

**A Traveler's Companion to the
Mazes of Menace**

Do not read this guide aloud. The dungeon is listening.

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For more than forty years the NetHack community has grown Jay Fenlason's "first-semester programming project" into the most unforgivingly intricate and emblematic roguelike, and a thriving culture of fun and community beyond the game itself. We hope this companion helps bring the joy of NetHack to a new generation of players.

Before You Read Further

The dungeon is an ancient temptation: old, but very much alive. No one remembers the subburian warriors who created it, only that its entrance has stood open for more than forty years to anyone bold enough to descend. Brave souls come from every land, drawn by tales of an artifact hidden in its depths: Knights, Wizards, Valkyries, Samurai, Archeologists with their picks, even Tourists with their cameras. No two find the same mazes. Rooms shift between visits, stairwells move. The one constant is that the dungeon is trying to kill you.

Most adventurers who go down there never come back. The ones who do have taken time to prepare: they have read the myths, learned the lore, and listened to the warnings of those who have gone before. The following pages gather the wisdom of generations of adventurers, and now seers have updated the canon with the latest intrigues of the dungeon. Every word has been paid for by the lives of those who did not return and by the painstaking observations of those who did.

A word of caution. This guide will change how you experience the Mazes. Once you know that a floating eye can paralyze you with a glance, you can never un-know it. Some adventurers prefer the thrill of discovery to the comfort of preparation. If that is you, close the Companion now and learn the hard way. There is real joy in that.

Looking for the manual instead? If you want commands, item lists, and bare mechanics without spoilers, you want the [Guide to the Mazes of Menace](#) that comes with the game. The document you are reading is a *strategic* guide. It assumes you already know how to play and want to know how to *survive*.

Read on if you have been stripped of your belongings by one too many water nymphs, if you cannot survive the Gnomish Miness](#the-gnomish-mines), or if you have grown tired of the gods abandoning you to starve with no food rations on level four. We will do our best to keep you alive.



Before You Set Out

Choosing Your Expedition

The first decision you'll make, before you even set foot on the stairs, is who you are. In the Mazes, this means three things: your **role**, your **race**, and your **alignment**. Together, these determine your starting equipment, your natural abilities, which gods hear your prayers, and which artifacts you can safely handle.

Don't agonize over this choice too much on your first few trips. You will die regardless, and each death teaches something. But if you'd like a recommendation for a first expedition, read on.

The Roles

There are thirteen roles available to adventurers. Each comes with different starting equipment, different intrinsic abilities gained at various experience levels, and a different quest to complete in the mid-game.

Archeologist. You start with a bullwhip, a pickaxe, a tinning kit, and a touchstone. The pickaxe is the kit's workhorse: it lets you dig through walls and create your own escape routes from the very first level. The tinning kit lets you preserve corpses for later, and the touchstone is your gem-identification edge: rub a gem on it and the game tells you whether it's the real thing or worthless glass. Useful for unicorn negotiation and shop pricing. Archeologists are capable and flexible, though a bit fragile in early combat. *Alignment: Lawful or Neutral.*

Barbarian. You start strong. Literally. A two-handed sword and good starting strength mean you can hack through early monsters with ease. The downside is that two-handed weapons prevent you from using a shield, and Barbarians are not known for their finesse. You do get poison resistance from the start, which saves you from several common early deaths. A straightforward role for players who like straightforward solutions. *Alignment: Neutral or Chaotic.*

Cave Dweller. You start primitive but tough, with a club, a sling, and a pile of flint stones for it. You gain speed by mid-game and your hit dice are generous. The Cave Dweller's simplicity is a virtue: fewer tools, fewer things to manage. *Alignment: Lawful or Neutral.*

Healer. You begin with a stethoscope, four potions of healing and four of extra healing, a **wand of sleep**, three **blessed spellbooks** (healing, extra healing, stone-to-flesh, all guaranteed to read), and poison resistance. The stethoscope lets you check a monster's hit points and your own internal state; the wand of sleep makes Healers a stronger early-game combatant than the medical kit suggests. You're also **immune to sickness**, so unknown potions of sickness become a free quaff-test (dip a unicorn horn into them to convert to fruit juice). *Alignment: Neutral.*

Knight. You start with a saddled pony pet, a +1 long sword, and a +1 lance among your gear. The pony is a decent combatant early on and the basis of your unique trick: jousting from horseback with the lance is devastating when it connects, though the lance is largely useless on foot. Don't be in a hurry to mount, though: the starting pony has only about 7 HP, a failed mount attempt costs *you* 10 to 14 HP, and most Knights keep the pony as a fighting pet until it grows up. As a Lawful character with a starting long sword, you also have the best odds in the game at **Excalibur**. Dip your long sword in a fountain at experience level 5+ and Knights get a 1-in-6 chance per dip, far better than the 1-in-30 every other Lawful role faces. Knights follow a code of conduct that imposes alignment penalties for attacking fleeing or helpless monsters, so pick your fights carefully. Knights also have intrinsic jumping, which lets you reposition without spending an attack. *Alignment: Lawful.*

Monk. You fight best with bare hands and start with no weapon at all. Monks gain martial arts abilities as they level, eventually becoming formidable unarmed combatants. You start with sleep resistance and see invisible, and you should avoid eating meat if you want to maintain your spiritual discipline. **Mind what you wear:** body armor costs -20 to-hit, a shield disables your martial-arts hit bonus, and metallic helmets, gloves, or boots each add a casting penalty. The starting robe is a cloak (not body armor) and adds a 20-point spellcasting bonus, larger than the Wizard's own. Keep wearing it. One of the more unusual roles, rewarding for experienced players. *Alignment: Any.*

Priest. You start with a mace, four potions of holy water, and the ability to intuitively sense whether items are blessed, cursed, or uncursed, so you know on sight whether that cloak you just found is safe to wear. Competent fighters with access to clerical spells. Your first sacrifice gift is guaranteed: Demonbane (now a silver mace), which aligns with your weapon skill, so sacrifice early and often. Refill the holy water stash by dropping water potions on a co-aligned altar and praying: the entire stack blesses at once, so the supply is effectively unlimited. *Alignment: Any (matches your god).*

Ranger. You start with a bow, a generous supply of arrows, a dagger, and a +2 **cloak of displacement**, one of the strongest defensive starts in the game. You're unmatched as an early-game ranged threat. Rangers gain Searching at XL 1, Stealth at XL 7, and See Invisible at XL 15. Your elven racial option grants sleep resistance at XL 4. Hoard the +2 stack of

arrows; they break at roughly 25% per hit while +0s break around 67%. Mulch the cheap stack on the level-1 newts. *Alignment: Neutral or Chaotic.*

Rogue. NetHack's thief class: lockpicking and stealthy assassinations. You start with a short sword, six daggers for throwing, leather armor, a lock pick, a sack, and a potion of sickness (toss it at an enemy, or save it to coat any darts, shuriken, or arrows you find. Only missiles can be poisoned.) Your lock pick makes every locked door, chest, and box openable from turn one. You get stealth from the beginning, which lets you walk up to sleeping enemies without waking them, and your backstab ability deals extra damage (+1 to +your level) when you hit a monster that's fleeing or helpless. Throw daggers rather than stab with them: Rogues get a multishot bonus on thrown daggers, and the backstab modifier applies to throws against fleeing targets too. Stealth and range are the role. *Alignment: Chaotic.*

Samurai. You start with a katana, which is one of the better one-handed weapons in the game, plus a wakizashi backup and a yumi bow with arrows. Samurai get speed early and have a strong martial kit overall. The katana's damage output carries you through the early game with ease. The wakizashi is the wrong off-hand: it's a short sword, while your katana is a long sword, so the two don't share skill. Drop it for any long sword (the Mines usually provides one) and twoweapon for the matched-skill bonus. *Alignment: Lawful.*

Tourist. You start with a Hawaiian shirt, a credit card, an expensive camera, a truly absurd number of +2 darts, two potions of extra healing, and four scrolls of magic mapping. Tourists have weak combat and a fragile early game (this is the hardest of the standard roles), but the mapping scrolls take the edge off exploration and the darts train ranged skills fast. Most runs lean on a **camera-flash blinding** of whatever's closest, follow-up darts from range, and the pet to finish. A good role for players who have ascended before and want a real challenge. *Alignment: Neutral.*

Valkyrie. The standard recommendation for a first serious attempt. You start with a spear, a small shield, and cold resistance; strong combat stats and good starting equipment do the rest. **Mjollnir** (+d5/+d24 war hammer that returns when thrown at Strength 25) drops as your sacrifice gift regardless of alignment, and is what you'll wield by the late game. *Alignment: Lawful or Neutral. Female only.*

Wizard. You start with a quarterstaff, a **cloak of magic resistance** (an endgame-quality item from turn one), a wand, two rings, three potions, three scrolls, the force-bolt spell plus a random spellbook, and a high-enchantment magic marker. Physical combat is terrible, so spells are the answer: fragile early, overwhelming late. Advancing a spell-school skill (new in 5.0) also identifies spellbooks of that school by appearance, so you get free book-ID just by casting (see Spellcasting). Two warnings: Wizards start with *zero* food rations and a kitten that won't share lunch, and force bolt shatters potions on the ground and breaks any mirror

a nymph is carrying. Keep the quarterstaff wielded while you cast: any quarterstaff lowers spell-failure rate, a small free bonus on top of the cloak. *Alignment: Neutral or Chaotic.*

The Races

Your race affects your starting and maximum attributes, and which intrinsics you get. All stats range from 3 and higher; the table below shows the maximum each race can reach for each attribute.

Race	Str	Int	Wis	Dex	Con	Cha	Intrinsics
Human	18/100	18	18	18	18	18	—
Elf	18	20	20	18	16	18	Infravision; sleep res at XL 4
Dwarf	18/100	16	16	20	20	16	Infravision
Gnome	18/50	19	18	18	18	18	Infravision
Orc	18/50	16	16	18	18	16	Infravision, poison res

Human. No infravision, no poison resistance, no special talents. On the bright side, every role is open to you and nobody in the dungeon singles you out for being one. Perfectly serviceable.

Dwarf. Sturdy fighters with the best Dex and Con caps and matching human Strength. Infravision (the ability to see warm-blooded creatures in the dark) from level 1. Available for: Archeologist, Cave Dweller, Valkyrie.

Elf. Infravision plus sleep resistance at XL 4. Fragile compared to humans but with the best Int and Wis caps. Elf Priests and Wizards get a free musical instrument. Available for: Priest, Ranger, Wizard.

Gnome. Small but resourceful; slightly higher Int cap than a human. Available for: Archeologist, Cave Dweller, Healer, Ranger, Wizard.

Orc. Poison resistance from level 1 is genuinely useful. Lower stat caps overall, and humans, elves, and dwarves are race-hostile to orcs (shopkeepers, priests, watchmen included); other orcs aren't automatically peaceful either. Available for: Barbarian, Ranger, Rogue, Wizard.

Alignment

Your alignment (Lawful, Neutral, or Chaotic) determines which gods you worship, which artifacts you can safely use, and how certain actions affect your standing. It's tempting to think of these as "good," "balanced," and "evil," but it's more nuanced than that.

The key thing to understand about alignment is that it's a number. Every action that matches your alignment's expectations increases it; actions that violate your alignment's code decrease it. Your alignment record affects your relationship with your god, which in turn affects whether prayer will save you or smite you.

Lawful characters should avoid attacking peaceful creatures and should never murder. Sacrifice frequently at co-aligned altars. Lawful has the advantage of access to Excalibur, a top-tier melee weapon obtainable as early as experience level 5.

Neutral characters have the most flexibility. You can get away with more than a Lawful character, but your god still frowns on truly chaotic behavior. Neutral has access to some excellent quest artifacts.

Chaotic characters can kill with relative impunity but should avoid pious behavior that doesn't match their dark patron's expectations. Chaotic is often paired with Rogue for thematic consistency.

For your first game: **Lawful or Neutral Valkyrie, Human or Dwarf.** Strong combat, cold resistance, and Mjollnir waiting at the first co-aligned altar you can sacrifice on. It's the closest thing to an easy mode the Mazes offer, which is to say it's still very hard.



What to Pack

Your starting kit is fixed by your role and suited to its strengths, but you'll want to improve on it. In the early game, keep an eye out for these items as you descend. They'll shore up most roles' weaknesses.

The Early Shopping List

A source of nutrition. You will get hungry. It happens faster than you think. But your main food source isn't going to be the rations in your pack. Unless you're playing a vegetarian role, **most of your food in the early dungeon is the corpses of the things you kill.** Eat fresh kills as you go, and rations become emergency backup rather than the main course. Grab every food ration you see, sure, but two or three is plenty to carry; you don't need to hoard. Tripe rations are for your pet, not for you.

A way to identify things. In the early game, your primary identification tools are altars (drop items to see if they flash blessed/cursed), your pet (it won't step on cursed items), and experimentation. A scroll of identify is valuable, but you might not find one for a while. A touchstone (a gray stone that identifies gems) is helpful but not urgent. The full identification playbook is in A Practical Identification Strategy.

Armor improvements. Whatever you're wearing, you can probably do better. Look for cloaks, helmets, gloves, and boots to fill empty equipment slots. Even basic items like a helmet or pair of gloves provide armor class benefits and can protect against specific attacks.

A ranged attack. Daggers, darts, or a bow with arrows. Fighting from range is almost always safer than melee, and some monsters (like floating eyes) should never be fought in melee.

Supply chests. Some of the large boxes and chests you find on the levels above the Oracle are special supply chests. They are usually locked but stocked with useful magical items: healing or gain-energy potions, enchant-weapon or enchant-armor scrolls, sometimes a wand of digging or a low-level spellbook. About two-thirds of the early levels have one. Picking or #forcing them open is almost always worth the time.

Restraint. New adventurers pick up everything they find. Veterans pick up everything they need. The difference is about forty pounds and the ability to outrun a gnome lord.

If your status line reads “Burdened,” you’re carrying more than you can use. You are also moving slow enough for some monsters to land two hits per one of yours. When your pile of stuff gets too heavy, drop the non-essentials. Careful about what you leave for monsters, though. Remember that monsters can pick up what you drop, and they can loot containers. You can drop stuff a level up; monsters don’t carry stashes between levels.

touches you, you have two turns to chew. Newt corpses are safe, and they sometimes restore 1–3 Pw, which is the first sustainable mana source a spellcaster will see.

Rule 3: Your pet is your friend. Your starting pet is more useful than it appears. It will fight alongside you, pick up items (which tells you they're not cursed, since pets avoid cursed items on the ground), and can even be trained to steal from shops. Keep it fed by dropping tripe rations or corpses near it. A healthy, well-fed pet is one of your best early assets.

Rule 4: Learn to pray. If you are about to die (hit points critically low, starving, turning to stone) you can pray to your god for help. In the early game, with decent alignment, prayer will almost certainly save you. But you can only pray about once every thousand turns or so, and praying at the wrong time (when your god is angry, when you're in Gehennom, or when you've prayed too recently) can make things much worse. Think of prayer as an emergency button with a cooldown. Don't waste it on minor problems (see Divine Relations (p. 81) for the full mechanics). If you've blundered into a peaceful and your alignment tanks, you can grind it back by killing the always-hostile classes (fungi F, fluids and oozes, insects); a clean ledger is worth the detour.

Rule 5: Explore thoroughly but move purposefully. Every turn you spend in the dungeon costs nutrition. If you stand around for hundreds of turns, you'll starve. But rushing past rooms means missing items you need. The sweet spot is to explore each level fairly completely (check rooms, open doors, look for hidden passages) but don't grind. When you've found what the level has to offer, move on.

Rule 6: Build your defenses. In the first half of the game, your real goal isn't accumulating treasure. It's acquiring the resistances and protections that will help you survive the late game. The three most important are **magic resistance**, **reflection**, and **poison resistance**. Poison resistance can be acquired as an *intrinsic* by eating the right corpse, like a killer bee, a cave spider, a yellow mold, or a black pudding kicked from a sink. Magic resistance and reflection come from special gear: scale mail made from the hide of a slain dragon (gray for MR, silver for reflection), a special cloak (of MR) or amulet (of reflection), a polished silver shield (reflection too), or a one-of-a-kind artifact bestowed by your god, won on the Quest, or granted as a wish. Your adventure will be shaped by the protective items you obtain.

Rule 7: Type deliberately, never autorepeat. Each key you press is a turn. If you hold a movement key down and let it autorepeat, your character marches blindly until something stops them — usually a monster you didn't intend to engage, a trap that's just been revealed, or a fountain you didn't mean to quaff. Press each key once and pause. To cross long corridors without typing one key per square, learn the **shift-direction** shortcut: capital H J K L Y U B N (or shift+arrow on number-pad layouts) moves continuously in that direction until something interesting appears. G+direction stops at the next item or monster; the _

travel command goes to a clicked or specified target. These commands all *yield control* the instant something warrants your attention — autorepeat does not.

Dungeon Hazards (and How to Survive Them)

Here's a short list of common early deaths and how to prevent them:

Starvation. Eat when you're Hungry (the status message), not when you're Weak or Fainting. If you're Fainting, pray immediately. Pick up every food ration you find.

Floating eyes. They're the e on the map. Small, blue, and seemingly harmless. If you hit one in melee, you'll be paralyzed, and every monster in the vicinity will take free shots at your frozen body. Use ranged attacks, or just walk around them. They are very slow.

Rotted corpses. If you eat a corpse that's been on the ground too long, you'll get food poisoning, which is lethal without treatment. Eat corpses fresh, within about 30 turns of the kill for a guaranteed-safe meal. Past that, the rot roll turns random; past ~175 turns an uncursed corpse is certainly tainted. If you do get food poisoning, pray immediately.

Falling down stairs while overburdened. If you're carrying too much, taking the stairs can make you tumble for 1–3 HP. Annoying rather than dangerous, unless you're carrying a cockatrice corpse: the tumble counts as touching it, and stairs become the most literal instadeath in the game.

Caught in the open by a pack. Jackals bite for only 1d2 each, but packs of four to seven spawn on the upper levels and surround you in open rooms. Killer bees, foxes, soldier ants, dwarves, and gnomes all kill in this same shape. Retreat to a doorway or corridor at the first sign of more than two attackers; they can only approach single-file there.

Pushing too quickly into the Mines. The problem isn't depth, it's getting there too early. The deeper Mines below Minetown are crowded with armored dwarves and gnome rulers. If your gear and experience level aren't ready for armored melee fighters in packs, head back up to the main Dungeons of Doom branch and return to the Mines later.

Supply Containers

New in NetHack 5.0: somebody has been leaving care packages.

Every level above the Oracle has a 2/3 chance of hosting a “supply chest”: usually a chest (sometimes a large box), usually locked, seeded with at least one survivability item. The contents pool: potion of healing (about a 50% chance per chest, sometimes a pair), or otherwise potion of extra healing / speed / gain energy, scroll of enchant weapon, enchant armor,

confuse monster, or scare monster, wand of digging, or spellbook of healing. There's also a 2/3 chance of an extra random item, biased toward low-level spellbooks. The Mines branch level gets a different gift: a guaranteed food ration, cram ration, or lembas wafer.

These look like ordinary containers, no special marking. On your first ten levels, check every chest and large box you find. A locked one will yield to a credit card, a key, a wand of opening, or you can #force the issue with a weapon you don't mind breaking. An orcish dagger off the first orc you kill is a perfect tool (pet-test it first: could be cursed). The contents aren't guaranteed to change your run, but finding a stack of healing potions on level 4 before you've learned the hard way how much you need them is the dungeon's act of goodwill.

Dungeon Sights

The Lay of the Land

The Mazes are procedurally generated. No two visits are quite the same. But the dungeon follows patterns, and understanding those patterns is the first step toward navigating them effectively.

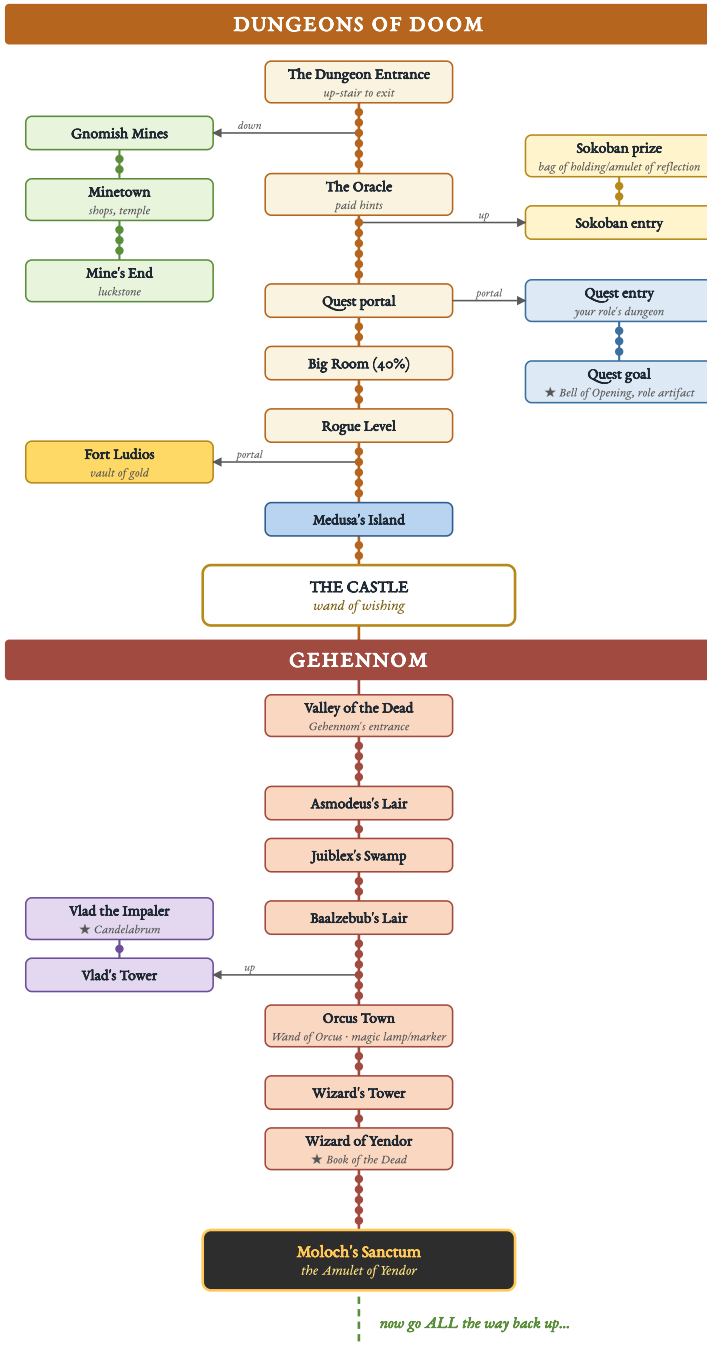
The Big Picture

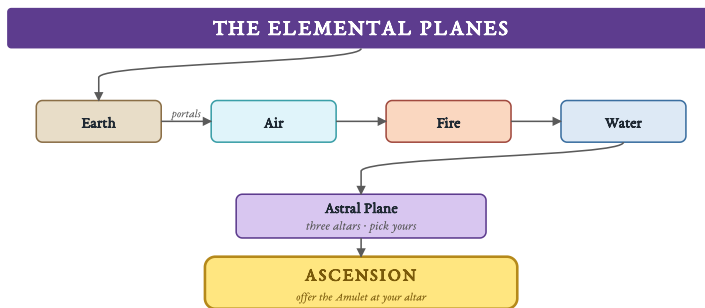
When Jay Fenlason wrote the original *Hack* in 1982, every level in the dungeon looked the same: rooms, corridors, a staircase down to more of the same. More than forty years of community development later, the Dungeons of Doom you first descend into form only one neighborhood of a much larger world. If you survive long enough, your adventure will lead you through towns, towers, and castles; swamps and islands and fortresses; an underworld of molten halls and four elemental planes that climb back to a temple where angels and demons do battle around the altars to the gods. Each landmark has its own architecture, its own inhabitants, and its own rewards. Every game is different, but the dungeon has a story to tell: an arc through a familiar cast of landmarks, each tougher and stranger than the last.

The dungeon is a branching tree with a main trunk that descends through three main phases. Off the trunk are several optional side branches that you will want to explore along the way. The exact depths and layouts vary from game to game, but the diagram that follows shows the typical shape. Knowing where you are in this tree helps you know what's coming.

The **Dungeons of Doom** form the upper half, roughly levels 1 through 27. Side branches lead to the **Gnomish Mines** (where you can find a *luckstone* (p. 147) and *shops*), **Sokoban** (a *puzzle* with a prize at the top), your Quest dungeon, and sometimes **Fort Ludios** (a vault full of gold). The trunk ends at **The Castle**, the gateway to Gehennom.

Gehennom is the lower half: maze levels and demon lords, with the **Amulet of Yendor** at the bottom in Moloch's Sanctum. Once you have it, you climb back up through the **Elemental Planes** to the **Astral Plane**, where your god awaits your offering.





Dungeons of Doom, Gehennom, and the Elemental Planes. Branches extend left and right of the main trunk. Pearls (small colored dots) indicate the approximate number of intervening dungeon levels. ★ marks the three Invocation items (Bell of Opening, Candelabrum, Book of the Dead) needed to enter Moloch’s Sanctum and claim the Amulet.

Simple enough on paper. Surviving it is another matter.

The Map Symbols

Everything in the dungeon is represented by a symbol on the screen. Learning to read these symbols quickly is important:

Symbol	Meaning
.	Floor (room)
#	Corridor
-	Wall (horizontal, vertical)
+	Closed door (or spellbook)
<	Stairs up
>	Stairs down
{	Fountain (bright blue) or sink (white)
-	Altar
\	Throne
^	Trap (once revealed)
@	You (or a human-type monster)

Letters represent monsters: d for dogs, D for dragons, Z for zombies. Colors help distinguishing within a class: a red D is a red dragon, while a gray D is a gray dragon (see Field Guide to Dungeon Fauna (p. 22)).

Color memo: branch staircases turn yellow. Staircases that lead into a sub-branch (Mines or Sokoban) display in yellow once you’ve used them. Ordinary main-trunk stairs

stay default-colored, so on a level with several stairs the yellow one is your way back into the branch.

Item symbols are punctuation marks:

Symbol	Item Class
)	Weapons
[Armor
%	Food (comestibles)
!	Potions
?	Scrolls
/	Wands
=	Rings
"	Amulets
(Tools
+	Spellbooks
*	Gems and stones
\$	Gold (zorkmids, abbreviated zm)

Room Types

Most rooms in the dungeon are ordinary, empty or with a few items and monsters scattered about. But some rooms are special:

<p>A shop:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> [?!=/")%*[?!(..@.... </div> <p style="text-align: center;">↑ #</p> <p>@ = shopkeeper Items for sale.</p>	<p>A zoo:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> Z..Z\$Z.. \$Z...\$Z.. .Z\$Z..Z\$ </div> <p style="text-align: center;">↑ #</p> <p>Z = sleeping \$ = gold piles</p>	<p>A throne room:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> ..Z.Z.Z.. .Z.\..Z.. ..Z.Z... </div> <p style="text-align: center;">↑ #</p> <p>\ = throne Monsters guard.</p>
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Shops. Identified by the shopkeeper inside, usually near the door. Shops sell items of a particular type: general stores, armor shops, weapon shops, scroll shops, potion shops, and more. Items on the shop floor belong to the shopkeeper; pick one up and you'll be quoted a price. You can sell items too. Shopkeepers are extremely powerful in combat, so don't steal unless you have a plan.

Temples. A room with an altar and a priest or priestess tending it. The altar's alignment matters: if it matches yours, you can sacrifice here for good effects. If it doesn't, the resident

priest won't be friendly about your attempts. The priest will also accept gold donations in exchange for clairvoyance or a permanent AC bonus See Donating to Priests (p. 83).

Throne rooms. A room with a *throne* (\) (p. 29), a sleeping ruler at the throne, and a full court of monsters filling the rest. Sitting on the throne has random effects, sometimes wonderful, sometimes terrible.

Zoos. A room packed with sleeping monsters and gold. They wake **not** when you enter, but from the noise of you fighting the first few. Fight from the doorway so they wake one or two at a time, not all at once.

Barracks. A room full of soldiers. They're organized and armed, but they're also carrying good equipment. Worth clearing if you can handle the fight.

Beehives. A room full of killer bees and royal jelly. The bees are dangerous in numbers, but royal jelly is excellent food.

Themed Rooms. You'll occasionally walk into rooms that are not from the list above but interesting in other ways. These are **Themed Rooms**, a new feature of 5.0, and there are dozens of them. Some have unusual *shapes*, and some have unusual *contents*. Interesting ones to look out for:

- **Light source rooms.** They reliably contain a lit oil lamp. Free torch.
- **Buried treasure.** A burned engraving somewhere on the floor reads "*Dig 3 east 2 south*" (or wherever) and points to a buried chest plus 3–12 random items. A pick-axe earns its weight here.
- **Massacre.** Floor strewn with adventurer-role corpses (rogue, ranger, valkyrie, etc.). Useful for sacrifice and for eating the safe ones for intrinsics if you know the role.
- **Mausoleum.** A small interior chamber with one waiting monster (mummy, vampire, lich, or zombie) or a human corpse. Open the door carefully.
- **Spider nest, buried zombies, trap room, teleportation hub.** These are traps in everything but name. Spider nest and buried zombies scale with level difficulty, so what looks innocuous on Dlvl 4 is rough on Dlvl 18. Trap rooms can be anything from arrow traps to anti-magic to land mines; recognize the pattern, retreat, prepare, return.
- **Light-and-frame rooms (pillars, room-in-a-room, blocked center).** Tactically excellent for setting up Elbereth squares or anchoring a polearm fight.

Themed rooms are mixed in with ordinary rooms; you can have several on a single level. They make the early dungeon less predictable in a friendly way: more terrain types to fight in, more item discovery, and the occasional educational ambush.

Field Guide to Dungeon Fauna

The Mazes are home to hundreds of monster species, organized into classes denoted by letters. Lowercase letters are generally smaller or less dangerous; uppercase letters are larger or more threatening. Color further distinguishes individual species within a class.

Here is a quick field guide to what each letter means, roughly ordered by how early you might encounter them. For the full level / speed / AC / attack details on every monster, see the Bestiary Tables appendix.

Common Early Encounters

Sym	Class	Notes
a	Ants	Soldier ants are a frequent early-game killer: speed 18, two attacks per turn (bite + strength-draining sting), and they travel in packs. A wandering soldier-ant group on Dlvl 4 can end a careless run. Killer bees, giant ants, fire ants are all the same shape of problem.
b	Blobs	Acidic or gelatinous. Acid blobs have no active attack. They only splash 1d8 acid back when <i>you</i> hit <i>them</i> , and the splash can corrode your weapon. Kill at range. Eat for resistances.
B	Bats	The B class is deceptively dangerous because of speed . Bats and giant bats clock in at speed 22, nearly twice the player's base 12, so they get roughly two bites per one of your swings. Giant bats bite for 1d6 each; the math catches up fast. Vampire bats are still in the bat class but their second bite drains Strength (not levels).
d	Dogs and other canines	The d class covers your starting pet (little dog, kitten via cat-class) and the most numerous early-game predators. Jackals only bite for 1d2, but they spawn in packs and there are a <i>lot</i> of them on the upper levels — the single most common cause of death on the public server. Foxes bite for 1d3 and are faster (speed 15) but spawn alone. Coyotes, dingos, wolves get progressively worse. Tame d (your pet, larger dogs you've fed up) help fight everything else.
e	Eyes	Floating eyes paralyze on melee hit . Never hit an e in melee. Use ranged attacks. (And eat them for telepathy.) Spheres (flaming/freezing/shocking) explode in a 3×3 area; also kill them at range.
f	Cats	Like dogs, often starting pets. Felines can be tamed with tripe.

G	Gnomes	The standard inhabitants of the Gnomish Mines. Individually weak, but the Mines have a lot of them, and mid-game players who treat the Mines as a milk run walk into a four-on-one with full-strength enemies. If you're a gnome yourself, most of them are peaceful.
h	Humanoids	Dwarves, bugbears, mind flayers. Wide range of difficulty. Dwarves in particular are dangerously underrated: they hit harder than they look, and they're armored. Don't trade blows with one in melee until your AC is solid.
i	Imps	Mostly minor pests, but a homunculus's bite can put you to sleep. Without sleep resistance, fight at range.
j	Jellies	Spotted and ochre jellies. Passive acid damage on melee.
k	Kobolds	Weak individually but sometimes carry poisoned weapons.
o	Orcs	Numerous and modest in strength one-on-one; dangerous in packs. Hill orcs and Mordor orcs are the common upper-dungeon variants.
r	Rodents	Rats and rock moles. Rock moles eat metal items, so protect your gear.
s	Spiders	Cave spiders are weak (eat them for poison resistance). Giant spiders poison.
x	Grid bugs	The weakest monster in the game; they can't even move diagonally. But they don't leave corpses. The x class also covers the much-later xan , whose sting cripples your legs (slow movement until it heals).
:	Lizards	Newts, geckos, and iguanas are individually weak, usually not too dangerous if you are paying attention. The class matters mostly for the corpses: lizard corpses cure petrification (always carry one for cockatrice/Medusa insurance), and newt corpses may restore 1–3 mana.

Mid-Dungeon Threats

Sym	Class	Notes
A	Angels	Powerful, usually aligned. Don't fight your own.
C	Centaur	Fast (speed 18-20). Half spawn with a bow or crossbow, but they'll still close into melee for weapon and kick attacks. Mountain centaurs hit hardest: 1d10 weapon plus <i>two</i> 1d6 kicks per turn.
E	Elementals	Hard to kill. Air elementals engulf; earth elementals phase through walls.
f	Displacer beast	Cat-class, but vicious: AC -10, three-attack melee, and a 50% chance on each player melee to swap places with you instead. Eat the corpse for temporary intrinsic Displacement.
F	Fungi	Yellow mold, green mold, shriekers. Shriekers summon other monsters.
g	Gremlins / gargoyles	Heavy claws plus a special trick. Gremlins strip a random intrinsic on hit at night and multiply when wet (don't kick one into a fountain). Gargoyles are slow but armored (AC -4) with three-attack salvos; winged gargoyles fly.
G	Gnome lords/kings	Tougher gnomes. Still fairly manageable.
'	Golems	Build things. Iron golems hit hard and resist nearly everything; clay, stone, and wood golems are softer. Glass golems leave gems on death.

H	Giants	Strong melee, throw boulders. Giants carry gems.
J	Jabberwock	Rare, but if you see one you're in for a fight. Four 2d10 attacks per turn (two bites and two claws) at normal speed.
K	Keystone Kops	The shopkeeper-summoned constabulary. They appear when you steal, refuse to pay, or anger a shopkeeper. Individually weak but they swarm, and they jeer at you.
L	Leprechauns	Steal your gold and teleport away. A single claw can grab up to <i>all</i> of your purse. Hide gold in a sack, drop it elsewhere, or fight at range.
L	Liches	Spellcasters. Arch-liches are among the most dangerous monsters in the game because they cast touch of death.
m	Mimics	Disguised as items, walls, doors, fountains, altars, or boulders. See A note on mimics (p. 65).
M	Mummies	Aggressive undead with physical claw attacks. Their corpses are dangerous to eat (age you). Mummy wrappings worn as a cloak block invisibility. That is usually a downside, but very useful if you've gone invisible and you need a shopkeeper to interact with you.
n	Nymphs	Steal items from your inventory, then teleport away. Fight from range.
N	Nagas	Large serpent-bodied creatures. Red nagas breathe fire, black nagas spit acid, golden nagas cast spells, guardian nagas spit Str-drain poison and have a paralyzing bite. Tough; speeds 12–16.
O	Ogres	Strong melee fighters. Ogre lords and kings are tougher.
p	Piercers	Disguise as stalactites; drop from the ceiling onto whatever walks below. The fall does serious damage. Hard to spot in advance.
P	Puddings	Black and brown puddings split when hit in melee with an iron or metal weapon (scalpel and tsurugi count). Good to eat for intrinsics.
q	Quadrupeds	Multi-attack mid-game bruisers. The rothe is the famous one (three attacks per turn at sluggish speed 9, dangerous in packs); mumakil are solo two-attack bruisers (4d12 butt + 2d6 bite).
R	Rust monster / disenchanter	Rust monsters corrode worn iron armor when they hit you, and your wielded iron weapon when you hit them. Use non-iron alternatives (mithril, silver, dragonhide) or take iron gear off before the fight; iron items in your inventory aren't touched. Disenchanters drain enchantment on hit; see Enchantment Drain (p. 78).
S	Snakes	Cobras and pit vipers poison. Water moccasins come from fountains.
t	Trappers / lurkers above	Hide in plain sight on floor or ceiling and engulf you when you walk under/onto them.
T	Trolls	Regenerate. They come back from the dead unless you eat or tin the corpse.
u	Horses / unicorns	Horses are usually mountable, mostly peaceful in the wild. Unicorns are color-coded by alignment: same-aligned spawn peaceful, cross-aligned hostile. Throw them gems; the gem-throwing negotiation playbook is in Luck and Fortune (p. 147).
U	Umber hulk	Confuses on sight. Avoid looking at them directly.
v	Vortices	Engulfing wisps. Air, fire, ice, and steam vortices each apply their element to whatever they engulf. Kill at range.

w	Worms	Long worms grow tail segments as they move and can be a corridor in themselves.
w	Wraiths	Drain levels on hit. But their corpses grant a level, so eat them fresh.
y	Yellow/black lights	Explode adjacent. Yellow blinds you; black hallucinates you. Black lights are invisible without <i>see invisible</i> . Kill at range.
Y	Yetis	Tough melee combatants. Corpses may grant cold resistance.
z	Zruty	Three-attack mid-game brute. Uncommon but a fair fight if geared up.
Z	Zombies	Slow, numerous, come in many varieties. Zombie corpses are old and will rot.

Things You Don't Want to Meet

Sym	Class	Notes
c	Cockatrices	Touch = instant petrification. Never hit one barehanded. Wield their corpse with gloves as a weapon.
D	Dragons	Each color has its own breath weapon, resistance, and scale mail property. See note below.
h	Mind flayers	Drain intelligence on hit. If Int hits your racial minimum (3 for humans), you die. A helmet blocks 7/8 tentacles. Kill from range.
v	Vampires	Drain levels. Vampire lords fly and are fast.
w	Purple worms	The big worm: swallows you whole on a hit, then digests. Cut your way out from inside.
X	Xorn	Phases through walls and floors. Three claws and a bite per turn; hard to ambush and hard to escape from.
;	Sea monsters	Drowning is an instadeath. Don't fight in water without a plan.
&	Demons	Major demons (Orcus, Demogorgon, Asmodeus) are boss-level threats.
@	Humans (hostile)	Includes the Wizard of Yendor, the most persistent nuisance in the game.
Q	Quantum mechanics / genetic engineers	Quantum mechanics teleport their target on a hit; genetic engineers (new in 5.0) polymorph their target.

Special Symbols

A few map glyphs aren't monsters in the conventional sense, but you'll see them and need to know what they mean.

Sym	What it is	Notes
I	Invisible monster marker	The game remembers the last spot you sensed something you couldn't see. The I stays there until you bump it or step on the square; the monster has usually moved.
~	Long worm tail segment	Part of a long worm's body. Hitting the tail damages the worm and shortens the chain; hitting the head (the w) is full melee.
]]	Strange object	Always a mimic. No ordinary item ever displays as]] (compare [, armor, and] is its mirror).
□ (space)	Ghost	Ghosts left from bones files. The glyph is a literal space, which paints over the floor underneath: in a room, a ghost shows as a one-square <i>gap</i> in the floor where a . should be. Walk into the gap to identify it.

Points of Interest

On your visit to the dungeon, be sure to make time for the landmarks. Scattered throughout the levels are fixtures that reward the curious, and occasionally punish them. Learning what to do (and what *not* to do) with each of these is a rite of passage.

Fountains {

Ah, fountains. That gentle bubbling sound has lured more adventurers to their doom than any trap, with the promise of a cool refreshing drink.

