

Nettlebed Caverns

This exercise started out as an attempt to produce a set of rules for the old *Caverns* game described in the *Beholder* website. The description was obviously set up with the intention of encouraging people to come up a set of rules themselves to roughly match the gameplay the author had recollected from his version of the game. Which is exactly the challenge being met here. However, the exercise has very quickly developed it's own life under the influence of exposure to other game systems, and other developments that seemed like a good idea at the time.

Other games that have impacted on this development are:

Hero Quest
Talisman
Wabbit Wampage
Tantrix

The game is basically a swords and sorcery game which is not all that serious and will hopefully have some quite fun and novel types of play involved.

The main aim of the game is that the players draw a Quest card for themselves then attempt to fulfill that quest. Once the quest is fulfilled then the character wins the game by getting back to the Caverns entry point. It's as easy as that.

Players

The game is designed for solitaire through to sixteen players. Sixteen is probably too many, but five or six should work well. The characters can be one of eight different classes, with a male and female version of most characters. The characters are designed to be essentially equal so that there is no advantage in having one type of character over another.

One way or another the players determine an order in which they can select their characters (or they could draw them randomly). The player's character card can be layed out in full view as there is nothing on it that the player must keep secret from the other players. Associated with each character is a miniature figurine which will be used to represent the player in the game world.

The Character Card

The character card defines the abilities of the character and the special things of note about the character. The characteristics are noted around the perimeter of the card.

The characteristics noted around the perimeter are:

Physical Attack
Physical Defence
Majick Attack
Majick Defence

These are the base characteristics and will not alter during the game. Various objects and events will serve to alter these values such as use of weapons and spells but they do not change the base value.

Other characteristics noted on the card are:

Lifepoints
Movement
Size

Lifepoints

The only characteristic that will vary during game play is the number of *lifepoints*. These points are reduced as the result of botched encounters, misfortune and poor judgement. They can be healed with the administration of some very rare spells. All players start with four *lifepoints*, and four tokens should be layed beside the *Lifepoints* part of the character card to depict the changing level of health of the character. A character dies if they lose all their *lifepoints* (the undead characters are considered dispelled – gone, finito, kaput – no existential arguments accepted OK). The character may be dead, but the player continues on in collaboration with other “dead character” players to run the non-player characters and make life more difficult for those players with characters still in action.

Movement

The value for movement is the number to be added to the 1D6 movement roll to give the number of spaces a character can move. The character can move in any direction, change direction at any time, or not even use their full movement. The amount of movement a character can do can be enhanced or hindered by various objects, events, or spells.

Drawing the Quest Card

Once characters have been selected they need to determine their purpose in life through drawing a card from the Quest Card pile. This will tell them the task they must fulfill in order to win the game. Once they have completed the task they must return to the entry tile by whatever means possible in order to win. Some of the Quests might be impossible for the

particular character type and so all players have the right to refuse two Quests that they draw. If they use their right to refusal twice, they **MUST** do the third one drawn no matter how impossible it is.

Order of Play

The order of play consists of each player taking their turn followed by a round in which all movements and attacks by monsters is resolved. Among the player characters the order of play starts with whoever rolls highest on 2D6, and then proceeds Anticlockwise from them.

Within a players' round they have a series of actions that they can do. They can move, attack, and/or use spells.

A player starts their turn by drawing an event card from the event card deck. If they are lucky nothing will happen. If they are unlucky, something nasty will happen. The instructions on the event card will tell what happens and what should happen to the card. See further details on **event cards** later.

Normally the player's round is; movement, and then an action such as an attack if circumstances are warranted.

If the player has another player character or monster on a space adjacent to their's at the start of their turn they can attack before moving. In the event of the player character carrying a ranged magical attack spell which will allow them to attack others remote to their character's position, they too can carry out their attack actions prior to moving. In the event that the player character opts to attack a character on an adjacent space but that attack fails, then they cannot carry out any further actions or movements. They just have to sit there and take what's coming to them.

The player can also opt to forfeit their movement for a second attack if they are faced with multiple enemies on adjacent spaces.

Actions such as drawing spells when at a **spell source** are counted as an action and so cannot be done in any turn in which the player character has decided to attack or carry out any action other than moving. Only one spell can be drawn per turn.

Casting spells will depend on the instructions on the spell card. Magical attacks count the same as a physical attack, and so can be done at either the start of a players turn or after the movement phase has been finished.

Entering Unexplored Tiles

When resolving a previously unexplored tile, the player must move their full move onto the tile before the encounters are resolved. Once the requisite encounter cards have been drawn for the tile, the next player character entering the tile does not draw more encounter cards. Once all tiles have been laid down and a player character has entered the tile and revealed the encounters on that tile, there should be no more encounter cards left. There is supposed to be only one encounter card per marked encounter on the board.

