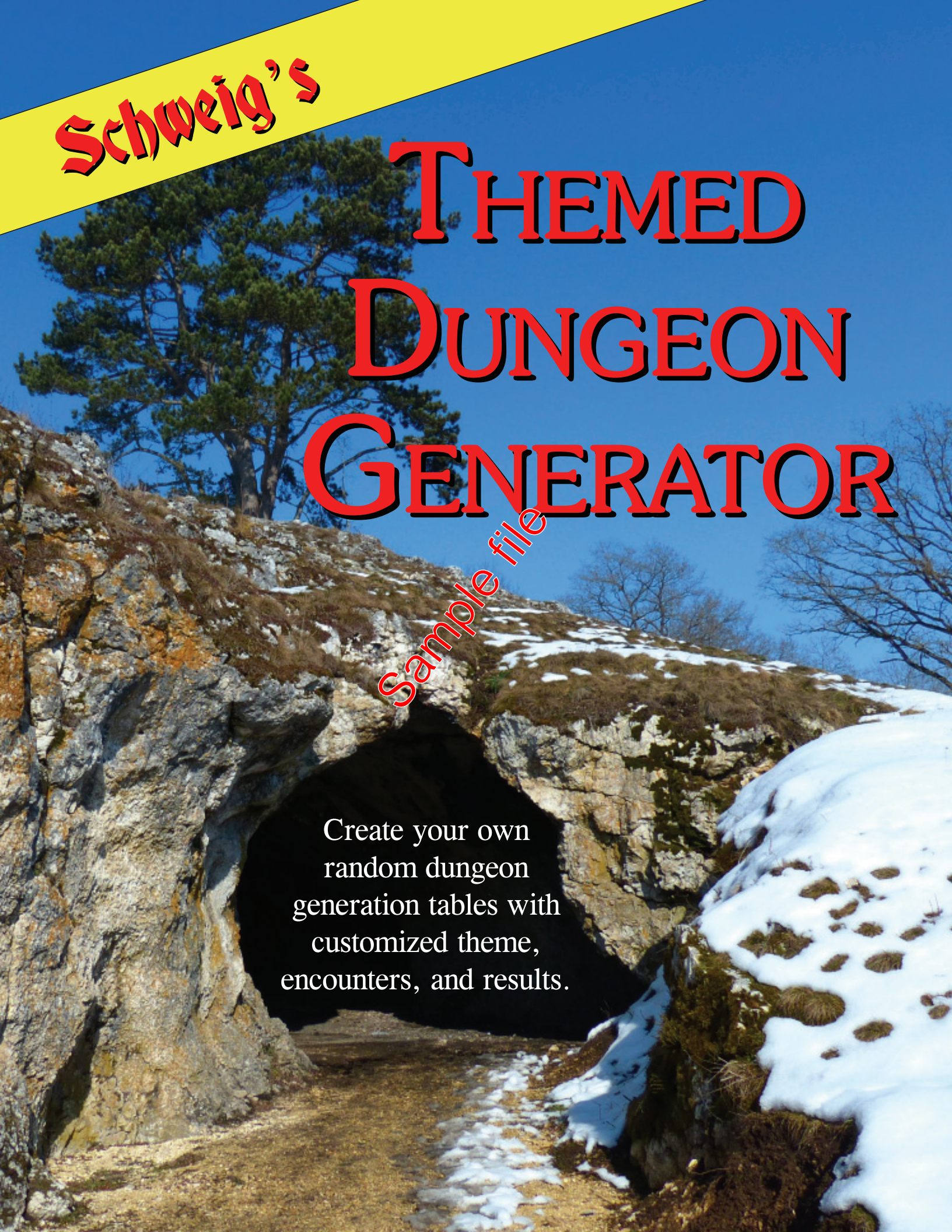
THEMED DUNGEON GENERATOR

Create your own
random dungeon
generation tables with
customized theme,
encounters, and results.

Create your own one-page random dungeon generation tables with customized theme, encounters, and results.

Random dungeon generation systems have been a part of roleplaying games since their birth in the 1970s; these tools for creating randomized settings and encounters have found renewed popularity with the recent resurgence of dungeon-delving in the "Old School Renaissance" movement and the pursuit of solitaire gaming.

Schweig's Themed Dungeon Generation System provides a form outline for customizing a random delve built around a general theme — such as a goblin lair, sorcerer's basement, ancient ruin, minotaur's labyrinth, frog-god temple — easily incorporated into most fantasy roleplaying games and even other genres.

A form and some basic instructions offer guidance in choosing die ranges for corridors, chambers, stocking potential traps and exceptional treasures, and preparing a menu of escalating encounters. Fill out the form in PDF and print to paper or PDF; or just print out the blank form and fill it out by hand. Once complete it's ready for generating a room-by-room dungeon for on-the-fly group play or an unscripted solitaire delve.

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Introduction

Throughout my gaming experience I've dabbled with random tables. I generally don't use them much, preferring scripted plots or detailed adversaries, motivations, and settings around which to craft an engaging adventure.

