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# GM'S MONTHLY MISCELLANY:

MARCH 2016





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# GM'S MONTHLY MISCELLANY: MARCH 2016

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Featuring material from some of Raging Swan Press's newest products as well as classic releases of yesteryear, advice articles and material from Creighton's own *Borderland of Adventure* campaign, the *GM's Monthly Miscellany* series is a terrific free resource for the busy, time-crunched GM.

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## SOURCES

As well as new, never seen before material from my own *Borderland of Adventure* campaign, this instalment of *GM's Monthly Miscellany* presents information from several Raging Swan Press products and advice articles including:

- **Campaign Events: Prison Break** Christopher Wasko.
- **I Loot the Druid's Body** Mike Welham.
- **Village Backdrop: Feyhall** Greg Marks.

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Welcome to March 2016! This year seems to be going faster than normal. Maybe it feels that way because I'm super busy or maybe it feels that way because I'm having loads of fun! Maybe it's both!

March sees the release of a compilation book I've been slaving away over for about a year—*GM's Miscellany: 20 Things*. Even more excitingly, you've probably

already read some of the book. The compilation comprises all the posts I've made on [ragingswan.com](http://ragingswan.com) in the 20 Things line. It also includes extra, never-seen-before entries designed to fill up as much of the pages as possible; I hate wasted space and I wanted to make the book as useful as possible. If you check it out, I hope you enjoy it!

In any event, herein you'll find excerpts from some of Raging Swan's newest products including *Village Backdrop: Feyhall*, *Campaign Events: Prison Break* and *I Loot the Druid's Body*.

I've also included a recent article inspired by a fascinating discussion on the Paizo forums about how to identify monsters using the various Knowledge skills. And finally, I also let you into the "secret" of why character optimisation is basically pointless (unless you enjoy it). You can read the articles—and scores more as well as campaign summaries—at [creightonbroadhurst.com](http://creightonbroadhurst.com).

You might also be aware that Raging Swan Press is now on Patreon. We signed up at the start of April 2015, and it's going rather marvellously. The thrust of our Patreon campaign is to be able to afford better rates of pay for our freelance game designers. As I'm sure you know, the economics of 3PP are notoriously tight, but Patreon gives us at Raging Swan Press a way to increase our freelancer rates. At time of writing, we've already increased our word rate to 7 cents a word, which gives me a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. We want to pay more, but to do that we need your help! If you sign up, you get our supplements earlier than normal and cheaper than normal. Even better, you can pledge what you want and cancel when you want. If you are interested in taking a look at the campaign, check out [patreon.com/ragingswanpress](http://patreon.com/ragingswanpress) or head over to [patreon.com](http://patreon.com) and search for Raging Swan!

In any event, I hope you enjoy the material in this GM's Monthly Miscellany, but more importantly I hope you find it useful and that it enhances your campaign. If you've got any comments or questions about Raging Swan Press, I'd love to hear from you. You can contact me at [creighton@ragingswan.com](mailto:creighton@ragingswan.com).



## HOUSE RULE: IDENTIFYING MONSTERS

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One of my players recently sent me the link for a jolly interesting conversation on the Paizo message boards. The thread was so interesting—and the generally suggested “rules fix” was so awesome—I immediately implemented it in my Borderland of Adventure campaign as a house rule.

The thread in question discusses how GMs deal with Knowledge checks made by PCs to identify monsters. This is one of those areas in the core rules that many GMs handle differently.

While the basics of the rule are clearly spelled out: a PC learns one piece of interesting or useful knowledge about the monster for each 5 points by which he exceeds the DC required to identify the beast.

But what information?

Sometimes the information can be less than useful. I once, for example, played under a GM notorious for giving out pointless information about the monster. For example, who cares about its mating rituals (or whatever) when it’s trying to rip your face off?!

The solution suggested in the thread is both genius and simple: for every 5 points by which the PC exceeds the DC required to identify the creature he can ask one question. So for example, the player could ask:

- What overcomes the creature’s damage reduction?
- Does the creature have spell resistance?
- What is its most powerful special attack?

For myself, I’d like to keep these questions relatively specific. Here are some questions I am unlikely to answer:

- What are all its spell-like abilities?
- What is it particularly skilled at doing?
- What attacks or energy types is it particularly vulnerable or immune to?

I like this system because it rewards player skill and attention and gives the player a measure of control over what information he gains. For example, a wizard plotting his next spell may care more about the monster’s potential spell resistance than what weapons he needs to get through its damage reduction. A rogue or cleric will probably have different concerns.