Size

Size is a representation of the characters physical height. Their description is either "big" or "small". A small character can go through the little tunnels but cannot walk though water hazards without losing a *lifepoint*. A big character cannot go through little tunnels but can cross water hazards without impediment.

Monster Round

Once the players have done all of their actions, it's over to the monsters to have their turn. Like a player character they will move then carry out an action. They never sneak. The same restrictions on movement through water spaces and narrow passages apply to the monsters as it does to the player characters.

Physical and Majickal Combat

Although some of the smarter characters and players may be able to get through the game without engaging in combat, sooner or later combat is likely to occur.

All characters and monsters have Physical Attack, Physical Defence, Majick Attack, and Majick Defence characteristics noted on their cards.

When combat is initiated the attacker declares whether it is a physical or majickal attack. Irrespective of the type of combat declared spells can be performed by either side at this point to enhance their attack or boost their defence. The attacker rolls 2D6 and adds their attack value plus any gains they might get from special weapons and spells. To be successful the roll must exceed the defence number plus any bonuses from defence boosting objects and spells. If the attack is successful then the defender must lose one *lifepoint* or forfeit one item, a follower, or a maximum of \$250 depending on what the victor decrees. If the attack fails then that is the end of the round for the attacker and they had better watch out.

For items such as shields and swords, carrying multiple of them does not increase the defense or attack bonuses for each item your character is carrying. It merely shows how mentally unstable and paranoid your character is. You may only claim the bonus for the single sword or shield that you define as the active one. Similarly your character can only wear one set of armour at a time.

Dead monsters are to be replaced with the dead body token on the board so that an easy tally of all the character's gruesome deeds can be seen. It also means that any bounty hunters can gather up proof of deeds. Any character can pick up the dead body token and take it with them. The final resting places of dead player characters are marked in the same way.

The World

The world consists of a large pile of hexagonal tiles that have been shuffled and placed face down on the ground. There is a single starting tile layed out that features the Cavern entrance through which the players have entered this world. A number of openings lead off through the edges of the tile. As a player character leaves a tile, they draw a tile from the pile and play it under their character and orient it to their satisfaction to ensure continuity of passages and doorways. Eventually all tiles will have been played out and you will have a magnificent Cavern network resolved on your floor. It would be very unlikely that the network does not have gaps where there are no tiles and where there are passages that still abut these spaces. For the purpose of this game, the unresolved ends are considered dead ends, and the players should grab a bunch of rocky boulder minitiles and have a short session putting these down to block the now dead-end passages. A set of additional tiles are provided for use if you want to explore a greater area or for games with more than four players.

Narrow Passages

Some of the passages are too narrow for big characters. These are a feature of the tile and will be shown as a passage that is around one space wide but has red marked on the passage walls.

Water Hazards

Water Hazards are a feature of the tile and are depicted to show their extent. Only big characters can cross water hazards unaided by spells or mobility devices.

Stairs

Stairs are drawn from the encounter deck, and placed on the space indicated on each tile for the purpose.

Stairs lead up to the surface and allow a character to quickly pass from one staircase location to another without having to pass through the Caverns meeting monsters, other characters and generally having a difficult time of it. The main Cavern entrance is also a stairway.

Sometimes it will occur that two stairs are drawn for a particular tile. In this case one stair is put on the position marked for the stairs and the other is placed on the space with the encounter marks.

Counters with a ladder on them have been provided to mark stairs. Place one of these counters on the space marked "potential stair" if you encounter or draw a stair.

Encounters

A number of tiles will be marked with notes about encounters on one or two spaces.

As soon as a character enters a tile with encounter spaces marked the encounter must be resolved. For each encounter indicated, an encounter card is drawn from the shuffled pile of encounter cards lying facedown with all the other cards.

The encounter cards will reveal things like monsters, treasure, unexpected events, useful objects, or some special feature about the tile.

Objects, treasure, and stairs cannot be used or claimed until the way is clear. This may mean that the character has to deal with a monster or two.

Cave-ins and holes blown through the walls of neighbouring tiles are represented by the partial tiles and counters provided.

Traps

The Caverns are treacherous places and made more treacherous by the possible existence of traps. The only characters immune to traps are dwarfs and Ninja skeletons.

Traps will occur in the game when drawn as a card when resolving an encounter. If the player character is not a dwarf or ninja skeleton they will need to roll 2D6 and roll either 2, or 3 for the trap to not go off. If the trap fails to go off, it will remain in the tile and be indicated by leaving the card on the tile. The next character to enter the tile will need to roll 2 or 3 on 2D6 to not have it go off (unless they are a dwarf or ninja skeleton). Traps do not affect monsters. No treasure or objects can be claimed from the tile on which there is an active trap remaining – unless the character is a dwarf or ninja skeleton.

