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20 THINGS #55:
FECUND JUNGLE



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20 THINGS #55: FECUND JUNGLE

Are you a busy GM? Does session prep take too long? Do you never have time to work on the cool little details that can bring your session to life? Well fear not! That's where the 20 Things line comes in. This short, focused compilation gives you, the time-crunched GM, the tools to effortlessly add verisimilitude and detail to your adventure. Use the material herein either before or during play and bask in your players' adulation.

This instalment provides five pages of material compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game and is designed to help you flesh out and bring to life the fecund jungles in your campaign.

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USING THIS BOOK

You can use these system neutral tables either during session prep or "on the fly" during the actual session. Roll on the desired table and describe the result. Remember:

- Some players may assume because you describe something it is important. This may slow down the party's progress through the adventure. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- Modify any result so it fit with your game.
- Ignore or re-roll inappropriate results.
- Have fun!

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I: CAMPING & CAMPSITES

Travellers in a fecund jungle would be wise to seek a good campsite.

1. A huge, densely crowned, tree casts deep shade below it, which has created a clearing of sorts. The tree stands by a small stream, making this locale an ideal campsite. (The water source may attract nocturnal animals, which could cause the party problems).
2. Dense stands of red and black flowers surround this campsite. The flowers nod in the breeze and are laden with pollen. The soporific pollen may lull the party's guards into deep slumber, at night.
3. A line of stone markers, overgrown with vines and tottering with age, lead to a sunken road. The road ends at an underground tunnel, which has collapsed about 40 feet in from the entrance. The tunnel could make an agreeable campsite—if the party can clear it of the vipers dwelling within.
4. A small cave, obscured by dense vegetation, burrows into the side of a hill. The gurgle of running water betrays a small hidden stream issuing from the hill. Monkeys dwell in the nearby trees; they screech, if intruders approach.
5. A low, dome-shaped barren hill provides an exposed campsite. Jungle animals shun the hill, however, so the party's rest is uninterrupted.
6. Two large trees have fallen across one another at right-angles to form two walls. Part-sunken into the soft jungle ground, the trees obscure the view of a carefully set camp. Small shrubs, vines and lichen, grow upon the trees' rotting trunks.
7. An abandoned treehouse juts from the low branches of a massive hardwood tree. The remains of a rope ladder hang from the house's door to about 15 ft. above the ground. The house is sound, but its timbers loudly creak in strong winds or when explorers venture inside. Rotting furniture and other odds and ends lie scattered around the interior. The inhabitant's skeletal remains sprawl amid the ruin.
8. A steep-sided craggy chunk of rock rears from the jungle floor. Explorers must scale its vertiginous snake- and bird-infested flanks to reach its zenith. The hill's peak commands an excellent—if exposed—view of the surrounding terrain.
9. A gentle slope of soft, knee-high grass runs down to the bank of a fast flowing river. Large stones in the river serve as stepping stones making it easy to cross the river's white water. Several natural hollows—on both sides of the river—offer concealment from casual observation, but are prone to flooding after heavy rain.
10. A small rocky cleft provides a sheltered campsite. Unfortunately, though, the cleft is prone to flooding after all but the lightest rain.