In all my years gaming — and having started with both *Basic Dungeons & Dragons* and *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* — I've never really had occasion to use the venerable random dungeon generator in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*'s "Appendix A. Random Dungeon Generation" (and the associated random monster tables by level); however, I recently sought to self-test a fantasy roleplaying game system in development and thought I'd use the "Appendix A" tables to generate a random dungeon layout seeded with encounters from the first-level monsters I'd designed for my own game. I even found a more recent take on the random dungeon generator. Both left me feeling unsatisfied with a senseless collection of chance encounters, empty rooms, and lack of any narrative or thematic cohesion.

Like any determined, creative gamer, I set out to craft my own dungeon generator, one designed around a general theme with results skewed toward certain outcomes reinforcing that theme and an escalating encounter table that increased the difficulty of challenges until delvers ultimately confront a "boss" monster at the dungeon's climax.

My overall rationale included several goals and limitations. I intended to keep the tables to one page; this resulted in some traditional random generator elements becoming extremely streamlined or omitted altogether. I used a PDF form to allow gamers to fill in their own die ranges to skew results as they saw fit, plus blank entries so they could fill in their own special features, treasures, traps, and encounters. The resulting form serves as a tool gamers can use in crafting their own themed dungeon tables; instructions and two examples provide guidance and inspiration.

Peter Schweighofer
Griffon Publishing Studio

"Seeding" the Generator

This form allows users to fill in fields to create a themed dungeon generation system, a randomly rolled dungeon-delving experience with results skewed toward a general theme for a more cohesive adventure experience. These instructions offer suggestions for filling out the different form fields to program a themed game experience.

Two completed themed dungeons illustrate how the system works to produce a final random dungeon generator.

Theme

Describe the general theme of the dungeon crawl: goblin lair, mage's ruin, minotaur labyrinth, catacombs of the evil shrine, lost mine. Don't get too specific. The theme should describe the dungeon just enough that it can fit as an adventuring location into a variety of circumstances. For instance, adventurers might simply happen upon a "goblin lair" during their travels, or a village might hire them to seek the source of recent night-time raids.

Corridors & Chambers

This chart assumes a 1D10 roll can skew the results one way or the other, with each single result representing a 10% chance of encountering a feature. The "Special" category allows users to include elements that don't easily fall into the corridor or chamber designation but add depth to the dungeon: stairs, back exits, gallery passages overlooking other chambers, pillared halls, chasms with bridges, or other architecture characteristic of the dungeon theme. Allocating the "10" result to the "Special" category keeps those features rare, while leaving a range of 1–9 to divide slightly or severely unevenly between corridors and chambers; skew a wider range in favor of more chambers for a meatier dungeon or more corridors for a more labyrinthine one.

Corridors

This table generates the most often-used passages in dungeons. Choose a base die to roll -- typically one higher than the number of options listed, like a 1D6 or 1D8 — then fill in the result range for each possible corridor type. Use a larger range of numbers for results you want to appear more often. For instance, an average dungeon might simply use a 1D8 and evenly space out the results (or you could use 1D4 and give each result one number); for a more labyrinthine dungeon, give larger ranges to passages like the T-junction or four-way intersection.

Choose a die type used in determining a corridor's length. Roll this to get the number of 10-foot sections a passage stretches before rolling on the "Corridors & Chambers" table again. Want short hallways? Go with 1d4. Long passages? Roll that 1D20.

Since corridors seem like good places for traps, include a die type and range to indicate when traps are present. Rolling a 1 on a 1D6 remains a good default, but increase the die type to limit the number of traps (such as rolling 1 on a 1D10 or 1D12), or increase the range for a deadlier dungeon (rolling 1–3 on a 1D6). To make figuring percentages of trap frequency easy, use 1D10, with each number equivalent to a 10% chance for traps.

Chamber

Choose a die type to roll when determining what kinds of rooms adventurers discover: chambers with nothing, encounters, or trapped treasures. A 1D6 offers a good possibility for both even distribution of results or skewed outcomes (finding a trapped treasure should remain a rare occurrence, encountered only on a 6). For greater range of results, use a higher die type and allocate the results accordingly.

Sample file

Choose a die type players roll twice with a +1 modifier to determine the length and width of rooms. For instance, rolling 1D6+1 can produce rooms with dimensions varying between 20 and 70 feet. (The +1 insures at least a 20-foot width since a 10-foot wide chamber seems more like a corridor.) For larger results choose a larger die type.

The 1D4 roll to determine additional exits from the chamber remains a default, though it employs a –1 after six rooms to limit the dungeon's extent. Rolling a 1 (regardless of the modifier) could determine that a secret door exists in the chamber.

Special

Choose a die type to roll when generating special dungeon features as directed by a result on the "Corridors & Chambers" table. These could include elements don't easily fit with those designations or stand out beyond the average passages and rooms yet work with the dungeon theme: stairs up or down, a vertical shaft, back exits, additional entrances, passages overlooking other chambers, audience halls, hallways with cell doors, chapels, chasms with bridges. Some might include notes for related encounters, such as "5–6 Back Exit: Go to Goblin Sentry encounter."