Dwarves and ninja skeleton characters can choose to disarm a trap, thereby making the tile safe for all characters – but they are not obligated to. Bribery may be required.

A Dwarf or ninja skeleton character can also declare that they will disarm a trap and then add it to their inventory. They will then be able to redeploy the trap in a fiendish location of their choosing.

Spells and Spell Drawpoints

All majick using player characters start off with one spell irrespective of their maximum capacity. These are drawn from the spell card pile.

Along with encounter markers on some of the tiles, there are Spell Sources (marked on some tiles). These are places where spells can be drawn by characters capable of casting spells.

A character can only make one attempt to draw per round. The act of attempting to draw a spell counts as an action and so the character cannot attack anyone else in that turn (they can still be attacked). They can take a card from the spell card stack and add it to their hand of spell cards. The maximum number of cards that can be held by a character is noted on their character card sheet. If the character draws a card that makes them exceed their maximum number of cards, then they will need to discard a spell to return to their allowable maximum.

Playing a spell card will depend on the instructions on the card. After it is played it is put onto the spell card discard pile.

Monsters

As more player characters get wiped out, so the monsters will get played by more and more players. Until the first character karks it the monsters will not move about much and will generally be fighting on automatic with any other player doing their combat rolls. Once a player is in control of the monsters they are free to wander the entire board, and interact with whomever they like however they like (guided by any natural affinities with the player characters and the possible sneaky actions of the player characters.)

Getting Along With Others

Some character have an automatic affinity (or lack of) for some types of monsters and encounter beings. This will generally be expressed as the monsters not automatically killing and eating the character, or in the best situations actually providing aid to the characters such as carrying them across water, or attacking other characters at the “likeable” character’s request.

Dead Bodies

The down side of adventuring it can tend to get messy with dead bodies all over the place. For this purpose some counters have been provided to represent the bodies of those who have fallen. They are the ones with a skull on them or a grave stone.

Odds and Ends Rules

Rockfalls

You’re underground. Rockfalls happen OK. The instructions for rockfalls are contained on the event cards. On occasions however, you will find that a rockfall occurs on the side of a tile occupied by a set of stairs. If this happens, then the stairs are destroyed and removed from the board.

Three-Legged Race Movement

As a salve to those having to endure the stupidity of a three-legged race, the partnership can move their own movement on each of their respective turns. They will not have to draw event cards for each of their turns either for the duration of the three legged race. We’re nice that way.

Germes

If a player character has germes they are a vector and not affected by the germes, nor by any other incidences of germes outbreaks.

Money and how it can bring happiness.

Money can be used to bribe other characters, ward off damage, and buy items, spells, or services from other player characters. This is by negotiation and up to the players. There are no stores below ground other than the transuniversal store which will turn up eventually.

The transuniversal store is an event and will remain on the board once it appears. The list of goods that it sells are:

Sticking plaster and detol.

Sticking plaster and detol can be used to fix one lifepoint on any one character. It cannot be used to bring save the last lifepoint of a character who has just lost it. A complete rip off at \$500.

Shield

Limit one per customer. Adds +1 defense bonus. Cost \$250. The shop will pay \$200 for used shields

Sword

Limit one per customer. Adds +1 attack bonus. Cost \$500. The shop will pay \$300 for used swords.

Light Armour

Limit one per customer. Adds +1 defense bonus. Cost \$250. The shop will pay \$150 for used armour.

Heavy Armour

Limit one per customer. Adds +2 defense bonus, -1 Movement. Cost \$800. The shop will pay \$300 for used heavy armour.

Dynamite

No limit. Use it on your turn as a single attack against multiple foes, or to blast a new entrance to another tile (add opening counter to affected walls.) To use as a weapon, you can throw it a distance of five spaces, and the blast affects one space and each of the spaces around it. All characters occupying the affected spaces are subjected to a 2D6 + 6 attack – roll for each character. Cost per stick \$500.

Helmet of Cerebral Focus

You can purchase a foil hat that will convert your magical attack strength into a physical attack strength. Cost \$500.

Newt Elixir

Turn other characters and monsters into a newt. Use it as a single attack on any other player character or monster. It has a range of eight spaces to throw it. The target character will be turned into a newt for 2 rounds. They can Move at 3 spaces per round.
Physical Attack -6, Physical Defense 6, Magical Attack -6, Magical Defense 6.
Cost \$800.

Read-Along Learn Spell Casting mp3 Series

If you are a character with no natural ability with spells and magic, you may purchase a series of lessons on mp3 format that will teach you the basics of spell casting. You will have the capacity to carry and use one spell. The series comes with a free spell to start with. Immediately draw your spell from the spells pile. Cost \$500.