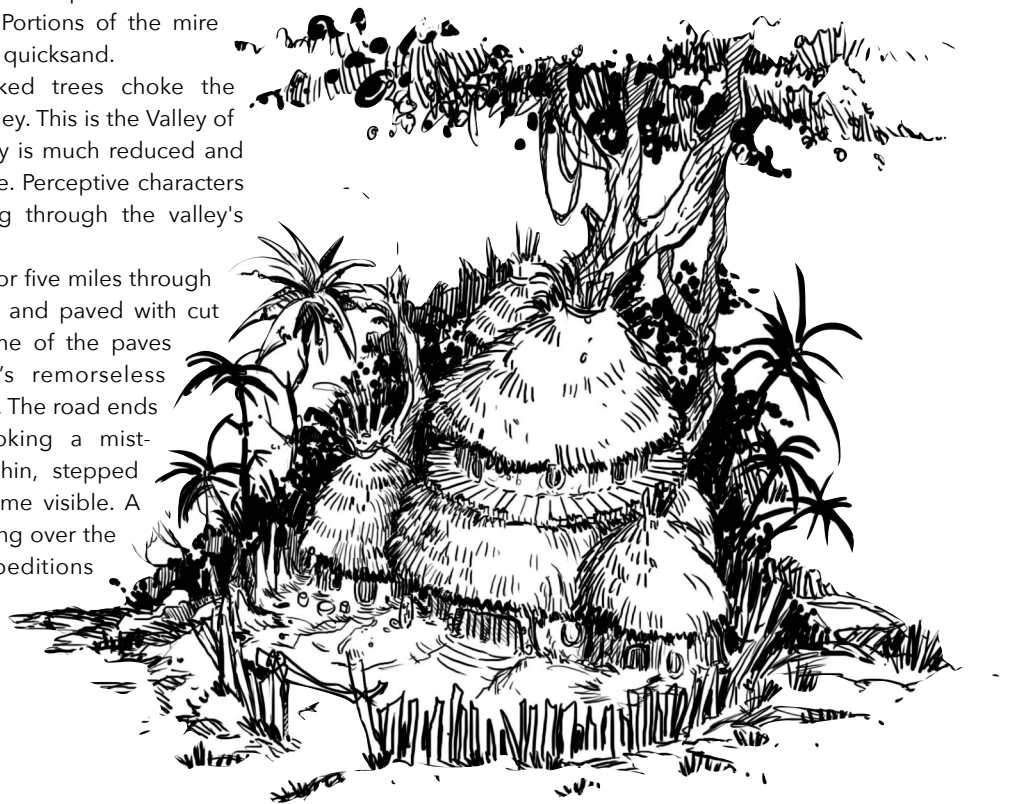


2: LOCAL LANDMARKS

Much of a jungle's landscape is unremarkable and mundane; however some features become local landmarks used as waymarkers in the jungle's near-trackless depths or meeting places.

1. A vertiginous escarpment rises from the fecund jungle. Noisy streams splash down from the Giant's Table plateau atop the escarpment. A tumbled ruin sprawls atop the rocky plateau. Only skilled climbers or birds can reach the ruin which could be a temple, palace or tomb.
2. Many small sinkholes pierce the jungle floor in this locality. Choked with rampant vegetation, the sinkhole pose significant danger to unwary travellers. Many of the holes intersect with a labyrinthine, miles-long cave complex. A small tribe of carnivorous albino apes dwells in the caves. Knowledgeable travellers avoid this area, as a result.
3. The Old Man's House squats atop a steep-sided hill jutting through the jungle canopy. The rambling pile of tumbled stone was once a large building, and its basic floor plan is still evident. Rumours, of fell lights at night and a vampire slumbering beneath the ruin, keep locals away.
4. The overgrown and shunned Palace of the Silver Princess lies in a narrow valley. The palace's jagged, vine-choked towers yet jut skyward; as a consequence, the place is easy to find. Legends tell of an exquisite silver statue of a beautiful princess guarding the ruin. At night, the statue comes alive to hunt and kill any interlopers invading the ruin.
5. Travellers describe this swath of low-lying, mosquito-infested bog as a hellhole. Known as the Mire of Hopelessness it fills the land between three steep hills. Portions of the mire have the qualities of deep and deadly quicksand.
6. Stunted, gnarled and densely-packed trees choke the sunken cairns scattered about this valley. This is the Valley of the Dead. Animal activity in the valley is much reduced and random encounters with such are rare. Perceptive characters may glimpse ethereal spirits moving through the valley's lingering gloom.
7. The Giant's Road runs dead straight for five miles through the jungle. The road is 20-foot wide and paved with cut stones of impressive uniformity. Some of the paves have begun to sink under time's remorseless onslaught but the road is still useable. The road ends at a crumbling cliff edge overlooking a mist-shrouded valley. When the mists thin, stepped ruins cut into the valley's cliffs become visible. A legion of legends and wild stories hang over the valley and the ruins. Several expeditions exploring the valley have disappeared without trace.