## FEYHALL AT A GLANCE

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The calamity that caused the Sylvan Court to abandon their hold under the Fey-Cursed Hills is not known and now only twinkling lights and haunting music remain; fairy magic that refuses to be extinguished. When the disease called the Hunger came to the Twyll River Delta, those empty halls provided a hiding place for rogues, bandits and those not welcome in the nearby village of Vaagwol. A constant threat, the Hunger animates the dead whether preserved in the bog, long entombed under fairy hills or recently succumbed in Feyhall hold itself.

Bandits, rogues and refugees now huddle in the eerie dark struggling to keep the Hunger at bay. Without the natural resources or trade of Vaagwol, the fruit of their neighbours' effort is all that sustains them. When their spies send word of river barges or clay gathering expeditions, the bandits of Feyhall attack and carry off all they can gather back to their families.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Ruler** Boss Stig

**Government** Overlord

**Population** 74 (47 humans, 6 dwarves, 2 elves, 4 half-elves, 11 half-orcs, 3 halflings, 1 goblin)

**Alignments** CN, CG, CE

**Languages** Common, Sylvan

**Corruption** +0; **Crime** -3; **Economy** -7; **Law** -6; **Lore** +0; **Society** -9

**Qualities** Eldritch, notorious

**Danger** +43; **Disadvantages** Hunted, plagued, wild magic zone

### NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

**Boss Stig** (location 4; CN male half-orc fighter 3) Stig is a bully not especially concerned with running the settlement, but instead enjoys raids on merchant caravans, river barges or workers from nearby Vaagwol. If his position is questioned, he is more than willing to defend it with axe or fist.

**Luthar Shieldamann** (location 2; CG male human ranger 2) Luthar is a dark, bearded man from a distant land of which he will not speak. While Stig greedily watches outside, Luthar looks within, searching for signs of the Hunger, strange fairy magic or simply keeping track of what supplies the villagers need to last another day. If there is a problem, the locals are more likely to approach him than Stig.

**Nin** (location 3; N female human expert 1) Nin is a former dockworker from Vaagwol infected with the Hunger.

**Oosa** (location 1; NE female human fighter 2) Oosa is one of the gate guards and a frequent member of raiding teams. She despises Boss Stig and wants to overthrow him.

**Sala Greenswidow** (location 2; N female half-elf adept 1) Sala and her love Teesha are new arrivals in Feyhall. Sala is quiet and sickly and claims to have visions directing her to seek a fairy crown beneath the Fey-Cursed Hills that can cure the

Hunger. She is known to have particular skill with divination and necromancy spells.

**Shank** (location 3; CE male goblin rogue 3) Shank is a masked goblin masquerading as a halfling. He is trying to forge the other halflings into a gang under his leadership.

**Teesha** (location 2; CN female human fighter 1/rogue 1) Teesha claims to be an expert in lost civilizations and seems knowledgeable on digging for artefacts. She is fiercely protective of Sala.

### NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of the village comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **The Hidden Gate:** This is the disguised and heavily defended entrance to the village along with attached barracks.
2. **Markethall:** The main cavern is the centre of village life with its two wells and storage of all raided goods. Here shares of plunder are doled out and villagers trade with each other. Balls of flickering starlight dance throughout the cave to a quiet haunting melody that changes for unknown reasons.
3. **The Hideaways:** A cavern with many twists, turns and meandering niches used by many of the villagers as "homes." The Hideaways is mostly populated by the weak, poor and sick.
4. **The Altars:** This two-storey hall has dozens of shrines with plain altars on two different floors which have been converted into living spaces. In contrast to the Hideaways, the Altars are populated by the strongest members of Feyhall.
5. **The Forbidden Stair:** Ornate, and disturbing, silver doors block access to stairs leading down to the Wytchlyte Graves.
6. **Wytchelyte Graves:** An unmapped maze filled with cairns, burial niches, strange curios and death.
7. **Solnicht Bog:** Home to peat, centuries of battlefields and the many walled town of Vaagwol on the Twyll River Delta; a ready target for Feyhall's raiders.
8. **Fey-Cursed Hills:** Once the home of the Sylvan Court, the hills hide ruins of former fey settlements including Feyhall.

### MARKETPLACE

**Resources & Industry** Fairy curios, stolen goods

**Base Value** 450 gp; **Purchase Limit** 3,750 gp; **Spellcasting** 1st (3rd for Divination and Necromancy); **Minor Items** 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** –

When the PCs arrive in Feyhall, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions & Oils** *elixir of vision* (250 gp), *cure light wounds* (50 gp)
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *identify* (25 gp), *see invisibility* (150 gp)
- **Scroll (Divine)** *lesser restoration* (150 gp)

## VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) check may know some information about Feyhall. A successful check gains all the information revealed by a lesser result.