Traps

List several traps one expects to find in this themed dungeon. Not all traps might seem appropriate. Pick a die type to roll in determining which traps appear, and distribute the results evenly or ranged to favor certain traps.

Treasure

Create a list of exceptional treasures found within the dungeon beyond what adventurers might uncover when looting vanquished foes: hordes of coins, gems, and jewelry; magical items; fine wine and food; enchanted weapons and armor; prized artifacts. Choose a die type to roll to generate a random result, spreading the results evenly or skewed toward items adventures are more likely to find.

Encounters

Devise a list of encounters likely in the themed setting, with the easiest to overcome at the top of the list and the most challenging, including "boss" monsters, at the bottom. Include numbers of creatures encountered (either set or as rolled on a die) and setting trappings, too: "1D4+1 goblins gamble in the corner of a cluttered guard room."

Choose a die type to randomly determine encounters. As a good general rule, pick a die type with about two-thirds as many sides as the number of encounters you envision. For instance, using a D12 seems ideal for a table with about 18 encounters. This allows for distributing results to favor a few more commonly encountered monsters while setting about half the encounters beyond the natural upper reach of the die roll. Each time one rolls on the table, add the number of previous encounters in the dungeon to the result; this enables escalating encounters beyond the topmost number on the die so greater challenges show up deeper in the dungeon.

The encounter table is arguably the most important one in the entire themed dungeon process, so populate it with interesting and challenging encounters and exceptional "boss" monsters. Label "boss" monsters with a parenthetical capital B. Some encounters, primarily those with "boss" monsters, should allow an extra roll on the "Treasure" table if defeated; note this with a parenthetical capital T in those entries. For instance, "1 Ogre (B) and 1D8 goblin minions revel at a small feast (T)."

When complete either print out the themed dungeon or export the document to its own PDF file using the "save as" feature.

Playing the Generator

After "seeding" the tables the user can begin rolling on the dungeon generator in a logical sequence, determining corridors, chambers or specials; corridor direction and length; chamber size, exits, secret doors, and contents. Several tables — notably those for treasures and encounters — include blank check boxes to note previously rolled results to ignore on future rolls; in these cases, players should move to the next-highest result.

Note that common sense rules the day in arranging corridors and chambers to fit. If a right turn corridor causes trouble, reroll or take a left turn. If a corridor leads into a

previously explored room, it might use a secret door for access or form a previously concealed additional exit. Overlapping rooms might occupy different vertical levels within the dungeon or share access though a raised balcony, sinkhole, or other feature.

The "Encounters" table requires more than a straight die roll. When rolling for results on this table, add the number of previous encounters to the die roll result. Keep track of the number of previous encounters with tick marks tallied in the box atop the table. Don't forget to check off an encounter, taking the next highest result if rolled again. This "escalation mechanic" moves a delving party of heroes toward higher and more challenging results.

Credits

Sample file

Schweig's Themed Dungeon Generator

THEME: _____

Corridors & Chambers

Roll 1D10 to determine whether adventurers encounter a corridor, chamber, or special feature in the direction they explore.

____   Corridor: roll on "Corridors" table.

____   Chamber: roll on "Chambers" table.

____   Special: roll on "Special" table.

Corridors

Roll 1D____ for corridor type, then roll for length and traps.

_____   Straight

_____   Turn (roll 1D6: 1–3 left, 4–6 right)

_____   T-junction

_____   Four-way intersection

Corridor Length: roll 1D____ for length.

Roll for traps: if 1D____ = ____ roll on "Traps" table.

⇨ Return to "Corridors & Chambers" table.

Chamber

Roll 1D____ for chamber contents, then roll for size and exits.

_____   Empty Room: if 1D____ = ____, roll on "Traps" table.

_____   Encounter: roll on "Encounter" table.

_____   Trapped Room with Treasure: roll on "Treasure" table to tempt characters, then roll on "Traps" table.

Chamber Size: roll 1D____ +1 twice for size.

Additional Exits: roll 1D4 for number of additional exits; apply −1 modifier after 6 rooms; rolling a 1 also indicates a secret door.

⇨ Resolve encounters, then go to "Corridors & Chambers" table.

Special

Roll 1D____ to determine special dungeon features.

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

Check off a special after finding it; use next result if rolled again.

Traps

Roll 1D____ to determine the traps found in corridors and chambers.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Treasure

Roll 1D____ to determine exceptional treasures found in the dungeon in trapped rooms with treasure and after defeating boss monsters.

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

_____ ❑ _____

Check off a treasure after finding it; use next result if rolled again.

+   [Number of Previous Encounters]

Encounters

Roll 1D____ and add the number of previous encounters to the result.

❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

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❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

❑ _____

Resolve chamber encounters and return to "Corridors & Chambers" table.

Check off an encounter after resolving it; move to next encounter if rolled again later.

Unless otherwise noted, defeating adversaries yields their normal treasure type. A "T" indicates a roll on the "Treasure" table after vanquishing the creature in the chamber. For highest results, a "B" indicates a boss monster; after defeating a boss monster, roll on the "Treasure" table…the heroes have conquered the dungeon.