8. The Ziggurat of Ancient Shadow stands amid a swath of dense forest. Here, daylight rarely penetrates the forest's lofty, intertwined canopy. Legends identify a nameless race of snakefolk as the ancient's ziggurat's builders. A collapse has blocked the only obvious tunnel into the structure's interior.
9. Dense stands of mangrove trees bound this wide lake. Two islands, overrun by mangrove trees, stand amid the lake's still waters. The rotting remnant of an extensive wooden building stands on the larger of the two islands. Part collapsed, the building was the home of an eccentric hermit who claimed the lake as his home. He has been dead for years, but locals name the place, Restless Spirit Lake. Several people have drowned in the lake, and the hermit's ghost is blamed.
10. The Well of Lost Souls pierces the bedrock of this range of oft-shunned hills. The well—a flooded sinkhole—intersects with a sunken cave system. Centuries ago, a now extinct people used the well for thousands of ritual sacrifices. Thus, did they attempt to win their blood-crazed gods' favour, but found only their own ruin. Mounds of bones and ancient artefacts yet lie visible in the deep, clear water and ensure a trickle of visitors to the site.
11. Crowned with vine-choked trees, the Giant's Dyke forms a circle roughly one mile in diameter. Local legend has the time-worn dyke as the boundary of a giant's now decayed and lost farmstead.
12. Towering above its neighbours, the Sky Tree is over 5,000 years old. Its crown is dense and lofty. Rumours describe the Sky Tree as a wizard's tower of sorts, although no one knows who dwells at its zenith.



3: MINOR DAYTIME EVENTS

Few journeys in a fecund jungle are wholly without incident.

1. Clouds of biting and stinging insects surround the party. Many of the insects carry disease which can cause blindness; some of the party may get infected.
2. Loud rustling overhead in the trees heralds the arrival of a troop of monkeys. The monkeys play and chatter, but scatter if they detect a lurking threat. A druid, ranger or elf can befriend one or more of the monkeys. A friendly monkey does not risk its life for their new friend.
3. A leopard emerges from the dense vegetation growing hard against the trail. The big cat carries the limp body of a monkey in its mouth. The leopard regards the party without fear before darting away.
4. The party comes across a trail of booted footprints. A tracker can determine someone passed this way recently. This could be another group of travellers, local hunters or a lost party's own tracks.
5. A huge constrictor snake lies coiled above the trail on a wide tree branch. The snake has recently eaten and is lethargic. If attacked, it slithers away to digest its meal elsewhere.
6. As a party member is about to drink from their flask, an adventurous monkey jumps down from a branch and grabs it. The monkey flees, whether successful or not, to a nearby tree.
7. A small yellow- and red-striped viper slithers across the trail. It is not interested in fighting, and flees if attacked. Characters blundering after it quickly lose the trail.
8. Thick spider webs stretch between the low-hanging branches of a tree near the trail. Large brown spiders scuttle about within, among the cocoons of many unfortunate insects.
9. The ground is wet and boggy, and the characters' feet quickly get soaked. If the heroes don't dry their feet when they rest they could develop trench foot. Characters with trench foot only move at half speed.
10. The characters stumble out of the jungle onto the banks of a sluggish stream. The buzzing of mosquitos fills the air. Characters lingering here may get infected with malaria (or some other horrible disease).
11. Thick vines grow among the fecund moss and grass covering the ground. Unwary characters could trip and fall if they don't spot the coiled vines. The vines could be nothing more than a natural occurrence or a crude trap.
12. The characters enter a dense stretch of jungle, which they must hack their way through. Many small animals dwell in the area, but the tangle is too dense for larger creatures. Thus, this is a safe place to camp.

4: MINOR NIGHT-TIME EVENTS

Few folk travel the jungle in the dead of night, but that doesn't mean nothing happens to those camping under the stars.

1. At night, the jungle comes alive with the roars and calls of many animals—both predators and prey. Getting a good night sleep is difficult, in these circumstances.
2. Shafts of soft moonlight pierce the jungle canopy, lancing down to the party's campsite. As the night draws on, any guards notice the moonlight creeping toward those sleeping. It is like the shafts are some kind of silent, preternatural nighttime predator.
3. Thick clouds pass in front of the moon, plunging the jungle into deep darkness. Rustling in the undergrowth and the calls of nocturnal animals seem amplified. The jungle quiets, when the moon re-emerges from behind the clouds.
4. The crash of something large falling through a tree's canopy shatters the air. A muffled thud heralds the thing reaching the ground. A falling rotten branch or the sound of a creature tumbling to the ground could be the cause of the sound.
5. Ants swarm about in the dead of the night, searching for food. If the characters have left food on the ground—even in packs—the ants carry away much of it to their nest.
6. A constrictor snake slithers through the dark of the night, hunting for prey. The predator only attacks a halfling, gnome or similarly-sized companion animal.
7. Sudden snarls and whines erupt from some distance away. The noise wakes all but the heaviest sleepers. A ranger or druid can confirm that somewhere nearby two large animals battle to the death.
8. Soft rain falls upon the camp. The rain is persistent, and reduces a guard's chance to hear or see anything approaching. By dawn, the rain has drenched anything or anyone not under cover.
9. The stars blaze, high above the jungle canopy. A perceptive guard notices something large pass in front of the stars. The creature heads in a random direction, and does not investigate the camp.
10. A silent jet black leopard pads into camp, hunting for food. Uninterested in large prey, it only attacks small humanoids or animals. It flees, if injured.
11. Heavy rain deluges the camp for much of the night, reducing the ground to a sticky, muddy morass. Only a robust tent provides any shelter from the deluge. By morning, deep puddles lie all around the camp. If the rain continues throughout the day, travel is difficult and miserable.
12. Monkeys chatter incessantly in the trees near the camp, from early in the morning. They wake all but the heaviest sleeper. When the birds join in with their morning chorus, sleep becomes impossible.