**DC 10:** Feyhall is a sanctuary hidden from the hungry dead somewhere in the Fey-Cursed Hills. It is a place with no laws where only the strong prosper.

**DC 15:** The people of Feyhall survive by raiding neighbouring Vaagwol and the trade flowing to that heavily walled village. Their only natural resources are strange weapons or devices of fairy construction sometimes found deep under the hold.

**DC 20:** The lights and music of Feyhall are magic of the former fey occupants. Something stalks the residents and many just disappear, while others go mad.

## VILLAGERS

**Appearance** The people of Feyhall are similar to those of Vaagwol and frequently have dark hair and dark eyes, though red hair is not uncommon. Hairstyles are often long and wild.

**Dress** Fashion tends to be made up of whatever the residents can scavenge or steal, and is frequently worn until it falls apart. It is not unusual for residents to have a piece of fairy-made jewellery or some scrap of shiny cloth as a good luck charm.

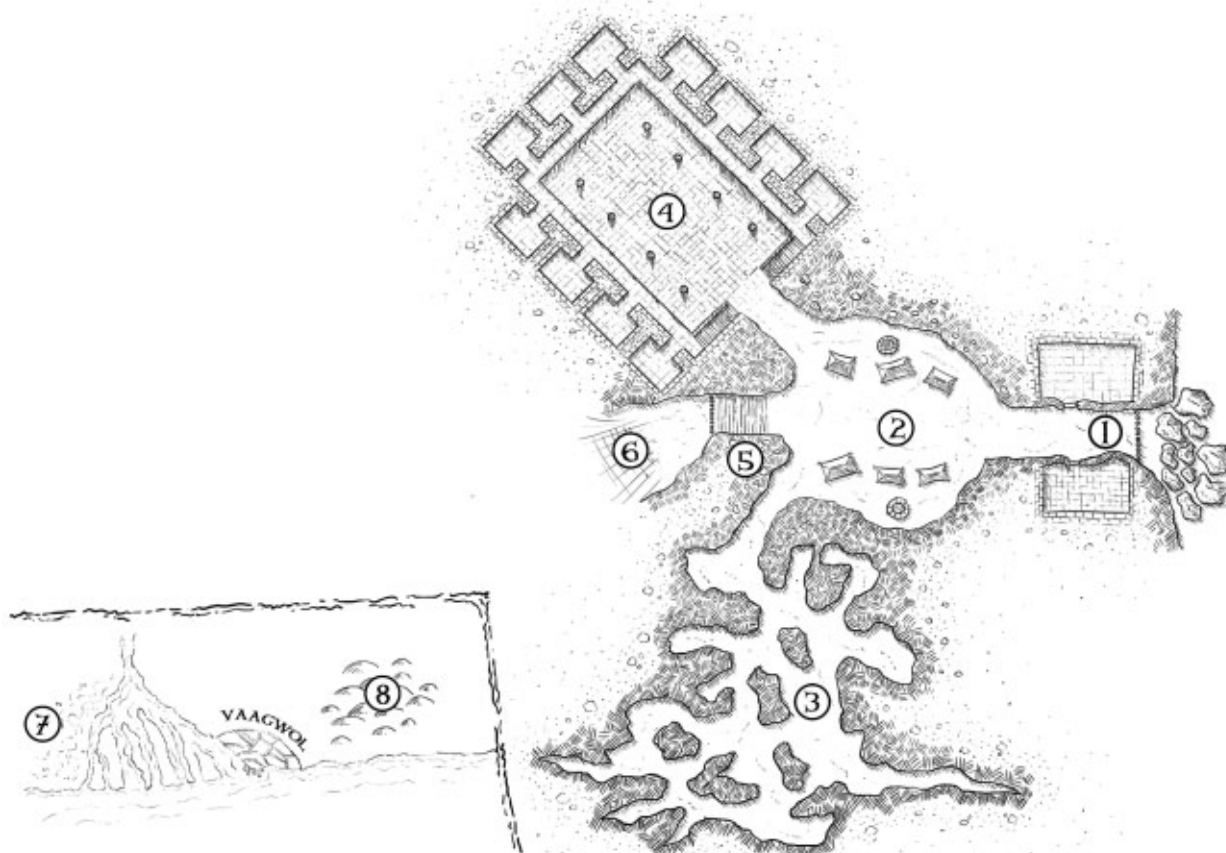
**Nomenclature** *male* Hindrik, Ove, Rasmus; *female* Hebbla, Igna, Nathalie; *family* Ahlgren, Forstlund, Lindqvist, Westermark.

## WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about Feyhall and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1*	Vaagwol has a spy in Feyhall and it is only a matter of time before their soldiers come.
2	Someone is purposefully opening the Forbidden Stair gate.
3*	Boss Stig contracted the Hunger on his last raid. He will soon die, no doubt touching off a power struggle to replace him.
4*	Sala knows a way to ward against the wytchlytes.
5	The halflings are stealing and hiding supplies in the Hideaways.
6	Tesha and Sala are planning on sneaking into the Wytchlyte Graves in search of powerful magical artefacts.

\*False rumour



## PRISON BREAK: PRISON DRESSING

Use this table, to generate minor points of dressing for the prison break. Ignore inappropriate results and simply re-roll.

D%	
1	Rust corrodes the door hinges, causing a brittle shriek when the door opens and closes.
2	Tally marks are chipped into a cell's corner wall.
3	Manacles dangle from the wall, their ridges darkened with dried blood.
4	A scone stands empty, the wall smeared with ash near where the torch previously burned.
5	A dented tin tray with an overturned bowl lies near a cell door. Any food it may have contained has been picked clean.
6	A dull buzz emanates from a small cloud of insects, which swarm around a pool of tepid water at the end of the corridor.
7	Tattered parchments with charcoal sketches of morose faces lie scattered across a table. Beneath each face is a six-digit number.
8	Two tarnished chains suspend the ends of a cell cot. One of the links has split, threatening to drop its end to the floor.
9	Tiny mice scurry through the corridors, escaping into narrow holes in the walls and floors.
10	A fire pit smoulders in the centre of the room, its fumes rank from the dung used for fuel.
11	A dusty ring encircles the inner courtyard, with hundreds of footprints stamped into the soil.
12	A large fire blazes, illuminating the whole area.
13	Greasy fingerprints stain a cell's otherwise polished iron bars.
14	A door opens into a vast pit, illuminated only by a fist-sized opening in the far wall near the ceiling. A rolled-up rope ladder lies nearby.
15	Coils of hemp rope and piles of dirty burlap sacks stand atop a long oak table. Some of the ropes have nooses at their ends.
16	A barely-perceptible crack runs along the entire perimeter of one brick in a cell wall. The stone juts out just enough to be gripped and removed.
17	Scraps of burlap lie stacked beneath a cell cot, each bearing hastily scrawled memos written with different improvised inks.
18	One cell has a faded wool blanket, its edges frayed and its centre ripped.
19	A dirty iron grate, partially clogged with grime, covers a drain in the middle of the hallway.
20	Profane symbols cover the walls at major intersections. There is evidence of trying to scrub them off, but the images remain.
21	Fistfuls of hair, spatters of blood and a stray tooth litter the floor.
22	Wooden stocks stand in a row, their neck and wrist grooves stained with sweat and blood.

23	Grooves crudely chiselled into the wall at regular intervals, form the start of a makeshift ladder.
24	Shards of arrow shafts and bits of fletching litter the ground near the main gate. The nearby stone and soil seem darker than the rest.
25	A diagram of the prison hangs from the wall, with certain guard posts labelled with coloured pins.
26	A smudged, crumpled letter from a family member sits carefully folded beside a cell cot.
27	A human-sized wooden rack stands atop four winches wound with ropes.
28	A hand-sized spider sits motionless inside a tangled web in a cell's upper corner. Desiccated mice dangle from the strands.
29	A tiny drawstring pouch hangs underneath a cell cot, bound by a strand of fabric.
30	A battered, nearly empty oil lamp casts a feeble light in a hallway corner.
31	One of the barred windows makes a dull whistling sound when the wind is up.
32	A relatively intact book with dog-eared pages sits atop one of the few cell cots with a mattress.
33	A trail of blood dots the floor from one cell through the halls to the outer door.
34	A jagged hole the size and depth of a fist blemishes an otherwise smooth wall.
35	A tray of spoiled food lies just outside a cell, untouched.
36	An archery range for the guards lines the inside of an outer wall. Certain prisoners' names are scratched onto the target dummies' torsos.
37	One outer tower screams with the racket of hawks, ravens and pigeons.
38	One cell contains a crooked wooden crutch, which leans against one of the cots.
39	A cast iron branding rod hangs from a rack beside a fireplace. The tool itself has six square slots, which can be filled with interchangeable pieces bearing inverted numbers.
40	A massive ledger sits atop an administrative desk. It contains a grid with hundreds of numbers, names and brief descriptions.
41	An empty iron flask lies on the floor.
42	A layer of dried mud fills the hallway, its surface dotted with footprints.
43	A chicken leg bone, sharpened at one end, lies in a corner. Its tip drips with fresh blood.
44	A broken key lies discarded near an empty cell; its other half sticks out from the cell's keyhole.
45	A used bandage lies in tatters beneath a cell cot.
46	One hallway has some flooding, causing even the softest footsteps to splash along its length.
47	A tin bowl holds a concoction of lard, oatmeal and water as well as a bent metal spoon.



