

Part I: The Sunken City

Mustertown: Gateway to the Sunken City

Just outside the walls of the Great City a ramshackle collection of buildings known as Mustertown clings to the dry lands at the edge of the encroaching swamp. Any party of adventurers heading to the Sending Stone must pass through this collection of crumbling buildings, enduring the hungry stares of the ne'er-do-wells who inhabit them. Eager gamemasters can simply use Mustertown as a place to scrounge up supplies before setting their players on the causeway that leads to the Sending Stone. Alternatively, players can be introduced to the traditions that shape most ventures into the swamp: traditions formed and refined in a large, dilapidated inn known as the **Soiled Dove**.

The Soiled Dove and the Mustering Compact

The owner of the Dove (known affectionately as **Old Soily**) is a former Sunken City adventurer who built his establishment with treasure purchased with his own blood in the ruins. Though a thoroughly unrepentant rascal in most senses, Soily is honest in his dealings with adventurers, and the inn has become the nexus for most parties heading into the swamp. Over the years, a series of traditions have grown, multiplied, and been "codified" into an informal standard known to all adventuresome sorts as **The Mustering Compact**. Most of the traditions of the Compact are unwritten, but there are three chief elements of which all locals are aware:

The Free Charter: The poor and desperate of the Great City have few generally respected rights, but one is that they are free to form **Free Companies** to explore the ruins of the Sunken City. Participation in a Free Company can delay entrance to debtor's prisons, and often acts as a final stage of initiation for various seedy guilds and apprenticeships. (Even wizardly apprenticeships, as many masters wish to test the will and determination of their charges before providing the final keys to access powerful magics...)

The Counting: Each companion in a Free Company contributes a single copper piece to one of Soily's employees known as the **Musters Counter**, receiving a brightly decorated arm band of matching colors, as well as a

baked clay marker. Adventurers scratch their name or mark on one side and next of kin/location on the reverse and deposit it with the Counter, who will see that it is delivered to next of kin if the adventurer fails to return from the ruins to claim his marker.

Prizes: The dream of most Free Companies (beyond surviving) is to return with a **Bright Prize**: a treasure of particular distinction. Returning with a Bright Prize will result in general acclaim, and the Company's name will be inscribed into a board outside the Soiled Dove. Old Soily will likely be able to fence any bright prize the party returns with. (Though check out **Nardgrog's Note** on Page 11 on how to handle things if your world lacks the buyers necessary for such activity!)

A **Grey Prize** is a prize judged something less than a Bright Prize, but capable of constituting a successful adventure for those wagering on the party's success. (A local known as **No-Legs** determines the nature of all prizes, he's discussed momentarily.)

Key Locations

The Soiled Dove (1): The key tavern of Mustertown. The Dove can provide most adventuring items at the usual prices, along with room, board, and other less savory services.

The Circle (2): An open circle of bare dry dirt that is the traditional gathering place for most companies. No-Leg's shack is adjacent. Typically when a company departs, a crowd of gamblers, gawkers, and pickpockets look on, sizing up the party and shouting out encouragement, derision, or betting odds.

The Causeway (3): A berm of raised ground that serves as a path through the fringe of the swamp to the gates of the Sunken City and the Sending Stone.

The Swamp (4): Straying off the Causeway is dangerous. The swamp is full of grasping muck, hidden channels, snakes, bigger snakes, crocodillos, two-tongued mud-wumpers, and even an occasional shiny-spined turf-hurdler. Feel free to punish those foolish enough to wander.

The Lady's Hovel (5): A small shack located halfway down the causeway that houses a kindly, yet mysterious seeress beloved by all the wayward scum of Mustertown. The Lady is a potential source for both information and blessing.



Oh Wise Nardgrog, what is this funnel you speak of?

Welcome one and all to the sausage grinder! During 0-level play your players should expect to lose some or most of their characters! (Pressed through a funnel, as it were.) When mere peasants explore deadly dungeons, what else is to be expected? That's why it only takes moments to create new characters, and in many cases replacements for the unlucky can be found along the way. Those who survive will be ready to choose classes and begin the trek to legendary status!

Mustertown

Gateway to the Sunken City



The Soiled Dove



0-level characters possess many skills gained in their previous professions. Encourage and reward creative solutions from your players to help their blacksmiths and chicken-butchers shine!

Key Figures of Mustertown

Old Soily: Proprietor of the Soiled Dove and a former Sunken City survivor. Regardless of his moral failings, gives a fair price for major finds if he's able to fence the item. Knows everyone in Mustertown: a good source of info as long as your coins continue to flow!