If you don't have bad luck, about one in seven is a **magic fountain** that is indistinguishable from a regular fountain until you take a drink. Quaffing from a magic one says, *Wow! This makes you feel great!*, restores all your attributes to their maximum values, and raises a random attribute by one, consuming the magic charge; afterwards the fountain behaves like any other. (Pre-placed fountains like those in Minetown or the Oracle, or sink-kicked fountains, are never magic. Also: dipping gets no benefits from magic charge but could consume it.)

Quaffing from an ordinary fountain is a dangerous slot machine with dozens of random effects including:

Outcome	Effect
Water demon	A water demon appears, hostile
Water nymph	A water nymph appears and tries to steal an item
Water moccasins	A swarm of snakes appears
Curse some items	"This water's no good!" (items in your main inventory may be cursed (items inside a bag are safe)
Poisonous water	"The water is contaminated!" Str damage (poison resistance blocks the worst)
See invisible	You gain the ability to see invisible creatures
Detect monsters	Brief view of every monster on the level
Self-knowledge	A brief enlightenment readout of your own state
Scare monsters	Bad breath, every monster on the level panics
Nothing	"The water is cool and refreshing" or "tasteless"

Most of the time, nothing happens. A demon appears about 1/30; on shallow levels it may grant a wish instead of attacking, working out to roughly 1 wish per 150 quaffs and dropping to zero past Dlvl 20. To take the risk: put your items in a bag (cursing protection), engrave Elbereth (demons keep their distance), and have a charm- or scare-monster effect ready in case a demon appears.

Dipping in a fountain is a different gamble, and one that Lawful characters should know by heart. If you're at least experience level 5, dipping a long sword may transform it into Excalibur, one of the finest weapons in the dungeon. Knights get a generous 1/6 chance per dip; everyone else gets a meager 1/30. Otherwise, dipping can rust your gear, summon hostile water creatures, or occasionally uncurse the dipped item.

The conventional wisdom: if you're a lawful Knight carrying a long sword, dip in every fountain you see until Excalibur appears. Other lawful characters should try too, but pack patience. If you're not lawful, don't dip.

Altars _

If fountains are slot machines, altars are the single most useful piece of furniture in the dungeon. Treat every altar like the treasure it is.

Dropping items on an altar reveals their BUC status instantly. **Amber flash** → Blessed. **No flash** → Uncursed. **Black flash** → Cursed.

This is free, unlimited, and works on everything. In the early game, your first altar becomes your testing laboratory: haul every suspicious piece of gear there before putting it on. Many promising ascensions have been saved by the simple discipline of altar-testing before wearing. (Drop the whole pile at once; you'll see one flash per item.)

Sacrificing monster corpses on an altar deepens your relationship with your god. The corpse must be fresh (stale sacrifices are an insult) and the bigger the monster, the more your god is impressed. Sacrifice enough and your deity may reward you with an artifact weapon aligned to your cause. Don't sacrifice your starting pet. the alignment penalty is steep and the residual aggravate-monster intrinsic sticks around for the rest of the run. See Divine Relations for the full theology.

Converting an altar to your alignment is possible by sacrificing ordinary monster corpses on a cross-aligned altar. Each attempt has a chance of flipping the altar to your god, a chance of doing nothing, and a chance of backfiring (the wrong god notices and punishes you, or worse, *you* get converted). It's a real gamble, but worth it when the dungeon gives you an altar to the wrong god and you need a co-aligned one for sacrifice and holy water. See Altars and Alignment for the gotchas (same-race sacrifice, unicorns).

Thrones \

Sitting on a throne is the purest gamble in NetHack. The list of possible outcomes reads like a wish list shuffled with a hit list:

- A wish (if your luck is positive)
- Genocide of a monster class
- Free identification of one to four items in your pack (or, one time in five, your entire inventory)
- A stat boost or a stat drain
- An electric shock
- Full healing
- A crowd of hostile monsters, summoned for your amusement
- Confusion
- A curse on one of your items
- Magic mapping of the level
- See invisible
- All your gold, vanished

About one time in three, something happens, but you won't know which column of the ledger it's going to hit. Sit on a throne when you're strong enough to survive the worst row of that table; the wish branch only fires above Luck 7, so grab the luckstone first if that's what you're after. Even when nothing happens, the throne may vanish in a puff of logic, so you might get several tries or none at all. (Vlad's throne in the Tower is special: it never vanishes without granting a wish first.) Kicking a throne is a different gamble: at positive Luck it dislodges 201–500 gold and Luck+1 gems (max 6), which doubles as a free Luck-meter if you've lost track.

Sinks {

Sinks are the dungeon's most underrated identification tool.

Kicking a sink can shake loose a ring (useful!), summon a black pudding (terrifying, but its glob is a triple-resistance snack), summon an *amorous demon* posing as “the dish washer” (the same incubus/succubus as a seduction encounter; careful!), or just stub your toe. Each non-stub outcome fires at most once per sink. Worth a kick in the early game if you can handle what comes out.

Dropping a ring down a sink produces a message unique to the ring type. This is the most reliable non-magical way to identify rings. **Most rings are consumed**, but two come back after IDing themselves for free. Reserve a virgin sink for this: a sink that's already been

kicked, quaffed, or poly'd may have moved, vanished, or angered nearby monsters by the time you've found rings to test.

Message	Ring	Ring kept?
"You thought your ring got lost in the sink, but there it is!"	searching	yes
"The ring is regurgitated!"	slow digestion	yes
"The sink quivers upward for a moment."	levitation	no
"You smell rotten slime molds." (or your custom fruit)	poison resistance	no
"Several flies buzz angrily around the sink."	aggravate monster	no
"Static electricity surrounds the sink."	shock resistance	no
"You hear loud noises coming from the drain."	conflict	no
"The water flow seems fixed."	sustain ability	no
"The water flow seems stronger/weaker now."	gain strength	no
"The water flow seems greater/lesser now."	gain constitution	no
"The water flow hits/misses the drain."	increase accuracy	no
"The water's force seems greater/smaller now."	increase damage	no
"Suddenly, [items] vanish from the sink!" any other items on the sink square vanish too	hunger	no
"The sink momentarily vanishes." sink moves to a new spot	teleportation	no
"The sink transforms into a fountain/throne/altar/grave!" (or rarely "The sink vanishes." if grave generation fails)	polymorph	no

Quaffing from a sink rolls one of 20 random effects. Mostly nothing useful (mild flavor messages, summoned sewer rat, vomit, scalding water), but three outcomes are worth the occasional risk: ~5% chance to gain an experience level outright, ~5% chance to find a ring at your feet (once per sink), and ~5% chance to drink a random unidentified potion. Worth a quaff or two from any sink you encounter, but keep HP and an escape plan in reserve: it could summon a water elemental, or it could polymorph you.

Pouring potions down a sink (by dipping) produces telltale effects, a clever way to narrow down potion identities without risking a sip. Five potions print unique sink-only messages:

Sink message	Potion
"The sink transforms into a fountain/throne/altar/grave!" (or "The sink vanishes.")	polymorph
"Muddy waste pops up from the drain..." (first time per sink also drops a ring)	levitation
"It leaves an oily film on the basin."	oil
"The drain seems less clogged." (blind: "a sucking sound")	acid
"You sense a ring lost down the drain." (once per sink)	object detection

For most other potions, the sink instead prints "A wisp of vapor rises up..." and then applies the same vapor effect as breathing a broken potion: the side effect normally identifies the potion (sleeping makes you yawn, hallucination starts hallucinating, blindness blinds briefly,

healing nudges HP, and so on). Wasted on water, fruit juice, gain level, gain energy, and monster detection: those all just print “*nothing seems to happen.*”

Vaults

A vault is a tiny walled-off 2×2 room not connected to the rest of the level. Each one holds a pile of gold. You will usually find one by digging through stone or by teleporting in. The engraving “*ad aerarium*” on a level marks one nearby (see Engravings). A scroll of gold detection (or object detection) will spotlight the gold pile through the walls, and magic mapping reveals the closet directly.

There is no door, and no obvious way out. After about thirty turns inside, a vault guard appears and asks “*Who are you?*” You have two real answers.

Tell the truth. The guard makes you drop your gold, opens a temporary corridor, leads you out, and re-seals the vault behind him. You lose every coin, but you escape.

Answer *Croesus* (or *Kroisos* or *Creosote*). The guard takes that as the vault owner’s name and politely leaves. Lawful characters lose one alignment point for lying. You keep your gold but stay sealed in alone with your treasure.

If you do not want to starve, follow the guard and leave the gold, unless you can dig or teleport out yourself. (If *Croesus* is dead because you killed him at Fort Ludios, the *Croesus* answer angers the guard instead; use the real-name route then.)

Statues

Most statues can be broken for any contents inside (with a pickaxe, wand of striking, or force bolt), but some are statue traps that animate the sculpted monster when struck or stepped on. Archeologists see historic statues by name and take a –1 alignment hit for breaking them.



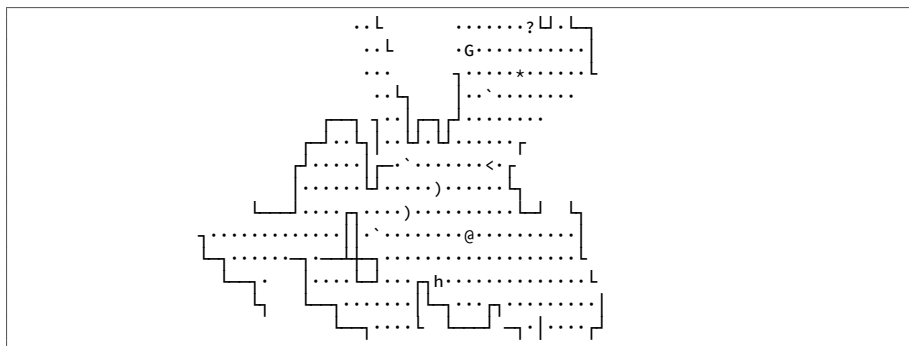
Branches and Landmarks

The main trunk of the dungeon goes straight down, but most of the rewards wait off to the side, in branches and at named landmarks roughly in the order that follows.

Sokoban or Mines first? The Mines entrance shows up first (Dlvl 2 to 4), but the *strategic* suggestion for most beginners is Sokoban. It's a controlled puzzle crawl with mostly trivial monsters, and the prize at the top (reflection or a bag of holding) materially helps the Mines run afterward. Slashing through the Mines early is exciting and fun, but if you want to play the strategic game, skip them until you've solved Sokoban and then return to the Mines when you are stronger and better equipped.

The Gnomish Mines

The entrance appears somewhere around dungeon levels 2 through 4, as a downward staircase. You'll know you're in the Mines because the walls become rough stone and the corridors get irregular, as pictured below.



The Mines are populated primarily by gnomes and dwarves, with tougher variants (gnome lords, dwarf lords, then gnome and dwarf kings) appearing as you descend. If you're playing a gnomish character, most of them will be peaceful, which makes the Mines a relatively comfortable detour. Everyone else will need to fight through a steady stream of hostile gnomes and dwarves.

The Mines also have a notorious surprise guest: a mind flayer can spawn on any random Mines level outside Minetown and Mine's End. "*You sense a faint wave of psychic energy*" on an unexplored Mines level is the warning. A mind flayer drains Intelligence on every successful tentacle hit. In the early game you may not have the helmet protection or ranged attack power you'll need to fight one safely. Retreat to prep, or skip the branch.

Minetown appears a few levels into the Mines. Usually it's a small settlement with shops and a temple, and it's worth visiting early. The shops let you sell unwanted items for gold and buy useful gear. The temple has an altar (check the alignment) and a resident priest. If the altar matches your alignment, you've found a safe place to identify items by dropping them on it. The Minetown priest can also grant permanent AC reductions. Donate at least the amount the priest names and you gain a point of intrinsic protection (a permanent -1 to your AC). The asked amount scales with your experience level, so early visits give you the cheapest points (see Donating to Priests).

Candles spawn often enough that you'll usually have enough by endgame, but you do need to source seven for the Candelabrum of Invocation later. **Izchak's lighting store** in Minetown is the clean answer: buy seven there. If the shop is absent (Orcish Town layout), seven are scattered on that level instead. Wax candles burn longer than tallow but either works, and mixing types is fine.

One in seven times, however, Minetown generates as **Orcish Town**: an overrun settlement with no shops, no priest, and iron bars blocking the entrances. There's still an unaligned altar, but you won't get any shopping done. If you were counting on Minetown for early commerce, this is a rude surprise.

Watch out for the Minetown watch. The guards are peaceful unless you steal from a shop or attack a peaceful creature. If you anger them, they'll call for reinforcements.

Mine's End is the bottom of the Mines. All three Mine's End variants contain a guaranteed (not-cursed) luckstone, so you'll get one wherever you arrive. A luckstone in your open inventory prevents your luck from timing out toward zero, which affects everything from combat to fountain wishes. Grab it and carry it for the rest of the game. (One layout variant also seeds a **fake luckstone mimic** disguised as a luckstone. BUC-test what you pick up before relying on it.)

Sokoban

The entrance staircase appears somewhere around dungeon levels 6 through 10 (one level below the Oracle), and it goes up. Sokoban is a set of four puzzle levels where you push boulders onto holes or into place to open a path. Teleport doesn't work here, and you can't dig down off the entrance level (its floor is reinforced).

The puzzles are fixed (two variants per level, randomly chosen).

Each level has exactly one correct solution. If you push a boulder into a corner where it blocks your progress there is no way to start over. You're left with a few ways to cheat, which might or might not help: **squeeze past** the boulder (drop your stuff to fit), **dig the boulder** with a wielded pick-axe or mattock, or **fracture it** with a wand of striking or a scroll of earth (or polymorph the boulder into something else). Each of these costs a point of Luck and breaks the Sokoban conduct. The walls themselves are non-diggable on every Sokoban level, and pit traps are inescapable. Even flying or levitation will not carry you over an open pit, the air currents pull you down anyway. **Teleport doesn't work here:** the level forbids it.

The prize at the top is either a **bag of holding** or an **amulet of reflection**, both extremely valuable; the Sokoban Solutions appendix documents the per-variant 75/25 weighting. A cursed scroll of scare monster is placed under the prize as bait. A bag of holding lets you carry far more inventory at reduced weight. An amulet of reflection bounces ray attacks back at their casters. Either one is worth the detour.

One important rule: the Sokoban levels penalize you for "cheating." Breaking or polymorphing boulders, reading scrolls of earth, or squeezing past boulders costs you a point of luck each time. Solve each level honestly if you can. The luck penalty isn't a sentence, though: it clears the moment you legitimately finish the level above it, and the prize is still available regardless of infractions. One desperate boulder-smash won't ruin the run.

Strength training side effect. Every legitimate boulder-push exercises Strength. Sokoban is the safest place to grind Str up since the puzzles require dozens of pushes without putting you in combat. Don't try to train Str by walking around Stressed in the rest of the dungeon: the HP penalty isn't worth what you'd gain.

For complete solutions to all eight level variants, see Sokoban Solutions in the appendices.

The Oracle

Somewhere in the mid-levels of the Dungeons of Doom (around levels 5 through 9), you'll find a special room containing the Oracle of Delphi, flanked by centaur statues and four fountains.

The Oracle offers two services:

- **Minor consultations** are cheap (50 zorkmids) and produce fortune-cookie-style messages, drawn from the same true-rumor pool, mostly atmospheric, occasionally useful.
- **Major consultations** are expensive (500 + 50 × experience level) but pay back the gold in useful intel: hints about monsters, items, and game mechanics.

The Oracle is peaceful and never attacks. Her room is a safe place to rest for a moment, though the fountains are subject to the usual fountain risks.

The Quest

Around dungeon levels 11 through 16, a magic portal drops you onto your Quest.

You'll know when you've reached the right level. The first time you arrive there, a faint telepathic call from your quest leader breaks through:

You receive a faint telepathic message Your help is urgently needed Look for a ...ic transporter. You couldn't quite make out that last message.

You are now looking for a magic portal, which renders as a bright magenta ^ once you discover it. Like any trap, it stays hidden until you step on it (which also triggers it) or search the square.

To embark on your Quest, you will need experience level 14 and a friendly word with your quest leader on the first floor before they will let you descend. If you are prepared and worthy, your leader will send you to retrieve your role's quest artifact from a quest nemesis.

Mid-game XP is slow to earn, so the path to XL 14 usually includes eating a few wraith corpses (one experience level each), or a blessed potion of gain level. (Wraith corpses don't drop on graveyard levels, though! A good strategy is to lead a wraith out of the Valley of the Dead before killing it.)

Each role has a unique Quest with unique maps, a unique nemesis, and a unique artifact reward. The Valkyrie hunts Lord Surtur for the Orb of Fate. A Samurai's path ends in a duel with Ashikaga Takauji over the Tsurugi of Muramasa. The Wizard descends into the Dark One's stronghold for the Eye of the Aethiopia. The Artifacts chapter has the full per-role list.

Quest artifacts are powerful. Each grants a unique mix of carried or worn intrinsics: protection, luck, ESP, warning, reflection, or stealth depending on role. A few grant magic resistance just by being carried; a few others block magic attacks only when wielded or worn. The Artifacts chapter has the per-role list. Getting your quest artifact is a pivotal moment. The late game starts here.

Two prizes wait on the nemesis's square. The **Bell of Opening** rides in the nemesis's pack and falls when you kill them (one of the three invocation items you'll need for Gehennom). Your role's quest artifact has been sitting under their feet the whole time, placed when the level was generated. Pick both up. The Quest is the only place in the game you can get them.

Most nemeses carry an amulet of life saving, so expect to kill them twice. The portal back to the main dungeon is on the first Quest level only. If you descend underprepared and have to turn back, you may have a long climb home.

If your alignment record is too low, your quest leader will refuse to send you. A history of attacking peacefuls is the usual cause. Keep your hands clean.

The Rogue Level

Somewhere in the middle dungeon you'll cross a one-level historical district. *"You enter what seems to be an older, more primitive world."* The neighborhood is preserved as it was when **Rogue** was the only dungeon-crawl anyone had heard of, and a few details give the era away:

- All the wildlife is in capital letters: lowercase species hadn't been invented yet.
- Armor displays as], food as :, amulets as ,, and gold shares a symbol with gems (in Rogue they were the same thing).
- Doors don't close. Hinges came later.
- Tile mode switches off in favor of plain ASCII characters.
- No fountains, sinks, altars, shopkeepers, or priests, and no spellbooks, tools, or amulets in the natural item pool, all post-Rogue inventions.

Modern mechanics still work; you can engrave Elbereth here even though that was a Hack-era addition. A small anachronism.

Fort Ludios

Fort Ludios is optional and easy to miss entirely. It appears as a magic portal anywhere from Dlvl 11 down to just above Medusa, always inside a sealed vault, so you'll need to dig in. The portal leads to a fortified military compound: sixteen soldiers and a lieutenant, with more drifting out of the barracks once the alarm trips. Four guard dragons. A stone giant. Four giant eels patrolling the moat. And **Croesus** on the throne, the vault guardian himself. The level is non-diggable. The level prevents teleportation, so once you're inside the only way out is back through the portal or a scroll of *level* teleportation (a plain scroll of teleportation won't work here). Croesus hits hard in melee, so shoot or zap him from across the moat rather than walking up.

The real prize is the gold. A 60-square treasury holds 36k to 54k gold, with land mines and spiked pits on roughly a third of the tiles. Gem caches in each corner tower (diamonds, emeralds, rubies, amethysts), plus the occasional chest in the barracks. Soldiers carry rations and serviceable weapons. The alarm only quiets once Croesus is dead. Fort Ludios is a good place to visit for gold, identification scrolls, or shop stock, but it's not essential for victory.

If you can't find the portal, don't worry about it. Fort Ludios is a bonus, not a requirement.

Medusa's Island

Medusa's level sits near the bottom of the Dungeons of Doom, around level 25. You'll know it by the large body of water and the statues scattered around (those used to be adventurers).

Arien Malec collected crossing strategies from RGRN posters back in the early 2000s, with input from Pat Rankin, Geoduck, Topi Linkala, and others. This is a condensed version of his guide.

The level has three challenges stacked together:

1. **Crossing the water.** The island is surrounded by water. You'll need levitation, water walking boots, or some creative approach (freezing water with a wand of cold, building a boulder bridge, polymorphing into a flying creature). Don't wade in without preparation, because:
2. **Giant eels** (electric eels on one layout). The water is home to giant eels that can grab and drown you on a successful hit, reaching into adjacent dry tiles too. See the eel-survival rules below.
3. **Medusa herself.** Her gaze turns you to stone. You need either **reflection** (a shield of reflection or amulet of reflection bounces the gaze back, stoning her instead) or **blindness** (you can't meet her gaze if you can't see). A mirror also works if you apply it at her.

Reflection is the cleanest solution. If you got the amulet of reflection from Sokoban, you're already prepared.

There is a downward staircase on the island itself that leads toward the Castle. The level has four possible layouts (two added in 3.6), so don't rely on memorizing a single map.

The Perseus statue. One of the statues on the island is named **Perseus**, the mythological hero who killed Medusa with a mirrored shield. #loot him for a (cursed) **shield of reflection** (75% in three of the four layouts; 25% in the fourth), a blessed +2 **scimitar** (50%), **levitation boots** (25% in three layouts; 75% in the fourth, the same layout that is stingy with the shield), and a **sack** to put them in (50%). The shield is cursed, so plan to uncure it before swapping it in. The other statues on the level are intentionally empty.

Surviving Medusa's gaze. You need one of the following before entering her level:

- **Reflection** (amulet, shield, or silver dragon scale mail). Her gaze bounces back and stones her instead. This is the cleanest solution and the one most players use.
- **Blindfold or towel.** Wear it before entering line of sight. You'll need telepathy or monster detection to navigate while blind. Works perfectly but makes the level harder to explore.
- **A mirror.** Apply it at Medusa to reflect her gaze at close range. More dangerous than passive reflection since you need to be adjacent.
- **One-shot kill.** If you have a wand of death, the spell finger of death, or a cockatrice corpse, you can kill Medusa before she gets a turn. Combine with speed or stealth for reliability. (A wielded cockatrice corpse, with gloves, is the cheapest of these options and bypasses the reflection requirement entirely.) Whatever you do, **don't eat her corpse:** she's the Gorgon, and the cadaver instantly petrifies whoever sits down for dinner.

Crossing the water. The island is surrounded by deep water. Your options, from safest to most desperate:

- **Levitation** (ring, boots, potion, or spell). The easiest way to cross. Eels can still grab you from adjacent water (see Drowning in Ways to Die Instantly (p. 73)).
- **Water walking boots.** You walk on the surface. Eels can still grab you in adjacent water.
- **Wand of cold.** Zap the water to freeze a path of ice. Ice is safe to walk on. This is reliable and only costs a few charges.
- **Scroll of earth.** Creates boulders that fall into the water, making a boulder bridge. Slow but works if you have nothing else.
- **Polymorph** into a flying or swimming creature. Risky if you lack polymorph control.
- **Jumping boots or the knight's jump.** Can leap across narrow water gaps, but requires careful positioning.

Surviving the eels. The water contains giant eels (and on one of the four layout variants, a kraken) that can grab and drown you. Critical rules:

- An **oilskin cloak** or **greased armor** makes the eel slip off on the grab attempt. Greasing wears off, so it's not fully reliable; oilskin doesn't.
- **Magical breathing** (amulet or polymorph) prevents the drown even after being grabbed.
- **Kill eels at range** whenever possible. Wands, spells, and thrown weapons all work. Don't melee eels in the water.
- Levitation and water walking do NOT protect against being grabbed by an eel in adjacent water. The drown check uses the *eel's* tile, not yours. Only oilskin/grease, magical breathing, or killing the eel first are reliable.

The Castle

The Castle is the last level of the Dungeons of Doom proper, a stone fortress surrounded by a moat with a drawbridge as its only entrance. Inside waits an army of defenders: soldiers in the barracks, dragons guarding the storerooms, and a court of high-letter monsters in the throne room. Hidden in a chest in one of the four corner towers is the **wand of wishing**.

The Castle also serves as the gateway to Gehennom. For how to open the drawbridge and what to do once you're inside, see The Castle (p. 168) in Part Six.



Traps and Hazards

Traps are invisible until you step on one, detect it with a search (`s` command), or reveal it by other means. Once discovered, they show up as `^` on your map, small consolation after you've already fallen in a pit. Each search of an adjacent square has an independent chance of revealing a trap, but the chance is well under 100%, so search repeatedly in suspicious areas. Your pet, being closer to the ground and warier by nature, will hesitate to step on traps it knows about; watch its movement for clues.

A useful pattern to recognize: an unexplained corpse sitting alone on a room floor is often covering the trap that killed it. The corpse's `%` glyph draws on top of the `^`, so the trap stays hidden even after you would otherwise have seen it. The corpse may also be sitting on dropped gear from its owner, which makes the square worth investigating. Search the adjacent squares to reveal the trap, then `#unttrap` to try to disarm it instead of stepping on.

Here are the traps you'll encounter, roughly grouped by how much you'll regret finding them:

Nuisance Traps

Trap	Effect
Arrow trap	Fires an arrow at you (modest damage)
Dart trap	Fires a dart, may be poisoned
Squeaky board	Makes noise, wakes nearby monsters
Rust trap	Splashes water: rusts iron worn armor, soaks cloak/suit/shirt, douses lit lamps

Annoying but rarely lethal. The silver lining: arrow and dart traps produce free ammunition. Veterans sometimes trigger them deliberately to stock up.

Trap	Effect
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Movement Traps

Trap	Effect
Pit	You fall in, take minor damage, can climb out
Spiked pit	Like a pit, but with spikes (more damage, possible poison)
Trapdoor	Drops you down a dungeon shaft. Usually one level, but with a 25%-per-level chance to keep falling, so you can land several deeper
Teleport trap	Teleports you randomly on the level
Level teleporter	Teleports you to a random dungeon level
Hole	Like a trapdoor, but you can see it
Magic portal	Transports to a different branch (branch entrances)

Trapdoors and level teleporters are the most disruptive: one wrong step and you're separated from your pet, your stash, and your carefully explored map. But with teleport control (from an item or intrinsic), teleport traps become free transportation. **Levitation or flying** both make you immune to pits, holes, and trapdoors entirely. Except in Sokoban, where the puzzle levels disable the skip and you fall in regardless.

Dangerous Traps

Trap	Effect
Land mine	Explosion, heavy damage, items can be destroyed
Bear trap	Holds you in place until you escape
Sleeping gas trap	Puts you to sleep (helpless for several turns)
Fire trap	Burns you, destroys scrolls and potions in inventory
Magic trap	Random magical effects (some good, some very bad)
Anti-magic field	Drains magical energy; hits harder if you carry magic resistance
Polymorph trap	Polymorphs you into a random creature
Rolling boulder	Triggers a boulder rolling along a fixed track; takes you out if your square is in its path

Fire traps are easy to underestimate. The fire itself hurts, but the real catastrophe is your inventory: scrolls burn, potions shatter, and that stack of twenty scrolls of identify you've been hoarding is suddenly ash. Fire resistance saves your skin but *not* your belongings. Items inside a *sack* or *oilskin sack* survive the trap; the sack itself absorbs the burn. Gehennom is fire-trap country, so keep your consumables bagged.

Polymorph traps are a double-edged sword. With polymorph control, they're a free polymorphing booth. Without it, you become something random, possibly a newt that can't use any of its equipment. **Magic resistance and the Unchanging intrinsic both block the polymorph entirely.** Tcontrol is the only way to *use* the trap; MR or Unchanging let you walk through it untouched.

If you do get caught and polymorphed into a helpless form, your gear drops to the floor on the spot. Don't panic and don't move: random polymorphs wear off in a few hundred turns, and your kit is at the square you're standing on. Defend the square if you can, pray if a monster has you in a corner, and pick everything up the moment you change back. (If you happen to be carrying a wand of polymorph or know the spell, zapping or casting it on yourself lets you reroll the form, but only if your current form can use a wand or cast.)

Sleeping gas is murder in monster-rich areas. You can't fight, you can't run, you can't even wake up on purpose. Monsters line up to hit you like it's a buffet. Sleep resistance (elven blood, the right ring) sidesteps it.

Magic traps roll one of about a dozen random effects. The bad outcomes are summoning hostile monsters, cursing one of your items, aggravating monsters, blindness, sleep, stun, vomiting, and an earthquake that pops pits open in the surrounding squares. The good outcomes are an HP restore, a mana refill, a Charisma boost, a magic-mapping flash, and a room-lighting flash. Patient players sometimes camp a known magic trap until their Charisma climbs (about +1.4 average per zap), shop prices and all.

Bear traps clamp on for several turns. Try to step *diagonally* off the square; the diagonal escape is about five times faster than orthogonal. A wand of opening or spell of knock frees you on the spot.

If you have magic resistance and you *want* to enter a teleport trap (for vault access, say), MR blocks the trip, unless you press Ctrl+T first, which forces a voluntary trap-use that bypasses the resistance.

Anti-magic fields hit harder if you're magic-resistant. Counterintuitive enough to mislead returning players. The trap drains spell energy, and having *magic resistance* also triggers an "anti-magic implosion" that costs you HP. The damage is d4 base, plus another d4 if you have half-physical or half-spell damage, plus d4 for wielding Magicbane, plus d4 for carrying any one magic-resistance artifact (only one counts; the check breaks on first match). At worst that's 4d4 damage, quartered (rounded up) if you can pass through walls. The defense is finding the trap first (search) and stepping around it. A wand of cancellation aimed at a magical trap *does* remove the trap, but it triggers a 20 + 3d6 damage blast at the trap's square in the process; not a silent defuse.

Iron footwear (iron shoes or kicking boots) absorbs a surprising amount of trap punishment in 5.0: no leg damage from a bear trap, no spikes from a spiked pit, no polymorph from a polymorph trap (your shoes shift instead), and a positively-enchanted pair eats an anti-magic field's drain by losing one enchantment instead. Useful protection to have on if you haven't found anything better yet.

Searching and Detection

The best defense against traps is finding them before they find you:

- **Search (s)** repeatedly. Each search has an independent chance to reveal each adjacent trap, and Luck improves the odds. (The artifact/lenses search bonus only speeds up secret-door and secret-corridor discovery, not trap finding.)
- **Wand of secret door detection** reveals everything hidden in a roughly circular area around you (radius about eight, blocked by line of sight): secret doors, secret corridors, traps, trapped chests, and concealed monsters. It's not directional.
- **Crystal ball** can reveal traps across the entire level
- **Pets** avoid known traps, so watch their pathfinding for clues
- **Flying and levitation** make you immune to most floor traps (you'll still trigger magic, teleport, and anti-magic traps)
- **A scroll of gold detection read while confused** turns the gold-reveal into a *trap* reveal: every magical trap on the level lights up at once. Confused gold detection is the cheapest pre-Gehennom trap survey.

A good time to search is when the dungeon has already hinted that something is wrong: a stray corpse in the middle of an otherwise empty room, a scatter of arrows or darts on the floor, a square your pet refuses to cross, or a themed room whose gimmick is hidden hazards.

Finding Secret Doors

The Dungeons of Doom were designed by architects who believed that every room should have one emergency exit that requires ten minutes of tapping on walls to locate. Secret doors and corridors are the game's passive-aggressive way of saying "you haven't explored *thoroughly* enough."

When to search for secrets:

- **Dead ends** that feel too convenient. If a corridor just stops, and you haven't found what you came for, there's probably a door in the surrounding walls

- **Suspiciously empty rooms** with no obvious exit. The exit exists; it's just been cunningly disguised as a wall
- **After exhausting all visible options.** When you've explored everything reachable and still haven't found the downstairs, it's time to stop wandering and start wall-tapping

The systematic approach:

Type 20s to search twenty times in one spot. For new characters with average Luck, you need 15-22 searches to reliably reveal a secret. Searching once and moving on is essentially announcing your intention to remain lost.

Move three squares along the wall and repeat. Each search reaches one square in every direction, so a stride of three gives complete wall coverage with no gaps and no wasted re-searching. The pattern looks tedious on paper because it *is* tedious, but tedium is cheaper than being trapped on Dlvl 1 forever.

Items that help:

- **Ring of searching** auto-searches every turn while it's worn
- **Excalibur** (or any artifact with the searching aura), wielded, adds its enchantment to your search bonus (a freshly-dipped +0 Excalibur adds nothing)
- **Lenses** worn (and you not blind) add +2 to the search bonus, but the total bonus from Excalibur + lenses caps at +5, so lenses only help if Excalibur's enchantment is below +3
- **Wand of secret door detection** instantly reveals nearby secrets in a radius
- **Blessed scroll of magic mapping** shows every secret door on the level (only the blessed version)

The wisdom of patience:

Secret doors are NetHack's way of teaching you that brute force doesn't solve every problem. Sometimes you need brute force applied methodically to every wall section in sequence. The downstairs you seek is behind one of these walls. Finding it is a matter of systematic elimination. The only mistake is giving up after three searches and declaring the level "impossible."

Engravings

You can write on the dungeon floor with the engrave command (E). Engravings serve a few practical purposes: writing **Elbereth** (covered next), running the engrave-test on an unidentified wand (covered in the wand chapter), or just leaving a note for whoever finds your bones file. The mechanics described here apply to *any* engraving, not just Elbereth.

Methods, speed, and durability. The tool you write with determines how quickly you can finish, how hard the engraving is to erase, and whether your stylus suffers wear.

Method	Speed	Durability	Notes
Finger (dust)	Instant	Fragile	Smudges when monsters step on it
Uncursed athame	Instant	Semi-permanent	Doesn't dull (cursed athame does)
Other edged weapon	Several turns	Semi-permanent	Interruptible. Dulls roughly 1 enchantment per 2 characters, so "Elbereth" costs about -4.
Hard gem or diamond	Several turns	Semi-permanent	Interruptible
Wand of digging	Instant	Semi-permanent	Good middle ground
Wand of fire or lightning	Instant	Permanent	Burns the word into the floor

The three durability tiers correspond to how the text resists ordinary erosion:

- **Fragile (dust).** A monster stepping on the square smudges one character. In dust, an Elbereth lasts as long as the floor stays clear.
- **Semi-permanent (scratched into the floor).** Monster traffic doesn't smudge it. Random erosion can occasionally chip a character under unusual conditions, but in practice the engraving lasts indefinitely.
- **Permanent (burned in).** The engraving doesn't erode at all under normal conditions. Only ice tiles or magical attacks can damage it.

Engraving by hand can be interrupted. Anything written by hand at multi-turn speed (non-athame edged weapon, gem) takes one turn per letter. If something breaks the engraving mid-word (an attack, a monster wandering into view, a passing earthquake), the partial word you leave behind does nothing useful. Instant methods (any wand, finger-in-dust, or an uncursed athame) finish in one action.

Impairment and errors. If you are blind, confused, stunned, or hallucinating, you have a chance of misspelling each letter, and this scrambling applies to *every* engraving method, including burns from a wand of fire. (Only the dust/blood surface-garble roll is skipped for harder methods.) A misspelled message has no special power; this matters most for Elbereth.

Overwriting and combining. Appending to an existing engraving is possible, but for named-word magic like *Elbereth* the engraving must read *exactly* that word and nothing else, so the appended text usually destroys the ward. To refresh, overwrite the square or pick a fresh one.

Two engravings worth recognizing. Most engravings you find are random flavor (graffiti, “*elbereth*” left by someone else, and the like). Two specific messages, though, are *trap markers* placed by the dungeon. “*Ad aerarium*” (Latin: *to the treasury*) marks a secret closet containing either a **vault teleporter** or a **level teleporter**. The vault teleporter is a one-shot trap that drops you into Croesus’s 2×2 gold vault on the same level; pick up the gold and escape ahead of the vault guard. The level teleporter sends you to a random dungeon level, often unwelcome without teleport control. “*Vlad was here*” marks a secret closet containing a **trap door**. Both messages are easy to miss in the message log. Investigate them when you see them, and be ready for what is on the other side.

Elbereth

Where the word comes from

Elbereth is Sindarin for “Star-Queen,” one of the Elvish names of **Varda Elentári**, highest of the Valar in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Silmarillion* and the one who set the stars in the sky. In *The Lord of the Rings* the Elves invoke her name for protection against evil: Frodo cries “*O Elbereth! Giltboniel!*” on Weathertop and the Witch-king recoils, and Sam invokes her in Shelob’s lair to make the Phial of Galadriel burn brighter. NetHack lifts the conceit directly: writing Varda’s name on the dungeon floor is an appeal to a higher power for safe ground.

The mechanics below were inspired by Kate Nepveu’s Elbereth FAQ. Kate also maintained steelytips.org, the long-running archive that preserved decades of community spoilers.

The ward

Writing the word **Elbereth** on the floor creates a protective ward. Most monsters will not melee-attack you while you stand on an *Elbereth* square; they mill around, frustrated, instead. The ward applies whether you wrote it or found it already engraved, and the underlying engraving method (dust, scratched, burned) does not affect the strength of the protection, only how long the engraving will survive.

Rules of the ward

- **It only works while you stand on it.** Step off and the protection ends. Stepping back on resumes it.
- **It must be the exact word.** “Elbereth,” nothing more, nothing less. Misspellings (from impairment) and combined text don’t count.
- **Some monsters ignore it.** Anything represented by @ (humans, elves, player-like creatures), the Riders on the Astral Plane, Angels, minotaurs, unique/named monsters (quest nemeses, Vlad, the Wizard), shopkeepers, guards, and any blind monster will all walk right through. So will cornered monsters with no retreat path: a creature with nowhere to flee will fight rather than stand helplessly. As a rough principle, anything intelligent enough to recognize the misuse, anything that can’t perceive the inscription, and anything with nothing to lose disregards the ward.
- **Elbereth doesn’t work in Gehennom, on the Elemental Planes, or on the Astral Plane.** Below the Castle, you’re on your own.

The defile rule (important)

If you attack a monster while standing on Elbereth (whether by melee, thrown weapon, or wand zap), and that monster *would* have feared the ward, or is peaceful, the engraving is **deleted instantly, in full, regardless of how it was made.** Even a burned-permanent Elbereth disappears in one swing. You take an **alignment hit** (“You feel like a hypocrite”) and see the message “*The engraving beneath you fades.*” The hit is a flat -5 if your alignment record is comfortably positive (above $+5$); otherwise it is a random -1 to -5 .

The durability table doesn’t show this. “Permanent” and “semi-permanent” describe resistance to *passive* wear (monster footsteps, erosion). Your own hostile action wipes the word regardless of tier. So Elbereth is strictly **defensive**. Use it to heal, drink a potion, read a scroll, swap gear, regroup. Any attack from on top defiles it, so step off when you mean to fight back.

Practical use

In an emergency, write Elbereth in the dust with your finger: free, instant, and good enough to buy a turn or two. Most monsters will back off and let you act. Once the immediate danger passes, you can either step off the dust ward to keep it for next time (it survives until a monster steps on the square), or upgrade to something more durable.

For a permanent safe spot, useful for stashing items, resting at a fixed retreat point, or anchoring a corridor fight, burn the word with a wand of fire or lightning. One turn, no interruption risk, no impairment penalty, no wear. A semi-permanent engraving (athame, weapon, gem, wand of digging) is the middle ground: durable, but the slow methods can be interrupted mid-word.

While levitating, you can't engrave with your finger or your weapon: the game refuses both. A wand of fire, lightning, cold, or digging still works from above. You'll see "you gesture toward the floor below you" first, but the burn lands anyway. The old finger-in-dust trick from earlier editions is gone, but torching Elbereth into the floor from a wand of fire while floating still works.

A **scroll of scare monster** dropped on the floor acts like Elbereth on its square. It does not erode and works while you are not standing on it. The catch: picking it up may destroy it (cursed scrolls crumble on the first pickup, uncursed on the second), so leave it where you want the safe spot. The Castle wand chest is parked on top of a cursed one for exactly this reason.