48	The crudely spelled names of prisoners are etched into a cell wall.
49	One cell contains a piece of inmate art, with three colours creating a crude landscape image on a ragged canvas hung from the wall.
50	A mound of horse droppings lies in a steaming pile in the courtyard.
51	The area reeks of sweat and body odour.
52	A torn uniform lies discarded in the hallway, the back ripped open along bloodied seams.
53	A small clay statue of a saint or deity sits atop a shelf overlooking a cell cot.
54	A steel alarm bell hangs from a cord near a door, its pull string dangling beside it.
55	Crude syringes and wells of black ink line a shelf in one cell.
56	A single shoe, muddied and worn to the point of uselessness, sits beside a cell door.
57	A deep crack runs the length of a hallway floor, making the ground slightly uneven.
58	A ball of hair lies in a gnarled bundle at the foot of the wall.
59	A metal mouthorgan sits on a prisoner's cot.
60	Misshapen dice and an incomplete deck of playing cards lie scattered across a table.
61	Tips of chewed fingernails litter the floor outside one cell.
62	A small blot of chewed tobacco stains the floor.
63	One cell's walls are covered with carefully etched carvings of linear shapes and patterns.
64	A jagged gash scars a hallway wall, as though someone scraped a dagger along its length.
65	A coil of chain binds the door latch of one cell.
66	Tendrils of ivy cover the walls like veins.
67	A beam of light outlined in the dusty air peeks through a small hole in the ceiling.
68	The smell of wet earth, blood and urine permeates the entryway.
69	One of the stairway steps has collapsed in on itself, leaving an awkward gap between the two adjacent steps.
70	Boards cover an opening in one outer tower, creating a potential blind spot.
71	The rim of a cauldron peeks between the exterior parapets. A wisp of steam rises from within it.
72	A slab of what might pass for meat sticks in a splattered mass to a wall in the mess hall.
73	One extended room holds long chains with multiple sets of manacles along their lengths.
74	A black fly the size of a grape buzzes lazily between cells.
75	A bag of bundled sheets and refuse hangs from a cell ceiling, like a homemade punching bag.
76	An empty burlap sack with a tattered drawstring lies discarded to one side. The inside is flecked with hair and sweat.

77	A tiny drawstring pouch carefully hidden in a cell cot contains a handful of battered silver coins.
78	An unconscious inmate lies on the floor, his face coloured with bruises, split lips and swollen eyes.
79	A stray fallen brick drips with fresh blood, a crimson stain around where it had been held.
80	A crowbar, a spade and a handmade stabbing weapon lie atop a table in the guards' office.
81	A tin tankard lies at the foot of a mess hall table, its side completely bent in as though it were smashed against a dense object.
82	A dead rat lies at the foot of an outer wall, an arrow shaft sprouting from its side.
83	Several thumb-sized centipedes crawl along a cell wall with startling speed before disappearing into a crack in the mortar.
84	Tiny shards of glass litter the ground in a small section of the courtyard.
85	Splintered wooden beams clutter the hall near a battered door.
86	This door's latch is completely rusted, rendering it inoperable and the door permanently locked. The sound of scratching comes from beyond...
87	Wooden trapdoors in the floor open into small oubliettes with barely enough room to stand.
88	Metal sarcophagi with tiny holes perforating their exteriors line the walls of this room. Large padlocks hold them shut.
89	One stone juts out of a corridor wall, posing a painful risk to the unaware.
90	A slick slime oozes slowly down the walls of the underground chambers.
91	A hunk of rock-hard stale bread lies just out of reach outside one cell's barred door.
92	Several detailed codices containing prisoner names numbers, cell numbers and death dates fill a bookshelf.
93	A row of manacles hang fastened to the outer wall, right over a strip of cold, muddy earth.
94	A dozen shallow graves lie empty in the courtyard, with spades sticking out of the adjacent mounds of soil.
95	A wooden rack holds metal apparatuses resembling unwieldy helmets with restrictive mouthpieces. An iron ring with clasp connects the device to a steel neck brace.
96	A poster outlining several prison rules decorates the door to the mess hall.
97	A single pump well provides water in the mess hall, spitting out dirty water when pumped.
98	A filthy kennel stands fenced off at the rear of the central prison complex.
99	A row of wooden pegs adorns the walls; some pegs hold damp, muddied cloaks.
100	The broken handle of a sundered sap lies on the common area floor.