5: WILDERNESS DRESSING

While vast swaths of a fecund jungle may seem boring and unremarkable, travellers will—no doubt—encounter some things of minor interest.

1. A huge tree lies part-buried in the gloom of the jungle floor. Lichens, vines and smaller shrubs grow on the rotting trunk creating a living wall. The tree is over 100-foot long and over half its bulk has sunk into the earth.
2. Without warning, the party reach a deep gorge cutting across their path. A fast-flowing river fills the gorge. Nearby, the mouldering remains of a rope bridge span the gap. The bridge is not strong enough to support heavy travellers.
3. The ruin of a wooden hut stands in the gloom of a stand of trees atop a small rise. Deep shadows filled the tumbled and rotting hut. Rudimentary signs of agriculture suggest someone tried to make a (likely solitary) life here.
4. A pit—its floor laced with sharpened wooden stakes—straddles the trail. The corpse of a gorilla lies amid the splintered stakes. Investigation reveals the gorilla has been dead only a day or so. (Whoever dug the pit may lurk nearby and won't take kindly to the characters making off with their catch.)
5. A tribal territory marker looms over the trail. Lurid and stylised carvings of nature spirits decorate the marker. Lichen and creepers obscure some of the carvings, suggesting it has been here for many years.

6. A rotting spear—of curious, but primitive design—lies tangled in a bush. The spear's tip comprises sharp, fire-hardened obsidian of blackest hue.
7. The shattered bones of some long-ago traveller lie in the shadow of a large tree. The unfortunate's equipment has long ago rusted or rotted away. Investigating the bones reveals, something powerful has feasted on the tasty marrow within.
8. A narrow, but deep, stream, flows from a rocky upland over a series of small waterfalls in a narrow gully. The stream is audible from some distance such away, and the gully provides an excellent place to rest.
9. With little warning, the dense undergrowth gives way to a small swath of savanna. The five-foot high grass undulates in the breeze and a faint susurrations fills the air.
10. A pile of skulls, weathered and bleached, stand in a vine-choked pyramid about six-foot high. The grinning skulls watch over the trail, providing—perhaps—a warning or serving as a boundary marker.
11. A crumbling statue of a cruel-faced man has part-sunken into the soft jungle soil. Digging out the bottom half of the statue reveals the man to have a snake's tail.
12. A huge ants' nest towers astride the trail, and a multitude of large ants quest all about for food. If disturbed, the ants swarm from their nest to attack.



6: UNEVENTFUL TRAVEL

Some days, an adventurer's life is full of danger and excitement. Many other days are boring and uneventful.

1. The party slog through dense jungle, pierced only by occasional game trails. The heroes end the day hot and exhausted.
2. The day is hot and the terrain hard and unforgiving. The jungle is alive with the sounds of large animals. Luckily, the party encounter nothing dangerous.
3. Dark clouds scud across the sky before deluging the jungle (and party) with hot and heavy rain. The party get soaked and the ground turns into a sucking bog.

4. The party find a network of winding game trails threading through the dense jungle vegetation. This discovery speeds their movement. In the afternoon, the trails debouch into an arid plain.
5. The jungle is alive with the sounds of its innumerable denizens. The party see many animals and birds during the day; if they choose to hunt, they are more successful than normal and feast well when they rest.
6. The party make slow progress until they come to a dried up river leading in the general direction they wish to go. Following the river, they make good time for the rest of the day, and easily find an agreeable campsite.



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