No-Legs: A portly former-adventurer who suffered a mishap with the Proving Stone. Appraises all major finds to determine their "prize" status. His word is trusted in Mustertown.

The Lady: Lives in a shack on the causeway. Is kind to all, and has very powerful friends, including Sender. Can grant a limited number of boons to those who impress her. (Applies an ash mark to the forehead, providing a pool of 2 luck points to be expended on a single luck burn during the next adventure).

The Lady is potentially a source of information about the mysteries of the swamp and the sending stones. To many, she is the only source of grace available, and all in Mustertown revere her. Everyone knows that to harm the Lady in any way is to invite death. It is customary for the blessed to reward her with some small trinket left outside her hut on the return trip. Those who ignore this custom will find themselves cursed by fate. (-1 luck for a month).

The Gates of the Sunken City

Once adventurers cross the Causeway, the ground rises slightly as it approaches a large crumbling gatehouse and walls, forming a clearing. Through breaks in the walls, the ruins appear to go on forever...

Key Locations of the Gates

The Clearing (6): The ground is generally dry here. A gatehouse provides entrance to the Sunken City, but few take this route, as the districts close to the gatehouse were picked clean of treasures years ago. In addition, a fearsome warrior known as **The Warden** patrols the ruins near the gate, and is rumored to be quite unkind to sightseers.

This field of dry ground houses two huge stone monoliths, both extremely weathered: far more so than even the dilapidated ruins they shadow, hinting at great age. Most adventures enter the city by use of the first stone: the Sending Stone.

The Sending Stone (7): Standing nearly 20 feet tall, the Sending Stone is roughly cylindrical, tapering slightly at the top. Covered in lichen and grime, the stone sports crude symbols that can barely be discerned. Chief among them is a dark horned face that seems to have weathered the years better than the other markings. When an adventurer presses his hand to the stone, it slowly warms, and after 15 seconds, all who are touching the stone vanish as one - at the whims of Sender's powers.

While not common knowledge, it's possible for a party to return to the same spot on a return trek if they all concentrate on a place while touching the stone. *Remember everyone, there's no place like the Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk.*

The Proving Stone (8): Slightly smaller and less decorated than the Sending Stone, the Proving Stone provides a destination point for travel back from the Sunken City. The grass immediately surrounding the stone is withered and grey: newcomers might be warned to stand clear in case someone comes through on a return trip. Ignoring this advice could be deadly.

Though Sender is committed to providing safe, reliable service, his is a demon, with a demon's sensibilities. Each return traveler must make a DC 5 Luck save upon arrival or roll a d4 and suffer one of the following:

- 1) **Scarecrow:** You're buried up to your calves upon arrival. (Traditionally you buy all surviving companions a drink at the Soiled Dove if you're scarecrowed.)
- 2) **Wiggly Armor Stand (or Mud Dive):** Buried head first to the chest. Friends have to help you out or you suffocate in short order. (Traditionally everyone chips in to buy you a drink if you take a mud dive... but on occasion this has led to folks not getting rescued by stingy compatriots.)
- 3) **Sender's Diet:** Something goes missing. A fingertip, part of a toe, all your hair...
- 4) **Birdy-Birdy:** You arrive 6-8 feet up. DC 5 Ref save or twist your ankle. (-5 to speed and -1 to reflex rolls for one week)

If an adventurer has done something to truly anger Sender, such as harming the Lady, or defacing the Sending or Proving Stone, that traveler will not arrive safely. The usual penalty is known as **Paying Sender's Tithe**: you arrive without your head.