## LOOTING THE DRUID: POUCH CONTENTS

Beyond their wealth, druids often carry strange odds and ends as well as minor pieces of small equipment in their pouches. Use this table, to generate such items.

D%	
1	Death's head moths flutter listlessly in this jar.
2	Dark green spots cover this potato that has sprouted five-inch-long roots.
3	Upon opening the pouch, the stink of rotten eggs permeates the air; a pair of stuck together greenish things that could have once been called eggs are the apparent source.
4	This vial, labelled "defoliant," holds a yellow liquid. A pungent smell escapes the closed vial.
5	Tailless rats glare with demonically red eyes at the intrusion, when the pouch is opened.
6	This pale moonstone glows when exposed to the light of a full moon.
7	This delicious green apple has a fat worm wriggling around in it.
8	The honey dripping from this honeycomb smells bitter.
9	This trio of oddly shaped, purple-blotched bird eggs show cracks as if they are about to hatch.
10	To the knowledgeable observer these shiny black berries are actually belladonna.
11	This severed frog leg twitches as if propelling its former owner in the air.
12	Live spiders scurry out of the pouch, when it is opened.
13	A skunk puppet made from the cured hide of a skunk and preserved skull; rough onyxes rest in its eye sockets, and its musk gland is still intact.
14	All but the index finger of this withered monkey's paw are curled tightly into its palm.
15	A packet of kibble, labelled "for death dog."
16	A fresh clump of red clay has stained everything else in the pouch.
17	Fangs of increasing length pierce this foot-long swath of silk, at regular intervals.
18	A jar contains a pair of bull's testicles in a preserving solution.
19	Steam rises from this lump of still cooling lava.
20	This mould-covered ball sends out tiny feelers when someone touches it.
21	A smooth, flat white pebble sits among a pile of dull, grey pebbles in this pouch.
22	This small pile of drying dung attracts flies, as soon as the pouch is opened.
23	A note accompanying this brilliant blue egg reads "last of its species."
24	This small notebook contains notes on various trees with poisonous leaves, along with perfectly preserved leaves from the described trees.

25	To get to the pouch's contents, one must avoid the stingers of the live black scorpions, each no bigger than a thumb, inside the pouch.
26	Dirt and roots caked this trowel.
27	Tufts of fur cling to the rope making up this simple snare trap.
28	A bag of black seeds contains a slip of paper stating, "Warning, experimental blend."
29	Living ivy clings to everything in the pouch.
30	Spores spray from this wide-capped, sickly green mushroom, the first time someone touches it.
31	This deep black—to the point of absorbing ambient light—tar ball is extremely sticky, leaving residue on anyone who handles it.
32	The spikes on this dog collar point outward and inward; blood tips the inward spikes.
33	These fossils of all descriptions come from a variety of flora and fauna.
34	This collection of dandelions has seeded; the seeds float away in the slightest breeze.
35	This tuft of hair from a silverback gorilla seems to have been carefully shaved from the beast.
36	A chart shows the dates of all the new moons and full moons within the past year and for the upcoming eighteen months. Two of the past dates for full moons are circled in red.
37	This giant red feather radiates heat.
38	Two hollowed-out coconut halves do not match up in colouration or shape.
39	A gold-plated bird cage holds three skeletons of songbirds, each gripping a perch.
40	A small metal shard sits in a cup filled with water; the shard points vaguely north.
41	The source of the awful odour upon opening the pouch appears to be rotting cabbage leaves.
42	A patch of fungus glows with a soft, blue light after it has been exposed to sunlight.
43	The fern-like leaves and the white flowers of this plant betray its identity: hemlock.
44	A variety of colourful butterflies are pinned to a thin wooden board; some of them seem to flutter of their own accord.
45	This vermilion flower sprays pollen in a five-foot radius, when touched.
46	Termites numbering in the hundreds crawl on these chunks of wood.
47	A small glass cube perforated with miniscule holes houses a living ant colony.
48	A large, purple mushroom emits an ear-piercing shriek, after the pouch is opened.
49	Black wrapping paper and a blood-red ribbon tied in a bow cover this box; inside is a still-beating heart.
50	Every third sound from this duck call is that of a duck dying mid-quack.