Iron Bars

Iron bars look like a barrier but aren't solid: light passes through, you can see what's on the other side, and **tiny** creatures (grid bugs, bats, rats) can squeeze between, but kittens and little dogs are already too big. What they resist is almost everything the player can throw at them: pick-axes bounce off ("Clang!"), wands of digging fizzle, weapons swing through harmlessly, and kicking just hurts your foot. Wands and spells of *striking* and *force bolt* pass through the bars without effect. The bars corrode for an acid ray, acid breath or spit (if you are polymorphed into a yellow dragon or black naga), and a **wand of lightning** can melt them too, though only about one zap in ten actually dissolves the bars.

The practical early-game answer is to **dig around** them. Iron bars sit in a niche cut into a room wall, so digging diagonally past the bars (or breaking through the wall to the stone behind and then back into the niche) reaches the contents without touching the bars. Mid-game, polymorph into something that breathes acid or lightning, passes walls (xorn, earth

elemental), is **tiny** enough to slip between, or eats metal (rock mole). Starting pets won't fit, but a polymorphed pet can.

What's typically behind them: a scroll of teleportation (unless the level is non-teleport, in which case the niche skips it), occasionally a random item or a previous adventurer's corpse. The scroll is a joke: you'd need one already to read it from outside the bars.

Feelings and Sounds

Much of the most important information in NetHack comes to you as cryptic feelings and sounds. They sound like atmosphere, but most of them are specific signals. If you don't know what they mean, you'll miss the cues entirely. They are worth memorizing.

(Caveat: being **deaf**, **swallowed**, or **underwater** silences the ambient-sound channel completely. Permadeaf conducts in particular lose every level-flavor cue. The feeling-from-corpse messages still come through.)

Message	What it means
<i>"You have a sad feeling for a moment, then it passes."</i>	Your pet just died offscreen.
<i>"You hear bubbling water." "You hear water falling on coins."</i>	Fountain on this level.
<i>"You hear someone cursing shoplifters." "You hear the chime of a cash register."</i>	Shop on this level.
<i>"You hear someone counting gold coins." "You hear the footsteps of a guard on patrol." "You hear someone searching."</i>	Vault on this level. The "counting" message means there's still gold inside; "searching" means the vault is already empty.
<i>"You hear a wolf howling at the moon." (or jackal)</i>	A werereature is somewhere on this level.
<i>"You hear crashing rock."</i>	A tunneler (dwarf, gnome miner, rock mole, umber hulk) just dug through stone.
<i>"You hear rumbling nearby." (or in the distance)</i>	A rolling boulder trap just fired offscreen. <i>"A rumbling stop abruptly"</i> means the boulder fell into a pit or teleport trap.
<i>"You hear a chugging sound."</i>	A monster just drank a potion (usually healing themselves).
<i>"You hear a nearby zap."</i>	A monster just zapped a wand at something offscreen.
<i>"You hear a strange wind."</i>	Oracle on this level.
<i>"You hear a slurping sound."</i>	A gelatinous cube just ate items off the floor on this level.
<i>"You hear a crunching sound."</i>	A rust monster, rock mole, or other metallivore just ate something metallic.
<i>"You hear a bugle playing reveille!"</i>	A soldier just woke nearby soldiers; expect a fight.
<i>"You feel healthy."</i>	Intrinsic poison resistance from a corpse.
<i>"You feel a momentary chill."</i>	Intrinsic fire resistance from a corpse.
<i>"You feel full of hot air."</i>	Intrinsic cold resistance from a corpse.
<i>"Your health currently feels amplified!"</i>	Intrinsic shock resistance from a corpse.
<i>"You feel wide awake."</i>	Intrinsic sleep resistance from a corpse.

Message	What it means
<i>"You feel very firm."</i>	Intrinsic disintegration resistance from a corpse.
<i>"You feel a strange mental acuity."</i>	Intrinsic telepathy from a corpse.
<i>"You seem faster."</i>	Intrinsic speed from a quantum mechanic corpse. (If you already had speed, you instead "seem slower". Quantum corpses toggle.)
<i>"You feel a mild buzz."</i>	Eye of newt corpse restored 1–3 mana.
<i>"You sense a lack of food nearby."</i>	Scroll of food detection, no food on level.
<i>"You feel materially poor."</i>	Scroll of gold detection, no gold on level.
<i>"You feel like someone is helping you."</i>	Scroll of remove curse; worn/wielded cursed items uncursed.
<i>"Your hands begin to glow red."</i>	Scroll or spell of confuse monster. Your next melee strike will confuse the target. (Purple if you read it while already confused.)
<i>"You feel guilty."</i>	Blessed or confused scroll of punishment. The ball and chain don't attach, but the scroll is now identified.
<i>"Who was that Maud person anyway?" "As your mind turns inward..."</i>	Scroll of amnesia. Some of your memorized spells (all if cursed) are now gone.
<i>"It tasted bad."</i>	Cursed potion of gain level read on a level you can't rise off (already at the top, no Amulet, or against the ceiling). Cursed, but otherwise harmless.
<i>"You have an uneasy feeling..."</i>	Cursed potion of enlightenment, or cursed potion of gain level in a no-rise spot. Identifies the potion; no other effect (a Wisdom exercise penalty for enlightenment).
<i>"You feel like a hypocrite."</i>	You just attacked a monster while standing on Elbereth. The engraving is gone, and your alignment took a hit (flat –5 if your record is comfortably positive, otherwise –1 to –5).
<i>"You feel that monsters are aware of your presence."</i>	Aggravate-monster effect just turned on (cursed ring of aggravate monster, a cast from a foe, etc.). Until removed, monsters home in on you from further away.
<i>"You feel that monsters have difficulty pinpointing your location."</i>	Stealth just turned on (you wore a ring of stealth, elven cloak, or other stealth source). "...no longer have difficulty..." means it just turned off.
<i>"You hear the rumble of distant thunder..."</i>	You just killed your own pet (or tame creature). –15 alignment and your god is now angry. Expect prayer to backfire for a long time.
<i>"You feel as if you need some help."</i>	A nearby monster just cast curse-items on you: something in your inventory was randomly cursed. BUC-test gear before relying on it.
<i>"You feel the presence of evil."</i>	A hostile water demon (or other major demon) was just summoned from a fountain but isn't visible to you yet. It's coming.
<i>"You bear someone summoning something, and..." (and "...summoning")</i>	An offscreen spellcaster (wizard, demon, lich) just summoned a monster. Expect company on the next level transition or as it walks in.
<i>"You feel mildly hot." / "You feel mildly chilly."</i>	A fire (or cold) attack hit you and your intrinsic resistance absorbed it. Useful confirmation that you actually have the resistance you think you do.

Message	What it means
<i>"You feel rather itchy under your mummy wrapping."</i>	You just read a scroll, zapped a wand, or cast a spell of invisibility, but the mummy-wrapping cloak blocked it. You're not invisible — and you've just confirmed the scroll/wand is invisibility.
<i>"You feel less paranoid."</i>	A monster you'd sensed-but-not-seen (the I marker on the map) just left your awareness. It walked off the level, died, or vanished. You can stop worrying about it.
<i>"You feel agile! You must have been working on your reflexes!"</i> (and Str / Wis / Con variants)	A stat just went up from the hidden exercise system. See <i>Exercising Your Stats</i> (p. 150) for what counts as exercise. The mirror message <i>"You haven't been working on reflexes lately"</i> fires after a streak of abuse instead.
<i>"You move very quietly."</i>	Ring of stealth or elven cloak. (Elven boots give <i>"You walk very quietly"</i> instead.)
<i>"Wow! This makes you feel great!"</i>	Blessed potion of restore ability with no remaining troubles, or a blessed magic fountain hit.
<i>"You feel feverish."</i>	Lycanthropy infection from a were-monster. <i>Quaff</i> holy water, eat wolfsbane, or #pray.
<i>"You are slowing down."</i>	You're turning to stone. Immediately eat a lizard corpse, drink acid, or #pray.
<i>"You are turning into slime."</i>	Green-slime contagion. Burn it off (read a fire scroll, cast fireball on yourself, or self-zap a wand of fire), or #pray.
<i>"You feel deathly sick."</i>	Terminal illness (Pestilence, Demogorgon). <i>Quaff</i> extra healing, eat eucalyptus, or #pray.



Survival

The Art of Combat

The most important combat technique in the Mazes is knowing when *not* to fight. The second most important is making sure you hit really, really hard when you do.

To-Hit Calculation

Every swing of your weapon is a d20 roll, modified by everything the game can think of to make your life interesting:

- Your experience level (the game's way of saying "you've seen things")
- Your weapon's enchantment (a +7 Excalibur hits *noticeably* better)
- Your Luck (the universe literally takes sides; the to-hit contribution caps around ± 5 even though Luck itself ranges further)
- Your Strength and Dexterity bonuses (muscles plus agility, both matter)
- The monster's AC (the lower their AC, the harder they are to tag)

You need to roll at or above (10 + defender's AC - your modifiers). Since some late-game monsters have AC of -10 or worse, this formula can feel like trying to hit smoke. Enchant your weapon. Keep your luck up. And maybe don't try to punch an arch-lich.

Damage

Base damage depends on your weapon and whether the target is small or large. (Most weapons are optimized for one or the other, because apparently dungeon physics care about monster volume.) Added to base:

- Weapon enchantment (+1 per point)
- Strength bonus (up to +6 for STR 18/xx, or more)
- Weapon skill bonus (depends on skill level)
- Special bonuses (silver damage, artifact bonuses, etc.)
- In 5.0, **two-handed weapons** get a 50% bonus to the strength damage component, a deliberate payoff for giving up your shield

This narrows the gap between two-handed builds and dual-wielding considerably. A Barbarian with a two-handed sword and respectable Strength is not just accepting the trade-off

of foregoing a shield: they're dealing measurably more damage per swing than a comparable one-handed build. If you've been avoiding two-handed weapons because the math didn't add up, run those numbers again.

AC and Defense

Your AC determines how likely monsters are to hit *you*. The journey from “I die to gnomes” to “nothing can touch me” looks like this:

Stage	Typical AC	Protection level
Starting out	8 to 10	Wearing a good attitude
Early dungeon	2 to 5	Basic armor equipped
Mid-game	-5 to 0	Enchanted armor + cloak
Endgame	-20 to -10	Walking tank

At AC -20, almost nothing hits you with physical attacks. Feel free to laugh at ogres. But many late-game threats use special attacks (breath weapons, spells, gaze attacks) that ignore AC entirely. You can be wearing impenetrable armor and a disenchanter will still ruin your day. AC is necessary but not sufficient.

Speed

Every entity in the dungeon (you and every monster) runs on the same movement-budget system. Each of you has a private movement counter measured in points. **An action costs 12 points.** When your counter reaches 12, you act, and the system deducts 12.

How the loop works. After you take an action, the game gives every monster whose counter is already at 12 or more its turn, each spending 12. If no one (including you) has enough points to act, the game performs an **allocation**: every entity on the level receives its **speed** worth of points to its counter at once. Allocations repeat until you have 12 points again, at which point the loop pauses and waits for your next keystroke.

Your base speed is **12**. Monster speed comes from each monster's bestiary entry: zombies move at 6, gnomes at 12, centaurs at 18, vampire bats at 20, air elementals at 36.

The translation rule. Because allocations only happen when no one can act, your speed effectively controls how many allocations occur between your keystrokes, and therefore how many actions each monster can take between yours. To a first approximation, the monster gets **(monster_speed ÷ your_effective_speed)** actions for every one of yours.

You at base speed 12 against a speed-18 centaur: ratio $18/12 = 1.5$. The centaur lands three hits for every two of yours, which is how it wins a melee duel.

With **speed boots** (Very Fast, effective ~20) against the same centaur: ratio $18/20 = 0.9$. The centaur now gets nine actions for every ten of yours; you have flipped the matchup.

Against an air elemental at speed 36, the baseline ratio is 3.0 (the elemental acts three times for every one of yours). With speed boots the ratio is 1.8. Speed boots help, but the gap is still hopeless on foot: this is a ranged-or-skip fight.

Intrinsic speed is probabilistic. There are two levels of intrinsics that can raise your speed over 12, and both add a **+12 bonus** to each allocation with some random chance:

- **Fast** (intrinsic, gained from certain corpses): the bonus lands on roughly **one allocation in three**. Average effective speed ~16.
- **Very Fast** (speed boots, potion of speed, haste self): the bonus lands on roughly **two allocations in three**. Average effective speed ~20.

The bonus is rolled each allocation, not sustained. On any one allocation either you got the bonus or you didn't. Tactical timing is therefore stochastic: the average is reliable across many actions, but any single tense round may or may not give you the extra. Very Fast does not stack with Fast; the better state overrides. **Speed boots are universally cited as the best boots in the game** because they grant Very Fast as a passive worn effect with no inventory or spell-slot cost.

Encumbrance shaves the allocation directly. It reduces the points your allocation gives you, before the intrinsic bonus is applied:

Status	Base points	Effective speed
Unencumbered	12	full
Burdened	9	-25%
Stressed	6	-50%
Strained	3	-75%
Overtaxed	~1.5	-87.5%

A Stressed character with intrinsic Fast still moves slower than a baseline Unencumbered one. At Stressed, a speed-6 zombie acts *more often than you do*. Get to Unencumbered, ideally with a bag of holding.

Reference: common monster speeds.

Speed	Tier	Examples
6	slow	zombies, fungi, brown molds
12	normal (your base)	gnomes, kobolds, foocubi, fire ants

Speed	Tier	Examples
18	fast	centaurs, ki-rin, soldier ants
20	very fast	bats, ravens, vampire bats
24	extreme	queen bees, vortices
36	untouchable on foot	air elementals

Practical rules for play.

1. **Before engaging, divide.** Monster's speed by your effective speed. The result is how often they act for every action you take.
2. **Ratio above 1.0** is a fight you lose to attrition unless you can drop them in your first burst. Wand them, use a ranged attack, or skip the fight.
3. **Ratio below 1.0** is kiteable. You can attack and retreat between their actions; back into a corridor and let them approach one step at a time.
4. **The big returns from speed boots come against fast monsters.** Against a speed-6 zombie, your ratio improves only from 0.5 to 0.3, which is marginal. Against a speed-18 centaur, it improves from 1.5 to 0.9, which is the difference between losing a chase and winning a duel.

Two-Weapon Combat

Some roles can fight with a weapon in each hand, which looks impressive and gives more attacks per turn. The catch: each strike takes a flat to-hit and damage penalty determined by your two-weapon skill ($-9/-7/-5/-3$ to hit, $-3/-1/0/+1$ damage from Unskilled through Expert), and the loadout must be melee on both sides. No shield, no launcher (bow, crossbow, sling), no ammo (arrows, bolts), no projectiles (darts, shuriken). Only **Rogue** and **Samurai** can reach Expert; Valkyrie and Knight cap at Skilled; everyone else lower or none. Rangers don't have the skill at all. If you're not sure, just use one really good weapon. In 5.0, two-handed weapons gained a $3/2$ strength damage bonus, making them a good alternative.

Fighting Smart

The dungeon rewards cowardice, cunning, and property damage. The reliable way to win a NetHack fight is to make the fight unfair before it starts, and that means thinking about where you stand, when you swing, and what happens if it goes wrong. Here are the time-tested tactics that keep adventurers breathing.

Position before contact

Use corridors. Monsters can only approach one at a time in a corridor. This is the single most important tactical principle in the Mazes. Never fight a mob in an open room if you can retreat to a chokepoint and fight them in single file. It turns a suicide mission into a turkey shoot.

Pick the square before contact. When you see a monster crossing an open room, walk toward the corridor or doorway you want to fight from, not toward the monster. Arrive at the chokepoint a turn before they do, and they meet you on your terms.

Step around a corner. Inside corners provide a tactical advantage: an approaching monster spends a turn rounding the corner, and you get a free hit as it arrives at the corner square.

Compare speeds before committing. Their speed divided by yours gives the number of actions they take per action of yours (see the Speed subsection). Ratio above 1.0: you lose attrition fights, so commit fast, zap, or run before contact. Ratio below 1.0: every step you take is a free move.

Keep an exit at your back. Never let yourself be surrounded. Keep at least one square open in the direction of your fallback (stairs, a known corridor, an Elbereth square). The moment you are boxed in, your retreat consumables are your only way out.

Doors and diagonals. You cannot move diagonally through a door: approach and leave orthogonally. **Closing a door** (c + direction) blocks pets and any monster lacking the intelligence or hands to open it; handy when you want to slip away from your pet, or when you need a turn or two of quiet.

During the fight

Trade hits only when the math works. Estimate how many rounds you need to drop the monster and how many it needs to drop you. If your number is smaller, trade. If theirs is smaller, retreat now: a turn spent backing up is cheaper than a death.

Fight at range when you can. Wands, thrown weapons, and spells let you soften up monsters before they reach you. This matters most against monsters with dangerous melee attacks. A fire ant is scary in melee. A fire ant that you have already zapped three times is just a warm corpse.

Stay in your pet's path. Your pet absorbs one hit per round if it can reach the monster, and a pet trading hits in your place is the best damage soak in the game. Step so the pet stays in melee range with the monster rather than blocking its approach.

The first swing wakes the room. Sleeping monsters stay asleep while you walk past them, but a hit on one wakes everything around it: the struck monster growls, and the growl wakes

any other sleeping monster within roughly seven squares for a level-3 gnome, more for larger creatures. A packed room becomes a simultaneous brawl on swing two. Pull the pack one at a time by *backing away* into a corridor first (so they wake strung out in a line), or write Elbereth so they cluster around the ward instead of swarming. Then step off to engage individually; attacking from on top of the engraving defiles it.

When the fight goes badly

Know when to run. The Mazes have no medals for bravery, only for survival. If a fight is going badly, use a scroll of teleportation, a wand of teleportation, or just run. Dead adventurers do not get second chances (unless wearing an amulet of life saving).

Use conflict. A ring of conflict makes monsters fight each other. Walk into a room full of enemies, put on the ring, and watch from the doorway as they destroy each other. Two 5.0 caveats: a monster has to *see* you for conflict to affect it (so blind or out-of-sight monsters keep their wits), and the chance scales with your **Charisma**. High Cha makes it noticeably more reliable. Low Cha makes it flaky.

Elbereth for emergencies. Write it, stand on it, recover. The monsters will mill around you looking confused and angry, which is exactly how you want them. Step off Elbereth before resuming the fight. Any attack from on top defiles the engraving and costs you alignment (“you feel like a hypocrite”). Elbereth is a rest stop, not a firing position.

Edge cases worth knowing

Ranged attackers retreat. Monsters with ranged attacks (archers, spellcasters, anything that can hurt you from a distance) now actively back away when you close to melee range. Walking toward a centaur archer to neutralize its bow no longer works; it will simply back up and keep shooting. The tactical implications: use corners and narrow passages to cut off their retreat, bring ranged options of your own, or use a wand of teleportation to skip past the dance. This change also means monster spellcasters are more dangerous than they used to be: they will maintain the range they need to cast while you struggle to close.

Cornered scared monsters fight. Elbereth still works, and the engrave-and-regenerate tactic still works, but only when the monster has somewhere to go. A frightened monster that has nowhere to flee will now turn and fight rather than stand helplessly while you recover. If you have carved Elbereth in a corridor and then backed a monster into a dead end, be ready for it to make a decision about that arrangement. Keep an exit behind the monster, or expect contact.

Watch your alignment around peacefuls. Knights and Samurai take a special alignment hit for attacking the helpless, fleeing, or peaceful (a caitiff penalty for Knights, a giri-breaking penalty for Samurai). The Quest entrance check requires alignment record at least 20 *and* experience level at least 14. A handful of careless peaceful kills can lock a Knight or Samurai out of the Quest for the rest of the run.



Things That Will Kill You

Only about **0.4% of games end in ascension**. The other 99.6% are deaths. NetHack ends in death by default; survival is the exception.

The early dungeon is deadly. The monsters that kill the most characters all live on the upper levels: jackals, dwarves, soldier ants, gnome lords, sewer rats, giant bats, small mimics, gnomes, foxes, water moccasins. None of them are intrinsically dangerous to a prepared character. They get you because you haven't built HP, AC, or resistances yet, and they outnumber you. Spend the early turns clearing levels, finding altars, and getting BUC information before pushing deeper.

On pacing. A rough rule of thumb: your experience level should be at least somewhere near the dungeon level you're standing on. Going down stairs at experience level 4 onto Dungeon level 12 is how you meet things you can't outrun and can't outfight. The dungeon doesn't wait. Every step deeper raises the monster difficulty roll, and a fragile character with 30 HP isn't going to soak even a single bad encounter. There's no prize for getting to Sokoban quickly. Clear, identify, level up, then descend.

Common Combat Deaths

Beyond the top ten, certain enemy categories kill more beginners than their depth or appearance would suggest. The shape of the threat is usually pack tactics, surprising speed, or one catastrophic special attack.

The Gnomish Mines are a top killer. This side branch is harder than it looks: Mines rooms are large open caves where four or five armed opponents have plenty of room to swarm around you. Use ranged attacks, or look for natural pinch points where the cave walls narrow. Dwarves hit harder than gnomes, and gnomish wizards (the first spellcasting enemy you meet) can sleep you, confuse you, and worse. Lords and kings appear deeper, with differently colored G and h glyphs. Take a look at the first Mines level, but it is usually wise to come back later after you are at XL 5 or better, have sleep resistance, and have AC at zero or below.

Sleep without resistance is a near-instadeath. A homunculus (i) bite, a gnomish wizard's sleep spell, or later an orange dragon or Nazgul breath puts you to sleep for several

turns. If you are alone in a corridor it costs you a couple of rounds. If you are surrounded by anything else, the surrounding monsters hit you freely while you cannot move. Sleep resistance comes from any elf, elven mummy, or giant corpse, and from several roles' starting kits (Wizard's cloak of MR, Ranger's elven cloak). Eat for it before descending into the Mines or the lower Quest.

Bats and other speedsters (B). Bats and giant bats clock in at speed 22, nearly twice your starting 12. They get two attacks for every one of yours, and a 1d4 bite at double rate chews through low HP fast. Ravens and vampire bats are speed 20 with two attacks each (and the vampire bat's second bite drains Strength). The defense is positioning, not HP totals: fight from a doorway so they cannot kite around you, or kill them at range. Centaurs (speed 18 to 20) and vortices raise the same problem later on.

Ants and other pack travelers (a). Soldier ants are speed 18 with two attacks (bite plus a Strength-draining sting) and travel in groups. A wandering soldier-ant pack on Dlvl 4 can end a careless run. Killer bees, giant ants, and fire ants are the same shape of problem. Treat any chittering or buzzing on an unexplored level as a reason to back up and find a chokepoint before the pack closes.

Quadrupeds (q). Rothes are three-attack pack hunters at sluggish speed 9: a single one is easy to outrun, but three in a room is several real fights stacked together. Mumakil are solo two-attack bruisers (4d12 butt plus 2d6 bite) that hit harder than anything else in the upper dungeon. Both wander mid-level rooms.

Golems ('). Most are slow but several hit disproportionately hard. The rope golem grapples on a hugs attack and pins you in place for adjacent friends to chew on. Clay and stone golems deliver 3d10 and 3d8 in a single claw. The iron golem is the endgame model: level 18, 4d10 weapon plus a 4d6 poison-gas breath that drains Strength, and resistant to fire, cold, electricity, sleep, and poison. Most golems leave no corpse, so they cannot be eaten for intrinsics. Kill them quickly and at range when you can.

Water demons from fountains (&). Quaffing a fountain summons a water demon roughly 1 quaff in 30. Water demons are major demons (class &, level 8) who attack first and grant a wish only if you survive. Wish odds also drop with depth, so casual quaffing pays worse the deeper you go. Don't quaff from fountains until you have magic resistance, reflection, or a clear path of retreat.

Floating eyes (e). Hit one in melee and you're paralyzed for ~70 turns; whatever passes by during the nap kills you. Kill at range, then eat the corpse for telepathy.

Minotaurs (H, in the Castle and maze levels of Gehennom). Three attacks averaging ~38 damage per turn. The hardest hitter short of the Riders themselves. A wand of sleep, a

thrown potion of paralysis (with free action), or just digging down before they reach you are the standard answers.

Major demons gate in more major demons. Every melee hit from a major demon has roughly a 1-in-13 chance of summoning another. A single bad fight in Gehennom can cascade into an arena.

Deadly Mistakes

Routine mistakes kill more adventurers than exotic instadeaths. The list below is sorted roughly by frequency on the public server.

Eating mistakes. Old corpses cause food poisoning, poisonous corpses (deadly poison) drop you fast, and eating while Satiated risks choking. Watch your nutrition before committing to a heavy corpse, and pray immediately if you ate something you shouldn't have.

Reading unidentified scrolls in a shop. A confused or cursed scroll of teleportation level-teleports you out of the shop with the unpaid merchandise still in your pack, turning the shopkeeper hostile when you return. A scroll of fire destroys shop goods you are liable for. Save the price-ID session for outside.

Mount slips and riding accidents. Getting on a steed rolls against your experience level plus the steed's tameness; a failure costs 10 to 14 HP. The dangerous cases are a cursed or greased saddle (the slip is essentially guaranteed and the fall hurts). The Confused or Fumbling or Glib cases just have worse odds, and a barely-tame pony at experience level 2 is a coin flip.

Pet kills. Kittens, little dogs, housecats, and ponies all appear on the death list, almost always because the player put on a ring of conflict and forgot to take it off. Remove the ring before walking back to your pet.

Boiling and shattering potions. Hot ground in Gehennom shatters any potion you drop on the floor, and the shrapnel is deadly. Keep potions in a bag once you descend below the Castle. Bagging your potion and scroll stash earlier is also wise: a yellow dragon's lightning bolt shatters every loose potion in your pack, and a fire trap incinerates loose scrolls.

Killed by your own wand. Self-zapped attack wands, rays ricocheting off a wall in a narrow corridor and back into your face. Engrave-test wands before pointing them at yourself.

Killed by a grid bug. The weakest monster in the game gets the last hit on someone who walked away from a real fight at 2 HP, or who decided to read a scroll on the turn one was adjacent. Don't read scrolls under threat.

Killed by kicking. Kicking sinks summons a black pudding, a foocubus, or worse. Kicking doors can break your toe. Kicking locked chests can electrocute you. Kick what you mean to kick, and only when you can spare the consequence.

Wrath of a god. You prayed when your god wasn't willing. See Divine Relations (p. 81) for the prayer cooldown and what counts as "trouble" worth a prayer.

Scroll of genocide while confused. Confused genocide removes your role's own species from the world (Valkyrie, Wizard, Samurai). You become the genocide. Don't read scrolls under confusion unless you already know what they are.

Scroll of earth on yourself. Buried under a pile of boulders you summoned on your own head.

The median death is a preventable swarm of jackals on Dlvl 3.

A note on dragons

Dragons deserve a full briefing. Each color has its own breath weapon, resistance, scale mail property, and degree of desire to kill you specifically. The summary:

Gray dragon scale mail grants magic resistance, the most important defensive property in the game, full stop. Gray dragons are the ones you most want to kill for their skin, and also the ones most likely to make you regret trying.

Silver dragon scale mail grants reflection. The second pillar of not dying to wands.

Black dragons disintegrate everything you're wearing along with you, including your magic resistance. Carry reflection or eat enough black dragons to grow disintegration resistance before going where they live. Their scale mail grants disintegration resistance plus drain resistance, a rare extrinsic source of the latter.

Yellow dragon scale mail is an underrated pick. Listed power is acid resistance, but it also grants **stoning resistance**, the same outright immunity acid blob corpses give. If you find a yellow dragon and don't already have stone-res, killing it is worth the trip. Yellow dragons are rare, though.

Orange dragon scale mail grants sleep resistance *and* free action (the ring's effect), bundled into one slot.

White dragon scale mail grants cold resistance *and* slow digestion, a useful nutritional save on long descents.

Red dragon scale mail grants fire resistance *and* infravision, the same effect as a ring of infravision or being elven.

Green dragon scale mail grants poison resistance *and* sickness resistance. A pair of niche defenses in one slot.

Blue dragon scale mail grants shock resistance *and* intrinsic **speed**, same tier as speed boots. (Wearing both at once doesn't make you faster; either alone reaches Very Fast.) One of the most powerful body slots in the game.

Gold dragons are new in 5.0 and breathe fire. Their scale mail has no resistance power but is permanently lit (radius 4 blessed, 3 uncursed, 2 cursed). The only body-slot light source in the game, and it lets you abandon torches and oil. It also confers hallucination resistance.

All scale mails are dragonhide, body-slot, +9 AC worn (the best in the body slot), and resist disenchantment naturally. The choice of which color to chase is usually whichever dragon's territory you can reach safely; about one in three adult-dragon kills drops a set of scales, which you can wear directly or convert to scale mail by reading a non-cursed scroll of enchant armor while wearing them.

A note on mimics

You will frequently meet mimics in **shops**, with more as you get deeper. An average shop has one or two mimics sitting in the aisles, masquerading as items. They're slow (speed 3) but their claws hit hard. Small mimics rank in the top ten causes of death.

The visual tell. A mimic appearing as a generic "strange object" renders on the map as], a mirror of [, the armor class. No real item ever displays as]. A] on a shop floor or anywhere else is always a mimic.

Other contextual disguises (rare in practice but worth knowing): a mimic in a temple may appear as an extra altar, in a Delphi room as a second fountain, in a maze as a lone boulder. So "a single piece of furniture that shouldn't be there" is suspicious.

How to uncover one safely. Search the adjacent square (s) reveals concealed mimics like it reveals traps. Throw a cheap item at the suspected square; the mimic uncloaks and the item lands harmlessly. A stethoscope applied to the square also uncloaks. Telepathy, ESP, astral vision, and a wand of secret door detection see through the disguise and show the mimic as m. Your pet won't step onto a mimic.

Sticking. Large and giant mimics glue you in place on a successful claw hit: you can't move, you can't go down stairs, you can't escape down a hole. Magic cancellation (cloak of protection, amulet of guarding, etc.) reduces the sticking chance, one more reason to secure MC before browsing mid-game shops.

Eating the corpse turns you into a pile of gold (or, while hallucinating, an orange) for 20 / 40 / 50 turns depending on size. Anything that tries to pick “you” up snaps the spell.

A note on nymphs

The n class (wood, water, mountain) doesn’t want to kill you. She wants your inventory. Each successful claw hit lifts a random item from your pack, and the nymph then **teleports away** to a random spot on the same level. Your bag of holding, your amulet of reflection, a freshly-wished cloak of magic resistance: gone, across the map, often into a room you haven’t explored. No NetHack horror story is more universal than “a nymph walked off with my bag of holding.”

The second claw is seduction. Nymphs get two attacks per turn, and the seduction half drains experience levels if the nymph is the opposite gender of your character. A successful seduction can also strip a ring or amulet you’re wearing. A single bump can rob you, drop your XL, and snatch the cloak off your shoulders, all in one round.

Defenses. Kill at range (darts, force bolt, a wand of anything). Engrave **Elbereth**: nymphs respect it. Or drop your most irreplaceable items on the floor before approaching. Whatever’s not in your pack can’t be stolen.

Already robbed? A satiated nymph stays on the same level unless she later falls through a trapdoor or wanders onto a staircase. Her corpse drops what she stole, so it’s often worth sweeping the level you were on before moving on.

Never engage a nymph while carrying the Amulet of Yendor during the Ascension Run. If she steals it, you abandon your climb to sweep the current level for her corpse, and the mysterious force does not pause while you search.

A note on puddings

Puddings are the dungeon’s signature self-multiplying monsters, and their leftover globs are also among the best food you can find. The class lives in the mid-dungeon and Gehennom. **Brown and black puddings split when you hit them with an iron or metal weapon**: one becomes two, two becomes four, and your long-sword grinding session turns into a swarm. **Black pudding additionally corrodes your wielded weapon** on its passive return-hit, so each round of splitting is also a step toward your blade rusting away. The community consensus: a beginner discovers puddings the same way every time: by feeding them their best weapon and watching the population graph go up.

Defenses. Melee with a **silver or wooden weapon** (silver dagger, elven dagger, athame, club, quarterstaff). These don't trigger the split. Mithril also bypasses the check. Wands of cold and fire kill puddings outright with no split, and most spells work too.

Gray ooze doesn't split, but it rusts armor on a hit; don't engage in your starting iron suit if you can avoid it.

Eat the globs. A pudding leaves a **glob** rather than a corpse, and the globs are some of the best food in the game. One difference between a glob and a corpse is that you cannot sacrifice globs at an altar, so puddings can't be farmed for offerings. The globs are slow to spoil (about 500 turns of edibility, twice a normal corpse) and packed with resistances. A brown-pudding glob grants **cold, shock, and poison resistance** over repeated eats; a gray-ooze glob grants **fire, cold, and poison resistance**; a black-pudding glob also grants **cold, shock, and poison resistance**. Brown pudding and gray ooze are *vegetarian-safe*; black pudding is not. Globs of the same color stack, and each bite is an independent roll for the resistance. A pile of brown-pudding globs is multiple chances at the one you don't yet have. Pudding splitting can have a strategic benefit. If you can kill one pudding cleanly, the splitting becomes a *feature*: very divided pudding is another glob to eat. The full intrinsic table is in Useful Corpse Effects.

A note on trolls

The T class doesn't stay dead. After you kill a troll, its corpse sits on the floor for a few hidden turns and then stands back up at full HP, fresh and angry. A pile of corpses after a five-troll fight is a timer, not a kill count. Walk away for twenty turns and the same five trolls are coming back. The veteran's lament "*I beat the trolls, I got cocky, the trolls beat me*" is one of the most repeated stories on the public boards.

Stopping the revival. The simplest cure is to eat the corpse, since trolls are safe to eat for everyone but vegetarians. You can also tin it with a tin opener, apply a magic whistle to call a pet over to eat it, zap a wand of teleportation at the corpse to send it off-level, or destroy it with a wand of striking. In Gehennom, kicking the corpse onto a lava square works in one move.

Trolls drop their gear when they die. A revived troll re-collects what it was carrying, so a revive-and-recollect cycle leaves piles of mixed troll-gear and dead-troll bodies on the same square. Pick up the gear before they wake up. The loot is yours either way.

Class members. Plain troll, ice troll, rock troll, water troll, and the late-game Olog-hai. All revive, and the corpse behaves the same way regardless of variant. The Olog-hai is the variant

to fear, a three-attack hitter at level 13. Fighting the same Olog-hai twice in twenty turns is the experience that turns a careless run into a careful one.

A note on wraiths

The W class has a touch attack that **drains an experience level**, one of the few permanent character setbacks in the game. You lose stat points, hit points, mana, and the most recent skill slot. There is no easy undo, and the wraith can land the touch again if you let it. The standard advice on the public boards is to fear the wraith on first sight and plan the kill from across the room.

The corpse, though, is one of the most valuable consumables in the game. Eating a fresh wraith corpse grants you a level, the inverse operation. The recipe is to kill the wraith carefully and then eat the corpse the moment it drops. The touch is melee-range only, so engage at distance or from inside a corridor where you control the spacing. Wraith corpses spoil quickly, so hesitation costs you the trade.

Farming wraiths. Mid-to-late-game players actively hunt wraiths in the upper Quest and throughout Gehennom for free XP. A *cursed* scroll of genocide naming “wraith” reverse-genocides four to six fresh wraiths at your feet, a ready-made banquet if you can drop each one in the turn it arrives. The classic setup is to stand on stairs (so you can escape if it goes wrong), drop a stack of cursed scrolls, and graze. Some ascending heroes credit a wraith binge for the experience levels that carried them through Gehennom.

A note on Seduction

The **amorous demon** (&, gray) appears as a **succubus** to male heroes and an **incubus** to female ones. A same-sex foocubus just claws at you and never starts the seduction. The encounter is a Cha+Int gamble: five bad outcomes vs. five good ones, plus a payment phase. Handled badly it can drain a level, an attribute, and 6–15 HP; handled well it grants a level, an attribute, full HP, and extra max Pw.

Mechanics. The demon must be adjacent and not on cooldown. It strips off your worn armor one piece at a time (cloak, suit, boots, gloves, shield, helm, shirt). The items are unequipped to your inventory, not taken or dropped on the floor; the only thing the strip costs you is the slot for the rest of the encounter. You get a yes/no prompt before each piece comes off with probability Cha/20 (so Cha 18 prompts about 9 times in 10; Cha 10 about half the time). **If you're still wearing a body armor or cloak when the strip ends, the encounter ends right there** and the demon walks away. A hard-to-remove suit is the simplest defense.

If you do get to the act, the outcome rolls against your combined Cha+Int (capped at 32). At the cap the bad-outcome chance is about 6%; at Cha+Int = 20 it's about 40%; at 10 it's nearly 70%. Check your stats before you accept.

Bad outcome (low Cha+Int)	Good outcome (high Cha+Int)
Energy drained (Pw → 0, -1d10 max)	+1d5 max Pw, refilled
-1 Constitution	+1 Constitution
-1 Wisdom	+1 Wisdom
Lose 1 XP level (drain res blocks)	Gain 1 XP level
6–15 HP damage	HP restored to max

The demon then charges 500+ zorkmids (high Cha can refuse; peaceful demons charge 1/5). Being asleep or otherwise unresponsive defers the attempt entirely.

Strategic note. At high Cha+Int the encounter is net-positive, and the armor-removal step strips *cursed* worn pieces too, an *amorous demon* can be the cheapest curse-removal in the dungeon. Some players keep one alive to farm XP and attributes. Don't try this at experience level 1, though: the level-drain outcome is fatal.

A note on Light Bursts

Yellow lights (y, level 3) and **black lights** (y, level 5) attack by exploding the moment you're adjacent. Yellow lights blind you for **10d20 turns** (a *blessed* potion of healing or any extra/full healing cures, or a unicorn horn); black lights hallucinate you for **10d12 turns** (unicorn horn cures, or wait). Both lights die in the explosion, so the after-effect is the real threat. **Defenses:** kill them at range — wands, thrown daggers, breath weapons. *Warning* detects them through their invisibility; *telepathy* does not (mindless).

Saving and Bones

A single NetHack run can span multiple play sessions. Two mechanisms govern what carries across that gap: **saves**, which preserve your game between sessions, and **bones files**, which preserve a dead adventurer’s level for a future hero to stumble into.

Saving. Press **S** and confirm to save and quit. To resume, start NetHack again with the same character name; the game loads your save and **deletes the save file in the process**. That deletion is the game’s anti-scum mechanism: there is no “load and try again.” If your character dies, the run is over. Copying save files outside the game to retry a death is what the community calls **save scumming** and is considered cheating.

NetHack does offer an honest opt-out for learning: launch with the `-X` command-line flag to enter **explore mode**, which keeps the save file after loading and unlocks `#wizard`-lite debugging commands. Explore mode disables scoring and tags your end-of-game record as a “discover game” so it doesn’t compete with real runs.

The real-world clock. Your in-game state — Luck, alignment, prayer timeout, the turn counter, every active timer — persists exactly across a save and resume. But a handful of effects are sampled at *session start* against your computer’s real clock, and those refresh when you resume:

- **Moon phase.** Full-moon and new-moon effects (e.g., the cockatrice 1-in-3 stoning rate on a new moon) are determined by the date on which you started the session and held fixed for the whole session, even if you play past midnight.
- **Friday the 13th.** A real-world Friday the 13th imposes a small Luck penalty for the whole session. Like the moon phase, it’s sampled once at start.
- **Day vs. night.** Some undead effects (e.g., a nymph’s attribute drain at night) check the real clock too.

If you start a session on a Friday-the-13th new-moon evening, the dungeon is genuinely worse — but only for that session. Save and resume the next day and those flags refresh.

Bones levels. When a hero dies on certain levels — most ordinary Dungeons-of-Doom levels at Dlvl 4 or deeper, plus Minetown and similar special levels (but *not* Sokoban, the Quest, Mines’ End, the Castle, Vlad’s outer floors, or the planes) — the game saves the level as a **bones file**. A future game has roughly a 1-in-3 chance of loading that bones file in place of generating that level from scratch, scaling up to 4/5 by Dlvl 16. The dungeon overview

tags a loaded bones level (“*This place looks familiar...*” on entry) and a grave marker appears in the level overview.