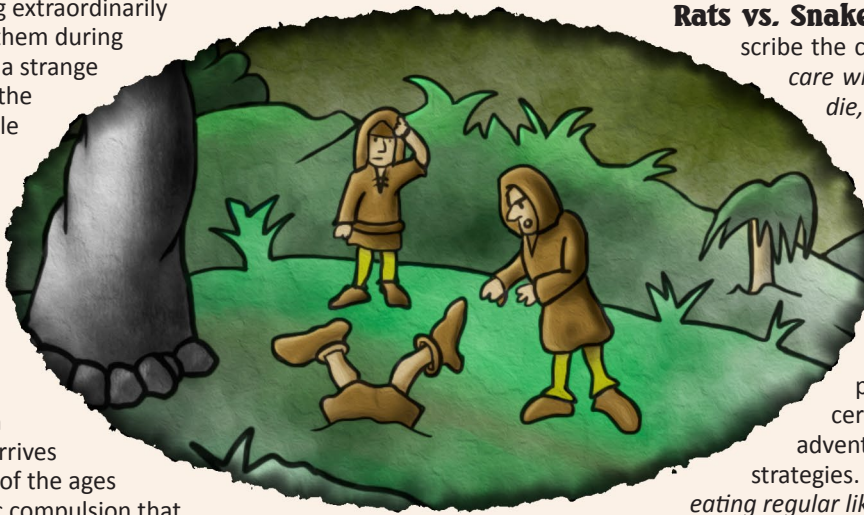
Key Figures of the Gates

Sender: Sender is the powerful demon that energizes the Sending Stones. Few understand the precise nature of his existence, but enough adventurers have returned from sendings with dark impressions to give his legend weight and shape. It is in the Demon's own interest to encourage as many sendings as possible, as each

sending brings it closer to reaching the terms of its release. Sender thus avoids mutilating adventures when possible, and occasionally sizes up parties to send them to locations where they can prosper.

If he holds an adventurer in ill-favor, he's perfectly capable of doing extraordinarily nasty things to them during transfer. He has a strange friendship with the Lady, as he is able to manifest in shadowy form in her hut, where she talks to him and treats him with kindness. He will kill anyone who hurts her. When the day finally arrives when he is free of the ages old necromantic compulsion that binds him to the stone, the Great City will mourn indeed.

The Warden: A powerful warrior who haunts the Sending Stone and environs. Any adventurer arriving at the Sending Stone who looks seasoned, experienced, or powerful is likely to lose 20 pounds of ugly fat off the top. Why the warden does this is a mystery: Is he protecting dark forces in the sunken city? Keeping the food supply coming? Defending the rights of the weak to have a chance at success? None truly know. Regardless of motivation, his influence is clear: only the weak of the city approach the Sending Stone. (For the experienced adventurer, there are rumors of another stone five miles to the south on a small, muddy island just off the coast – tales say it transports the bold to the very gates of The Shriken Tower itself - home of the mumbling necromancer Xax - in the darkest heart of the ruins. Be warned! The mumbles of Xax have driven the bravest men mad!)



Mustertown Lexicon

Mustertown has its own dialect. Those who wish to blend in will benefit by picking up some of the local slang.

Rats vs. Snakes: How the lowly of Mustertown describe the city elite's opinion of them. *They don't care whether we or the fiends in the swamp die, it's all just rats vs. snakes to them...*

Over the Undsy: Betting term about the number of warm bodies remaining in a company upon return from the ruins. *What's the over the undsy on this party? Six warm bodies?*

Melon Thumping: Unsavory practice of gamblers attempting to discern the strength/smarts of members of adventuring companies to improve betting strategies. *Shows us your teeth handsome... been eating regular like?*

Croc Scat: A particularly weak looking company. *This band's croc scat for sure...*

Three-Day Pastry: An overly cautious adventurer who has made numerous journeys into the ruins with little to show for it. *That be one stale company: check out the number of three-day's in the muster...*

Kind: Describes an adventurer who has prospered in the ruins, but at a terrible cost. *He's had luck, of a kind...*

Band of Scholars: A party that seems entirely too confident considering the talent at hand. *Like as not Sender will teach this band of scholars a thing or two about proper perspective...*



But Nardgrog, my world is a deliciously grim and brutish place...

It's assumed that the Sunken City rests near a 'great city' wealthy enough for Soily to easily fence the treasures that emerge from the fetid swamps. But what if your world is a darker, grittier place where finding a market for most treasures is nearly impossible? You have a few options:

You call that a city? There is a city adjacent to the swamps, but it's poor, with few wealthy patrons capable of purchasing expensive treasures. It's impossible for Soily to raise the cash for anything the adventures return with: he's barely able to keep the Dove supplied! The party will have to search to find buyers, which could trigger additional adventures. Also, instead of referring to bright or grey "prizes", successful parties will be known as "Bright Companies" or "Grey Companies" - since reputation and admiration are the only coins that the folks of the city will be willing to share.

We ain't got no stinkin' city: Mustertown is all that remains of the once great city, the last fringe of civilization on the edge of the swamp. The Soiled Dove operates as a crossroads inn, Soily spreading rumors far and wide of the riches of the Sunken City to attract customers. Adventuring parties are few and far between, the ring of gamblers a gathering of old-timers and drifters wagering apples to ward off the air of desperation and despair that surround their lives. Sender is not amused.