51	This rusted dagger crumbles into a cloud of rust the moment someone touches it.
52	Apparently the diary of a young child, many entries decry the fact his or her parents would not buy a puppy for the child.
53	Knitting needles protrude from a partially completed scarf.
54	This sticky tongue is five-foot long.
55	A woodcarving of a horse with flames jetting from its hooves only has the hindquarters and one fore hoof completed.
56	This four-inch-diameter mud sphere has a hole at the bottom; a hornet emerges from the hole when someone disturbs the sphere.
57	A plant sprig sits in a dirt-filled pot; it moves to "look" at anyone who speaks.
58	A cloud of gnats springs forth from the pouch, when it is opened.
59	This book composed of different fish scales contains no writing.
60	This starfish is missing one of its limbs, but it appears the limb is starting to regrow.
61	The species of butterfly or moth that will emerge from this pair of purple cocoons is unknown.
62	Lightning struck this piece of driftwood; it also bears a blackened lightning bolt sigil.
63	The blood tipping this peacock feather is recent.
64	A pair of salamander's eyes float in the noxious liquid filling this jar made of green glass.
65	Several twigs tied together with twine are fashioned into a vaguely human figure.
66	Vines of poison ivy line the inside of the pouch.
67	The owner of these stones carved them so they have sharp spikes; they would make passable caltrops.
68	Two packets of nearly identical mushrooms had labels which have since fallen off; one reads "delicious" and the other reads "deadly poison."
69	The pouch holds a surprising amount of sheep's wool, enough to make a human-sized sweater.
70	The vibrant purple flowers on this plant mark it as wolfsbane.
71	Live centipedes crawl out of the pouch, just after it is opened.
72	When someone grabs this wooden divining rod, it points to the nearest source of water.
73	This praying mantis head, complete with mandibles, is the size of a cat's head.
74	When placed in a liquid, this spoon cools or warms it based on the holder's desires.
75	These fuzzy white balls are actually severed cottontails.
76	Most of the fireflies in this jar have perished; none illuminate.
77	A dozen blind mole rats shriek in unison, when light shines on them.

78	This block of charcoal seems mundane in comparison to the rest of the pouch's contents.
79	This hollowed-out reed allows one to breathe while underwater.
80	This wooden whistle makes no audible sound when blown, but dogs start baying shortly thereafter.
81	Ears from various herd animals have tags identifying the animal belonging to the ear.
82	A star chart is annotated with scrawled words reading "the time is nigh."
83	The clapper is missing from this brass cowbell.
84	A chart shows a line of succession to the archdruid of the region; half the names are crossed off.
85	This severed rattle from a rattlesnake shakes when someone opens the pouch.
86	This gland from a fire beetle is warm to the touch.
87	These dried purple berries fizz, when eaten or placed in liquid.
88	This bundle of kindling rapidly sets fire to anything it touches, even damp material, when lit.
89	Numerous teeth marks measuring at least four inches in depth pierce this grapefruit-sized ball.
90	Rotten grain catches on the wind and makes black marks on any plant it touches.
91	Opening this vial labelled "deer urine" unleashes a horrific smell.
92	This leering, mechanical monkey crashing cymbals together seems eerily realistic.
93	This otherwise empty tortoise shell holds unhatched tortoise eggs.
94	Ants crawl on this half-eaten leg from a fowl of some description.
95	This rare orchid begins to wither when removed from the pouch.
96	This length of thorn-covered vine is coiled up like a whip.
97	This magnifying glass doubles the size of objects viewed through it. A piece of paper wrapped around the handle describes the optimal height to hold the glass to properly burn ants.
98	Briny water fills this small watering can.
99	Considering the other items in the pouch, this cheese wheel is surprisingly well-preserved and tastes delicious.
100	Dozens of dried locust husks fill this pouch; strange patterns decorate several of them.



## WHY CHARACTER OPTIMISATION IS POINTLESS (UNLESS YOU ENJOY IT)

I've been running my Borderland of Adventure campaign—in one form or another—for over four years now. In that time, I've come to a—possibly controversial—conclusion: character optimisation is basically pointless.

Before you flame me, let me explain. Flame me at the end (in the comments).

A normal optimisation cycle goes something like this:

- A player optimises his character to be particularly good at something. This could be his physical attacks (melee or ranged), his defences (normally armour class), the power of his spells or something else such as a certain skill. Even taking into account his level, in whatever he chooses to specialise, this character is epic. He rules.
- The character begins adventuring, and crushes or defeats everything standing before him.
- The GM notices this. The GM wants to challenge his players and so he adds in harder monsters, opponents or challenges to defeat than normal for the character's level. He's not trying to kill the characters, just challenge them.
- The player (or players) notice the adventures are getting harder and tweak or optimise their characters to be even better at the thing or things they are already awesome at.
- The GM noticed this. The GM wants to challenge his players and so he adds in harder monsters, opponents or challenges to defeat. than normal for the character's level. He's not trying to kill the characters, just challenge them.
- Repeat steps 4-5 until someone gives up.