The bones level keeps its layout, traps, and items, with several adjustments:

- The dead hero leaves behind a *named* remnant — usually a **ghost**, but a **vampire** if killed by a vampire, a **wraith** if killed by one, a **mummy** for a mummy kill, a **green slime** for a sliming death, or a **statue** if the hero was petrified by a cockatrice. The hero’s corpse stays where it fell.
- Every non-artifact item in the hero’s inventory has an **80% chance of being cursed**, even items in containers. Pet test or altar test anything before wearing or wielding it.
- Artifacts revert to their base items, and any *quest* artifact is stripped entirely.
- The Amulet of Yendor and the three Invocation items, if the former hero carried them, are swapped with cursed mundane doubles — a “cheap plastic imitation” amulet, a blank spellbook, a partly-used wax candle, an ordinary bell.
- Unique monsters that *should* be on the level (the Wizard, Medusa, Vlad, your quest leader and nemesis) are removed; any statues of unique monsters are silently swapped for doppelgangers in their guise.

Bones-level dangers. The 80% curse rate is the obvious one, but the subtler danger is that bones-level *monsters* can be far above the level’s normal difficulty. The previous adventurer may have died with a master mind flayer adjacent, or a summoned demon nearby, or in monster form. Those creatures stick around. Treat any above-depth monster on a bones level as evidence to retreat, not to engage. If your character isn’t ready for the monster, leave the level and come back when you are.

Opting out. Set `OPTIONS=bones=false` in your rcfile if you want a bones-free run. This blocks both *creating* bones (your own death won’t generate a file) and *loading* bones (you’ll never inherit a level). The **Bonesless** conduct (new in 5.0) requires it.



Ways to Die Instantly

Some things in the Mazes kill you outright. Not by whittling down your hit points, not by wearing you down over time, but by ending your life in a single move with no second chance. These are called instadeaths, and learning to recognize the situations that produce them is the difference between a promising run and a one-line epitaph.

The catalog of instadeaths below was inspired by Trevor Powell's Instadeath Spoiler, which drew on Dylan O'Donnell's RGRN files. Trevor defined an instadeath as "a single move death which does not involve the player's hit points dropping to zero," and that taxonomy has been the standard reference ever since.

Attack Wands and the Warning Shot

Being hit by a powerful wand can mean instant death. A wand of death or finger of death kills an unprotected character outright, and ray wands of cold, fire, lightning, or magic missile can roll lethal damage too. But the first time any given monster zaps a beam wand (death, sleep, fire, cold, lightning, magic missile) at you, the shot misses. If you can see the monster, the wand identifies itself in the same moment, so now you know what was just aimed at you and you have a turn to do something about it before the next zap connects.

Choking

If you push past Satiated and keep eating, you can choke and die. The game prints "You're having a hard time getting all of it down" as a warning; if you have eating-confirmations turned on it'll also prompt you. Past a hard nutrition threshold the choke check fires and, unless you're Breathless or pass a 1-in-20 escape, kills you instantly.

The other path to choking is the amulet of strangulation. Worn, it puts a short count-down on your throat and kills you when it runs out. The amulet generates cursed 90% of the time, so you usually can't just take it off: pray, or uncurse it with holy water or remove curse. Magic resistance doesn't help; strangulation isn't an attack, it's a timer death. Polymorphing into a Breathless form *does* save you.

Defense: Don't eat above Satiated. Be paranoid about unidentified amulets.

Starvation

This isn't technically instant, but it feels like it. If your nutrition drops to zero, you faint. If you don't eat something while fainted, you die. In the early game before you've established a food supply, starvation is a real threat.

Defenses: Eat corpses promptly. Pray when your god is willing and you are Weak or Fainting (prayer cures hunger). Carry food rations, tripe rations, or lembas wafers. Don't let nutrition management slide.

Famine, one of the three Riders in the endgame, will kill you quickly through starvation by draining 40–80 nutrition per hit, without any extrinsic that blocks it. At the end of the game, be sure to enter the Astral Plane Satiated and carry a stack of food rations through the fight, or you will be Faint soon after Famine hits.

Deadly Poison

A handful of monsters (pit vipers, killer bees, cobras, some spiders) have a poison-damage branch that can deliver 10 to 34 extra HP of damage on top of the normal hit. At full HP you usually survive; at low HP it can outright kill you. The “extra-damage” roll fires about 1 in 240 per qualifying hit. Eating any Rider corpse (Death, Pestilence, *or* Famine) is genuinely instantly fatal regardless of HP.

Defenses: Poison resistance makes you immune. Most characters can get this early by eating enough appropriate corpses. It's one of the first intrinsics worth acquiring.

Brainlessness

Mind flayers drain Intelligence with their tentacle attacks. If your Intelligence drops to your racial minimum (3 for humans), the next drain kills you: “brainlessness.” A regular mind flayer has three tentacle attacks per turn; the **master mind flayer** has *five*, plus a heavier weapon strike. A single unprepared turn next to a master mind flayer can drop your Int by up to ten. Each hit also has a 1-in-5 chance to trigger **spell amnesia**: a random number of your spells (up to all of them) drop to zero retention; re-study spellbooks to restore. Independently, each hit has another 1-in-5 chance to drain one or two of your **weapon skills** — Basic falls back to Unskilled, Expert to Skilled, and so on. Skill loss has to be earned back the slow way at training posts; pack a long fight against a mind flayer carefully.

Defenses: **Wear any helmet.** Even a plain orcish helm blocks seven of every eight tentacle drains. Greasing the helmet stacks an additional slip-off roll on top, so a greased helmet is

the gold standard. Better yet, kill them at range (wands, spells) so the question doesn't arise. One counterintuitive detail: a mind flayer's *mind blast* only fires if you have telepathy. If you're wearing an amulet of ESP and you can spare the turn, take it off before the fight. To recover drained Intelligence you need a *potion of restore ability* (uncursed restores one stat; blessed restores all), the spell of restore ability, or prayer when you're in good standing. In 5.0 the unicorn horn no longer restores lost attributes, so don't rely on it. Stockpile at least one restore ability before pushing into mind flayer territory.

Engulfment

Two monsters hide in plain sight until you walk into them. The **lurker above** (t, gray, level 10) hides on the ceiling and drops onto whoever passes underneath; the **trapper** (t, green, level 12) hides on the floor and engulfs whoever steps onto it. Both look like ordinary terrain until they trigger. Their engulfment wraps and crushes rather than digesting.

Other engulfers don't hide; they just swallow you in melee. Dragons and purple worms can swallow whole creatures up to their size. Dragons tend to be polite about it (you escape after one or two turns); purple worms are the bigger danger, and the dread **fog cloud** and **air elemental** count as engulfers too even though they don't digest.

Defenses: Searching reveals hidden monsters. *Telepathy* shows them through the deception. Wearing a *ring of warning* or a *helm of caution* tips you off before you step.

Getting out. Once engulfed, attack the host repeatedly; weapons still work from inside. If you have a wand of digging, zap it (no direction needed): it almost always expels you immediately, leaving the engulfer at 1 HP. A wand of opening or the knock spell forces the engulfer to release you on the spot without killing it, useful if a *tame* purple worm has swallowed you in conflict. Ranged spells and rays will tear into the host from the inside.

Drowning

Giant eels, electric eels, and krakens can grab you with their wrap attack. Once they have you, each of the monster's turns you can drown. The check uses the *monster's* tile (always water for an eel or kraken), not yours, so you can drown even while standing on adjacent dry land. Only *Swimming*, *magical breathing*, or *amphibious form* prevent the drown; encumbrance doesn't matter here. (Encumbrance only matters if you *fall* into water and need to crawl out; Stressed or worse forces emergency disrobe.) You'll meet eels and krakens at Medusa's level, in moats around the Castle, in swamp rooms, and on the Water Plane.

Defenses: An amulet (or spell) of *magical breathing* gives you Breathless and ends the grab-drown threat. Levitation keeps you above pools so you can't walk into them, but **does not save you from an eel's grab** once it lands. Kill sea monsters at range whenever possible; their grab attack requires adjacency.

Petrification (Stoning)

Petrification is the dungeon's most notorious way to instantly kill you, and the reason every experienced player carries a lizard corpse. Touching a cockatrice without gloves, eating a cockatrice corpse, catching Medusa's gaze, or **kicking** a cockatrice corpse barefoot will turn you to stone. *Stepping* on the corpse is safe so long as you don't have Fumbling (Fumbling can trip you over the corpse for instant death). The process is sometimes immediate; otherwise a five-turn countdown announces itself with "*You are slowing down,*" "*Your limbs are stiffening,*" "*Your limbs have turned to stone*" (at which point you are **paralyzed** and can no longer act), "*You have turned to stone,*" and "*You are a statue*" (death).

Defenses ahead of time: wear gloves around cockatrice corpses, use reflection against Medusa, and pile up *timed* stoning resistance from acid blob corpses (each one grants a few hundred turns of resistance: useful but not permanent). For something permanent, wear yellow dragon scale mail.

Peril in the new moon. A cockatrice's hiss has a small chance to start stoning on any landed melee hit (roughly 1 in 30). On the real-world night of a new moon, that jumps to about 1 in 3. Hunt the nest on another night.

Defenses while it's happening: eat a lizard corpse (this is why you carry one), eat an acidic corpse, drink a potion of acid, pray, or cast stone-to-flesh on yourself. Keep the lizard in your **main inventory**, not in a bag: pulling it out of a bag takes a turn you can't spare against a two-turn timer. Note: act *before* the "Your limbs have turned to stone" message; after that you're paralyzed for three turns and the final messages kill you. Amulet of Unchanging does **not** interrupt stoning. If you happen to be polymorphed into a non-stone golem, wearing

it during the countdown is actively harmful; it blocks the stone-golem auto-poly that would otherwise save you on death.

Out of lizards? Any acidic corpse will do: acid blob, jellies, yellow dragon, black naga, and yes, green slime works (but green slime starts a *different* countdown that turns you to slime; only reach for it as a last resort). Quaffing a potion of acid has the same curative effect.

The other side of the coin: a wielded cockatrice corpse (with gloves on) is one of the game's most devastating weapons. anything you hit that lacks stoning resistance turns to stone. The classic offense, known to veterans as the "rubber chicken," handles demon lords, Medusa, and even a Rider on a good day. The failure modes you must guard against are falling into a pit, hole, or trapdoor while carrying it, and losing the gloves. Thrown cockatrice eggs work the same way and have the same hazard if a monster throws one at you.

Disintegration

A black dragon's breath is the only monster, spell, or wand that disintegrates you. (A deeply angered god can also call down a wide-angle disintegration beam as a follow-up to lightning; reflection won't block that one. Only disintegration resistance will. Stay on speaking terms with your god.)

Defenses: Disintegration resistance (from eating a black dragon corpse or wearing black dragon scale mail) gives full immunity. **Reflection** bounces the breath back, protecting you, but black dragons are themselves disintegration-resistant, so the bounce won't kill them. Magic resistance does **not** help.

Without disintegration resistance, the game tries to save your worn armor before disintegrating you: the breath destroys your **shield** first if you have one, then your **body armor**; only if neither is worn do you die outright (with your cloak and shirt destroyed in the process). So an ordinary shield at least eats one breath for you before being lost. An amulet of life saving still rescues you from the fatal case, though you lose any armor it took.

Level Drain

A recurring theme in the bestiary: certain monsters reduce your experience level on a hit, taking the HP and power gains that came with each lost level. Wraiths, barrow wights, Nazgul, vampires, vampire leaders, and Vlad himself all carry level-drain attacks. Stormbringer in an enemy's hand does the same. Drained levels do not come back on their own. You re-earn them by killing more monsters, by drinking a potion of restore ability (a blessed one restores all lost levels at once), or by eating a wraith corpse.

(Don't confuse drain-life with *Strength* drain: a vampire bat's poisoned bite drains Str, not levels. Stat drain is a separate problem and Enchantment Drain covers its cousin.)

Defenses: *Drain resistance* makes you immune. The classic sources are wielding Excalibur (Lawful), Stormbringer (Chaotic), or the Staff of Aesculapius (Healer's quest artifact). New in 5.0: wearing **black dragon scale mail** (disintegration resistance plus drain resistance, both in one slot) or a **shield of drain resistance** (random shop find, no other property).

Eating a fresh wraith corpse restores one experience level and is one of the better reasons to keep one fresh; wraith corpses are weightless and can't be tinned (no nutrition), so eat them as soon as the fight ends.

Enchantment Drain

Disenchanters (R, blue) appear only in Gehennom. Their claw is the silent ascension-killer it's reputed to be, but the mechanic is more constrained than common lore suggests.

Their **active** claw picks one of your worn armor pieces (cloak first, then suit, then shirt, then helm, gloves, boots, or shield by weighted chance) and shaves 1 off its enchantment. If you have no armor at all, it can instead chew a ring, amulet, or blindfold. **It can't reach your wielded weapon** with the active attack. The game does print "Your *thing* seems less effective" each time, so you'll know when it lands.

Your weapon only takes enchantment damage as a **passive** counter when you hit them in melee. Three or four melee strikes will take a +7 sword to +3; that passive drain is silent. Range-killing sidesteps both attacks at once.

Defenses. Magic-cancellation armor at MC3 mostly blocks their armor drain but doesn't stop the melee counter that drains your weapon. Rings of conflict and pets redirect them to other targets. Artifacts resist drain 9 times in 10; ordinary items only 1 in 10. **Don't eat the corpse:** it strips a random intrinsic.

The Touch of Death

Some monsters, most notably Death (one of the Riders on the Astral Plane), can kill you with a single touch. The Finger of Death spell and the wand of death work similarly. **Do not zap a wand of death or finger of death at Death the Rider.** Death absorbs the attack and gains max HP. Magic missile is the recommended answer against all three Riders.

Death the Rider's touch rolls 1d20 each hit. Rolls 17-19 trigger the full **8d6 + 50** instakill attempt and permadrain half the damage from your max HP. Magic resistance fully blocks

this high-damage branch. Rolls 5-16 (the most common 60%) deliver a smaller life-drain that MR does **not** block. Rolls 0-4 miss entirely. A high-level character with many hit points can survive the high-damage hit; the permadrain still hurts.

The wand of death and Finger of Death spell are gated by magic resistance only when the death ray *hits you from outside*. If you misfire and self-zap, MR doesn't save you; only being **nonliving** (polymorphed into a vampire, lich, skeleton, etc.) or a demon will. The same nonliving/demon immunity also protects against incoming death rays.

An amulet of life saving will revive you once if the touch or zap kills you outright.

Genocide

Reading an uncursed scroll of genocide while confused can genocide your own species. Don't do this.

Saving Yourself from Imminent Death

Not every fatal threat kills instantly. Several give you a few turns to react.

Sliming. Being hit by a green slime (or eating its glob, or being digested by one as a poly-form) starts a ~10-turn transformation into a green slime yourself. Dead. **Cures:** burn the slime off with fire (a wand of fire zapped at yourself, a scroll of fire read at self, a fire trap, a red dragon's breath); polymorph into a flame-bodied or slime-immune form; or cast the spell of *cure sickness*. An **amulet of unchanging** blocks the contagion entirely and even aborts a transformation already underway. Cancelling the green slime in melee prevents new infections but does nothing to a timer already running. Prayer would cure it, but green slime lives in Gehennom where prayer fails, so don't plan on it. Fire is the most reliable cure.

Illness (food poisoning). Eating a rotten corpse or certain attacks (giant ant, etc.) gives you food poisoning, which kills in 10–19 turns ("You feel deathly sick."). **Cures:** a unicorn horn (apply it), pray, eat a eucalyptus leaf, or vomit (by being satiated and eating more). Vomiting from other causes also cures food poisoning. Poison resistance does NOT protect against food poisoning. That is *sickness resistance*, a separate intrinsic.

Pestilence's terminal illness is the harder cousin: vomiting won't clear it, and the timer is Constitution-dependent (~20+Con turns). The cures that *do* work: unicorn horn, prayer, eucalyptus leaf.

Sinking in lava. Falling into lava without levitation or fire resistance gives you a few turns to escape before you sink and die. Your inventory is also at risk. **Cures:** prayer, levitation (put

on levitation boots or a ring), teleport, or just step out if you can. Fire resistance prevents the damage but doesn't prevent sinking. Lava immersion also destroys most of your inventory.

Drowning (being held). When grabbed by an eel or kraken in water, you have a few turns to escape before drowning. The drown check uses the eel's tile, so levitation, water walking, and encumbrance status are irrelevant once the grab lands. **Cures:** magical breathing (amulet or spell), kill or teleport the eel before it pulls you under, or avoid water entirely. See Drowning above for the full picture.

Strangulation. A cursed amulet of strangulation slowly kills you. **Cure:** uncurse it first (scroll of remove curse, holy water, or prayer), then remove it.

Divine Relations

Your relationship with your god is one of the most important mechanics in the game. A happy god answers prayers, forgives transgressions, and occasionally sends gift artifacts. An angry god smites you.

Prayer

Praying (#pray) calls on your god for help. When conditions are right, prayer is the single most powerful emergency tool in the game. When conditions are wrong, it can kill you.

The mechanics below were inspired by Matthew Labut's Praying Spoiler, the long-running RGRN reference for the prayer system.

What prayer fixes (in priority order). Your god addresses your problems in a specific order, fixing the most urgent first:

1. Petrification in progress (stoning)
2. Sliming in progress
3. Strangulation
4. Sinking in lava
5. Illness (food poisoning, sickness)
6. Severe hunger (Weak or Fainting)
7. Standing in a stinking cloud
8. Critically low HP (≤ 5 , or below a fraction of maxHP that scales with your experience level: 1/5 at XL 1–5, 1/6 at 6–13, 1/7 at 14–21, 1/8 at 22–29, 1/9 at XL 30+)
9. Lycanthropy
10. Stuck in a wall, collapsing under load, cursed levitation boots, unusable hands (cursed glove + cursed wielded weapon), cursed blindfold

After resolving the major troubles above, your god may also grant additional blessings: clearing minor afflictions (plain hunger, blindness, confusion, stunning, hallucination, ordinary punishment with iron ball and chain), improving your alignment, or even gifting intrinsics like telepathy or speed.

The requirements for a safe prayer. All of the following must be true:

- Your **alignment** must be non-negative. Killing peacefuls, robbing shops, and other misdeeds reduce alignment. Sacrifice and virtuous behavior raise it.
- Your **luck** must be non-negative. Luck is affected by many things (see Luck and Fortune (p. 147)).
- Your god must not be **angry**. God anger is separate from alignment and accumulates from specific offenses (breaking conduct with your god, desecrating altars).
- The **prayer timeout** must have expired. After a successful prayer, you must wait before praying again. The timeout averages around 450 turns but can range from under 200 to over 700 due to the random formula used. In a genuine emergency (HP critical, starving), there is some forgiveness if your timeout is close to expiring.
- You must not be **polymorphed** into a demon or undead while worshipping a non-chaotic god.
- You must not be in **Gehennom** (unless you worship Moloch, which no standard role does). Your god cannot hear you there. This is one of the things that makes Gehennom so dangerous.
- If you're on an altar, it should be **co-aligned**. Praying on a cross-aligned altar directs your prayer to the wrong god.

When prayer goes wrong. If any requirement is unmet, your god responds with punishment instead of help: loss of alignment, loss of luck, increased timeout, cursing of worn items, or summoning of hostile minions. Severe transgressions (praying to a very angry god) can trigger lightning or disintegration, both potentially fatal.

Practical guidance. Pray when you're about to die and have no other option. Starvation, stoning, illness, and critically low HP are all valid emergencies. Don't waste prayers on minor inconveniences. Before you pray, make a mental check: is my alignment positive? Have enough turns passed? Am I on a co-aligned altar or no altar at all? If you can't answer yes to these, find another solution.

Prayer timeout tracking. The game doesn't show your timeout directly, but you can estimate it. Count roughly 500 turns from your last prayer (more if it went badly). In the early game, when turns are slow and you're fighting one creature at a time, 500 turns pass quickly. In the late game, when you might take 100 actions per level, it takes longer to feel.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a trade: a corpse you could eat, given up to your god in exchange for divine help. Drop a fresh corpse on an altar that matches your alignment (**#offer**) and your god takes notice. Over time that notice pays out as artifact weapons, holy water, restored alignment, and eventually a crown.

The rules:

- The corpse must be fresh, killed within the last **50 turns**. A corpse older than that has zero sacrifice value (the gods simply ignore it). Acid blob corpses are the one exception and never spoil for this purpose.
- Bigger monsters make more valuable sacrifices, and your god expects more impressive offerings as you advance. If the altar gives back “*You have a feeling of inadequacy,*” the corpse fell short of what your god was hoping for this time.
- The altar must match your alignment, or you’re praying to someone else’s god (which has its own consequences).
- Same-race sacrifice is forbidden and severely punished. On a lawful or neutral altar it turns the altar chaotic, which is no use unless you are chaotic yourself; on a chaotic altar it summons a demon.
- Two requirements before any gift can fire: you must be experience level **3 or higher**, and your Luck must not be negative.

With enough sacrifice credit, your god may gift you an artifact weapon. The chance per qualifying sacrifice is roughly **1 in 6** for the first gift, then drops sharply for each subsequent gift. The drop depends on two things: how many gifts you have already received and how many artifacts exist in the game (yours, randomly generated, and from any bones files you have inherited). The second gift is more like 1 in 16 to 1 in 26 per sacrifice, and the third is in the dozens to hundreds. Don’t be surprised if you get one artifact and then nothing more for thousands of turns.

The first gift is biased toward an artifact that matches your alignment and a weapon skill you can use, which in practice usually means your role’s signature artifact (Magicbane for Wizards, Mjollnir for Valkyries, and so on). Sacrifice early to lock in that bias before the random pool dilutes it. Gift artifacts are always aligned to your god and always match a weapon skill you can use.

Worthiness floor: the gods filter the artifact pool by the sacrifice’s value, so a kobold corpse can roll for a gift but nothing interesting will come of it. Fresh corpses of appropriately challenging monsters are what advances your standing.

Donating to Priests

A peaceful priest in their own temple accepts donations. #chat to them and a prompt appears: *How much will you offer (suggested: X or Y)?* The two numbers are the priest’s suggested thresholds for the two reward tiers.

What you get:

- **Clairvoyance.** A few hundred turns of automatic short-range map awareness (you “see” the immediate area around you every few turns without moving). Granted if you offer in the lower tier.
- **Protection.** An intrinsic AC bonus that *stacks* across visits. Granted if you offer in the upper tier. Your **first** donation grants 2–4 points; subsequent donations add 1 each up to 9; past 9, the chance to get another point drops to 1-in-N. The bonus persists for life, unlike clairvoyance.

The cost. Pay enough and the benefit is yours. The priest’s prompt always shows you the exact ask, which scales with your experience level and how much gold you’re carrying:

- **Clairvoyance:** a randomized 150–250 zorkmids × experience level as the base ask
- **Protection:** twice that, 300 to 500 zorkmids × experience level

If you walk in carrying far more gold than the baseline, the priest scales the ask up to match, roughly a third of your purse for clairvoyance, two-thirds for protection. A rich hero who hands over only the baseline amount will be politely thanked but not blessed. The prompt always tells you the exact figure, so trust it over any rule of thumb.

The cheapskate penalty. If you offer noticeably less than what’s expected while clearly able to afford more, the priest calls you a Cheapskate and will hold a grudge: the next time you chat with that same priest, the cost will be higher. The penalty stacks if you keep doing it, and it sticks for the rest of the game. Other priests in other temples aren’t affected. Refusing to donate anything at all also costs you alignment with your god.

Practical guidance:

- **Donate early, donate often.** Protection stacks, so 500 zm at XL 1 buys the same AC reduction as 15000 zm at XL 30. Visiting the Minetown temple every time you climb back up from the Mines is a classic stacking ritual.
- **Count gold before chatting.** The priest’s roll is sensitive to what’s in your inventory; drop excess gold on the floor outside the temple before asking, then pick it back up.
- **Cross-aligned priests still accept donations** and still grant the AC and clairvoyance. You miss the alignment bonus and you can’t sacrifice on their altar, but the AC ramp still works.
- **Walk away rather than lowball.** Once the cheapskate flag is set on a priest, it doesn’t come off. If the suggested amount is more than you want to part with, decline the prompt entirely rather than offering a token sum.

Altars and Alignment

To convert a cross-aligned altar, sacrifice ordinary fresh corpses on it. Each attempt either flips the altar to your god (success), costs you Luck (failure), or, if your god is already angry, converts *you* to the altar's alignment instead. Better odds at higher experience level. Worth the risk when you need a co-aligned altar for sacrifice gifts, holy water, or BUC testing.

Two complications worth knowing. A *successful* conversion can still summon a pair of hostile minions from the displaced god, arriving just as you exhale; have an exit plan in case the “victory” comes with company. And if you try this with a *negative* alignment record, the result inverts: instead of the altar flipping to your god, your god disowns you and you become a follower of the altar's god permanently.

Two things to **never** sacrifice on any altar:

- **A same-race corpse** (humans for most roles; also elves if you're elven). Punished on every altar; on a Chaotic one it summons a demon.
- **A unicorn whose alignment matches the altar.** Counts as an insult to that god.

Crowning

If your alignment record reaches 20 *and* your Luck reaches 10, your god may crown you on a successful prayer. Crowning grants:

- A special title (e.g., “Hand of Elbereth” for lawful characters).
- An artifact weapon appropriate to your alignment, if one is available that you can use. A Lawful crowning transforms whatever long sword you happen to be wielding into Excalibur in place, so having a +7 long sword in hand at the moment of crowning gives you a +7 Excalibur.
- Intrinsic fire resistance, cold resistance, shock resistance, sleep resistance, poison resistance, and see invisible.
- Permanent skill-unrestriction on your alignment's sword slot, and permanent knowledge of your role's special spell.
- A class-specific bonus: Wizards get the *finger of death* spell; Monks get *restore ability*.

The catch is that crowning **adds about ~1000 turns of prayer timeout** on top of the usual post-prayer wait, turning prayer into an unreliable emergency tool. If you're sacrificing to fish for an artifact gift, watch your piousness so you don't trigger a crowning by accident. Applying a stethoscope to yourself reports it in words, and *piously* is the highest band, the one in which the next sacrifice could crown you.

Making Friends

The Mazes of Menace are dark, hostile, and full of things that want to eat you. Under those circumstances, a loyal companion is worth more than a bag of gold. Fortunately, the dungeon provides.

Starting Pets

Most roles begin with a faithful pet: a little dog or a kitten, depending on your role. This small creature is more useful than it looks. It follows you between levels (if adjacent when you take stairs), fights alongside you, picks up items, and eats food it finds on the floor. Think of it as a self-propelled, self-feeding trap detector with teeth.

A pet that eats well and fights often will grow. A little dog becomes a dog, then a large dog. A kitten becomes a housecat, then a large cat. A grown large dog or large cat is a genuine combat asset, capable of taking on mid-dungeon threats that would give you trouble.

One more thing: your pet usually avoids cursed items when there's an uncursed alternative, which makes it a *probabilistic* curse-detector. Drop items on the ground and watch what your pet walks past versus what it walks around. If it has no choice, it will still cross the cursed square, but consistent avoidance across many turns is a strong tell. Even when it does step onto a cursed pile (chasing food, or pulled by a magic whistle), the game prints “[pet] moves reluctantly onto ...”. That message is a giveaway.

Feeding and Loyalty

Pets have an invisible tameness score that decreases when they go hungry past the threshold, when you leave them behind on another level for too many turns, or when *you* hit them. (Combat damage from other monsters doesn't reduce tameness.) When tameness hits zero, the pet either goes untame-but-peaceful or turns fully hostile. Feeding is the antidote:

- **Dogs and cats** love tripe rations and most meat
- **Horses** prefer apples, carrots, and other vegetarian fare

Tripe rations are ideal for dogs and cats. You'll find them scattered through the dungeon. Always pick them up, even though they're revolting food for humans. Your pet will adore you for it.

Taming New Creatures

If your starting pet perishes (or you want an army), several methods of taming exist:

- **Throwing food** at a suitable creature: meat for dogs and cats, produce for horses
- **Scroll of taming** or **spell of charm monster** both route through the same handler and tame all eligible creatures within a 3×3 radius. Reading the scroll while confused widens that to 11×11 (but you can't cast the spell while confused).
- **Magic trap effects** occasionally produce taming

Taming isn't limited to small animals: with a scroll of taming or the charm monster spell, you can recruit a purple worm to swallow your enemies whole (its growing tail will sprawl across the room and get in the way of your shots), a dragon to breathe fire at them, a titan to crush them underfoot. The exclusion list is substantial, though: no humans (priests, shopkeepers, watchmen, soldiers, kings), no covetous monsters (the Wizard, liches, masters), no demons (unless you are one), no vault guards, quest leaders, nor minions can be tamed. Unique monsters (Medusa, etc.) also resist.

What Pets Do for You

A well-fed pet earns its keep in several ways:

- **Combat muscle.** A strong pet clears rooms and softens up dangerous monsters before you engage
- **Curse detection.** The old drop-and-watch trick, described above: free, reliable, and available from turn one

- **Shoplifting.** If your pet picks up an item inside a shop and carries it out the door, the shopkeeper blames the animal, not you. This takes patience (the pet must wander onto the item, then wander back out) but it's the cheapest way to acquire a wand of wishing from a shop
- **Sacrifice fodder.** Monsters your pet kills leave corpses you can sacrifice on altars, exactly as if you'd killed them yourself

Training apport (fetching). Hand-feeding your pet builds a score called apport. A pet with high apport will pick up nearby items and bring them to you. This is what makes pet-shoplifting practical: once your pet returns dropped items reliably, you can drop something at the shop counter, walk out, and trust the pet to follow with the goods. Pair it with a magic whistle (below) to yank a loaded pet to your side from anywhere on the level.

Upgrading your pet. Three moves matter most.

- A **magic whistle** teleports every tame creature on the level to a spot next to you each time you blow it. Distance doesn't matter; trapped pets get freed in the process.
- Tame a **warhorse** early (throw apples or carrots) and you have a fast, hard-hitting mount before mid-game.
- Late in the run, **polymorph your pet** into a stronger form. **Titan** is a popular target: level 16, speed 18, flies, throws boulders, and casts spells. Faster than anything else this strong, so it keeps up with a speed-boosted hero, and the spell-cast attack threatens at range. Balrog hits harder but is speed 5, slow enough that anything that runs gets away. Gray dragon is an alternative when you specifically want the magic-resistance intrinsic and a body that won't accidentally re-polymorph.
- If you can tame an **Archon** directly (via a scroll of taming on a hostile, magic-whistle recall of one you tamed earlier, or a conflict-ring accident), do it. Archons are the consensus ultimate pet: level 19, speed 16, AC -6, magic resistance, sees invisible, flies, regenerates, and a multi- attack that includes a blinding gaze and a spell-cast. You cannot polymorph a pet into an Archon: you must encounter one and tame it.

Keeping Your Pet Alive

Pets die from the same things you do: traps, poison, powerful monsters, drowning in water. Keep an eye on your companion's health (; to farlook) and don't lead it into fights it can't win. A dead pet is not just a loss of utility; it's a cold feeling in the pit of your stomach.

If you change levels and your pet isn't adjacent, it won't follow. Your pet is still alive on the previous level. Its loyalty is ticking down, though, so go back for it before it forgets you were friends. A **magic whistle** is the recommended fix: applying one warps every pet on your level to a square next to you, even on no-teleport floors. **Sokoban** also doesn't let pet

loyalty decay; leaving a pet there while you do the Quest or the Mines is the dungeon's safest kennel.

If you see "*You have a sad feeling for a moment*", that's different. That message means a pet of yours just died offscreen on another level, usually one you left behind that got into a fight it couldn't win.

Current editions have added two things that veteran pet-owners should know.

First: your pet eats for a reason beyond loyalty. The same corpse mechanics that grant you resistances apply to pets as well. A pet that dines on the right monsters will gain resistances: fire resistance, cold resistance, whatever the dungeon's terrible buffet was offering. A well-fed pet is also a better-armored one. This is not something you can reliably engineer, but it's a reason to let your pet eat rather than scooping up every corpse yourself.

Second: pets can now be revived. If your companion falls in battle, stand on its corpse at a co-aligned altar and pray. The gods, in their occasional mercy, may return it to you. This is a last-resort miracle, not a renewable strategy: your prayer timeout, your alignment, and a certain amount of luck all factor in. A pet you've carried since the early game is worth a detour to the nearest temple before you write it off.



Gear and Provisions

A Practical Identification Strategy

Here is the central puzzle of the Mazes, and the thing that kills more promising expeditions than any monster: you will find dozens of items, and you won't know what most of them are.

Every game, the dungeon shuffles the deck. Potions, scrolls, wands, rings, amulets, and spellbooks are all given randomized appearances. The “milky potion” in this game might be healing; in your next game it might be paralysis. The only things that stay consistent between games are the item classes themselves (a ! is always a potion, a ? is always a scroll) and the prices, which turn out to be the single most powerful identification tool you have.

Blessed, Uncursed, Cursed (BUC)

Before you can worry about *what* an item is, you need to know *what condition* it's in. Every item in the Mazes is blessed, uncursed, or cursed (BUC for short), and the difference matters far more than you'd think. The gods have opinions about your equipment, and those opinions have consequences:

- A **blessed** scroll of identify reveals at least 2 items in your pack (more with positive Luck), and one time in five reveals the whole pack. An *uncursed* scroll IDs one or two items; a *cursed* scroll IDs only the scroll itself the first time you read one of that type, and one item per subsequent cursed read.
- A **cursed** piece of armor bonds to your skin like it has abandonment issues. You cannot remove it until you lift the curse.
- A **cursed** potion of gain level interprets “gain a level” in the most literal architectural sense: you rocket through the ceiling to the floor above, instead of gaining an experience level.

Blessed items are helpful beyond their description, uncursed items work as advertised, and cursed items find creative ways to ruin your day. A blessed luckstone passively improves your luck; a cursed one drags it down. A cursed scroll of teleportation sends you to a random *level* instead of teleporting within the current one. You get the idea.

You don't see BUC status by default (Priests are the exception: they sense it naturally, which tells you something about clerical paranoia). But there are several reliable ways to check:

Altar testing. Drop an item on an altar:

- An amber flash means blessed.
- A black flash means cursed.
- No flash means uncursed.

This is free, fast, and unlimited. If you find an altar early, use it heavily.

Pet testing. Your pet won't step on cursed items. If you drop something and your dog walks around it, it's cursed. If the dog walks over it (or picks it up), it's safe. Not as precise as an altar, but works anywhere. Two ways the test can lie: a hungry pet will march straight over a cursed pile if there's food in the same stack, and items that *autocurse on wear* (helm of opposite alignment, gauntlets of fumbling, dunce cap, levitation boots) read as uncursed on both pet and altar tests, then curse themselves the instant you put them on.

Holy water. Dipping an item in blessed water (holy water) will uncurse a cursed item or bless an uncursed one. Dipping in cursed water (unholy water) curses an uncursed item or unblesses a blessed one. You make holy water by praying on a co-aligned altar while carrying potions of water; it's precious in the early game, so save it for items you've already identified.

Scroll of identify. A blessed scroll identifies at least 2 items in your pack, more with positive Luck, with a 1-in-5 chance to ID the whole pack outright. An uncursed scroll IDs one or two items per read. A cursed scroll IDs only itself the first time you read one of that type, then one item per cursed read after. Pick every unidentified item into your inventory before reading a blessed scroll: the jackpot reads everything in your pack.

The Price Is Right

Shopkeepers are, without exaggeration, your most important identification tool. Every unidentified item has a fixed base price that depends on what it actually is. When you pick up an item in a shop, the shopkeeper quotes you a price derived from that base price, modified by your Charisma and the shopkeeper's markup.

Shopkeeper pricing was first documented in detail by Gregory Bond's Shopping Spoiler, HTML-formatted by Kate Nepven and hosted on steelytips.org. David Damerell's Object Identification Spoiler expanded the price-based identification techniques. The mechanics below draw from both.

Two ways to get a quote without committing to the buy: **throw** the item into the shop from outside (you forfeit ownership but the shopkeeper still quotes the buy price as they pick it up), or **#chat** with the shopkeeper while standing on the item to hear the same quote. The chat trick is the polite way to price-ID a heavy item, or to price-test under teleporitis.

A note on the markup: three things give you “sucker” sell prices (1/3 base instead of 1/2). Wearing a *dunce cap*, being a *Tourist under XL 15*, or letting a *T-shirt or Hawaiian shirt show* (no body armor and no cloak) all flip the divisor. Cover the shirt before you sell, and don’t browse in your cone hat. Charisma doesn’t touch sell prices at all; the Charisma bands in the table above only move *buy* prices.

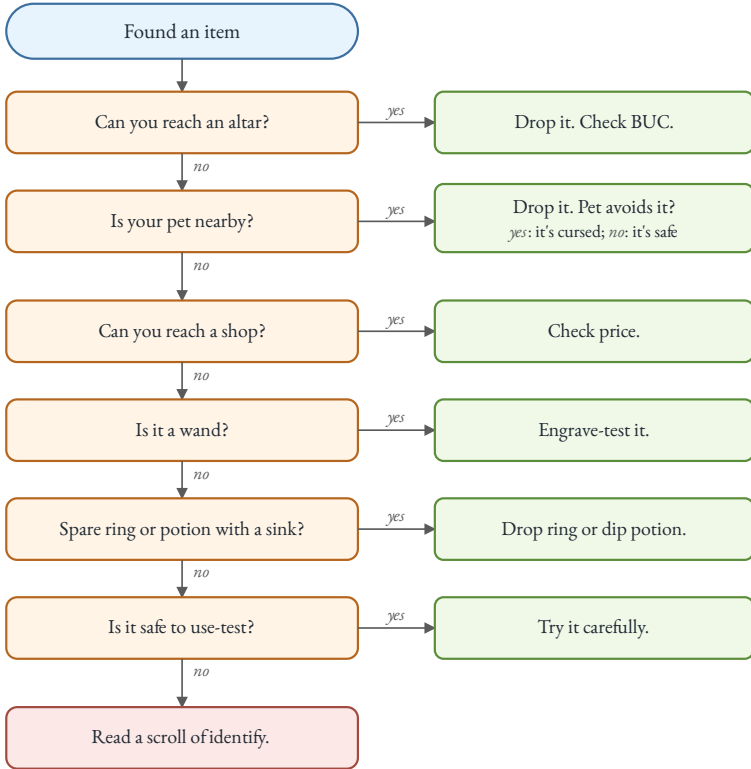
The key insight: items in the same category that share a base price are in the same **price group**. If you know the price, you can narrow down the possibilities enormously, sometimes to just two or three candidates.

Pick up an item and note the quoted price. With average Charisma (11-15), buy price equals base and sell is half base. Low Charisma pushes buy up ($\times 2$ at $\text{Cha} \leq 5$); high Charisma pulls it down ($\times \frac{1}{2}$ at $\text{Cha} \geq 19$). Sell prices don’t change with Charisma, but if shopkeepers see you as a **mark**, then you can only sell at a third of base, and you’ll have to pay 4/3 to buy. Three visible cues count you as a mark: wearing a **dunce cap**, playing a **Tourist** below XL 15, or wearing a **Hawaiian shirt visibly** (no body armor or cloak over it). The rest of this guide refers to them collectively as *Tourist*. You don’t need to memorize the formulas; what matters is grouping by price tier.

Two further wrinkles affect unidentified items. About a quarter of unID’d items carry an extra $\times 4/3$ buy surcharge, rolled independently for each item when it’s created. Two stacks of the same scroll in one shop can have different prices, but each stack’s surcharge follows it for life: once you’ve paid the surcharged price on a particular scroll, the next shop you take it to charges the same. And about a quarter of shopkeepers are “unfamiliar” with unID’d merchandise and offer only 3/4 of normal on sell, fixed per shopkeeper, so once you’ve tested one unID item you know the rule for all unID sales at that shop. Either wrinkle can shift a quoted price into an adjacent tier, so when in doubt check the surrounding tiers too.