Of course, that's a pretty simplified view of optimisation, but it's basically accurate.

Now if you are the kind of person who likes tinkering with rules, coming up with new power combos and so on—all power to you. Feel free to ignore my opinion. Have fun, enjoy.

However, if you are the kind of person who optimises purely to win I can "sensationally" reveal you aren't really increasing your chances of victory. If the GM is paying attention and matching the challenges your group faces to its abilities (like a good GM should) you aren't achieving anything. You are just rolling more dice, or adding better numbers to your die roll. Your chance of victory essentially stays the same.

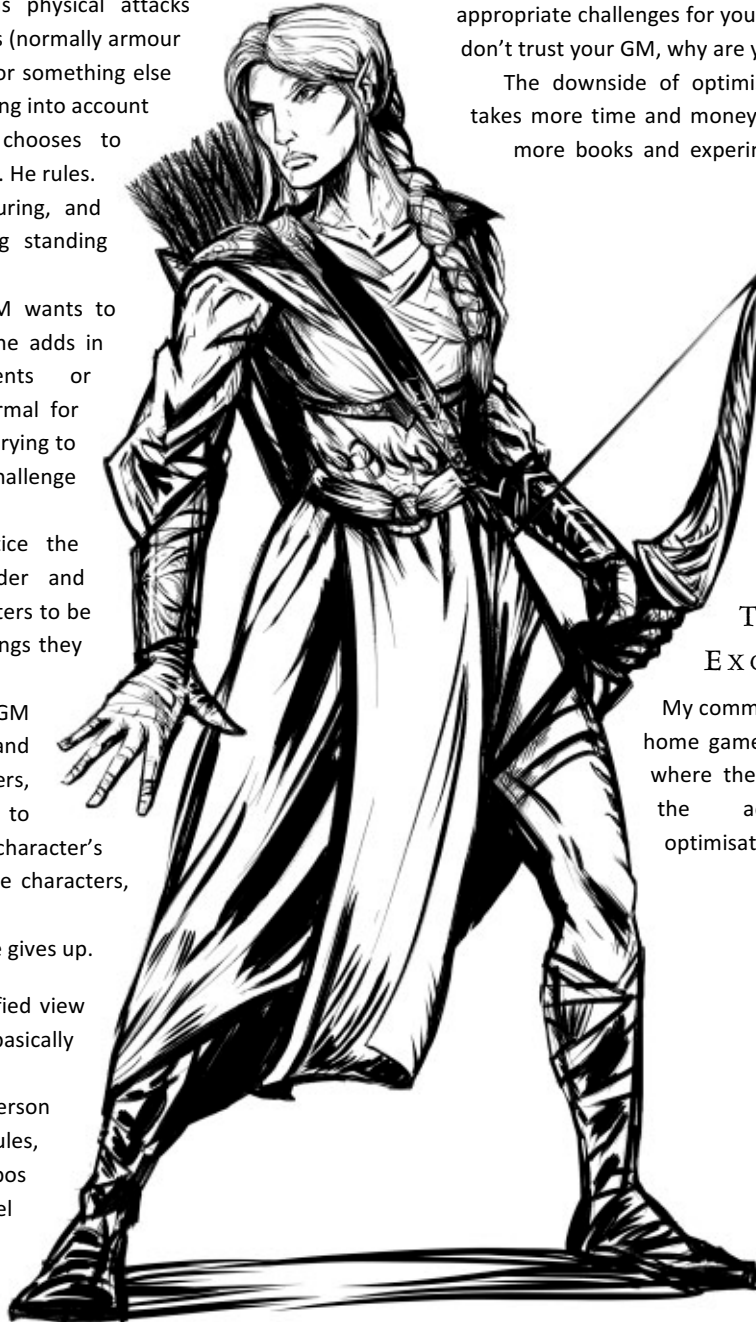
So I'm here to tell you not to bother (unless you want to). Just relax, have fun and trust your GM to provide appropriate challenges for your PC and group. (And if you don't trust your GM, why are you playing with him?)

The downside of optimisation (for me) is that it takes more time and money. I've got to buy and read more books and experiment with more character builds.

This takes time I could spend developing a background and personality for my character, plotting his hopes and dreams and generally creating a more rounded individual.

### THE "LIVING" EXCEPTION

My comments above apply purely to home games. In Living-style events—where the GM has no control over the adventure's contents—optimisation is a viable strategy.



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