Angry. A shopkeeper you’ve previously angered (fired a wand from a doorway, attacked them, picked up an unpaid item while broke) and then made amends (paid the bill, fled and let them calm down) becomes peaceful again but keeps a permanent +33% buy surcharge on every item. Paying the bill clears the bill but not the surcharge; that flag sticks for the rest of your visits to that shopkeeper. Sell prices are unaffected.

The price tables for each item class follow. These are your field reference for shopping trips.



The identification flowchart: cheapest method first, scroll of identify last.

Quoted-price conversion

Each row shows the price you'd transact for the listed base prices.

Buy rows are the Charisma bands (the price you'd be *quoted* to buy). A bare band (like 11-15) is the baseline; 11-15^T is Cha 11-15 with one $\times 4/3$ surcharge applied; 11-15^{T2} is two surcharges stacked. Surcharges come from three sources: a Tourist markup (low-XL Tourist, dunce cap, or visible undershirt), an angry shopkeeper, or the random unidentified-item surcharge that fires on about 1 item in 4 (deterministic per object; two of the same appearance disagreeing is the giveaway).

Sell rows at the bottom show what an unangry shopkeeper *offers* for a sale. Sell prices ignore Charisma. *S* is the baseline $\frac{1}{2}$ of base. *S^T* is the same sucker condition (dunce cap, low-XL Tourist, visible undershirt). On the sell side it cuts your offer to $\frac{1}{3}$ instead of $\frac{1}{2}$. *S^P* is a pennypinching shopkeeper (1 in 4) who shaves $\frac{1}{4}$ off unidentified items; unlike the buy-side unid surcharge, this is per-shopkeeper, not per-item: the same pennypinching shop applies it to every unidentified item you bring in. *S^{TP}* stacks both.

Charisma / Markups	Mult	20	50	60	80	100	150	175	200	300	500
6-7 ^{T2}	$\times 2.67$	53	133	160	213	267	400	467	533	800	1333
8-10 ^{T2}	$\times 2.37$	47	119	142	190	237	356	415	474	711	1185
6-7 ^T	$\times 2.0$	40	100	120	160	200	300	350	400	600	1000
8-10 ^T , 11-15 ^{T2}	$\times 1.78$	36	89	107	142	178	267	311	356	533	889
6-7	$\times 1.5$	30	75	90	120	150	225	263	300	450	750
8-10, 11-15 ^T , 16-17 ^{T2}	$\times 1.33$	27	67	80	107	133	200	233	267	400	667
18 ^{T2}	$\times 1.19$	24	59	71	95	119	178	207	237	356	593
11-15, 16-17 ^T	$\times 1.00$	20	50	60	80	100	150	175	200	300	500
18 ^T , 19+ ^{T2}	$\times 0.89$	18	44	53	71	89	133	156	178	267	444
16-17	$\times 0.75$	15	38	45	60	75	113	131	150	225	375
18, 19+ ^T	$\times 0.67$	13	33	40	53	67	100	117	133	200	333
19+, S	$\times 0.5$	10	25	30	40	50	75	88	100	150	250
S ^P	$\times 0.375$	8	19	23	30	38	56	66	75	113	188
S ^T	$\times 0.333$	7	17	20	27	33	50	58	67	100	167
S ^{TP}	$\times 0.25$	5	13	15	20	25	38	44	50	75	125

Scroll Prices

Price	Scrolls
20	identify
50	light
60	blank paper, enchant weapon
80	enchant armor, remove curse
100	confuse monster, destroy armor, fire, food detection, gold detection, magic mapping, scare monster, teleportation
200	amnesia, create monster, earth, taming
300	charging, genocide, punishment, stinking cloud

The \$100 group is crowded, which makes scroll price-ID less precise than other categories. But you can still narrow things down. If a scroll is in the \$20 group, it's identify. Period. That's one of the most useful scrolls in the game and you just found it for free.

A closet tip: a *single* unidentified scroll alone in a one-square closet, behind a door or in a niche, is almost always scroll of teleportation. The dungeon generator hides it there as the level's teleport-trap clue. If you find that closet, you've probably found a free \$100 ID.

Spellbook Prices

Spellbooks price at $100 \times$ the spell's level, which makes reading risk easy to gauge: a \$700 book is level 7 and will probably explode in the hands of anyone who isn't a careful Wizard.

Price	Level	Spellbooks
100	1	confuse monster, detect monsters, flame sphere, force bolt, freeze sphere, healing, jumping, knock, light, protection
200	2	chain lightning, create monster, cure blindness, detect food, drain life, magic missile, slow monster, wizard lock
300	3	cause fear, clairvoyance, cure sickness, detect unseen, extra healing, haste self, identify, remove curse, sleep, stone to flesh
400	4	cone of cold, detect treasure, fireball, invisibility, levitation, restore ability
500	5	charm monster, dig, magic mapping
600	6	create familiar, polymorph, teleport away, turn undead
700	7	cancellation, finger of death

Potion Prices

Price	Potions
20	healing
50	booze, fruit juice, see invisible, sickness
100	confusion, extra healing, hallucination, restore ability, sleeping, water
150	blindness, gain energy, invisibility, monster detection, object detection
200	enlightenment, full healing, levitation, polymorph, speed
250	acid, oil
300	gain ability, gain level, paralysis

Healing sits alone at \$20, uniquely identifiable from the price tag. Water is always the “clear” potion, so if you see “clear potion” you know what it is without even checking the price. The \$50 group is tricky because sickness and see invisible are in there together (one very good, one very bad). The \$200 group is packed with excellent potions.

Ring Prices

Price	Rings
100	adornment, hunger, protection, protection from shape changers, stealth, sustain ability, warning
150	aggravate monster, cold resistance, gain constitution, gain strength, increase accuracy, increase damage, invisibility, poison resistance, see invisible, shock resistance
200	fire resistance, free action, levitation, regeneration, searching, slow digestion, teleportation
300	conflict, polymorph, polymorph control, teleport control

The \$300 group is extremely informative: only four rings live there, and three of them (conflict, polymorph control, teleport control) are among the most powerful in the game.

Wand Prices

Price	Wands
100	light, nothing
150	digging, enlightenment, locking, magic missile, make invisible, opening, probing, secret door detection, slow monster, speed monster, stasis, striking, undead turning
175	cold, fire, lightning, sleep
200	cancellation, create monster, polymorph, teleportation
500	death, wishing

If a wand costs \$500, you are having a very good day.

Amulet Prices

All amulets have a base price of \$150 except the cheap Amulet of Yendor imitations (\$0). Price won't ID them; you'll need other methods.

The Engrave Test (Wands)

The single most useful wand-identification trick costs only one charge and preserves the rest.

Procedure adapted from Kieron Dunbar's "Identifying Wands by Zapping" spoiler, originally posted to RGRN.

1. **BUC-test the wand first.** A cursed wand used to engrave may **explode**. Drop the wand on an aligned altar, hand it to a priest, or otherwise determine its BUC before testing.
2. **Write a short message on the floor with your finger.** Engrave anything in the dust first (command E, then select "-" for fingers, then type a word or two). This matters because a few wands act on the *existing* engraving rather than producing a visible effect on bare floor: polymorph rewrites the message as a random new one, and cancellation, make-invisible, and teleportation each make it "vanish". Without a pre-written message you won't see those behaviors.
3. **Engrave again with the wand.** Use E and select the wand. Observe the result. The Wand Table lists the engrave-test result for each wand; most wands reveal themselves here. A few share results; see Resolving Ambiguous Engrave Results (p. 117).

Don't be afraid of the suspected wand of wishing. Engraving with it grants the wish: if a \$500 candidate prompts you with "*For what do you wish?*", take the wish; that is the identification and the reward in one step.

The Sink Test (Rings)

If you find a sink, you can drop a ring down it. Each ring type produces a characteristic message, identifying the ring. See Sinks under Points of Interest for the full message-to-ring table; the short version is that searching and slow digestion come back to you (free identification), and every other ring is consumed.

Use-Testing (The Careful Way)

When you don't have access to a shop or a sink, you can sometimes figure out what an item is by using it carefully. Here's the approach for each category:

Potions. The safest test is to throw a potion at a monster and observe the effect. Throwing avoids the risk of drinking something lethal. If a potion heals the monster, it's some kind of healing potion. If the monster speeds up, it's speed. If the monster becomes invisible, well, you've learned something (and now have an invisible monster to deal with).

You can also dip items into potions. Dipping a stack of poisonable ammunition (arrows, crossbow bolts, darts, shuriken, or sling stones) into a potion of sickness will poison it, confirming the potion's identity (it won't poison a sword or any non-missile weapon). Dipping a unicorn horn into a potion of **confusion**, **hallucination**, or **blindness** turns it into water; dipping into a potion of **sickness** turns it into fruit juice.

Testing a \$200 potion. The \$200 group (enlightenment, full healing, levitation, polymorph, speed) has the best payouts but two hidden traps. Quaff levitation and you're stuck off the floor for a few hundred turns. Quaff polymorph and you may turn into a form that destroys or sheds your body armor. Strip down to a shirt before you test, and quaff somewhere nothing is hunting you.

Scrolls. Reading is risky. Some scrolls (destroy armor, amnesia, punishment) are outright harmful. The safest approach is to price-ID first, then read scrolls from safe price groups. If you must test blind: take off your armor before reading a scroll that might be destroy armor. Read from a position where teleportation won't be disastrous.

Confused reading produces different effects for many scrolls and is sometimes useful. A confused scroll of remove curse **randomizes the BUC of your uncursed items** (about a quarter end up blessed, a quarter end up cursed, and half stay uncursed) and leaves already-cursed items cursed. A non-blessed confused scroll only touches your worn and wielded gear (plus loadstones and active leashes); a blessed confused scroll touches your whole inventory. So it's a way to get a few cheap blessings on worn items, not a curse-removal tool. Don't read it confused if you need to uncurse something.

Rings. First, confirm the ring is not cursed (altar or pet test). Then put it on. Many rings produce an immediate message or visible effect: you start levitating, you become invisible, you feel stronger. If nothing obvious happens, check your stats and inventory for subtle changes (protection, searching). Take it off quickly if you feel hungry faster than normal (hunger ring) or if monsters seem newly aggressive (aggravate monster).

Amulets. Most amulets are safe to wear briefly. Put it on, wait a few turns, take it off. The dangerous ones (strangulation, restful sleep) are usually cursed, so check BUC first. An

amulet of ESP reveals itself if you go blind while wearing it (you'll see monsters as brain-shapes). Amulet of reflection is trickier to detect, but you'll notice it when a ray bounces off you.

Armor. Magical armor reveals itself when worn: speed boots make you faster, a cloak of invisibility makes you invisible. But trying on unknown armor in a shop is dangerous: if it's cursed it welds itself on, you can't drop it, and the shopkeeper still expects payment. Worse, the auto-cursed types (fumble boots, levitation boots, gauntlets of fumbling, helm of opposite alignment) masquerade as the desirable ones. **Verify BUC before wearing unknown armor in a shop.** Without an altar, your options are the pet-step test, Priest intrinsic BUC sense, or a scroll of identify from your own inventory.

Each type of special armor has a **randomized appearance**, so the same "snow boots" that were safe levitation in your last game might be jumping or fumble boots this time. The four shuffled pools are:

- 4 magical **helms** share 4 appearances: plumed / etched / crested / visored helmet → one of helmet, helm of caution, helm of opposite alignment, helm of telepathy. (Helm of brilliance is always "crystal helmet"; dunce cap and cornuthaum both look like "conical hat"; that pair *is* a fixed pun.)
- 4 magical **cloaks** share 4 appearances: tattered cape / opera cloak / ornamental cope / piece of cloth → one of cloak of protection, invisibility, magic resistance, or displacement.
- 4 **gloves** share 4 appearances: old / padded / riding / fencing gloves → leather gloves or one of the three gauntlet types (fumbling, power, dexterity).
- 7 magical **boots** share 7 appearances: combat / jungle / hiking / mud / buckled / riding / snow boots → one of speed, water walking, jumping, elven, kicking, fumble, or levitation boots.

The good news: prices *don't* shuffle, and prices within each pool fall into informative tiers.

Armor Prices

Price	Type	Possibilities
8	Boots	elven (stealth), kicking
30	Boots	fumble, levitation (both commonly cursed!)
50	Boots	speed, water walking, jumping (all desirable)
8	Gloves	leather gloves (only)
50	Gloves	gauntlets of fumbling, power, or dexterity
50	Cloaks	cloak of protection or displacement
60	Cloaks	cloak of invisibility or magic resistance

A \$30 boot is the warning sign: both candidates are common auto-curse items and putting them on without BUC-checking can ruin a run. A \$50 boot is almost always one you want. A \$60 cloak is one of two excellent cloaks, but you still need BUC and a free body before wearing. \$8 boots and \$50 gauntlets are the cases where you can't tell stealth-from-kicking or fumbling-from-power by price alone. Try them on (BUC-checked) and watch for the messages.

Gray Stones: Four Stones, One Correct Answer

Gray stones deserve their own section because they look identical but have wildly different value. There are four types:

Price	Stone	Effect
1	flint or loadstone	flint is useless ammunition; loadstone weighs 500 units, usually cursed, and won't drop once carried. Use the kick test (loadstones don't scoot).
45	touchstone	Identifies gems when rubbed. Very useful.
60	luckstone	Preserves luck. Essential.

The problem: all four look like “a gray stone” until identified. Here's how to tell them apart:

The kick test. Kick an unidentified gray stone on the floor. If it scoots away normally, it's not a loadstone. A loadstone is abnormally heavy and resists being kicked. Take off gauntlets of power and kicking boots first, or you may overpower a real loadstone and fool yourself.

The weight-menu test. Drop any junk item onto the gray stone to force a pickup menu the next time you walk over it. The menu shows weight; a loadstone is 500, everything else is 10. The menu test gives a clean read without committing to picking the stone up.

The pick-up test. Loadstones are cursed when they generate, and a cursed loadstone refuses to be dropped at all. The game prints “For some reason, you cannot drop the stone!” and the stone stays in your pack. If you pick up a gray stone and it weighs you down suspiciously, try to drop it. If you can't, you are stuck with a cursed loadstone until you uncurse it (holy water, scroll of remove curse, prayer). Then you can drop it.

The #tip escape. Or, more elegantly: stow the cursed loadstone in any container you carry (a 2z sack is enough), then apply #tip to the container. The contents spill onto your square, loadstone included, because #tip extracts items directly and bypasses the cursed-drop check. Step off and walk away. The trick has worked through every NetHack edition and the 5.0 source still leaves the asymmetry in place.

The price test. If you can reach a shop: a \$60 gray stone is a luckstone. A \$45 gray stone is a touchstone. A \$1 gray stone is flint or a loadstone.

The rub test. Apply (a) a gray stone to a gem in your pack. A touchstone produces a colored-streak message. If the touchstone is **blessed** (or you're an Archeologist or Gnome holding an uncursed one), the streak also identifies the gem. Other gray stones produce similar streak messages, so a streak alone doesn't prove touchstone; an *identification* result does. A cursed touchstone can shatter the gem.

Location clue. The luckstone at the bottom of the Gnomish Mines is guaranteed. If you find a gray stone at Mine's End, it's almost certainly the luckstone. Bless-test it at an altar to confirm (the guaranteed one is always uncursed).

The rule of thumb: if you find a gray stone, don't pick it up until you've tested it. A loadstone can ruin your encumbrance, and if it's cursed, you're stuck with it until you find a way to uncurse. Kick it first. Check BUC second. Then pick it up.

Naming What You've Learned

As you gather clues, use the #name command to track what you know. You can **call** an entire item class by a name you choose. For example, if you've determined that "fizzy potions" are in the \$200 price group, call them "fizzy=\$200" so you don't forget. If you later throw one at a monster and it speeds up, you can rename the class to "speed."

This habit of annotating your discoveries is what separates adventurers who die on level 8 from adventurers who reach the Castle. The dungeon doesn't keep notes for you. You have to do it yourself.

Identification by stacking. When you pick up an item, the game merges it into an existing slot only if the two are *identical*: same type, same enchantment, same BUC, same erodeproofing. So whether a new item stacks with one you already understand leaks information for free. When a merge actually teaches you something the game says so explicitly: "*You learn more about your items by comparing them.*" That message is your cue that the merge propagated a known property (BUC, enchantment, erosion) to the previously unknown side. Two same-appearance items that *don't* merge are a different potion, a different BUC, or one side has been diluted or eroded.

A Practical Strategy

All of these techniques combine into a workflow. Here's what a seasoned traveler does on a typical descent:

At an altar (priority one). Ferry everything you've found to the altar. Drop each item. Sort your pack into blessed, uncursed, and cursed piles. Wield or wear the blessed stuff. Stash or discard the cursed stuff.

At a shop (priority two). Pick up and put down unidentified items to get price quotes. Group them by price. Cross-reference with the tables above. Suddenly half your inventory is narrowed to two or three possibilities.

Engrave-test your wands as soon as you find them. It's fast, it costs only one charge, and it immediately sorts wands into categories. A wand that digs the floor is digging. A wand that drops ice cubes is cold. Simple.

Experiment cautiously with the rest. Wear non-cursed rings one at a time. Throw potions at monsters. Read scrolls from safe price groups after removing your armor.

Save your scrolls of identify for the items that resist other methods, in roughly this order: **spellbooks first** (reading an unknown high-level book is the most lethal mistake on the identification table), **amulets** next (all the same price), then the resistance/utility rings in the \$200 group, then any wands that engrave-tested ambiguously.

The system is about reducing uncertainty with the cheapest, safest method first: altars and shops are free, engrave-testing costs one charge, use-testing costs more and carries risk, and scrolls of identify are the precious last resort.



Provisions and Dining

Of all the things that kill adventurers in the Mazes of Menace (the dragons, the liches, the cockatrices, the inexplicable decision to kick a sink), none is quite as embarrassing as starving to death while carrying forty thousand gold pieces. Hunger is the dungeon's most persistent clock: every turn you spend costs nutrition, and when the tank hits empty, you faint. Faint a few times without eating and you die. It is, in the grand tradition of roguelikes, completely your fault.

How Hunger Works

Your nutrition starts at 900 and ticks down steadily. The rate depends on what you're doing:

- **Base consumption** costs 1 point per turn (less while sleeping).
- **Regeneration** (from a ring or intrinsic) costs extra on odd turns.
- **Encumbrance** costs extra on odd turns if you're **stressed** or worse (burdened alone is free).
- **Rings** cause additional hunger while worn. Two rings drain faster.

When nutrition drops below certain thresholds, you get warnings:

Nutrition	Status	Effect
above 1000	Satiated	Overfull. Eating more risks choking.
151–1000	Normal	Fine.
51–150	Hungry	Warning message. Time to eat.
1–50	Weak	Strength penalty (-1 Str). Pray if possible.
0 or below	Fainting	Collapse randomly. Eat NOW or die.

Eat when you get the “Hungry” message; don't wait for “Weak.” If you hit Fainting and have no food, pray to your god (see Divine Relations); a willing god cures hunger.

What to Eat

Eat the things you kill. The single most important food fact for new players: unless you're playing a vegetarian role (Monk, or any role pursuing a vegan/vegetarian conduct), the bulk of your nutrition comes from **monster corpses you leave on the floor**. Every fresh kill is a meal. Don't burn food rations while there's a freshly dead rat at your feet. A few rules:

- Eat corpses within 30 to 50 turns of the kill. Past that they risk being tainted, which means food poisoning (lethal without treatment).
- Never eat old corpses. If in doubt, don't eat it.
- Some corpses grant intrinsic resistances (poison resistance from killer bees, fire resistance from fire giants, etc.). Eat these deliberately, even when you are not hungry. See the table below.
- Some corpses are harmful (cockatrice corpses petrify you, green slimes turn you into slime, kobold meat is poisonous). Know which corpses are safe before eating.

Food rations (or **gunyoki**, for Samurai) are the emergency backup. 800 nutrition, weight 20, common in shops. Carry two or three for the times you don't have a fresh kill in front of you. You don't need to hoard them.

Lembas wafers are the gold standard: 800 nutrition at only 5 weight, the best ratio in the game. Elven characters find these more often.

Tripe rations are terrible for you (your character retches) but pets love them. Save tripe for your pet.

Tins are preserved food that never spoils, but they are also a *trap if you're sloppy about where you open them*. Opening a tin is an occupation: you cannot act while you work, and a monster can wander up and attack you mid-open. A tin opener finishes in zero or one turn, a dagger in three, an axe in six, and bare hands in as many as fifty turns of helpless effort. Don't pop a tin in a corridor next to a sleeping room. Blessed tins are the one exception: they open in zero or one turn no matter the tool (instantly with a blessed tin opener). A tin of spinach increases your Strength.

Vegetarian characters have to live on rations, lembas, fruits, and the small set of non-meat corpses (fungi, molds, lichens, jellies, plus eggs). **Vegans** lose the eggs, so they're stricter still: rations, lembas, fruits, and plant corpses only. Plan ahead. The corpse-pile strategy doesn't work for either, so rations and fruit are the budget items to hoard.

Dangerous Foods

Cockatrice corpse: instant death by stoning. Never eat this.

Acidic corpses (acid blob, etc.): damage unless acid resistant.

Poisonous corpses: damage and stat drain unless poison resistant.

Rotten corpses: food poisoning. Pray immediately if affected.

Cannibalism (eating your own race): costs 2 to 5 luck and gives the aggravate monster intrinsic. Cavemen and orcs are exempt.

Useful Corpse Effects

Eating for intrinsics is the highest-leverage habit in the early and mid game. Each resistance is a *chance* per eat, not a guarantee, so eat *every* one of these you find, not just the first. Two tables follow: meat corpses and vegetarian-safe corpses, each ordered roughly by when you'll first meet the creature on a typical descent.

Meat corpses:

Corpse	Effect
Newt	May restore 1 to 3 mana
Cave spider, centipede, killer bee	Poison resistance
Lizard	Cures stoning in progress
Floating eye	Telepathy. (Great to eat.)
Fire ant	Fire resistance
Wraith	Gain an experience level
Yeti	Cold resistance
Tengu	Teleportitis / teleport control
Giant (any)	Increase strength
Winter wolf	Cold resistance
Stalker	Invisibility (and see invisible)
Black pudding (glob)	Cold, shock, and poison resistance
Fire giant	Fire resistance + Strength
Disenchanter	STRIPS a random intrinsic. Never eat.

Vegetarian-safe corpses (those marked † are also vegan):

Corpse	Effect
Acid blob †	Acid and stoning resistance
Yellow mold †	Poison resistance

Brown mold †	Cold and poison resistance
Red mold †	Fire and poison resistance
Quivering blob †	Poison resistance
Gray ooze (glob)	Fire, cold, and poison resistance
Blue jelly †	Cold and poison resistance
Brown pudding (glob)	Cold, shock, and poison resistance
Gelatinous cube †	Fire, cold, shock, and sleep resistance

A gelatinous cube is the highest-density source of ascension-kit intrinsic in the game; poison resistance off any of the early corpses is the most important single intrinsic to bank.

Sprig of wolfsbane. Not a corpse but the same shelf. Eating one cures lycanthropy outright. If you're heading anywhere were-things roam (the Mines, the Quest for some roles), carry a sprig or two. It weighs almost nothing.

Eat the puddings, cubes, molds, and blobs. They look like inedible terrain, but every one of them yields an intrinsic when eaten. Puddings and acid blobs leave **globs** rather than corpses (a 5.0 food-handling detail that doesn't change the strategy), and the globs of one color stack and shrink slowly, so a pile of brown-pudding globs is a re-rollable chance at shock resistance.

Food Strategy

1. Eat fresh corpses as your primary food source.
2. Save food rations and lembas wafers for emergencies.
3. Eat intrinsic-granting corpses deliberately (even if not hungry).
4. Pray when Weak or Fainting if you have nothing to eat.
5. Buy food from shops when you can afford it.
6. Don't carry more food than you need. It's heavy.



The Apothecary

The dungeon is full of mysterious bottles. Ruby liquids, milky fluids, smoky concoctions: each one a small gamble between salvation and catastrophe. The colors are shuffled every game, so the “bubbly potion” that healed you last time might polymorph you this time. Identification is everything.

The Potion Table

As with all randomized items, price is your best friend. A shop visit narrows a mysterious bottle from “could be anything” to a short list of candidates:

Price	Potions
20	healing
50	booze, fruit juice, see invisible, sickness
100	confusion, extra healing, hallucination, restore ability, sleeping, water
150	blindness, gain energy, invisibility, monster detection, object detection
200	enlightenment, full healing, levitation, polymorph, speed
250	acid, oil
300	gain ability, gain level, paralysis

Water is the oddity in the \$100 group: it always appears as “clear potion,” identifiable on sight. Don’t underestimate it; water is the raw material for holy water, which is the foundation of everything.

Key Potions

Healing, extra healing, full healing. The healing chain, and your lifeline in combat. Extra healing is the workhorse: it always cures blindness and (non-cursed) also cures sickness in addition to restoring HP. Non-cursed extra and full healing raise your maximum HP if the heal would otherwise overflow; blessed versions give the biggest boost. You can never have too many of these.

Gain ability. When blessed, raises *all* your stats by 1. Uncursed raises a random stat. This is liquid gold: save every one until you can bless it.

Speed. One non-cursed quaff and you're permanently faster for the rest of the game; blessing only stretches the temporary timer that overlays the intrinsic. Speed is arguably the single most important buff in NetHack; the difference between moving at normal speed and fast speed is the difference between trading blows and hitting twice before they swing once. In 5.0, the wand of speed monster no longer grants permanent speed when self-zapped, only a temporary burst of 50–74 turns. The potion is the real prize.

Holy water. Not a potion you find: a potion you *make*. Drop uncursed water on a co-aligned altar, pray, and the gods bless it for you (pile every water you own on the same square and a single prayer blesses the whole stack). Holy water then blesses any item you dip into it. A holy water can even bless *more water* by dipping into it. Keep one to make more.

Gain level. Raises your experience level by 1. Useful for reaching quest eligibility quickly, or converting into something better through alchemy.

Identifying a polymorph potion. A clean test: dip a single arrow or dart into an unknown potion. If the arrow turns into a different item, the potion was polymorph and identifies itself. You spend one arrow and one potion; you save the gamble of quaffing it.

Alchemy

Here's where potions get interesting. Dip one potion into another and you might create something better, or you might cause an explosion. Most combinations are duds, but the useful recipes are worth memorizing:

Dip this	Into this	Result
Healing	Gain energy/level	Extra healing
Extra healing	Gain energy/level	Full healing
Full healing	Gain energy/level	Gain ability
Fruit juice	Gain energy/level	See invisible
Speed	Healing	Extra healing
Booze	Gain energy/level	Hallucination
Levitation	Enlightenment	Gain level (2/3)

The chain from healing → extra healing → full healing → gain ability via gain energy or gain level is the core alchemy sequence, and it's extraordinarily powerful. A handful of common healing potions and a gain energy or two can be transmuted into the rarest potions in the game. Treat every gain energy potion like the catalyst it is.

A side-loop worth knowing: **Levitation + Enlightenment → Gain level (2/3 chance, or nothing 1/3)**. Both inputs are reasonably common and individually low-value, but the output is one of the catalysts that feeds the main healing chain. If you find a stack of each,

this is a way to manufacture gain-level potions rather than wait for the dungeon to drop them.

A note on the current state of dungeon chemistry. The old alchemy trick (dilute a large stack of potions by dipping them in water, then convert the whole diluted stack at once) no longer works. Current editions cap diluted dips at two potions per operation. The chain from healing up to gain ability is still there; you just do it in small batches with undiluted inputs. Think of it as artisanal alchemy rather than industrial production.

Alchemy carries an explosion risk: roughly 10% on any non-water combination. An alchemy smock (if you find one) reduces this to about 1 in 30, which is the difference between “risky hobby” and “acceptable profession.” Do your chemistry in an isolated room, away from your stash, and never dip a cursed potion into another. The dipping potion (not the one it goes into) is the one the game tests for explosion, and a cursed dip detonates every time. The dungeon is consistent about this if nothing else.

Unicorn Horn Interactions

A unicorn horn dipped into certain potions purifies them:

- **Blindness, confusion, hallucination** → uncursed water
- **Sickness** → fruit juice

This turns dangerous potions into useful raw materials. The water can be blessed into holy water; the fruit juice can be alchemized into see invisible. Nothing is wasted in a well-run dungeon pharmacy.



The Scroll Rack

Scrolls are the dungeon's single-use spells: read once, triggered, gone. They appear with absurd randomized labels (“ZELGO MER,” “DAIYEN FOOELS,” “PRATYAVAYAH”) that stay consistent within a game but mean nothing until you identify them. The labels are part of the charm. You'll develop superstitious favorites.

The Scroll Table

Price-identification is especially powerful for scrolls, because the cheapest scroll (base 20) is always identify, the one you need most:

Price	Scrolls
20	identify
50	light
60	blank paper, enchant weapon
80	enchant armor, remove curse
100	confuse monster, destroy armor, fire, food detection, gold detection, magic mapping, scare monster, teleportation
200	amnesia, create monster, earth, taming
300	charging, genocide, punishment, stinking cloud

The \$60 group is treasure (enchant weapon lurks there alongside innocent blank paper). The \$80 group is equally good: enchant armor and remove curse, two scrolls you'll always want more of. The \$100 group is the danger zone, a grab-bag mixing magic mapping and teleportation with destroy armor. At \$300, you'll find both genocide (the nuclear option) and punishment (a ball and chain attached to your ankle). Choose wisely.

Key Scrolls

Identify. The bread and butter of dungeon life. The scroll only inspects your **main inventory**: items inside a bag or sitting on the floor are invisible to it. Pull everything out of your bag, pick up nearby unknowns, and consolidate them in your pack before reading. Blessed identify with positive Luck names at least two items, and on a 1-in-5 roll it names your whole inventory at once. You will never have enough of these.

Enchant weapon / enchant armor. The path to endgame power. Uncursed enchant *weapon* raises by +1. Blessed raises by up to 3, less the more the weapon is already enchanted (no more than +1 once the weapon is +6 or higher). And there's a catch: at +6 or higher, each read has a 2/3 chance of destroying the weapon outright. **Safe ceiling: +5.** Enchant *armor* raises by a small random amount that's larger when armor is unenchanted, larger again for elven or non-magic armor, and +1 extra when blessed. Once worn armor exceeds +3 (or +5 for elven / Wizard's Cornuthaum), each further enchant attempt can destroy the armor; the scroll "evaporates" your gear. Blessed scrolls don't bypass this cap.

Remove curse. Frees you from cursed equipment. Uncursed version works on worn and wielded items only; blessed version uncurses your entire inventory. Every adventurer has a "put on a cursed ring" story. This scroll is the happy ending.

Charging. Recharges wands and rechargeable tools. Save these for your wand of wishing: one charge means one more wish. Blessed charging restores more charges. Each recharge has an $n^3/7^3$ chance of the wand exploding (where n is the count of previous recharges): 0% on first, 0.3% on second, 2% on third, 8% on fourth, 19% on fifth, 36% on sixth, 63% on seventh, and on the eighth, always. Wand of wishing is the exception: it explodes 100% of the time on the second recharge, so recharge it exactly once and no more.

Genocide. The nuclear option. Uncursed eliminates a single species; blessed wipes an entire monster class from the game forever. Liches (L) are the canonical blessed target. **Never blessed-genocide a class that contains your own race or role.** Dwarves are h, Gnomes are G, Elves and Humans are @, Orcs are o; a blessed scroll targeting one of those ends the game with "killed by a scroll of genocide". (That makes the popular "wipe mind flayers" pick a Dwarf trap, since mind flayers are also h.) Read one while confused and you genocide your own role's species the same way. Read carefully.

Reverse genocide. A cursed scroll of genocide doesn't remove its target; it spawns 4 to 6 of the named species at your feet. The named species must be one that can ordinarily be created. Naming wraiths gives you a corpse pile for level recovery; naming mind flayers buys an Int-fed feast if you're polymorphed into one; naming an easy-to-tame creature gives you instant pet candidates. Don't try unique monsters (the gods refuse).

Magic mapping. Reveals the entire level layout; blessed also shows secret doors. Invaluable in Gehennom's maddening mazes, where mapping by hand could take a lifetime you don't have.

Scare monster. The trick: don't read it. Drop it on the floor and stand on it. It works like a permanent Elbereth, frightening most monsters away. The first time you pick up an uncursed scroll, it survives but gets "stamped"; the next pickup ends with "*The scroll turns to dust as you pick it up,*" and the scroll is gone. A cursed scroll dusts on the first pickup. Drop where you want the safe spot, not where you will need to relocate.

Teleportation. Uncursed teleports you randomly on the level. Cursed or confused reading sends you to a random dungeon level. With teleport control, *you* choose where you land. The game's most flexible escape hatch.

Stinking cloud. Reading places a poison-gas fog at any square you can see (about fifteen squares of coverage uncursed, twenty-five if blessed) that blinds anything inside and deals roughly 6–13 HP per turn to anything not poison-resistant. A clean way to clear a throne room or the Wizard's Tower from a safe corridor, as long as *you* are poison-resistant or unbreathing: the gas doesn't pick sides. Kills inside the cloud still count as yours for XP and alignment.

Confused Reading

Here's a trick the dungeon doesn't advertise: many scrolls do something completely different when read while confused. Some of these alternate effects are *better* than the normal ones:

Confused destroy armor, *if cursed*, doesn't destroy anything: it erodeproofs a piece of armor. (Uncursed or blessed strips erodeproofing instead.) One of the best tricks in the game.

Confused enchant armor / enchant weapon, *if uncursed or blessed*, erodeproofs the item instead of enchanting. Useful when you need protection from rust more than another +1.

Confused remove curse has a 25% chance of blessing *or* cursing each uncursed item. Risky, but it's a clever way to create holy water if you confuse-read while carrying uncursed potions of water.

Confused taming widens the scroll's reach from a 3×3 area around you to 11×11. The trick is scroll-only; confused charm monster just fizzles.

Confused teleportation sends you to a random *dungeon level* instead of a random spot on this floor. Useful as a panic button, dangerous if you're shallow and want to keep exploring.

Confused gold detection detects every trap on this level instead of gold. Far faster than searching tile by tile.

Confused charging restores Pw, and if you're already at full, *raises your max Pw* by 4–16 (6–24 blessed). A spellcaster's permanent buff if you can spare the scroll. Cursed reading zeroes your Pw instead.

The cleanest way to confuse yourself on purpose is a **potion of confusion**: drink one and the timer runs about 25–80 turns. A non-blessed **potion of booze** (Samurai: **sake**) will also confuse you for a few turns.

Wands and Staves

Wands are reusable magical items that produce directed effects when zapped. They come in three types: **ray wands** fire a beam in a direction that bounces off walls, **beam wands** affect what they hit in a straight line, and **non-directional wands** affect the area around you.

The Wand Table

Unlike scroll and potion prices, wand prices alone rarely pin down a specific wand. A \$150 wand is one of thirteen possibilities. The **engrave-test result** in the rightmost column is far more useful: most wands reveal themselves in one zap. See *The Engrave Test (Wands)* (p. 98) for the procedure and *Resolving Ambiguous Engrave Results* for the few shared results.

Price	Wand	Type	Max Charges	Engrave-test result
100	Light	NODIR	15	room lights up
100	Nothing	BEAM	15	no message
150	Digging	RAY	8	gravel flies up
150	Enlightenment	NODIR	15	you feel enlightened
150	Magic missile	RAY	8	bullet holes
150	Make invisible	BEAM	8	engraving vanishes ¹
150	Opening	BEAM	8	no message
150	Probing	BEAM	8	no message
150	Secret door detection	NODIR	15	doors revealed
150	Slow monster	BEAM	8	bugs slow down
150	Speed monster	BEAM	8	bugs speed up
150	Stasis	NODIR	15	no message
150	Striking	BEAM	8	wand fights you
150	Undead turning	BEAM	8	no message
150	Locking	BEAM	8	no message
175	Cold	RAY	8	ice cubes drop
175	Fire	RAY	8	flames fly
175	Lightning	RAY	8	lightning arcs
175	Sleep	RAY	8	bugs stop moving ²
200	Cancellation	BEAM	8	engraving vanishes ¹
200	Create monster	NODIR	15	bugs appear

200	Polymorph	BEAM	8	engraving rewrites
200	Teleportation	BEAM	8	engraving vanishes ¹
500	Death	RAY	8	bugs stop moving ²
500	Wishing	NODIR	3	prompts for a wish

¹ Shared by cancellation, make-invisible, and teleportation. ² Shared by sleep and death.

Key Wands

Wishing. The most valuable item in the game. Each zap grants one wish. In 5.0, wands of wishing generate with only **1 charge** and can be recharged once (and only once) to a maximum of 1 additional charge. This means the Castle wand of wishing typically yields 2 wishes plus a possible wrested third, a significant reduction from older versions where it could provide 5 to 7. Plan your wishes carefully before you find one.

Death. Fires a death ray that instantly kills most things it hits. Reflected by reflection. Blocked by magic resistance. One of the best offensive tools in the late game.

Digging. Essential utility. Dig through walls to create shortcuts, dig down to escape dangerous situations, dig through rock to reach vaults and hidden areas. Every ascension kit should include a wand of digging. It also doubles as the universal “I’m leaving” button: a downward zap drops you straight onto the next floor, the same direction you wanted to go anyway. One quirk: a *curse*d wand of digging zaps downward no matter which direction you point it.

Teleportation. Zap monsters to send them somewhere else on the level. Zap yourself to teleport. Enormously useful for escaping trouble or removing a dangerous monster from your path.

Fire, cold, lightning. Offensive ray wands that bounce off walls. Fire burns scrolls and spellbooks on the floor. Cold freezes water (useful for creating paths). Lightning blinds monsters.

Cancellation. Removes special properties from items and monsters. A cancelled monster loses most of its special attacks: a cancelled cockatrice can’t petrify, a cancelled mind flayer can’t suck brains, and a cancelled clay golem dissolves on the spot. Do NOT put this wand in a bag of holding (it will explode the bag). Pointed at a pile of unidentified scrolls and potions, it converts them into blank scrolls and water, which feed the magic-marker and holy-water production lines. Keep it separate in your main inventory.

Polymorph. Transforms monsters into random other monsters and items into random other items of the same class. Can be used creatively (polymorph a pile of junk armor hoping

for dragon scale mail, polymorph a weak monster hoping for a useful corpse). Risky but powerful.

Make invisible. Turns a target (or yourself, if you zap it reflexively) invisible for 31–45 turns. Useful for slipping through a dangerous area or turning a fight in your favor. For lasting invisibility, use a ring of invisibility or a cloak of invisibility.

Stasis. A new 5.0 wand that freezes every monster on the level for **10–30 turns**. No ray, no aim, no message. Just a hush. Use it when you’re surrounded and need a free moment to engrave Elbereth, drink a potion, change weapons, or just walk past. The silence on engraving makes it harder to identify by the engrave test, but if you sit on a charge for a fight you’ll know.

Probing. A diagnostic wand: zap at a monster to learn its HP, max HP, level, and *what it’s carrying*. Useful on shopkeepers, soldiers, and named adventurers whose inventory might be worth the trouble. A stethoscope reports HP and status but not gear; if you want to know what’s in the pack, probing is the tool.

Resolving Ambiguous Engrave Results

A few engrave-test results are shared by more than one wand.

“**The engraving vanishes!**” belongs to **cancellation**, **make-invisible**, or **teleportation**. Drop a known item and zap each candidate: make-invisible hides it, teleportation sends it elsewhere on the level, cancellation dulls its magic.

“**The bugs on the floor stop moving!**” belongs to **sleep** or **death**. Death is the only \$500 ray wand.

No engrave message at all narrows to one of six: **nothing**, **opening**, **locking**, **probing**, **undead turning**, or **stasis**. Test each at a safe target:

- **Opening** unlocks a chest or door. **Locking** locks one.
- **Probing** reveals a nearby monster’s stats.
- **Undead turning** revives a fresh corpse to its original species (and animates any corpses the target was carrying).
- **Stasis** halts every monster on the level. The silent freeze is unmistakable mid-combat.
- **Nothing** does nothing.

For non-ambiguous wands, a follow-up zap at a safe target confirms what the engrave-test already suggested: **slow monster** / **speed monster** at a tame or weak monster, **striking** at a closed door, **polymorph** at a pile of junk gear. Avoid zapping unidentified wands at yourself.

Recharging

Wands can be recharged with a scroll of charging. The most prized use is on a wand of wishing, where one recharge safely turns a single wish into two. Each successive recharge raises the risk of the wand exploding. The formula is (recharges cubed) / 343, so:

- First recharge: 0.3% explosion chance.
- Second: 2.3%.
- Third: 7.9%.
- Seventh: 100%.

Use blessed charging for the best results, except on a wand of wishing, which follows its own rules. A fresh wand of wishing is always generated with **exactly one** charge. A scroll of charging adds **one more** wish whether blessed or uncursed; blessing doesn't help here, and a cursed scroll strips the wand to zero like any other. You can recharge once safely; a second attempt is a **guaranteed explosion**. So the lifetime cap on a single wand of wishing is two wishes reliably, or three if you successfully wrest the final charge at the end.

Rings are chargeable too, but with a practical ceiling. The explosion chance scales with the ring's current enchantment: roughly 1/7 per point. A +0 or +1 ring of protection is virtually free to charge; a +3 ring explodes about 43% of the time; +7 is a guaranteed bang. The popular cap is around +5.

Wresting

When a wand has 0 charges, you can still try to zap it. There is a 1/121 chance of "wresting" one final charge from the wand before it turns to dust. This is a last resort, but it works on wands of wishing too.

Polymorph as a Tool

Self-polymorph is one of the most interesting tools in the game. A wand of polymorph zapped at yourself, a potion of polymorph, the polymorph self spell, or stepping on a poly-trap all do the same thing: roll a new form for you. With **polymorph control** (the ring or intrinsic) the game lets you *choose* the form, which is where the real fun begins.

- **Travel where your legs can't.** A xorn phases through walls. An eel breathes underwater. A vampire becomes a bat or a fog cloud and slips under doors. A floating eye drifts past traps you can't disarm.

- **Bring your own resistances and attacks.** A red dragon form gives you fire breath. A brown mold form burns anything that hits you in melee. A purple worm swallows your problems whole. Most monster powers are yours when you wear their shape.
- **Grow a bigger body.** A stronger form rolls a new max HP and your current HP scales with the ratio. A dying Wizard at 50/100 wakes up at 200/400 as a fresh titan.
- **Escape cursed body armor.** A *bigger* form breaks out and destroys the suit. A *smaller* form drops it intact into your inventory, where you can holy-water it back to neutral.
- **Eat what you can't.** A metallivore form eats iron bars. A green dragon shrugs off poisonous corpses.

Caveat: cursed polymorph items strip control, and rough transformations can hit you with system shock. Don't be at 5 HP when you reach for the wand.

A wand of polymorph zapped at a *pile* of junk items reshuffles each one into a random item of the same class. This trick is called “polypiling,” because it can turn a pile of dross into a selection of stuff you need. Drop the fodder on a square far from your real pack: a misaimed zap that catches your bag of holding rolls the bag too. Max your Luck first. When polypile fails, one of the zapped items can turn into a hostile golem made from its material, and every point of Luck lowers the chance of that going wrong.



Rings and Amulets

You can wear two rings (one on each hand) and one amulet (around your neck). These are the most constrained equipment slots in the game, which makes choosing what to wear a genuine strategic decision. Both rings and amulets have randomized appearances, and some of the best items in the game hide behind unassuming descriptions like “granite ring” or “circular amulet.”

The Ring Table

Price	Ring	Notes
100	Adornment	+CHA, chargeable
100	Hunger	Increases hunger (auto-curse)
100	Protection	+AC, chargeable
100	Protection from shape changers	Useful against werebeasts
100	Stealth	Reduces noise
100	Sustain ability	Prevents stat drain
100	Warning	Shows nearby monsters
150	Aggravate monster	Bad (auto-curse)
150	Cold resistance	Resist cold attacks
150	Gain constitution	+CON, chargeable
150	Gain strength	+STR, chargeable
150	Increase accuracy	+hit, chargeable
150	Increase damage	+dmg, chargeable
150	Invisibility	You become invisible
150	Poison resistance	Immune to poison
150	See invisible	See invisible creatures
150	Shock resistance	Resist electric attacks
200	Fire resistance	Resist fire attacks
200	Free action	Immune to paralysis
200	Levitation	Float in the air
200	Regeneration	Heal faster (costs hunger)
200	Searching	Auto-search each turn
200	Slow digestion	Reduces hunger
200	Teleportation	Random teleports (auto-curse)

300	Conflict	Monsters fight each other
300	Polymorph	Random polymorphs (auto-curse)
300	Polymorph control	Choose polymorph form
300	Teleport control	Choose teleport destination

Rings marked “auto-curse” generate cursed 90% of the time. If you slip on a ring and can’t remove it, you’ve just learned what auto-curse means the hard way.

Ring of aggravate monster deserves a footnote in the “niche uses of terrible things” category. In 5.0, wearing it roughly doubles the effective dungeon level for purposes of monster generation, so creatures well above your current depth start appearing. This is obviously catastrophic if you forget you’re wearing it. But for a chaotic player who needs high-difficulty sacrifice fodder for the next artifact gift, deliberately wearing the ring to force harder spawns (then removing it) is a calculated risk with an actual payoff. The key word is “deliberately.” The ring is auto-cursed 90% of the time. If it goes on and won’t come off, the fact that you’re now generating liches on dungeon level 8 is no longer a feature.

The rings that matter most: Free action is arguably the single best ring in the game: paralysis is death in the late game, and this ring makes you immune. Teleport control turns random teleportation from a nuisance into on-demand transportation. Conflict makes monsters attack each other instead of you, which is devastating on crowded levels (though it also turns your pets hostile). Slow digestion lets you go indefinitely between meals.

In 5.0, a blessed potion of polymorph grants you polymorph control for that specific transformation: you choose the form, no ring required. This makes the ring of polymorph control less of a critical acquisition: you no longer need to find it or wish for it just to do a single controlled polymorph. The ring remains useful if you want ongoing control for repeated transformations, but it’s no longer a hard prerequisite for the opening act of any polymorph strategy. Save that wish for something else.

The hidden cost: Every ring you wear increases your hunger rate. Two rings drain food noticeably faster. The veteran habit is to keep rings in inventory and slip them on only when needed: free action before fighting mind flayers, conflict before entering a throne room. Economy of fingers is an art. (One curiosity for the ring-of-slow-digestion holder: the two hands tick hunger on different turns, so wearing two slow-digestion rings doesn’t double the saving, and swapping a hungry ring onto the *other* hand briefly skips the tick entirely.)

Amulets

Amulets are simpler in theory but harder to identify: they all cost \$150, so price is no help. You'll need to wear-test or use a scroll of identify. The stakes are high, because the range runs from "saves your life" to "slowly strangles you to death":

Amulet	Effect
Life saving	Revives you once from death, then crumbles
Reflection	Reflects ray attacks
Magical breathing	Survive underwater and without air
ESP	Detect monsters via telepathy
Unchanging	Prevents involuntary polymorph
Versus poison	Poison resistance
Flying	Grants flight (new in 5.0)
Guarding	+2 AC and +2 MC (new in 5.0)
Strangulation	Slowly kills you (always cursed)
Restful sleep	Puts you to sleep randomly (usually cursed); grants +1 HP/turn regen while asleep

Life saving is the crown jewel. When you die (any kind of death) it triggers, revives you at full HP, and crumbles to dust. Wear it whenever you're going somewhere dangerous. Take it off when you're safe. You only get the one miracle.

Reflection is excellent if you didn't get a shield of reflection from Perseus's statue or elsewhere. Wearing it as an amulet frees up your shield slot for a small shield or two-weapon fighting.

Guarding provides +2 AC and +2 magic cancellation (MC). This is a new addition in 5.0 that neatly solves the MC puzzle: pair it with a cloak of magic resistance (MC1) and you reach MC3, freeing you from needing the less versatile cloak of protection.

Magical breathing prevents drowning, which sounds niche until you reach Medusa's level (surrounded by water) or the Plane of Water (entirely underwater). Then it's existential.

Flying is the late-addition cousin of levitation: you stay in the air the same way, but you can still pick things up and choose to drop down on your turn. The under-appreciated bonus is that **your steed flies with you**. A flying warhorse skips over moats, pools, and the Castle's drawbridge, and crosses Medusa's island edge to edge. Stack with speed boots on the mount for a terrifying cavalry unit.

Restful sleep puts you to sleep randomly and is usually cursed, which should tell you everything you need to know about putting it on unexamined. In 5.0, wearing it while asleep grants +1 HP per turn via accelerated regeneration. In a fully secured room with the door spiked shut, this turns a near-useless item into a slow field hospital.

Tools of the Trade

The (symbol covers the dungeon's most eclectic category: pickaxes, magic lamps, unicorn horns, musical instruments, crystal balls, and bags that eat other bags. Some of the most powerful items in the game hide in this grab-bag.

Containers

Sooner or later every adventurer runs out of carrying capacity. The bag of holding is the dungeon's most coveted answer to the problem, and the other containers below have their places too.

Container	Weight	Special
Sack	15	Basic storage
Oilskin sack	15	Protects contents from water
Bag of holding	15	Reduces weight of contents dramatically
Bag of tricks	15	Creates monsters when opened (not a bag)
Large box	350	Comes with 0 to 3 items (0 to 5 if locked)
Chest	600	Comes with 0 to 5 items (0 to 7 if locked)
Ice box	900	Preserves corpses from rotting

Note the weights. Sacks are 15 (carry one). Boxes and chests are furniture, not luggage: a large box weighs 350, a chest 600, an ice box 900, comparable to your *entire* carrying capacity. Use them as floor stash, not as something to drag from level to level.

The **bag of holding** deserves special mention because it transforms how you play. A blessed bag reduces the weight of everything inside to roughly one quarter, meaning you can carry your entire potion supply, your backup armor, your scroll library, and still have room for loot. Almost every ascending player carries one. Sokoban's prize is a bag of holding half the time; otherwise wish for one when you can.

A warning: **never** put a wand of cancellation, another bag of holding, or a charged bag of tricks inside a bag of holding. The explosion scatters your inventory across the floor.

If you find a *cursed* bag of holding (in a bones pile, perhaps), don't open it. Drop it on the floor and zap a wand of cancellation at it. The explosion rule only fires on insertion, not on a zap, so the bag uncurses safely.

Carrying capacity

Your carrying capacity is roughly $25 \times (\text{Strength} + \text{Constitution}) + 50$, capped at 1000. Average human stats land you near 950; a low-Str spellcaster might start closer to 700. As you load up, the status line walks through these tiers:

Tier	When	Cost
Unencumbered	weight at or below capacity	None
Burdened	up to about 1.5× capacity	Movement –25%; nutrition fine
Stressed	up to about 2× capacity	Movement –50%; extra hunger on odd turns; exercises Str (free upside)
Strained	up to about 2.5× capacity	Movement –75%; extra hunger; combat exerts you (1 HP every 3 attacks); exercises Str but abuses Dex
Overtaxed	up to about 3× capacity	Movement –87.5%; same hunger and exertion; pass out instead of dying; abuses Dex and Con
Overloaded	beyond 3× capacity	You can't pick anything else up

Practical rule: stay **Unencumbered** in normal play, accept **Burdened** during loot runs, and never linger at **Stressed** or worse without a reason. The bag of holding is the standard answer to the encumbrance problem; carrying everything inside one reduces the effective weight to roughly a quarter, which is why veteran players treat finding one as a turning point in the run.

Running out of inventory letters. Weight isn't the only limit. Your inventory has **52 slots** (a–z plus A–Z), and a 53rd item hits “*Your pack is too full.*” Stackable items consolidate into a single slot only when the game can tell they are the same thing. Five identified scrolls of identify share one letter, but identified and unidentified scrolls of the same type stay in separate slots, and weapons of different enchantments do not merge. Clutter is usually an identification problem in disguise: the more you identify, the more your inventory consolidates.

The bag of holding doubles as the answer here too. Items inside any container do not count against your 52, so a stash of twenty potions in a BoH costs you a single letter. The #adjust command lets you swap items between letters, force-merge stacks that didn't merge, or split a stack to a new letter; it is purely relabeling, with no game effect.

One 5.0 hazard that you will need to be aware of: **intelligent monsters can now loot unlocked containers.** They can remove items, carry containers away, and unlock chests with keys. If you've been leaving your secondary stash in an unlocked chest on a partially-cleared level while you scouted ahead, stop. The Castle chest in particular (containing the wand of wishing) can be emptied by the level's residents if you leave them time and opportu-

nity. Clear levels before abandoning valuables, and **keep your most important containers locked**. The dungeon has gotten better at wanting what you have.

Unlocking Tools

The dungeon is full of locked things, and brute force is noisy and slow. A **skeleton key** is the gold standard (70%+ success on doors, 75%+ on boxes). A **lock pick** (Samurai: **osaku**) is respectable. A **credit card** is the worst but still better than kicking. Always carry one of these. The weight is negligible and the utility is constant.

Skeleton keys and lock picks can also **lock** what they can unlock, so they double as your way to relock a chest after stashing loot. Credit cards are unlock-only.

Light Sources

Oil lamps and **candles** light dark corridors, which is pleasant but not essential. The real prize is the **magic lamp**: rub it and there's a 1-in-3 chance the djinni emerges, then a chance it grants you a wish (80% if the lamp is blessed, so ~27% wish per rub overall), less if it isn't. Try again on the same lamp until the djinni shows. Never, ever use a magic lamp for light. That's like using a winning lottery ticket as a bookmark.

The **Candelabrum of Invocation** is a unique candelabra found in Vlad's Tower. It's one of three items needed for the invocation ritual to enter Moloch's Sanctum. You'll need seven candles to fill it, so start hoarding candles when you find them.

Musical Instruments

Music has power in the Mazes. Any tonal instrument (wooden flute, magic flute, tooled horn, frost or fire horn, bugle, or harp) can play the passtune at the Castle drawbridge. You will find the notes nearby, so listen carefully. A **magic harp** (Samurai: **magic koto**) charms monsters into tameness; a wooden harp is just a **koto**. A **magic flute** puts them to sleep. A **drum of earthquake** creates pits around you, which is as chaotic as it sounds.

Non-magical instruments (wooden flute, leather drum) produce noise but no special effects, useful only for confusing the issue.

Other Notable Tools

Tool	Use
Pickaxe / mattock	Dig through walls and floors
Unicorn horn	Cure confusion, blindness, sickness, hallucination, stunning, vomiting, deafness
Stethoscope	Check HP and status of a monster
Tin opener	Open tins in one turn
Tinning kit	Preserve corpses as tins
Can of grease	Coat armor, weapons, bags
Blindfold	Voluntarily go blind (useful for telepathy)
Towel	Wipe cream pie from face, use as blindfold
Magic marker	Write scrolls and spellbooks on blank paper
Crystal ball	Pick a glyph class per gaze (objects, traps, monsters, etc.); each gaze answers one question
Bell of Opening	Invocation item; carried by your quest nemesis, looted from their corpse
Leash	Tie a pet to you so it follows through stairs

The **unicorn horn** is the dungeon's all-purpose first-aid kit. Apply it to cure confusion, blindness, sickness, hallucination, stunning, vomiting, and (new in 5.0) deafness: most of the status ailments that matter. Carry one at all times. If you don't have one, getting one should be near the top of your priority list.

Bless your horn. A blessed horn can fix up to seven ailments in a single application; an uncursed horn maxes out at three, with a 35% chance of doing nothing even when you have troubles to fix. A cursed horn will *inflict* a random ailment from the same list (including the new deafness one), so be sure of bless status before applying. Horns don't get used up, so a non-emergency test apply is free.

A 5.0 caveat: the unicorn horn **no longer restores lost ability scores** the way it used to. Drained Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, and so on now require a *potion of restore ability* (or its spell) to bring back. The horn remains the universal cure for *status* problems, but not for attribute drain. Earlier guides that described it as a complete cure-all are out of date; budget for restore ability separately.

The **magic marker** is a printing press for scrolls (and, more expensively, spellbooks). A fresh marker has 30-99 charges; one non-cursed scroll of charging restores it to at least 50 (more if the scroll is blessed), but only once. The second recharge attempt always fails. Each write costs roughly half to all of the target scroll's basecost: magic mapping 4-7 charges, identify 7-13, enchant weapon / enchant armor / charging 8-15, teleportation 10-19, and **genocide**

15-29. Spellbooks cost about $10 \times$ spell level: a level-3 book averages ~22 charges, a level-7 ~52.

To write a scroll intentionally you must have **identified** it first. Writing by appearance gives a random scroll of that appearance, which is usually wasted charges. If charges run out mid-write, scrolls disappear entirely (paper + charges wasted); a spellbook's paper survives but the writing fades.

The big-ticket writes for an ascension kit are scrolls of **genocide** (three of these wipe the worst monster letters L, &, and h out of the game, though uniquely-named demon lords survive any class genocide; see Genocide (p. 112) for the race-trap warning), **charging** (a blessed one restores one additional wish to an empty wand of wishing for 8-15 charges very well spent, though a second charging attempt always explodes the wand), and **enchant weapon** / **enchant armor** for the +7 ascension kit. A well-used marker can produce a meaningful share of your ascension kit.

The marker also feeds the **wraith feast**: a cursed scroll of genocide on a non-graveyard level summons four to six wraiths at your feet (see Farming wraiths (p. 68)).

The **tinning kit** turns a fresh corpse (apply, then select the corpse) into a tin: 450 nutrition of preserved food that keeps indefinitely. Tin-eating skips the raw-corpse poison and acid damage checks, so a tinned killer bee or acid blob is safe to eat with no resistance, and the intrinsic-grant still applies. The kit doubles as a way to grind poison or acid resistance without taking the per-corpse hits. Don't tin a cockatrice without gloves; you petrify on the spot.

The **pickaxe** and the heavier **dwarvish mattock** dig through most walls and floors. Apply (a) and pick a direction for a sideways tunnel, or apply downward to chip through the floor for the straight-shaft escape that ends many ascension runs. Wand of digging is faster in a straight line but burns charges. Sokoban walls and most of Gehennom are non-diggable. Applied to a statue, a pickaxe also breaks it (dropping any contents, or animating the sculpted monster if it is a statue trap).

The **crystal ball** is a one-question oracle when applied (a): pick a glyph class, point at a square, learn what's there or what's on the level. Beautiful in theory; ruinous in practice if your Intelligence is low. A blessed ball wants Int 16+ to be reliable, and a cursed ball can hallucinate, blind, or simply shatter. Drop it on an altar before the first use.

The **can of grease** is the cheapest hardening upgrade in the dungeon. Applied to worn armor, the slick coat makes the wearer harder to grab and steal from: nymphs slide off, Riders' grab attacks miss, weapon-snatch attempts fail. Applied to a bag of holding, it waterproofs the contents like an oilskin sack. The coat wears off after a few hits, so it's per-fight protection.

The Armory

Weapons and armor are the bread and butter of combat. Your choice of equipment determines how hard you hit, how well you dodge, and what special resistances you carry. This section covers the strategy of choosing equipment; the Weapons Tables and Armor Tables appendices give the full stats for every item.

Armor and AC

Armor Class is what decides how often you get hit, and it's the most important defensive number in the game. Each point you push down means more monster swings whiff past you. AC starts at 10 and drops as you add protection. Lower is better. At AC -10 or below, you're quite difficult to damage with physical attacks; community consensus is that -20 is the practical target for an ascension kit, with diminishing returns past -25 . The **cloak of displacement** should not be underrated: monsters waste attacks on your phantom image, which complements low AC instead of competing with it.

The key armor slots:

Slot	Primary pick	Specialty pick
Body	Splint mail, banded mail	Dragon scale mail (two extrinsics)
Cloak	Cloak of protection	Cloak of magic resistance
Helmet	Helm of caution (early game)	Helm of telepathy / helm of brilliance
Gloves	Gauntlets of power	Gauntlets of dexterity
Boots	Speed boots	Water walking boots, levitation boots
Shield	Shield of reflection	Small shield (for spellcasters)

The **helm of caution** is new in 5.0: it grants *warning*, the same intrinsic the ring provides, in the helmet slot. Warning fills the screen with colored markers indicating nearby threats by danger level (white for the least threat, through red, with magenta for the worst) without you having to see the monsters yet. It is the ideal early-game helm slot: cheap (50 zm), light, and a real edge against ambushes. Late game it competes with helm of brilliance (Wizards) and helm of telepathy (everyone), but the warning bonus stays useful all the way down.

Dragon scale mail is the endgame body armor of choice. **Gray** grants magic resistance and is the most-wished color, **silver** grants reflection, and other colors carry one or two intrinsics each. See Dragon Scale Mail below for the full list and the forge recipe.

Speed boots are worth wishing for. Being faster than your enemies means you get more turns, more chances to attack, cast spells, or run away. Casters with surplus Pw (Wizard or Monk late game, especially with the Eye of the Aethiopica) can lean on **haste self** as a substitute and free the boots slot for water walking or jumping. Haste self alone reaches *very fast* just like the boots; maintenance costs about 10 Pw every 150 turns at Skilled.

Magic cancellation (MC). Worn armor pieces contribute a hidden defensive value called MC, capped at 3. When a monster lands a “special attack” on you (gaze, breath, touch effect, monster-cast spell, sticky grab, status inflictor), the game rolls to *negate* the attack, with the block chance set by your MC level:

MC	Block chance
0	0%
1	30%
2	60%
3	90%

Your MC is the highest MC value among your worn armor pieces, plus +1 if you have extrinsic Protection (+2 if the Protection comes via the **amulet of guarding**), capped at 3. The most common single-item paths to MC3 are wearing the cloak of protection, or wearing any MC2 piece together with extrinsic Protection, or stacking the amulet of guarding’s +2 onto an MC1 piece.

MC is not the same as the magic resistance intrinsic. Magic resistance is a binary on/off flag that blocks specific *magical* attacks at 100%: wand-of-death rays, magic missile, the touch of death spell, polymorph beams, magic traps, and so on. MC, by contrast, dampens a different category of special attacks at a percentage rate: cockatrice touch petrification, mind flayer brain suck, monster cancellation, status inflictors, and the like. The two defenses cover different threats, and an ascending hero generally wants both.

Cloak of magic resistance vs. cloak of protection. These two cloaks cover those two different defenses:

- The **cloak of magic resistance** grants the magic resistance intrinsic and contributes MC1. It is the simplest source of magic resistance in the game; mid-game heroes who haven’t yet wished for gray dragon scale mail rely on it.
- The **cloak of protection** grants no magic resistance, but contributes MC3 on its own. It is the late-game choice once you already have magic resistance from another source.

The canonical ascension kit takes both defenses by putting **gray dragon scale mail** in the body slot (which grants magic resistance there) and then wearing the **cloak of protection** in the cloak slot (for the MC3). Before you have gray dragon scale mail, the cloak of magic resistance is doing essential work in the cloak slot, and the cloak of protection waits in your pack.

For the AC, MC, weight, cost, and granted-power numbers on every piece of armor in the game, see the Armor Tables appendix.

Weapons

Weapon choice depends heavily on your role and skill caps.

Weapon	Damage (sm/lg)	Notes
Long sword	d8 / d12	Lawfuls can dip for Excalibur
Katana	d10 / d12	Best base damage for a one-hander
Silver saber	d8 / d8	+d20 vs silver-hating monsters
Crysknife	d10 / d10	Excellent damage, fragile
Tsurugi	d16 / d8+2d6	Two-handed, bisects small monsters
Runesword	d4 / d6+d4	Chaotic weapon
Battle-axe	d8+d4 / d6+2d4	Two-handed, good damage
Rubber hose	d4 / d3	No, seriously, don't use this

Excalibur (long sword dipped in a fountain while Lawful) is one of the best weapons: +d5 to hit and +d10 damage, level drain resistance, automatic searching. For Lawful characters, getting Excalibur early is a priority.

Silver saber deserves special mention. Many endgame threats (demons, undead, werereatures) are vulnerable to silver. A silver saber does an extra d20 damage against them, making it one of the best late-game weapons.

Your quest artifact is often your primary weapon or at least worth carrying for its properties. Check what your role's artifact does.

For the full damage/weight/cost numbers on every weapon in the game, see the Weapons Tables appendix.

Enchantment

Weapons and armor can be enchanted using scrolls of enchant weapon and enchant armor. Each scroll adds +1 (uncursed) or potentially more (blessed). For **weapons** there's no destruction limit at all: above +9 the scroll just becomes less likely to add a point, but the weapon is never lost. **Armor** is different: above +3 each new scroll has a chance to destroy the item (above +5 for "special" armor like elven pieces, or the Wizard's cornuthaum). Blessed scrolls give more points per read but don't change the destruction threshold; cursed scrolls can subtract enchantment and shouldn't be used for enchanting at all.

Erosion and Proofing

Weapons and armor can be damaged by rust (iron items), fire (organic items), and corrosion (copper items). A badly damaged item provides less AC or damage.

To fix erosion, read a confused scroll of enchant weapon (for your weapon) or confused scroll of enchant armor (for a random worn armor piece). This erodeproofs the item permanently without changing its enchantment. It also repairs any existing damage.

You can also slow erosion without magic. Coat an armor piece with grease (apply a can of grease). The grease layer also makes the piece slippery to monster steal and to grab attacks, but it wears off after a few hits.

Dragon Scale Mail

Dragon scales are prized for their toughness and their magical protections, and mail forged from those scales is among the best body armor in the game.

Dragons don't always drop scales, and they never drop the mail itself. A fresh kill yields scales about one time in three, and a revived dragon only one time in twenty. **Scales** can be worn as body armor just like mail and carry the color's full intrinsic property (gray gives magic resistance, silver reflection, and so on, identical to the mail). But the AC of scales is only +3 whereas fully formed scale mail is +9. Same weight.

To upgrade scales into scale mail: wear the scales and read a non-cursed scroll of enchant armor. The scales merge and harden into the corresponding dragon scale mail at +0 (or higher if blessed; a blessed scroll also blesses the result). A cursed scroll just gives the usual bad enchant effect; no merge.

Curses and How to Break Them

Sooner or later, you will put on something cursed. Maybe it's a ring you didn't test. Maybe it's boots from a bones level. Maybe a monster touched your inventory and you didn't notice. However it happens, you're now wearing an item that refuses to come off, and it's probably doing something terrible. The curse problem is one of the dungeon's quieter ways to kill you.

How Items Get Cursed

- **Born that way.** Some items generate cursed most of the time (rings of teleportation, rings of polymorph, amulets of strangulation; anything the dungeon thinks is funny)
- **Bones inheritance.** Items on a bones level have an 80% chance of being cursed. That tempting armor on the dead adventurer's corpse? Probably trapped
- **Monster interference.** Certain monsters can curse items in your inventory
- **Confused remove curse.** Reading it confused has a chance of *cursing* items instead of uncursing them
- **Unholy water.** The evil twin of holy water

Effects of Cursed Items

- **Cursed armor and rings** bond to you and can't be removed: a cursed ring of teleportation means random teleports you can't stop, and a cursed pair of levitation boots means you can never touch the ground again
- **Cursed weapons** can't be unwielded. Hope you like that -3 orcish dagger
- **Cursed potions and scrolls** often do the opposite of what you want, or a weakened version of the normal effect
- **Cursed tools** malfunction spectacularly. A cursed bag of holding *doubles* the weight of its contents instead of reducing it
- **Cursed food** is unpleasant but rarely fatal. Small mercies

Detecting Curses

Prevention is better than cure. Test items *before* wearing them:

- **Altar test.** Drop an item on an altar. A black flash means cursed. This is free, instant, and should become instinct
- **Pet test.** Your pet refuses to step on cursed items. Drop and observe
- **Scroll of identify.** Always reveals the full status
- **Formal price-ID via shop appraisal.** Shopkeepers don't reveal BUC directly, but the sell-back offer they make narrows the item to a few possibilities; combined with the altar test you can often pin it down

(Temple donation does *not* reveal BUC; that's a common spoiler myth. Donating to a priest grants temporary clairvoyance and a Protection bonus, but inventory BUC stays hidden.)

Removing Curses

When prevention fails, you have three remedies:

- **Scroll of remove curse.** Uncursed removes curses from worn and wielded items. Blessed uncurses your entire inventory, a real relief when the curse problem has gotten out of hand
- **Holy water.** Dip a cursed item in holy water and it becomes uncursed. Simple, reliable, and reason enough to stockpile holy water
- **Prayer.** A pleased god uncurses your worn items as a side benefit of answering prayer. Don't waste a prayer solely on this, but it's a nice bonus

Stuck in cursed body armor? Polymorphing into a form too small for the suit drops it off into your inventory (curse and all), even though it would normally refuse to come off. From there, dip in holy water and re-wear. See Polymorph as a Tool (p. 118).

Most veterans carry holy water and a scroll of remove curse at all times. The first time you find yourself stuck in cursed levitation boots over a moat is the moment you'll see why.



Mastery

Playing Each Role

The Mazes treat different roles very differently. The Knight's full-armor mounted combat would not work for a Monk, whose weaponless martial arts need a robe and no body armor. Starting kits, skill caps, intrinsic ladders, and restrictions add up to thirteen distinct games inside the same dungeon. The sections that follow give role-specific advice for each.

Archeologist

Indiana Jones, basically. You start with a bullwhip, a pickaxe, a tinning kit, a touchstone, and a sack: a kit built for exploration rather than combat. Your starting Strength and HP are modest, so your first ten levels lean on stealth and footwork rather than firepower. Survive that stretch and you become one of the better mid-game spellcasters in the game.

Intrinsics: Searching at XL 1, Stealth at XL 5, intrinsic speed at XL 10.

Skill caps: Pick-axe and saber both reach Expert, which makes a silver saber your endgame weapon and the pickaxe your mid-game one. Divination Spell hits Expert too, and your special spell is magic mapping, one of the most valuable spells in the game.

Your pickaxe gives you mobility no other role has. It skips locked doors, chips a diagonal exit from a surrounded room, escapes upward when you're cornered, and digs the straight downward shaft that finishes most ascension runs in a handful of turns. Train Pick-axe to Skilled early by chopping at zombies and ogres; the slot cost pays back many times over by the Castle.

Your touchstone identifies gems. An Archeologist applies an uncursed touchstone as if it were blessed, so any gem you find can be tested for whether it's real or worthless glass. Rub gems before you offer them to a unicorn, before you sell, and on a co-aligned altar for full ID.

Pivot: by mid-game your Wisdom and Intelligence are within reach of Wizard-tier casting. Once you've read magic missile, identify, and cone of cold, you are a caster who happens to swing a saber, not a fighter who happens to read books.

Avoid: breaking historic statues (a -1 alignment hit per offense, and the Archeologist is the only role that automatically recognizes which statues are historic). Getting Burdened collecting too many items; the role has a mediocre Str cap.

Barbarian

A Barbarian's plan is mostly: hit the thing in front of you. You start with poison resistance, good Strength, a two-handed sword or battle-axe, and an off-hand short sword. Your skill list reads like a weapon shop's inventory; the early dungeon is much easier when you can carve a path through it without thinking too hard.

Intrinsics: Poison resistance at XL 1, intrinsic speed at XL 7, Stealth at XL 15.

Skill caps: Two-handed sword Expert (or Axe Expert if you took the axe start), Short Sword Expert, Hammer Expert. Bare-handed combat reaches Master, so if you ever lose your weapon to a polymorph trap or a wand of disarming you remain a real melee threat with your fists.

Twoweapon early. The starting twin pair (two-handed sword plus short sword, or battle-axe plus short sword) is positioned for a two-weapon transition. Once you find a long sword, drop the short sword for it and twoweapon for mauling damage.

Pivot: around XL 12 to 15 most Barbarians want magic resistance and discover that without spell skill they have only artifact and armor options. Aim for gray dragon scale mail in the Castle, or crown for Stormbringer if you are Chaotic; the Magicbane option is gated behind a sacrifice gift that may not roll.

Avoid: picking fights you cannot escape. Barbarians have no escape spells and no intrinsic teleport, so once surrounded you fight your way out or pray. Skipping early quaff-tests; with poison resistance handed to you from turn 1, blind quaffs are unusually safe.

Cave Dweller

Primitive but tough. You start with a club, a sling, a pile of flint stones, and good HP growth. Cave Dwellers are the other role (with Barbarian) that pushes bare-handed combat to Master, so even unarmed you do real damage. The simplest role in the game: few tools, no starting spellbooks, no language quirks.

Intrinsics: Speed at XL 7, Warning at XL 15. No early resistances at all; this is the role that earns those resistances one corpse at a time.

Skill caps: Club, mace, quarterstaff, and spear all Expert, plus the sling Expert (Cave Dwellers train sling as easily as anyone). Bare-handed combat reaches Master.

Pivot: the Cave Dweller's mid-game is built from the corpses they eat. Without role-granted resistances, you climb the resistance ladder by eating fire ants, killer bees, giants, and the right molds. Plan to eat every safe intrinsic-granting corpse you can; an amulet of life saving is more valuable here than for almost any other role.

Avoid: putting too much weight on Intelligence. Cave Dwellers have the lowest Int cap of any role and the weakest spell access; aside from identify or detect-X scrolls you will mostly be reading rather than casting. The gnome racial option leans toward casting, so pick dwarf or human if you want the heaviest melee.

Healer

You start with a stethoscope, four potions of healing, four of extra healing, a wand of sleep, three pre-blessed spellbooks (healing, extra healing, stone-to-flesh), poison resistance, and immunity to sickness. The stethoscope shows monster HP and your own internal state; the wand of sleep makes early combat much easier than the medical kit suggests.

Intrinsics: Poison resistance at XL 1, Warning at XL 15.

Skill caps: Knife Expert, Quarterstaff Expert, Dart Expert, Unicorn Horn Expert (a permanent dividend on every horn you find), Healing Spell Expert. Healing pre-blessed books guarantee successful reads from turn 1.

The wand of sleep is your survival. A handful of charges that put even serious monsters down for several turns, and most of the early dungeon has no sleep resistance. Spend one charge per dangerous encounter, never on an easy kill, and you'll bridge to XL 6 before running out. Recharge it later with scrolls of charging or a magic marker.

Sickness immunity is a free quaff-test. Healers cannot be made ill by potions of sickness, so unknown clear-colored potions can be tested safely. Dip a unicorn horn into the leftover sickness potion to convert it to fruit juice.

Pivot: around XL 10, Healers move from "survive on potions and sleep" to casting extra healing as a Pw battery. At Skilled in the healing school, your healing casts behave like blessed potions.

Avoid: spending sleep charges on small monsters. Selling the stethoscope.

Knight

You start with a saddled pony, a +1 long sword, and a +1 lance. The pony is a credible early-game ally, and the basis of your unique attack: a jousting blow from horseback does heavy damage, and Knights are the only role with Lance at Expert. Two catches: chivalry imposes alignment penalties for attacking helpless or fleeing monsters, so pick your fights; and the lance is useless on foot.

Intrinsics: Speed at XL 7. That is the entire ladder.

Skill caps: Long Sword Expert (set up for Excalibur), Lance Expert, Riding Expert, Bare-handed Combat Expert. Several blunt and edged weapons reach Skilled for fallback options.

Mount strategically. You can #ride from turn 1, but a failed mount costs 10 to 14 HP (“slipped while mounting a saddled pony” is a noted scoreboard death), and at XL 1 the failure rate is around 45%. Two unlucky tries kill a starting Knight. Most Knights stay on foot until the pony grows up into a horse and then a warhorse: by then you have intrinsic speed, more XL behind the mount roll, and a steed worth riding.

Excalibur is almost guaranteed. A Lawful Knight dipping a long sword into a fountain at XL 5 or higher has a 1-in-6 chance per dip, five times better than other Lawful roles. Most runs find Excalibur before the Mines luckstone.

Pivot: with Excalibur and a warhorse, mounted fighting pays off: long-sword swings with the Riding bonus plus jousting against fleeing targets you can position. A late-game Knight on a polymorphed dragon mount is one of the strongest melee builds.

Avoid: jousting a fleeing, sleeping, or paralyzed monster (a chivalry alignment hit and an alignment record you cannot recover quickly). Retrying a failed mount when you’re already low on HP.

Monk

Bare-handed combat by design. The intrinsic ladder is the broadest in the game and your Martial Arts caps at Grand Master, hitting +7 to-hit and +9 damage with no weapon. The trade-off is a steep set of armor restrictions: a body suit costs –20 to-hit, a shield kills your martial-arts bonus, and metallic helmets, gloves, and boots all add a casting penalty. The default Monk fights through the dungeon in a robe with no body armor.

Intrinsics: see invisible, sleep resistance, and intrinsic speed all at XL 1; poison at 3; stealth at 5; warning at 7; searching at 9; fire 11; cold 13; shock 15; teleport control 17. Eating the matching corpses just accelerates a schedule you’d mostly reach anyway.

Skill caps: Martial Arts Grand Master, Healing Spell Expert, Cleric and Escape Spells Skilled. The four allowed weapon skills (quarterstaff, spear, crossbow, shuriken) cap at Basic, so weapon training is for the Staff of Aesculapius or the silver spear endgame and not much else.

Gear by slot: starting robe (+20 spellcasting), elven leather helm, gauntlets of dexterity, speed boots, no shield, no body armor. The robe is irreplaceable; protect it from polymorph traps from D7 onward with a ring of polymorph control or an amulet of unchanging.

Pivot: the Eyes of the Overworld quest artifact grants magic resistance and astral vision, which frees your cloak slot for the robe instead of cloak of magic resistance. Most clean Monk runs postpone the Quest until after the Castle, then complete the Quest for the Eyes.

Avoid: eating meat (−1 alignment per offense; vegetarian is essentially free for Monks). Wearing iron skull cap, iron shoes, or gauntlets of power (all metallic, all penalize casting). Picking up a shield for the AC.

Priest

Sacrifice-gift specialists. Priests sense the blessed, cursed, and uncursed status of every item on sight, so you walk through the dungeon knowing which gear is safe to wear. Your first sacrifice gift is guaranteed to be Demonbane (in 5.0, a silver mace), and your stack of four holy waters lets you re-bless gear at will.

Intrinsics: Warning at XL 15, Fire resistance at XL 20. Almost nothing innately. Priests trade intrinsics for divine favor.

Skill caps: six blunt weapons all reach Expert (club, mace, morning star, flail, hammer, quarterstaff), which means whatever blunt weapon drops first becomes your trainable kit. Healing, Divination, and Cleric Spells all Expert.

You can refill holy water at will. Stack potions of water on a co-aligned altar and pray; the entire stack becomes holy water (each dip elsewhere consumes one holy water but blesses one plain water, a 1:1 exchange not a multiplier). The supply scales with how much water you find. Save at least one for the trail.

Pivot: around XL 14 Priests transition from “Demonbane bops things” to a clerical-spell cycle: protection prayer, healing, remove curse, and the heavy clerical attack spells. High Wis means high prayer success, so #pray during low-HP fights against tough foes.

Avoid: abusing your luck (breaking mirrors, angering shopkeepers, eating your own race) before sacrificing on a co-aligned altar; your god may visit with a wand of death. Selling holy water for shop credit; it’s worth far more in your pack than as gold.

Ranger

The ranged role. You start with a bow, a generous supply of arrows, a dagger, a +2 cloak of displacement, and Searching from XL 1. Multishot is your engine: a Ranger at Expert bow fires two or three arrows per turn at high Str, and your elven racial option also gains sleep resistance at XL 4.

Intrinsics: Searching at XL 1, Stealth at XL 7, See invisible at XL 15.

Skill caps: Bow, Sling, Crossbow, Dart, Spear, Dagger, and Boomerang all Expert. Almost every ranged weapon in the game is at your top tier, plus Divination Spell Expert for utility casting.

Guard your cloak of displacement. +2 enchanted from turn 1 is an endgame-quality defensive item. If you find a cloak of magic resistance, carry both and swap based on threat (magic resistance for monster spells, displacement for melee crowds).

Pivot: mid-game Rangers wish for or polypile a stack of silver arrows to enchant. Highly enchanted silver arrows on a Ranger at Expert bow are one of the highest damage-per-turn options in the game.

Avoid: mulching your +2 arrow stack. Keep the cheaper found arrows as your training stack and reserve the +2s for hard fights. Engaging in melee on the front line; your role is ranged.

Rogue

NetHack's thief: daggers, stealth, and backstab. You start with a short sword, six daggers, leather armor, a lock pick, a sack, and a potion of sickness. The lock pick opens every locked door, chest, and box from turn 1. Stealth at XL 1 lets you walk past sleeping monsters, and backstab adds +1 to +XL bonus damage against fleeing or helpless targets.

Intrinsics: Stealth at XL 1, Searching at XL 10.

Skill caps: Dagger Expert, Knife Expert, Short Sword Expert, Two-Weapon Combat Expert, Bare-handed Combat Expert. The two-weapon synergy with daggers is unique to the role.

Throw daggers; do not stab. Rogues get a multishot bonus on thrown daggers, and the backstab modifier applies to throws against fleeing targets too. A high-enchantment dagger stack carries you through Gehennom.

Pivot: around XL 8 you can poison your darts and daggers with the starting sickness potion or any poison potion you find. Coated daggers double or triple damage against non-poison-resistant targets.

Avoid: noisy actions that waste your stealth advantage (kicking, casting some spells, attacking unsleeping crowds). Selling the lock pick: Rogues get a +25 to +30 bonus on lock-picking that doesn't apply to regular keys.

Samurai

Katana, off-hand wakizashi, yumi bow with arrows. Samurai start with intrinsic speed and a strong opening melee kit. The katana is a long sword underneath, so it shares long sword skill: with Long Sword and Two-Handed Sword both at Expert, Two-Weapon Combat at Expert, and a guaranteed katana start, the role is set up for a katana plus long sword two-weapon combination.

Intrinsics: Speed at XL 1, Stealth at XL 15.

Skill caps: Long Sword, Two-Handed Sword, Short Sword, Bow, Shuriken, and Two-Weapon Combat all Expert; Martial Arts Master (the only role besides Monk with Martial Arts at all).

The wakizashi is the wrong off-hand. It's a short sword, while your katana is a long sword, so the two don't share skill. Drop it for any long sword (the Mines usually provides one) and twoweapon for the matched-skill bonus.

Pivot: mid-game Samurai who invested in bow can pivot to a multishot ranged build. Yumi at Expert with high Str gives 2 or 3 arrows per turn, comparable to a Ranger build on a role that already starts strong in melee.

Avoid: keeping the wakizashi for sentimental reasons. Forgetting the yumi: Bow at Expert plus speed puts two or three arrows on a target per turn.

Tourist

The hardest role. Low HP, no melee weapon, a Hawaiian shirt with zero base AC. You start with four scrolls of magic mapping, an expensive camera, 21 to 40 +2 darts, a credit card, two potions of extra healing, ten random food items, and a 1-in-5 chance of a magic marker. Most Tourists die in the first thousand turns; those that survive become disproportionately powerful in the late game.

Intrinsics: Searching at XL 10, Poison resistance at XL 20. Both late.

Skill caps: Dart Expert, Dagger Expert, Short Sword Expert. That is the entire combat-skill list; every other weapon caps at Basic, including most melee weapons you might find.

Your camera is the early-game survival tool. Apply it at any monster to blind it (and often to scare it). Camera-flash, dart from range, let the pet finish, and repeat. Save scrolls of magic mapping for levels that look genuinely nasty.

The Tourist tax. Shopkeepers charge Tourists below XL 15 a +33% markup and offer 1/3 base on sales. Below XL 15 you are literally priced as a sucker. Most ascending Tourists do their shopping after Quest completion.

Pivot: the Tourist quest artifact, the Platinum Yendorian Express Card, is one of the best in the game: magic resistance, telepathy, and half spell damage all while carried, plus charge items by invocation. Tourists who reach the Quest become caster-heavy mid-game on a role nobody expects to cast.

Avoid: rushing to Minetown without an upgrade weapon. Shopping below XL 15. Wearing the Hawaiian shirt if you plan to enchant it up; before you protect it with magic resistance it's likely to be destroyed (a polymorph trap or the destroy-armor monster spell).

Valkyrie

Recommended for first serious attempt. You start with a long sword (or spear), a small shield, intrinsic cold resistance, and good combat stats. Mjollnir, a +d5/+d24 war hammer that returns when thrown at Strength 25, drops as your guaranteed sacrifice gift regardless of alignment, so the late-game weapon question is solved early.

Intrinsics: Cold resistance at XL 1, Stealth at XL 3, intrinsic speed at XL 7.

Skill caps: Long Sword Expert, Two-Handed Sword Expert, Axe Expert, Hammer Expert (Mjollnir's skill), Spear Expert, Dagger Expert. The widest practical weapon-skill range in the game.

Excalibur is also possible. Lawful Valkyries dipping a long sword into a fountain at XL 5+ get the standard 1-in-30 per dip. Fountain-dip until it appears, then transition to Mjollnir at the altar.

Pivot: Valkyries already have most of the combat they need; mid-game focus shifts to magic resistance (gray dragon scale mail) and reflection (shield of reflection or amulet of reflection from Sokoban). The Castle wand of wishing usually settles the magic resistance question with one wish.

Avoid: coasting through the early game without preparing for Gehennom. Magic attacks bypass your HP and AC, so line up magic resistance and reflection before things get hard.

Wizard

The undisputed caster. You start with a quarterstaff, a +2 cloak of magic resistance, a wand, two rings, three potions, three scrolls, force bolt plus a random spellbook, and a magic marker.

Intrinsics: Warning at XL 15, Teleport control at XL 17.

Skill caps: Four spell schools at Expert (Attack, Divination, Escape, Matter); Healing, Enchantment, Cleric Skilled. Quarterstaff and Dagger Expert. Wielding a quarterstaff lowers spell-failure.

Spell-school advancement IDs spellbooks. In 5.0, training a spell school auto-reveals book appearances at higher levels. Wizards start knowing every level-1 plus level-3 attack and enchantment.

Pivot: by XL 10 the Wizard mid-game is “get every spellbook.”

Avoid: force-bolting glass: a nymph’s mirror is –2 Luck and shattered potions are wasted. Going hungry: you start with no food and casting drains nutrition fast.



Spellcasting

Magic in the Mazes is hard-won. You study a crumbling spellbook, hope it doesn't explode in your face, and earn the power to set things on fire with your mind. Spells are reusable abilities learned from spellbooks. Unlike scrolls (consumed on use) or wands (limited charges), spells can be cast repeatedly as long as you have mana (Pw, power) and the spell hasn't expired from your increasingly overtaxed brain.

Learning Spells

Read a spellbook to learn the spell it contains. Reading takes several turns and can fail. A failed reading can teleport you, take your gold, blind, confuse, or poison you, blow up in your face for HP damage, or randomly curse one of your items. A book that survives failures can be retried.

The book's level decides which effects are on the table. A level-1 book can teleport you somewhere random when you fail to read it. A level-2 book might aggravate nearby monsters instead. Misread a level-3 book and it can blind you for 250 to 350 turns. A level-4 book can take all your gold, and level 5 can leave you confused for 16 to 22 turns. Misread a level-6 book and you may be contact-poisoned: gloves take corrosion damage, bare hands take 1 or 2 points of Strength plus 1d10 HP (1d6 with poison resistance). And a level-7 book can have an exploding rune. Magic resistance blocks the explosion; without it, you take 2d10+5 damage. Practical rule: don't read books you can't afford to fail.

The chance of successfully reading a spellbook depends on the **spell level**, your **Intelligence**, and your **experience level**. The exact formula is $\text{Int} + 4 + \text{XL}/2 - 2 \cdot \text{level}$ versus a roll of 1d20, so read 20 or more always succeeds, 10 is a coin flip, and anything below that is dicey. Reading a level-7 spell at Int 15, XL 2 gives a read score of 6: only a 30% chance of success. Lenses add +2. A **blessed** spellbook bypasses the check entirely and always succeeds. A **cursed** spellbook fails automatically and applies one of the failure effects above.

In the table below, the "*Minimum Int + XL needed*" column means the sum of your Intelligence and your experience level. With 18 Intelligence at level 14, your sum is 32, so you can reliably read up to level 6 spells.

Spell Level	Minimum Int + XL needed	Who can read it reliably
1	~10	Almost anyone, early game
2	~14	Most characters by mid-game
3	~18	Wizards easily, others with effort
4	~22	Wizards with decent stats
5	~26	Wizards with boosted Int
6	~30	Wizards with serious investment
7	~34	Only well-built Wizards

A blessed book skips the difficulty check entirely and always succeeds, no matter what your Int and level are, which is one reason to save holy water for your hardest unread spellbooks.

Wizards are the undisputed masters of magic: they learn faster, fail less, and have the widest range of useful spells. A well-built Wizard can eventually learn *every* spell in the game, which is the closest the Mazes come to letting you cheat. **Monks** are the surprising second. They have access to all seven spell schools too, and their no-body-armor restriction actually helps casting because body armor adds a failure penalty; the monk-favored robe grants another bonus on top. Priests and Healers cast meaningfully in their own schools. Other roles can manage the occasional spell with help. A Valkyrie can sometimes read identify (level 3) if her Intelligence is boosted by gain-ability potions, but non-spellcasters are usually better off with scrolls. Tourists, Barbarians, and Cavemen should probably stick to hitting things.

Wizards identify books by training. In 5.0, advancing a spell school skill to each rank automatically reveals the appearances of spellbooks in that school: unskilled unlocks level-1 appearances, basic level-3, skilled level-5, expert level-7. A Wizard starts knowing all level-1 appearances and level-3 in attack and enchantment, which means they begin the game with a meaningful identification advantage in their core schools.

Each spell stays in memory for about 20,000 turns, then fades and must be relearned. The spell list (+) shows time-remaining. You can also apply a spellbook to check how worn it is: each **successful** read counts toward a fixed total of four before the book fades to blank paper. Failed reads don't add to that counter, but each failure has its own 1-in-3 chance to destroy the book outright. Carry important spellbooks with you if you plan to rely on their spells in the late game.

Paperbacks. A spellbook that appears as a *paperback* is a novel rather than a real spellbook. Read it: the first novel you pick up in a game grants 20 XP, which is exactly enough to lift a fresh character from experience level 1 to 2. (The 20 XP only fires once; subsequent paperbacks just display a quote.) Each paperback is a Terry Pratchett **Discworld** title, and reading it opens a passage from the novel.

Key Spells

Spell	Level	Effect
Force bolt	1	2d12 ranged hit; an Int/XL bonus adjusts by -3 to +3
Healing	1	Restore hit points
Detect monsters	1	Sense nearby monsters
Identify	3	Identify items (saves scrolls)
Remove curse	3	Uncurse worn/wielded items
Chain lightning	2	Shock that spreads from the caster in all directions, chaining to nearby monsters
Magic mapping	5	Reveal the level (saves scrolls)
Charm monster	5	Tame nearby creatures in a 3×3 area; Skilled+ acts like a blessed scroll
Finger of death	7	Kill in a beam; MR resists

The other 34 spells, along with their schools, types, and rank-gated upgrades, are in the Spell Tables appendix.

For Wizards, learning **identify** and **magic mapping** as spells dramatically reduces your need for scrolls: it's like having infinite scrolls, except they cost mana instead of inventory space.

Finger of death is the ultimate argument-ender. **Charm monster** turns your enemies into your friends, which is even better than killing them because friends carry things and absorb hits.

Chain lightning is the 5.0 room-clearer. At level 2 it's within reach of any character who can cast at all. The spell auto-fires in all eight directions without a target prompt, deals 2d6 per hit, and stops dead at any peaceful or tame monster, so you can clear a hostile room without lighting up your pet or a shopkeeper down the hall. Shock-resistant hostiles eat one hit, then end that beam.

Mana Management

Your power (Pw) pool determines how many spells you can cast before you need to sit in a corner and regenerate like a phone battery. Casting a spell costs **5 Pw per spell level** (so finger of death is 35 Pw). A failed cast still spends half. Power regenerates over time, faster with higher Wisdom and Intelligence, faster still for Wizards or with a regeneration source.

High-level spells cost serious power. Plan your casting and carry backup wands and scrolls: a Wizard out of Pw is just a person in a bathrobe holding a stick.

Luck and Fortune

The Mazes are rigged. Not unfairly (the dungeon doesn't *hate* you), but there is a hidden number attached to your character that quietly tilts every die roll, every prayer, every scroll, every combat swing. It's called Luck, and it's one of the most important stats you can't see. Players who ignore Luck die to things that "shouldn't have happened." Players who cultivate it find that the dungeon is mysteriously generous. This is not a coincidence.

How Luck Works

Luck ranges from -13 to +13. It starts at 0, the universe's way of saying "prove yourself." Left alone, luck drifts back toward zero over time; the Mazes don't give anything for free.

Luck timeout. Every 600 turns, your luck moves one point toward 0. If you have +5 luck, it will drop to +4 after 600 turns, then +3 after 1200, eventually reaching 0. Your good deeds are forgotten. Your sins, alas, are also forgiven.

Luckstone. Carrying a luckstone in your open inventory (not inside a container) freezes the timer. Your luck stays wherever it is until something changes it. For this reason, getting the luckstone from Mine's End early is recommended. It's a small gray stone that makes the universe remember you fondly.

Bless state matters. Any **non-cursed** luckstone (blessed *or* uncursed) freezes drift toward your baseline and adds **+3 to your effective Luck on most rolls**. A **cursed** luckstone is dangerous: it subtracts 3 from your effective Luck and holds *negative* Luck in place (preventing the usual drift back toward zero from below). Always BUC-check a luckstone before carrying it, and bless it on an altar if you can. (The +3 bonus comes from `set_moreluck`; the curse doesn't speed positive Luck's decay, but it locks bad Luck in.)

The Heart of Ahriman, Tsurugi of Muramasa, and Orb of Fate all count as luckstones. Barbarian, Samurai, and Valkyrie quest artifacts confer the same drift-freeze and bless-state bonus, so those three roles get a "free luckstone" from their quest reward. Carrying both a blessed luckstone *and* one of these artifacts doesn't stack the +3 bonus (the bonus is binary, not additive), but it does add an extra unit of "blessed" to the count if you somehow end up with a cursed luckstone, partially offsetting it.

Calendar Luck. The drift target isn't always 0:

- On a **full moon** night, baseline Luck is +1: Luck drifts toward +1 instead of 0. If you started the session on a full moon, you have +1 Luck for free.
- On **Friday the 13th**, baseline Luck is -1. Avoid stair-up runs on this day if you can; your accumulated good Luck will sap toward -1 even if you've been virtuous.

(NetHack uses your computer's real date for this; set your clock back if you've planned an ascension on the 13th and don't want the penalty, though most players just embrace the theme.)

Gaining and Losing Luck

Action	Luck change
Throw identified real gem to co-aligned unicorn	+5
Throw named-but-unidentified real gem to co-aligned	+2
Throw unknown real gem to co-aligned unicorn	+1
Throw fully-identified real gem to cross-aligned unicorn	-3 to +3 (random)
Throw unidentified real gem to cross-aligned unicorn	-1 to +1 (random)
Sacrificing on your own altar (varies by corpse value)	typically +1
Sitting on a throne (lucky outcome)	+1
Breaking a Sokoban rule (squeeze, fracture, polymorph boulder, scroll of earth)	-1 each
Killing a peaceful creature	-1 (50% chance per kill)
Killing a same-alignment unicorn	-5
Killing your quest leader	-20 immediate (floor at -10), +7 god-anger, plus permanent -4 to baseline luck
Killing your pet	-1 plus -15 alignment
Cannibalism	-2 to -5
Breaking a mirror	-2

Be virtuous and the numbers smile on you. Be a monster and they frown. The Mazes have a moral compass, and it's embedded in the math.

Unicorn gem-throwing is the strongest active Luck source in the game. Throw a properly-identified real gem (not glass) at a unicorn whose alignment matches yours and you gain +5 Luck immediately. The unicorn turns peaceful, accepts the gift, and teleports away, and will accept another later if you find it again. Identify your gems *first* (touchstone or scroll of identify); the bonus drops from +5 to +1 if you don't actually know what you're throwing. Glass gems are harmless but yield nothing; throwing them is a safe way to pacify an unwanted unicorn without spending real gems. Avoid throwing real gems at cross-aligned unicorns: the result is a random Luck change between -3 and +3 and is rarely

worth the gamble. Archeologists start with a **touchstone**, which lets them verify whether a gem is real before throwing it at a unicorn.

There is a ceiling on the luck you can obtain from any given kind of offering. If your current luck score already exceeds the difficulty rating of the monster you just sacrificed, you gain nothing. The altar accepts your offering politely and gives you nothing in return, because the gods have standards.

Before 5.0, players used to be able to sit at a co-aligned altar with a pile of kobold corpses and grind luck to maximum. That no longer works once your luck is already above modest levels. To raise luck via sacrifice in the mid-to-late game, you need fresh corpses of monsters whose difficulty exceeds your current luck value. A luckstone, occasional mid-tier sacrifices, and care to avoid killing peacefuls is the standard path to high luck.

Why Luck Matters

At Luck +5 (or higher, with a luckstone), life is *noticeably* better:

- You hit more often in combat. Swings that would have missed connect instead.
- Your prayers are more likely to be answered. Your god likes lucky people. (Gods are fickle that way.)
- Scrolls of enchant weapon/armor succeed more often at high enchantment levels.
- Wands of wishing are more likely to work perfectly on wresting.
- Fountain wishes become slightly more likely.

At negative luck, all of these go wrong. Even one point of negative Luck causes prayer to backfire. Instead of helping, your god responds with punishment: a stat loss with a “*thou hast strayed from the path*” sermon, a black glow that curses your gear, or in the worst case bolts of damage. You’ll miss attacks you should have hit. Scrolls will backfire. The dungeon becomes a place that is trying to kill you even harder than usual, which is saying something.

The practical advice: get a luckstone early, sacrifice occasionally to keep luck positive, and don’t kill peacefuls. Treat the universe well and it will return the favor, in the form of slightly better random numbers, which in the Mazes is the closest thing to love.



Exercising Your Stats

Behind the scenes, NetHack keeps a hidden exercise counter for four of your six stats: **Str**, **Dex**, **Con**, and **Wis**. (Int and Cha don't exercise; they only change through magical sources like gain-ability potions.) Living a way that *trains* a stat slowly pushes the counter up; living a way that *abuses* it pushes the counter down. Every several hundred turns the game checks the counter and may grant a +1 or -1.

How Exercise Works

The counter is invisible. A long enough streak of exercising behavior, plus a passing random roll (with diminishing returns once you've already gained), gives you the message "*You feel agile! You must have been working on your reflexes!*", or the matching one for the other stats. The reverse, "*You haven't been working on reflexes lately,*" fires when the abuse counter wins instead.

Exercise can lift a stat up to **18** (your innate maximum isn't bypassed; potions of gain ability still rule the top end). Abuse can drop it down to your racial minimum.

Actions That Exercise and Abuse

Stat	Exercises	Abuses
Str	Carrying a heavy load (Stressed but not Overtaxed), intrinsic regeneration, throwing or pushing a boulder, throwing the heavy iron ball	Being Weak from hunger
Dex	Successful kicks (locks, sinks, doors), successful thrown weapons	Being Satiated, heavy encumbrance, Fumbling, Stunned, Wounded legs, missed kicks
Con	Staying just-Not-Hungry consistently	Fainting, Sick, Vomiting, polluted fountains, extreme encumbrance
Wis	Active Clairvoyance, successful detection (gold/monster/food), a willing prayer, a worthy sacrifice	Confusion, Hallucination, cursed enlightenment, digging up graves

Two Monk-specific quirks: a Monk who is Weak from fasting exercises Wis, and a Satiated Monk abuses it. The vow of restraint pays in wisdom.

Why Exercise Matters

Stats matter for almost everything: Str for damage and carrying capacity, Dex for hit chance, Con for HP per level, Wis for prayer success and Pw regeneration. Drifting one of them up over the course of a run is a small but real upgrade. Drifting one down because you've spent five hundred turns Satiated and Fumbling is a small but real loss. The mechanic rewards habits more than single actions.

Enhancing Skills

Most adventurers discover the skill system the first time they press #enhance and realize the broadsword they've been swinging for several levels is finally ready to graduate from Basic to Skilled. Weapons, fighting styles, and spell schools each track their own proficiency, and you train them one slot at a time.

The Skill Ladder

Practice with a weapon improves how often you hit and how hard. The game tracks this as a **skill rank**: more practice, higher rank, more deadly swings. Most skills run **Unskilled** → **Basic** → **Skilled** → **Expert**. **Bare hands** and **martial arts** alone reach **Master** and **Grand Master**. Each rank-up costs both **practice** (uses of the skill) and **skill slots** (a finite budget tied to your experience level).

To reach	Practice (cumulative)	Weapon slots	Non-weapon slots
Basic	20	1	1
Skilled	80	2	1
Expert	180	3	2
Master	320	—	2
Grand Master	500	—	3

Non-weapon skills (spell schools, riding, bare hands, martial arts) cost roughly half as many slots as melee weapons, the dungeon's quiet subsidy for magic. (Two-weapon uses the weapon column despite the name.) You start with 2 slots, gain one per experience level (29 more by XL 30), and one more if you are crowned, so the absolute ceiling is **32 slots** for an XL-30 crowned hero. Lose an experience level and you lose a slot, which can demote your most recent advancement.

Each role has a per-skill **cap** beyond which no amount of training will help. A Wizard caps at Basic with a mace and is restricted from long swords. Restricted skills don't appear on #enhance and stay Unskilled, except for god-given artifact weapons, which unrestrict the skill to Basic. The full role caps appear in Per-Role Skill Caps below.

Training a Skill

Practice accumulates through use:

- **Weapon skills** tick on every melee or thrown hit that does **more than 1 damage**. A pillow-soft punch for 1 point doesn't count. Spears, javelins, knives, daggers, and aklys train the same skill whether you stab with them or throw them.
- **Bare hands** counts **50%** of your hits; **martial arts** counts **75%**. The rank still applies on every hit; this just slows the climb.
- **Riding** earns one tick every **100 squares** ridden.
- **Spell schools** earn **N practice per successful cast of a level-N spell**. Every school has a level-1 option to grind. See the schools table below.

Skills your role starts at Basic come **pre-credited with 20 practice uses**, so you're already a quarter of the way to Skilled before the first turn.

When you've earned enough practice, the game says **"You feel more confident in your skills."** That's your cue to type #enhance. If more advancements remain after you pick one, you'll see **"You feel you could be more dangerous!"** Keep going.

What a Rank Buys You

For weapons and fighting styles, each rank shifts your to-hit and damage bonuses by a flat amount (the values replace each other, not stack):

Rank	Weapon	Two-weapon	Riding	Bare hands	Martial arts
Unskilled	-4 / -2	-9 / -3	-2 / 0	+1 / 0	+2 / +1
Basic	0 / 0	-7 / -1	-1 / 0	+1 / +1	+3 / +3
Skilled	+2 / +1	-5 / 0	0 / +1	+2 / +1	+4 / +4
Expert	+3 / +2	-3 / +1	0 / +2	+2 / +2	+5 / +6
Master	—	—	—	+3 / +2	+6 / +7
Grand Master	—	—	—	+3 / +3	+7 / +9

(Each cell is **to-hit / damage**.) Two-weapon penalties apply to **each** of the two strikes. A Basic two-weaponer hits twice but at -7 each, which is much worse than one solid swing. Bare hands and martial arts bonuses apply on every hit; only the practice counter is gated by the $\text{dmg} > 1$ roll. The Expert weapon line (+3 / +2) is why dedicating to a single weapon matters: that's the difference between killing the monster and watching it shrug.

The Seven Spell Schools

Every spellbook belongs to one of seven schools, and your rank in that school determines how reliably you can cast spells from it. Higher rank also unlocks some spell upgrades. Cone of cold becomes a cluster of 3×3 explosions at Skilled, identify IDs the whole stack, haste self lasts longer, and so on.

School	Focus	L1 grind
Attack	Direct damage (force bolt, fireball)	Force bolt
Healing	HP restore and cure status	Healing
Divination	Sensing, identifying, mapping	Light
Enchantment	Bufs, debuffs, charm	Confuse monster
Cleric	Divine protection and summoning	Protection
Escape	Mobility, evasion, levitation	Jumping
Matter	Manipulation, transmutation, polymorph	Knock

Per-Role Skill Caps

Three tables of fixed maxima follow: weapons, fighting styles, and spell schools. Skills not listed for a role are **restricted**: the rank is locked at Unskilled, with one exception (a god-given artifact weapon unrestricts you to Basic in its skill). Key: **B**=Basic, **S**=Skilled, **E**=Expert, **M**=Master, **GM**=Grand Master, **(blank)**=restricted.

A blank cell doesn't mean the skill is unusable, just locked at Unskilled forever. A Healer can still read a spellbook of force bolt and try to cast it. A Wizard can still swing a long sword. They'll just always pay the Unskilled penalty from the Skill Ladder (-4/-2 for a weapon, -9/-3 per strike for two-weapon, the Unskilled cast-failure rate for a spell school), with no path to improvement. Role abbreviations: Arc=Archeologist, Bar=Barbarian, Cav=Caveman, Hea=Healer, Kni=Knight, Mon=Monk, Pri=Priest, Rog=Rogue, Ran=Ranger, Sam=Samurai, Tou=Tourist, Val=Valkyrie, Wiz=Wizard.

Weapon Skill Caps

Weapon	Arc	Bar	Cav	Hea	Kni	Mon	Pri	Rog	Ran	Sam	Tou	Val	Wiz
dagger	B	B	B	S	B	—	—	E	E	B	E	E	E
knife	B	—	S	E	B	—	—	E	S	S	S	—	S
axe	—	E	S	—	S	—	—	—	S	—	B	E	S
pick-axe	E	S	B	—	B	—	—	—	B	—	B	S	—
short sword	B	E	—	S	S	—	—	E	B	E	E	S	B

Weapon	Arc	Bar	Cav	Hea	Kni	Mon	Pri	Rog	Ran	Sam	Tou	Val	Wiz
broadsword	—	S	—	—	S	—	—	S	—	S	B	S	—
long sword	—	S	—	—	E	—	—	S	—	E	B	E	—
two-handed sword	—	E	—	—	S	—	—	B	—	E	B	E	—
saber	E	S	—	B	S	—	—	S	—	B	S	B	—
club	S	S	E	S	B	—	E	S	—	—	—	—	S
mace	—	S	E	B	S	—	E	S	—	—	B	—	B
morning star	—	S	B	—	S	—	E	B	B	—	B	—	—
flail	—	B	S	—	B	—	E	B	S	S	B	—	—
hammer	—	E	S	—	B	—	E	B	B	—	B	E	—
quarterstaff	S	B	E	E	—	B	E	—	B	B	B	B	E
polearms	—	—	S	B	S	—	S	B	S	S	B	S	S
spear	—	S	E	B	S	B	S	B	E	S	B	E	B
trident	—	S	S	B	B	—	S	—	B	—	B	B	B
lance	—	—	—	—	E	—	B	—	—	S	B	S	—
bow	—	B	S	—	B	—	B	—	E	E	B	—	—
sling	S	—	E	S	—	—	B	—	E	—	B	B	S
crossbow	—	—	—	—	S	B	B	E	E	—	B	—	—
dart	B	—	—	E	—	—	B	E	E	—	E	—	E
shuriken	—	—	—	S	—	B	B	S	S	E	B	—	B
boomerang	E	—	E	—	—	—	B	—	E	—	B	—	—
whip	E	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	B	—	B	—	—
unicorn horn	S	—	B	E	—	—	S	—	—	—	S	—	—

Scimitar was merged into saber in 5.0; both refer to the same skill now.

Fighting Style Caps

Style	Arc	Bar	Cav	Hea	Kni	Mon	Pri	Rog	Ran	Sam	Tou	Val	Wiz
bare hands	E	M	M	B	E	—	B	E	B	—	S	E	B
two-weapon	B	B	—	—	S	—	—	E	—	E	S	S	—
riding	B	B	—	—	E	—	—	B	B	S	B	S	B
martial arts	—	—	—	—	—	GM	—	—	—	M	—	—	—

Only Monks and Samurai have martial arts at all, and only Monks reach Grand Master.

Spell School Caps

School	Arc	Bar	Cav	Hea	Kni	Mon	Pri	Rog	Ran	Sam	Tou	Val	Wiz
Attack	B	B	B	—	S	B	—	—	—	B	—	B	E
Healing	B	—	—	E	S	E	E	—	B	—	—	—	S
Divination	E	—	—	—	—	B	E	S	E	B	B	—	E
Enchantment	—	—	—	—	—	B	—	—	—	—	B	—	S
Cleric	—	—	—	—	S	S	E	—	—	S	—	—	S
Escape	—	B	—	—	—	S	—	S	B	—	S	B	E
Matter	B	—	S	—	—	B	—	S	—	—	—	—	E

Healers cap at Expert in healing but are restricted from every other school. The only role with this kind of single-school specialization. Wizards and Monks are the only roles with access to all seven schools, though only Wizards can push four of them to Expert; Monks reach Expert only in healing. Barbarians and Valkyries cap at Basic in their two available schools (attack and escape) and are restricted from the other five.

Spending Slots Wisely

Thirty slots sounds like plenty until you start counting. Expert in a single weapon costs **6 slots** (1+2+3) by itself. A Valkyrie aiming for Expert long sword, Expert two-weapon, and Skilled riding is fourteen slots deep before any spell school.

A few principles:

- **Don't enhance reflexively.** Slots are spent permanently (short of losing experience). If you're not committed to a weapon, hold the slot until you are.
- **Cap-aware investment.** Pushing a skill to its role cap is fine: the menu just stops offering further advances. You can't waste enhancements past the cap because the option never appears.
- **Wizards get two benefits from spell schools.** Each rank-up improves casting success *and* reveals more spellbook appearances in that school (the identification payoff covered in the Spellcasting chapter). Schools containing your unidentified books deserve priority. This double benefit is Wizard-only; other roles only get the casting-success benefit.
- **Wizards: daggers before schools.** A common opening pushes **Dagger to Expert** (six slots) before serious investment in spell schools. Thrown daggers carry the early game while Pw is scarce, and school ranks then come online to upgrade the late game without leaving the early game starving.

- **Riding is a skill.** Without **Basic riding** you can't pick up items, loot, dip, set or disarm traps, or engrave on the floor while mounted. Knights start at Basic. Pushing to Skilled erases the -1 to-hit penalty in the saddle and adds +1 damage.
- **Bare hands and martial arts are the domain of Monks.** Grand Master needs **9 cumulative non-weapon slots**, which Monks reach naturally. Anyone else dabbling in unarmed combat should plan to stop at Basic.

A few spells get sharper at Skilled. Cone of cold and fireball become a cluster of 3×3 **explosions** you can place at range. Identify, remove curse, haste self, detect monsters, and several others gain the blessed-scroll effect.

Wishes and Wishing

There is a moment in every successful game where you're asked, "For what do you wish?" It's the best question in all of gaming. Don't panic. Don't mistype. And for the love of all that is holy, don't wish for a +3 blessed cockatrice. (Actually, that *would* be something. But no.)

Wishes are rare, powerful, and the difference between a character who ascends and one who dies memorably on the Plane of Fire.

Sources of Wishes

The Mazes are stingy, but there are more wish sources than most travelers realize:

- **Wand of wishing:** found in the Castle treasure room (see Key Wands (p. 116) for the 5.0 charge mechanics). The Castle chest also contains a potion of gain level, because the Mazes occasionally feel generous.
- **Vlad's throne:** A special throne that grants a guaranteed wish if you keep sitting. Four of thirteen outcomes are a wish (which destroys the throne); the other nine are painful but the throne survives, so persistence pays off.
- **The Amulet of Yendor:** Grants a wish when you first pick it up. A reward for reaching the bottom of the dungeon. You can decline this wish if your kit is already complete; some minimalist ascenders skip it entirely on principle.
- **Magic lamp:** Rubbing a blessed lamp summons the djinni 1-in-3 times; *if* it appears, it grants a wish 80% of the time, so roughly 27% wish per rub. Keep rubbing. Either a magic lamp or a magic marker is guaranteed in Orcus Town.
- **Fountain:** roughly 1 in 30 quaffs summons a water demon, and *that* demon grants a wish only about 1-in-5 times on shallow floors (less on deeper ones), so a true wish chance closer to 1 in 150 per quaff. Far more likely to produce snakes, nymphs, curses, or vomiting.
- **Throne:** Very rare chance of a wish when sitting. Also a very real chance of everything going wrong.
- **Djinni from smoky potion:** Rare (1 in 13 base probability), and even then only 20% wish chance (80% if blessed). But when it works, you feel like a genius.

In practice, the number of wishes a run produces varies widely. A sensible budget if you take each guaranteed source once is about four (Castle wand, Vlad's throne, Amulet pickup, one magic lamp). Anything beyond that is luck (extra lamps, fountain demons, recharge chains) or commitment. Don't waste any of them on food.

What to Wish For

Generations of adventurers have argued about optimal wish order. Here's the conventional wisdom, battle-tested by thousands of ascensions:

1. **Gray dragon scale mail** (magic resistance + AC; magic resistance is the most important protection in the game, so this is highly recommended).
2. **Silver dragon scale mail** (reflection + AC, the second pillar of not dying to wands).
3. **Speed boots** (being fast gives you more actions per turn, excellent for both offense and escape).
4. **Gauntlets of power** (STR 25 if your role benefits; most roles benefit from punching harder).
5. **Amulet of life saving** (insurance for the endgame, when overconfidence kills more adventurers than monsters do).
6. **A specific artifact** (Grayswandir is a common target for the silver damage against everything in Gehennom).

Don't wish for consumables (scrolls, potions) unless you're in dire straits. Items you can find through normal play aren't worth a wish. A wish is for things that change the fundamental equation of your survival.

Wish Syntax

When the game asks “For what do you wish?”, be specific. This is not the time for ambiguity:

- “blessed greased fixed +3 gray dragon scale mail” is the veteran’s incantation. **blessed** because BUC defaults to random, **greased** deflects nymph theft and Rider grabs, **fixed** (or **erodeproof**) locks erosion, **+3** is the safe enchantment ceiling.
- “gray dragon scale mail” alone lets the dice pick the BUC and the enchantment, so a bare wish can land cursed. You had *one* wish; spell out the BUC and the plus. And don’t forget “scale”: “gray dragon mail” alone hands you a scroll of mail instead.
- Artifact wishes get *harder* as artifacts accumulate. The denial roll scales with the total artifacts in the world (yours, generated, even bones-file ones), and your artifact-wish counter ticks whether or not the artifact actually appears. Quest artifacts are absolutely blocked.
- A few targets are silently nerfed into mundane substitutes. The **Amulet of Yendor** becomes a fake amulet, the **Bell of Opening** a plain bell, the **Book of the Dead** blank paper, and the **Candelabrum** a tallow candle. A wish for a **magic lamp** also fails, handing you an ordinary oil lamp. Cruel, after all that lamp-rubbing.



Artifacts

Scattered throughout the Mazes are items of legend: named weapons, amulets, and tools that carry powers no ordinary gear can match. Each artifact exists only once per game, so when you find one, you're holding a genuine one-of-a-kind. Here's how they come into your hands:

- **Fountain dipping** (Excalibur, for Lawful characters).
- **Sacrifice** on an altar (your god may gift you an aligned artifact).
- **Quest completion** (each role's unique quest artifact).
- **Wishing** (you can wish for most artifacts, but they resist if they don't match your alignment).
- **Random generation** (rare, but weapons have a small chance of being generated as an artifact).

Alignment and Blasting

Each artifact has an alignment. If you try to handle an artifact that doesn't match your alignment:

- **Intelligent artifacts** (most quest artifacts and certain alignment-restricted artifacts): 4d10 damage (or 2d10 with magic resistance) and the item evades your grasp. You cannot wield these.
- **Other misaligned artifacts**: 4d4 damage on first touch (2d4 with magic resistance), 1/4 chance of being blasted on each subsequent touch.

Wishable / random artifacts

These are the artifacts you can find, get from a sacrifice gift, fountain-dip up (Excalibur), or wish for. Bonus damage is rolled fresh on each hit (e.g. +d10 means roll 1d10). The "extra" column is the damage rolled *on top of* the base weapon's own damage. A weapon listed as "×2 vs X" rolls its base damage *twice* against any member of that monster class.

Artifact	Align	Weapon	Hit	Extra damage	Notable
Excalibur	Lawful	long sword	+d5	+d10 physical	drain resistance, automatic searching
Grayswandir	Lawful	silver saber	+d5	(base only)	half physical damage received, hallucination res.
Mjollnir	Neutral	war hammer	+d5	+d24 shock	returns when thrown if STR 25
Magicbane	Neutral	athame	+d3	+d4 magic (stun)	magic resistance and curse protection while <i>wielded</i>
Stormbringer	Chaotic	runesword	+d5	+d2 drain life	drains a level (you gain it); attacks peacefuls
Vorpal Blade	any	long sword	+d5	+d1 physical	chance to behead on hit
Frost Brand	any	long sword	+d5	(base only) cold	cold resistance while wielded
Fire Brand	any	long sword	+d5	(base only) fire	fire resistance while wielded
Sunsword	Lawful	long sword	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs undead	wielded light; #invoke fires a blinding ray any direction (camera-style; works on any monster)
Snickersnee	Lawful	katana	—	+d8 physical	one free reach attack per turn (the “Shkinning!” hit) at polearm distance, on top of normal katana melee
Cleaver	Neutral	battle-axe	+d3	+d6 physical	one-handed wield → strikes target <i>and</i> both flanks
Demonbane	Lawful	silver mace	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs demons	banishes demons; Priest’s first sacrifice gift
Sting	Chaotic	elven dagger	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs orcs	warns of orcs (the dagger glows blue)
Orcrist	Chaotic	elven broadsword	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs orcs	warns of orcs
Grimtooth	Chaotic	orcish dagger	+d2	+d6 physical (any target)	warns of elves; defends vs poison
Dragonbane	any	broadsword	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs dragons	reflection while wielded
Werebane	any	silver saber	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs were-	defends against lycanthropy
Giantslayer	Neutral	long sword	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs giants	—
Ogresmasher	any	war hammer	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs ogres	—
Trollsbane	any	morning star	+d5	(base only); ×2 vs trolls	regeneration while wielded

Not every entry is equally desirable. **Grayswandir** and **Magicbane** are the artifacts most players try to wish for first; **Mjollnir** is the Valkyrie’s archetypal wish; **Excalibur** is usually fountain-dipped rather than wished. **Frost Brand**, **Vorpal Blade**, and **Stormbringer** are

common second wishes. **Snickersnee** and **Sunsword** were historically considered flavour pieces, but their 5.0 effects (free reach attack per turn; on-demand camera-style blind) have moved them into the “worth wishing for, role permitting” tier. The remaining entries (the bane weapons, Fire Brand, Cleaver) are usually accepted as sacrifice gifts rather than spent wishes on.

Excalibur is the go-to weapon for Lawful characters; the drain resistance alone is worth carrying it, even after you have a stronger weapon. Knights start aligned to it and have unique 1-in-6 fountain-dip odds; every other Lawful role faces 1-in-30.

Grayswandir is wishable and arguably the game’s best melee weapon. It’s silver (extra damage to many monsters), halves incoming physical damage, and grants hallucination resistance.

Mjollnir is the Valkyrie’s signature throw-and-return weapon — only Valkyries catch it back 99% of the time. Other roles can wield it in melee, but throwing it is risky because the return often misses. Needs Strength 25 to wield in either case (gauntlets of power or rings of gain strength get you there); +d24 shock damage is brutal against anything not shock-resistant.

Magicbane is the Wizard’s go-to athame. Its stun damage, curse protection, and magic resistance all require it to be **wielded**, not just carried. Often the first gift from a Neutral sacrifice. One nuance for two-weapon Wizards: the curse protection only applies while Magicbane is the *primary* wielded weapon. If you stash Magicbane in the off-hand to swing a heavier blade, you’ve also turned off its anti-curse aura.

Stormbringer is dangerous because it attacks peaceful monsters automatically, which can wreck your alignment. But each hit drains a level from the target and gives it to you, huge in the early-to-mid game. Stormbringer is also *intelligent*: a Lawful or Neutral wielder takes 4d10 blast damage on touch, not the 4d4 that ordinary cross-aligned artifacts deal.

Cleaver is the Barbarian quest artifact. When wielded one-handed, every swing strikes the primary target *and* the two squares flanking it: three monsters per attack at a corridor mouth or against a diagonal pair. The side-strikes don’t fire when two-weaponing, so most Barbarians keep Cleaver as the primary and a shield in the off slot.

Frost Brand and **Fire Brand** each have an *invoke* power the wishable table doesn’t capture: Frost Brand summons a snowstorm around you (cold damage to nearby squares), Fire Brand summons a firestorm. Either one clears the room around you when you’re cornered.

Snickersnee got a major buff in 5.0: once per turn you can *apply* it for a reach attack at a target up to two squares away, *without* using your turn — you still get a normal melee swing on top. The free hit is announced by a distinctive “Shkingg!” That combined output (one

reach + one melee per turn) makes Snickersnee a contender for best Samurai weapon, not the flavor piece it used to be.

Sunsword is the Lawful long sword that wants to be a tool. Wielded, it lights its current radius (handy in caves and the Mines without costing an oil lamp). #invoke it for a directed *blinding ray*, mechanically a Camera flash in any direction (not limited to undead). It costs 50 Pw per invocation, so save it for the fights that demand it: Riders, mind flayers, the Wizard of Yendor. Invoking up or down lights the room; invoking at yourself self-blinds you.

Bane weapons (Sunsword, Demonbane, Sting, Orcrist, Grimtooth, Dragonbane, Werebane, Giantslayer, Ogresmasher, Trollsbane) deal double base damage against their target class. Most are disappointing as a primary weapon, but the defensive riders are often the real reason to swap one in: Trollsbane regenerates while wielded (genuinely useful for an early character holding the line), Dragonbane reflects, Werebane neutralizes lycanthropy, Grimtooth defends against poison.

Quest artifacts

Each role has exactly one quest artifact, awarded for completing the role's quest. They are intelligent: only the rightful owner can safely wield them; anyone else gets blasted. Most of the non-weapon ones grant magic resistance just by sitting in your inventory, so roles whose quest artifact is a passive object still benefit from carrying it.

A wishing quirk to know about. The wish system blocks *your own* role's quest artifact (you have to earn it the hard way), but it doesn't block *other roles'* quest artifacts. A neutral character can wish for any neutral quest artifact, a lawful one for any lawful quest artifact, and so on. The alignment-blast rule still applies if you actually wield or wear a misaligned one, but carry bonuses (MR, drain resistance, regeneration, half spell damage, energy regeneration, etc.) work for anyone. A neutral Monk can wish for the Healer's *Staff of Aesculapius* for the drain-life-on-hit and drain-resistance carry bonus, or the Wizard's *Eye of the Aethiopica* for MR + half-spell-damage + energy regen, even though those quests are closed to the Monk. Wishes for artifacts of all kinds also have an increasing fizzle chance as more artifacts already exist in the game.

#invoke (default ^A) activates each artifact's special power for an energy cost, and the power has a cooldown before you can use it again.

Role	Artifact	Form	Wear/wield	Carry	#invoke
Arc	The Orb of Detection	crystal ball	—	MR, ESP, ½ spell dmg	invisibility

Role	Artifact	Form	Wear/wield	Carry	#invoke
Bar	The Heart of Ahriman	luckstone	×2 dmg as a projectile	stealth, +luck	levitation
Cav	The Sceptre of Might	mace	+d5 hit; ×2 vs non-lawful	magic resistance	conflict
Hea	The Staff of Aesculapius	quarterstaff	drain-life on hit	drain res., regen	full heal + cure
Kni	The Magic Mirror of Merlin	mirror	(speaks to you)	MR, ESP	—
Mon	The Eyes of the Overworld	lenses	astral vision, magic res. (when worn)	—	enlightenment
Pri	The Mitre of Holiness	helm	+1 prot. (brilliance base)	fire res.	energy boost
Ran	The Longbow of Diana	bow	+d5 hit; reflection	ESP	conjure arrows
Rog	The Master Key of Thievery	skeleton key	—	warn, t-ctrl, ½ phys	guaranteed untrap
Sam	The Tsurugi of Muramasa	tsurugi	+d8 phys; chance to behead	+luck, +1 prot.	—
Tou	Platinum Yendorian Express Card	credit card	—	MR, ESP, ½ spell dmg	charge an item
Val	The Orb of Fate	crystal ball	—	+luck, warn, ½ all dmg	levitate / teleport
Wiz	The Eye of the Aethiopia	amulet	—	MR, ½ spell, +energy	create portal

The Orb of Detection (Archeologist): a crystal ball that grants ESP and magic resistance just by being carried. #invoke toggles invisibility. Archeologists are already exceptional at stealth, and this turns them into a ghost.

The Heart of Ahriman (Barbarian): a true luckstone (so it raises the Luck cap to +13 and counts everywhere a luckstone does), plus stealth and a +1 luck bonus. Barbarians can also throw it for double damage and pick it back up. #invoke is levitation.

The Sceptre of Might (Caveman): mace base, +d5 to-hit, double damage against any monster whose alignment differs from the artifact's (the Sceptre itself is Lawful, so it deals doubled damage against chaotic, neutral, *and* unaligned monsters: most of the dungeon's hostiles once you reach Gehennom). It also grants magic resistance while *wielded*. #invoke casts conflict (monsters fight each other) at a steep energy cost.

The Staff of Aesculapius (Healer): the Healer's salvation. Each hit drains life (one of only three drain-life weapons; the others are Stormbringer and the rider Death) and gives you regeneration plus drain resistance just by carrying it. #invoke heals fully and cures nearly every bad status. Few artifacts change a role's late game as much as this one.

The Magic Mirror of Merlin (Knight): grants ESP and magic resistance, and occasionally *speaks*, dropping hints. Knights already have Excalibur for combat, so the Mirror is pure passive utility.

The Eyes of the Overworld (Monk): lenses that, when worn, give astral vision (see invisible, see through walls, spot secret doors) **and** magic resistance. Both effects require them to be worn; carrying them in inventory does nothing. #iinvoke enlightens you. For a Monk who can't safely wear body armor, a powerful passive on a slot they can use.

The Mitre of Holiness (Priest): a helm of brilliance with the usual brilliance bonus to intelligence and wisdom (so spell-cast more reliably), plus fire resistance while carried, plus a free -1 to AC. #iinvoke for an energy boost, useful for spell-heavy Priests. Note: despite what older spoilers say, the Mitre does **not** deal bonus damage against undead (the artifact has no melee attack to carry the bonus), and it does not grant drain resistance.

The Longbow of Diana (Ranger): a real artifact bow with +d5 to hit plus reflection while wielded, ESP while carried. #iinvoke conjures free arrows out of thin air. Combined with the Ranger's ranged specialization this is the role's centerpiece.

The Master Key of Thievery (Rogue): just carrying it grants warning, teleport control, and half physical damage taken. #iinvoke disarms a nearby trap. The Key also opens any lock without effort and detects traps on doors and chests as it unlocks them — for a Rogue this works on any non-cursed Key, but everyone else needs it **blest**.

The Tsurugi of Muramasa (Samurai): a katana-grade two-handed sword with +d8 damage *and* a behead chance (like Vorpal Blade) *and* a +1 protection bonus, and it acts as a luckstone. Note that Tsurugi does **not** grant magic resistance, despite the weapon's reputation. One of the strongest artifacts in the game, the Samurai's reward for a hard quest.

The Platinum Yendorian Express Card (Tourist): the Tourist's get-out-of-jail card. Carrying it grants ESP, magic resistance, and half spell damage; #iinvoke charges an item (a wand, ring, or marker), which in the Tourist's hands is roughly "a free wish per ~1000 turns." Pairs especially well with marker-stockpiling strategies.

The Orb of Fate (Valkyrie): the most generous carried passive in the game — counts as a luckstone, grants warning, halves both spell *and* physical damage taken. #iinvoke is levitate-or-teleport (a toggle, very useful in the Sanctum).

The Eye of the Aethiopica (Wizard): grants magic resistance when **worn**; carrying also gives half spell damage taken and *extra energy regeneration*, a Wizard's most precious resource. #iinvoke opens a portal that drops you in Vlad's Tower (one-way; useful for short-cutting the Castle → Vlad's traversal). For a spell-caster this is irreplaceable.

The Deep Dungeon

The Castle

If you've reached the Castle, congratulations: you've survived the easy part. Everything below is worse.

The Castle sits at the bottom of the Dungeons of Doom, guarded by a drawbridge and whatever the dungeon decided to stuff inside this time.

The drawbridge is the first puzzle. You can lower it four ways:

- **Play the passtune.** A five-note musical sequence played on any tonal instrument (wooden flute, magic flute, tooled horn, frost or fire horn, bugle, harp) opens the drawbridge. The notes are randomized per game. You can learn them by trying different sequences: the game tells you how many notes are correct after each attempt, like a game of Mastermind. Stand one knight's-move from the bridge while guessing; adjacent squares get crushed when the bridge opens or breaks. The notes are A-G; "H" is also accepted, in the German notation where it means B.
- **Wand of opening** pointed at the drawbridge.
- **Spell of knock** cast at the drawbridge.
- **Wand of striking** *destroys* the drawbridge entirely. The moat squares become walkable, but the bridge is gone and the tune is useless afterward. Use this as a one-way option.

Once you're across, the Castle contains:

- A **throne room** with a throne and a random court of high-letter monsters (liches, nymphs, eyes, giants, and the like). Sitting on the throne is tempting but risky (see Points of Interest). The throne room also holds a separate **treasure chest** with random loot. This is not the wand chest, just a side prize.
- **Barracks** full of soldiers carrying decent equipment, which is to say *your* equipment once you've dealt with them.
- **Four corner-tower alcoves.** One (and only one, randomly) contains the **wand of wishing** in a locked chest. *Search them all*, or quaff a potion of object detection from the courtyard to see which tower holds the chest and skip the other three. In 5.0, that chest also holds a **potion of gain level**, included as a small make-good for the wand's charge changes (see below). The chest's square is protected by a burned-in *Elbereth* engraving and sealed with a cursed scroll of scare monster. Those wards exist to keep wandering monsters from *eating* the chest itself (some species, like leprechauns and rats,

gnaw containers). The cursed scroll is also a known gotcha: don't try to read it casually. The locked chest opens by force, by a key, or by a wand of opening.

- Four **storerooms** along the north and south walls, each guarded by a dragon (D-class). Don't confuse them with the corner alcoves; the storerooms hold random fodder.
- A **central hallway lined with five trap doors**. Stepping on one drops you straight to the Valley of the Dead, which is rarely what you want at this stage. Watch the floor. The trap doors are also the *only* way down from the Castle: the level has no conventional > stair to Gehennom, so when you are ready to descend, you do so by deliberately stepping on one.
- A **fountain** in the moat-side corridor, usable in emergencies but not worth risking the wand of wishing for.
- A **moat** surrounding the fortress, occupied by giant eels and the occasional shark.

Strategy: clear the Castle carefully. A ring of conflict turns the guards against each other: walk in, put on the ring, and let the soldiers solve your monster problem for you. Loot everything. Then use your wand of wishing to fill critical gaps in your equipment (gray dragon scale mail, silver dragon scale mail, gauntlets of power, speed boots, whatever you're missing).

The locked Castle wand chest is **safe to leave temporarily**: monsters in 5.0 can pick up and rummage through *unlocked* containers, and they can unlock doors with keys, but they cannot unlock chests. A chest that started life locked stays locked until you or a wand of opening intervene. Unlocked containers are fair game.

The Castle wand yields only two wishes reliably (one charge + one recharge), so plan a *small* wishlist and accept that further wishes will need to come from other guaranteed sources: Vlad's throne, the Amulet pickup, Orcus Town's lamp/marker, fountain luck, or wresting. The era of the bottomless wishing wand is over (see Key Wands (p. 116) for the full mechanics).

Once you're fully equipped, the trap doors in the central hallway are your way down to Gehennom. Take a moment before descending. Sit down. Have a snack. Check your inventory twice. You should have **magic resistance**, **reflection**, **fire** and **poison resistance**, a **wand of digging**, a **unicorn horn**, plenty of food, holy water, scrolls of teleportation and identify, and your **quest artifact**.



Gehennom

Below the Castle the dungeon changes its character. Corridors give way to mazes, ordinary monsters to demons. Worst of all, your god goes silent. Prayer fails in Gehennom, and from this point on you survive on what you packed at the Castle.

This is the stretch of the game that separates tourists from ascenders. Everything you have prepared for has been leading here.

The Valley of the Dead

The first level of Gehennom, immediately below the Castle, is the **Valley of the Dead**. The arrival message reads *"You arrive at the Valley of the Dead..."* and the dungeon overview marks the level for the rest of the game. The map is a wide hand-designed level with three irregular graveyards scattered across it and a permanent **shrine to Moloch** in the upper-left corner. The shrine sits on an unaligned high altar; do not pray here. The walls are non-diggable everywhere, so no shortcuts, and both `noteleport` and `nommap` are set, which means magic mapping will not reveal the level and teleportation does not work.

A morbid detail worth noticing. Scattered across the level are **dead bodies of every player role** the dungeon has ever seen descend: two corpses each of Archeologists, Barbarians, Cavemen, Healers, Knights, Rangers, Rogues, Samurai, Tourists, Valkyries, and Wizards. Pointedly absent: no Priests and no Monks. Moloch may have a special fate reserved for members of those classes.

What's Different in Gehennom

- **No prayer.** Your god is deaf to you in Gehennom (unless you are a Moloch worshipper, and you are not). No emergency healing, no food rescue, no curse removal via divine intervention. Pack accordingly; from here on you are on your own.
- **Fire everywhere.** Fire traps litter the corridors, and demons breathe fire as casually as you breathe air. If you do not have fire resistance by now, turn around.
- **Hot ground.** In 5.0, the ground itself is hot enough to shatter potions dropped on the floor. Keep everything in a bag at all times.

- **Demon lords on specific levels.** Asmodeus, Baalzebul, Juiblex, Orcus, Yeenoghu, and, very rarely, Demogorgon hold court on private throne levels. Each fight is a major battle, several can summon reinforcements, and all of them are angry you are here. Their lairs and the bribery rules get their own section below.
- **Teleportation restrictions.** In 5.0, teleportation is blocked on a demon lord's lair level while that lord still lives. Kill or banish them and the restriction lifts. In older editions, most Gehennom levels permanently blocked teleportation, which is no longer the case.
- **Mazes.** Nearly every level is a maze. A wand of digging or a pickaxe is no longer optional. Dig straight lines to the stairs and don't look back.

The demon-prince lairs

Three of Gehennom's special levels are the personal thrones of **Asmodeus** (fire-, cold-, and poison-resistant, casts cold spells, carries wands of cold and fire), **Baalzebul** (the Lord of the Flies, with a stunning gaze and a poisonous bite that drains Strength; his lair is a beetle-shaped maze), and **Juiblex** (the Faceless Lord, a slime that engulfs in melee and spits acid). All three sit alone in their lairs and **will not pursue** you, so you can avoid them entirely by skipping their level.

Asmodeus and Baalzebul are bribable. The demand is a random fraction of the gold in your main inventory, so **stash gold in a bag of holding before walking up to the throne** and a few hundred zm will buy off a prince who would otherwise have demanded thousands. Lawful characters get a sweetener. All four bribable demon princes are themselves lawful, and they discount the demand by half for a co-aligned visitor. **Juiblex is not bribable**, and neither are Yeenoghu, Orcus, or Demogorgon. Only the Arch-Devil demons with the bribe disposition (Geryon, Dispaten, Baalzebul, Asmodeus) accept gold. The rest attack on sight regardless of how friendly your wallet looks.

Fighting Juiblex is viable late game (a wand of death works on all four), but expect a real fight. None of their corpses is useful for sacrifice the way a fresh weak monster's would be. One thing the demon never forgets: a *refused* bribe converts the prince to permanent hostility, and he will not offer terms again. Bribe or fight. Don't dither.

Wielding Excalibur or Demonbane closes off bribery entirely. Those artifacts refuse to talk and attack on sight, so a Lawful character planning to bribe should sheathe them before approach.

Vlad's Tower

A three-level tower branching **upward** off Gehennom, one of the only side-branches in the lower dungeon. **Vlad the Impaler**, a unique vampire lord, guards the **Candelabrum of Invocation** at the top. Climb the tower, kill Vlad, take the Candelabrum.

The tower also contains a **special throne**, and 5.0 has made it both more rewarding and more painful. The good news: it never disintegrates from sheer use the way ordinary thrones do, so you can sit on it again and again. The bad news: you will, because the prize is rare. Each sit rolls one of thirteen effects. Four of them grant a wish (the throne *does* disintegrate after the wish, having spent its power). The other nine are bad: permanent level drain, an inventory-coating layer of grease (your weapon will slip, your shield will fall off), a stripped intrinsic, a forced level teleport to the vibrating-square level (sometimes useful, often not), three summoned demons, a confused-blessed remove curse on your gear, forced polymorph, acid damage in eighty-HP gulps if you do not have acid resistance, or a randomized stat shuffle that will probably make several of your scores worse.

The arithmetic: only one sit in three picks an effect at all (the other two roll “you feel out of place” and do nothing), and of those that fire, 4/13 are the wish. The unconditional rate is about 1 in 10, so plan on roughly ten sits before the wish lands, with about seven bad effects absorbed along the way. Stand at full HP, leave any precious gear behind (a grease hit coats your whole pack and makes your hands slippery for 100 to 200 turns, dropping items when you try to use them), and have acid resistance or magic resistance ready before you sit. If you do not want a forced wish right now (say, you have already used your Castle wish and Amulet wish and want to keep this one for the ascension kit), you can come back later. The throne stays put unless something destroys it.

Orcus Town

Orcus is a god of the underworld in Roman mythology, a chthonic figure who punishes broken oaths and devours the dead. In NetHack he is a unique demon prince (&, level 66, fast flier), the **Prince of Undead**, who casts spells, swings a weapon, claws twice, and stings for strength drain. His signature artifact is the **Wand of Orcus**, a wand of death by another name. His fingertip cantrip is also a death ray, so wear an amulet of life saving and consider opening with your own wand of death rather than a melee approach.

His level is a ghost town. A normal shopping district has been emptied: the shopkeepers and customers were all killed off by his ambient aura, and the buildings are stocked with random loot instead of for-sale inventory. What remains is an honor guard of liches, vampires, and ghouls. Somewhere on the level the dungeon guarantees either a **magic lamp** or a **magic**

marker (50/50). Walk carefully, since fire and magic traps are everywhere; deal with the residents, and lift the lamp or marker on your way out. Either is a real supplement to the Castle wand's single charge.

The Wizard's Tower

A sequence of three special Gehennom levels that lead to the **Wizard of Yendor** himself and the **Book of the Dead**. He is dangerous not for raw combat power but because he *never stops*. He teleports to your location, summons monsters, steals back his Amulet whenever you grab it, curses your gear, and once you wake him he *will not leave you alone* for the rest of the game.

Kill him cleanly the first time, grab the Book, and move on. Subsequent kills don't yield new loot (he respawns), so don't engage him voluntarily again. The "Run, don't fight" advice for the Ascension Run is mostly about him.

Moloch's Sanctum

The bottom level of Gehennom. It is **sealed**: until the Invocation ritual is performed (see "The Heist" below), the down-stair to the Sanctum doesn't exist, and the level above is just one more maze. Once the seal breaks, descend to find the **High Priest of Moloch** standing on the **high altar** with the **Amulet of Yendor**. The High Priest is a unique non-bribable boss who casts spells, summons minions, and aggrieves anyone in melee range. The standard answer is a wand of death or finger of death from a safe distance.

The Heist

The climax of the game is a choreographed sequence: three Invocation items, one vibrating square, one final boss, and one frantic climb back to the surface. The steps:

1. **Collect the trio.** You need the **Bell of Opening** (the Quest goal, dropped by your quest nemesis), the **Candelabrum of Invocation** (the top of Vlad's Tower), and the **Book of the Dead** (the bottom of the Wizard's Tower). Missing any one means walking all the way back to fetch it; the Bell in particular is easy to leave behind on the nemesis's corpse the first time through the Quest.
2. **Attach all seven candles to the Candelabrum.** Apply (a) each candle and select the Candelabrum. Candles spawn often enough that you'll usually have enough, but you

need a source for seven: **Izchak's lighting shop in Minetown** is the clean answer, or seven are scattered on that level if the shop is absent (Orcish Town layout).

3. **Find the vibrating square.** On the Gehennom level directly above Moloch's Sanctum, a single square vibrates when you step on it: *"You feel an unsettling vibration under your feet."* The square's position is random within the maze, so you have to search by walking. Scrolls of magic mapping help enormously.
4. **Perform the Invocation.** Standing on the vibrating square, with the Candelabrum lit and the Book in your pack, **#invoke the Bell of Opening**. The floor opens; a down-stair to the Sanctum appears under your feet.
5. **Swipe the Amulet from Moloch.** Descend, take down the **High Priest** (wand of death is the clean answer), walk onto the high altar, and pick up the **Amulet of Yendor**.
6. **Begin the getaway.** The up-stair from the Sanctum now lifts you out (it would not before you had the Amulet). You are now on the **Ascension Run**. Every covetous monster in the game has noticed, the Wizard of Yendor will keep teleporting to you to take his Amulet back, and the Mysterious Force will keep yanking you back down. Climb fast (see The Ascension Run below).

Survival Tips

- **Bring extra food.** You will be moving fast and prayer is not a reliable refill.
- **Bring scrolls of remove curse.** Fast inventory cleanup when something goes wrong.
- **Dig, don't navigate.** Maze walls are faster to go through than around.
- **Kill the Wizard quickly.** Every turn he lives is another summoned monster, another stolen item, another cursed piece of gear. He will come back (he always comes back), but the intervals between his appearances give you breathing room.
- **The Amulet anchors you.** Level teleportation does not work while you carry it. Every step back to the surface must be climbed by foot.
- **Genocide the lich class.** A blessed scroll of genocide applied to **L** removes liches, demiliches, master liches, and arch-liches in one read. Some of the worst Gehennom threats, gone for the rest of the run.



The Ascension Kit

Here is what most successful adventurers carry into Moloch's Sanctum, slot by slot:

Slot	Typical pick	Notes
Body	Dragon scale mail	Gray (magic resistance) or silver (reflection) are the popular picks; blue (shock) also works.
Cloak	Cloak of magic resistance	Or a robe for casters. Magic resistance keeps you alive through Gehennom.
Helm	Helm of brilliance or helm of telepathy	Brilliance for casters; telepathy when you might be blind.
Gloves	Gauntlets of power	Skip them only if you have a different STR strategy (e.g. a Knight with a +STR ring).
Boots	Speed boots	Universal.
Shirt	Hawaiian shirt or T-shirt	A free body slot under everything else. Heavy enchantment (typically blessed +4 or +5) buys several extra AC at no cost.
Shield	Mostly skipped	Reflection comes from silver dragon scale mail or an amulet instead; two-weapon fighters can't use a shield anyway.
Amulet	Amulet of life saving	The "extra life" plan.
Ring (L)	Free action	The Astral Plane is packed with paralyzing attacks; you want this on every step.
Ring (R)	Slow digestion, conflict, or regeneration	Conflict is the standard Astral-Plane crowd-control choice.
Weapon	Your role's quest artifact + a silver saber	Silver saber appears in most builds as the off-hand because silver bypasses demon resistances.
Pack	Bag of holding, magic lamp, unicorn horn, luckstone, wand of death, multiple wands of teleport, seven candles, ≥ 5 holy water, a couple of blessed potions of full healing, a cockatrice corpse	The "bag-of-holding bundle." Holy water re-blesses items the Wizard or liches keep cursing in Gehennom; full healing is a one-action panic button; a wielded cockatrice corpse one-shots Riders (and other non-stoning-resistant nasties). Candles are for the Candelabrum, and Izchak's Minetown lighting shop is an easy source.
Required loot	Bell of Opening, Candelabrum of Invocation, Book of the Dead, Amulet of Yendor	The Invocation chain plus the prize.

A typical ascension AC sits in the **-25 to -40** range, but AC alone is not the difference between winning and losing.

What killed the runners-up

A look at adventurers who died deep in Gehennom shows that their gear was nearly indistinguishable from the ascenders'. Their AC was -23 to -40 . They had wands of death, all three Invocation items, silver dragon scale mail. What killed them was *behavior*:

- **Inventory management mid-combat.** An Archeologist on Dlvl 35 tried to open a tin while a jabberwock, a displacer beast, and a zruty were adjacent. The tin opener prompt took the turn she didn't have.
- **Eating when not hungry.** A Tourist with AC -40 and all three Invocation items, deep in Gehennom, chose to eat a stalker corpse while satiated and choked to death. The ring of slow digestion on her finger does not prevent choking.
- **Out of escape consumables.** A Wizard on Dlvl 50, within sight of the Sanctum, burned the last wand-of-death charge without any further escape route, then died blind and surrounded.

Keep at least one escape consumable within reach: a scroll of teleportation, a wand of digging, or an oilskin sack with a potion of full healing.

The Ascension Run

You did it. You fought through Gehennom, defeated the High Priest, and snatched the Amulet of Yendor from Moloch's Sanctum. Now all you have to do is carry it from the absolute bottom of the dungeon, through every level of Gehennom, past every demon lord you thought you were done with, all the way back to the surface, and then through the Elemental Planes to the Astral Plane where your god awaits. Easy, right?

A free wish on pickup. The moment you pick up the Amulet of Yendor, your god grants you a single wish on the next turn. It fires automatically; you do not need to invoke it. This is one of the most generous moments in the game. Have your wish list ready *before* you reach the Sanctum: gauntlets of power, a +5 weapon of your choice, a blessed cloak of magic resistance, or whatever you are missing for the climb. You only get this wish once. A late-game favorite is a wish for a **cursed potion of gain level**. Drinking one while carrying the Amulet skips you up a whole Gehennom level without provoking the Mysterious Force.

Bring the authentic Amulet. The climb out is always open. Every up-stair in the Dungeons of Doom takes you closer to the surface regardless of what you carry. The **Astral plane portal** at the top of the Endgame ladder, however, will not open without the real Amulet of Yendor in your inventory. Only the Amulet you took off the High Priest's body in Moloch's Sanctum counts. Bones-pile Amulets are fakes (the game converts a dead adventurer's real Amulet to a fake when their corpse becomes a bones level), and a wish for an Amulet of Yendor silently substitutes a fake too. If you didn't pick yours up off the High Priest, you don't have the real one.

The Ascension Run is the victory lap that keeps killing even the strongest adventurers. You have the most powerful artifact in the dungeon in your pack, every covetous monster in the Mazes knows it, and the dungeon itself is fighting to keep you from leaving. The most exhilarating and terrifying stretch of the game.

The Gauntlet

The dungeon now opposes you on four fronts, all of them aimed at the Amulet in your pack:

- **The Wizard of Yendor** periodically teleports to your location, summoning monsters and reaching for the Amulet. He will not stop. Kill him each time. He always comes back. He is the world's most persistent ex.
- **The Amulet blocks teleportation.** You cannot level teleport while carrying the Amulet. Every single staircase from the bottom of Gehennom to the surface has to be climbed by foot.
- **Covetous monsters.** Demon lords and the Wizard can warp directly to your position and attack. They are specifically targeting you for the Amulet, because apparently everyone wants this thing.
- **The Mysterious Force.** While you carry the Amulet in Gehennom, each time you climb stairs there is a chance the force grabs you instead. Often it just shuffles you elsewhere on the same level. Sometimes it drops you **down** a level (Chaotic max), two levels (Neutral max), or even three (Lawfuls only). The worst yank is hardest on Lawfuls and gentlest on Chaotics: a Chaotic climb can never lose more than one level at a time. In 5.0 the trigger chance also **decays** as it fires. Every yank slightly reduces the chance of the next one, and the decay is faster when the yank was deeper, so over the whole climb the per-step rate stays roughly even across alignments. The force stops the moment you climb out of Gehennom, and it never fires on the bottom four levels.
- **Consider a Chaotic detour.** A helm of opposite alignment worn just before the climb flips you to Chaotic and caps every yank at one level. The cost is that your Astral offering then goes to the Chaotic altar, since the altar check uses your *current* alignment. An optimization choice, not a free lunch.

Strategy

You are no longer an explorer. You are a running back carrying the ball through the entire opposing team. Speed is everything.

- **Run, don't fight.** Don't explore. Don't loot. Just go up. Every turn you spend fighting something optional is a turn the Wizard gets closer to stealing back his Amulet.
- **Dig.** Use your wand of digging to reach staircases quickly. Straight lines through walls beat wandering through corridors.
- **Zap problems away.** Teleportation wands move monsters out of your path. Death wands remove them permanently. Use both liberally.

- **Casters: drop the Amulet to cast.** Carrying the Amulet adds an extra 1–2× the spell's base cost on every cast, so you pay roughly 2–3× total. Drop the Amulet, cast your finger of death or magic mapping, pick it back up. The three-turn round trip is cheaper than the Pw burn.
- **Kill the Wizard fast.** When he shows up (and he will), don't try to be clever. Finger of death, wand of death, or brute force. The faster he's down, the fewer monsters he summons.
- **Don't rely on Elbereth past the Castle.** Elbereth is **completely ignored** in all of Gehennom and on all four Elemental Planes plus Astral. You can still write it for the alignment, but no monster will care. Plan your heal-and-recover breaks around corridors, scrolls of teleportation, and conflict instead.

The Ascension Run rewards preparation and punishes hesitation. If you packed well at the Castle and your resistances are solid, this is a sprint, not a marathon. Once you reach the top of the Dungeons of Doom, the final staircase leads to the Elemental Planes: the last obstacle between you and divinity.

The Elemental Planes

Beyond the top of the Dungeons of Doom, the world dissolves into its raw elements. Four planes stand between you and the gods, each one a different flavor of hostile. There are no stairs here, only magic portals, hidden somewhere on each plane, leading to the next. Each plane is a closed world; the portal you find is the only way out of it, and it closes behind you. There is no going back.

Two cheap ways to find a portal. A scroll of gold detection read while confused marks every trap on the level, the portal included: one read, one map. And the Amulet of Yendor is itself a compass while you carry it: wielded or worn, it occasionally mutters *hot*, *very warm*, or *warm* as you get closer (within 3, 8, or 12 squares of the portal). It's a hot/cold game you can play your way across the void.

Plane of Earth

You arrive in a small cavern in the corner of the plane. The light is dim, and two figures are already there to meet you: an Elvenking and a minotaur, both hostile. The plane is a constellation of small caverns scattered through diggable rock, and the portal to the Plane of Air is hidden in another one of them. The only way through is to dig. The other caverns hold earth elementals, stone giants, rock trolls, stone golems, pit fiends, dust vortices, and an umber hulk. Teleportation is sealed, so once a fight starts you cannot escape it on a wand. A wand of digging is essential. A scroll of magic mapping or a crystal ball tells you which cavern holds the portal, so you can dig *toward* it rather than tunnel blindly. The plane is claustrophobic and punishing, but it is the gentlest of the four.

Plane of Air

The opposite extreme: an open void with no walls, no floor you can feel, just empty sky and air elementals moving faster than thought. They attack multiple times per turn and they cannot be genocided. A ring of conflict is devastating here: let them tear each other apart while you search for the portal. A scroll of magic mapping reveals it. The plane is divided into drifting **cloud bubbles** that move on their own each turn, and if you are standing in a bubble when it shifts, you shift with it. Walking with the drift can carry you across the

plane faster than fighting against it, and a bubble may eventually drift you onto the portal square itself.

The plane bars its own shortcut. Self-teleportation meets only the message “*A mysterious force prevents you from teleporting!*” A wand of teleportation still moves whatever is chasing you; it just will not move you.

Plane of Fire

Everything is on fire. The ground is fire. The air is fire. Fire elementals fill the level, and fire traps dot every corridor. Fire resistance isn't just recommended: without it, you'll be dead in turns. Map the level, find the portal among the flames, and get there. Don't stop to fight anything you don't have to.

Plane of Water

The entire plane is underwater. Without magical breathing (an amulet, the Amphibious intrinsic, or a polyform that breathes water) you will drown. An **amulet of life saving** rescues you from the first death, but the water is still there, and the next turn drowns you again unless something has changed. The plane is a labyrinth of water-filled chambers with occasional air pockets between them. Sea monsters prowl the corridors.

The standard tactic on arrival: genocide class ;. Read a scroll of genocide, target the entire ; class (jellyfish, piranhas, sharks, giant eels, electric eels, krakens), and the plane instantly empties of anything that can drag you under. This is the right moment for that scroll. Class ; is almost nowhere else in the game (a kraken occasionally appears in Medusa's pool, but that is the only meaningful encounter), and on the next plane it is irrelevant. Spend the scroll here. Then find the portal and push through. This is the last barrier between you and the gods.

The Astral Plane

You surface into the presence of the divine. Three altars stand in the great temple: Lawful, Neutral, and Chaotic. You must sacrifice the Amulet of Yendor on the altar matching your alignment to ascend. **Choose wrong and the game ends on the spot:** the opposing god gains dominion over your god, and you've handed victory to the other side. There is no retrying. Pick the right altar the first time. Farlook (;) shows an altar's alignment only when you are *adjacent* to it. From across the room you only see "an aligned high altar," so plan to walk within one square of each in turn until one matches yours.

The plane is swarming with Angels and the three **Riders**: Death, Famine, and Pestilence. They are level 30, regenerate while you fight, see invisible, and shove monsters out of their path. Each one hits twice per turn with a touch attack dealing 8d8 damage.

- **Death** moves with the slow inevitability of his name. Every touch is 8d8 damage, and roughly three in twenty land the kill itself. Magic resistance blocks the instakill but not the baseline damage; without magic resistance you live or die at random on every swing.
- **Pestilence** comes with a sickness that finishes you a few turns after the swing connects. Sick resistance breaks the curse before it takes hold; without it, a unicorn horn may clear the timer in time, but the race is real and the timer is short.
- **Famine** kills by accumulation. Each touch is 8d8 damage and 40 to 79 turns of hunger taken straight out of you. No single swing starves you. Three swings in a row will.

A slight mercy that is new to 5.0: if Pestilence or Famine land their first attack on a turn, their second downgrades to a stun.

The Riders cannot be permanently killed. They revive, they pursue, they do not stop. **Eating any Rider corpse is instantly fatal.** You are not here to fight; you are here to reach one altar, make one sacrifice, and end this.

If you have to pick which Rider to engage first, the community consensus is **Pestilence is the one to fear most:** the sickness timer keeps killing you after you've moved away, and unicorn-horn cures sometimes lose the race. Death's instakill is blocked by magic resistance; Famine you can outrun with a stack of food. Pestilence wants to be settled before either of the others.

Defenses. An **amulet of life saving** is the best insurance on Astral. Magic resistance stops Death's instakill. Sick resistance handles Pestilence (green dragon scale mail is a source). Carry plenty of food (Famine bypasses normal nutrition pacing) and a unicorn horn for the stun side effects. A wielded cockatrice corpse (with gloves) can remove a Rider on a single landed hit: they have no stoning resistance. A ring of **conflict** keeps the Riders tangled fighting Angels and minor demons instead of chasing you, sometimes long enough to reach the altar; just don't put the ring on while your own minion Angel is still alive: it vanishes and

your god replaces it with four hostile Angels. Teleportation wands can clear a path through the crowds; note that **self-teleport fails on every elemental plane**, so zapping the wand at yourself does nothing. Only zapping it at others teleports them.

Don't zap a wand of death at Death. It heals him. Magic missile works on all three Riders; use that instead.

Offer the Amulet at the correct altar. Your god accepts the gift, the Amulet vanishes into the divine flame, and you ascend among the immortals. Few adventurers reach this moment. The book closes here. Congratulations.

Appendices

Advanced Controls

The basic keys get you through every situation in NetHack. The commands below get you through them faster. Once you've spent a few thousand turns hammering `s` and walking corridors one square at a time, you may find they become reflexive.

Command counts

Type a number before any command and the game repeats it that many times: `10s` searches ten times, `20.` waits twenty turns, `5h` walks west five times. The sequence interrupts automatically as soon as anything interesting happens (a monster appears adjacent, your HP changes, a `--More--` prompt fires, the search turns up something. Press `ESC` to cancel early.

Counts up to 32,767 are accepted (five digits), but the practical limit is “however long you'll watch the screen update without losing patience.” `99s` is plenty for any real searching job.

Repeat last command (Ctrl+A)

`Ctrl+A` runs whatever you just ran, with the same count if you used one. After your first `10s` of searching, every subsequent search is one keystroke. This is the most-used advanced command in the game and you'll reach for it dozens of times per session. It remembers the *last command that actually executed*, not attempts that were canceled or bumped against a wall.

Movement prefixes

A handful of prefix keys modify the next command and then clear. They are essential for moving safely through populated areas.

- **F** then a direction is **force attack** into that square, even if no monster is visible there. Use it on suspected invisible monsters, on a displaced creature whose image is one square off from its real position, or to break your own Elbereth. Double-tap `F` to cancel without acting.

- **G** then a direction is **run** that direction until something interesting appears: a monster, an unknown item, a trap, a corridor branch, a closed door. Capital-letter directions (H, J, K, L, and the diagonals Y, U, B, N) are the same thing in one keystroke and are what most players actually use. **g** is a less-cautious variant of **G**, but in practice the difference is negligible.
- **m** then a direction is **move without attacking and without picking up**. Walk past your pet without striking it (“Pardon me, Fido”), step past an autopickup heap, refuse to walk into a known pool or lava square. With non-movement commands, **m** requests a menu instead of the default single-target prompt: **me** is “what would you like to eat?”, **ma** is “which tool?”, **m**, lets you pick from a floor pile.

Travel

The underscore key (**_**) is the “travel” command, a speedy autopilot. Press **_**, point at a destination you’ve already explored, then **.** to confirm, and your character walks the shortest path there. The walk stops on any interruption, including closed doors, which travel walks up to but doesn’t open (press a direction to step through them, or **o** first). After **_**, you can type a background symbol to jump the cursor to the next one of that kind: **_<** walks to the up-staircase, **_>** walks to the down-staircase, **__.** walks to a known altar. After **Ctrl+A**, this is the single biggest quality-of-life command in the game.

Forcing locked chests

#force (or **#f**) pries a locked chest open with your wielded weapon when you don’t have a lockpick or key. Bladed weapons risk breaking the blade on the lock; blunt weapons risk destroying the chest’s contents.

Message history and redraw

Ctrl+P walks backward through the message history one message at a time. A monster’s special-attack warning, a shopkeeper’s price quote, or a status onset is preserved long enough to read it twice. The buffer holds the last several dozen lines; older messages roll off silently.

Ctrl+R redraws the screen, a useful reflex when the terminal gets garbled or when something doesn’t look right.

Dungeon overview and event journal

`Ctrl+O` (or `#overview`) lists the interesting levels you've visited (anywhere with an altar, throne, fountain, sink, shop, temple, vault, or branch stair, plus the Castle's tune once you learn it. Prefix with `m` to see *all* visited levels in a menu and add or edit annotations from there; `#annotate` does the same for the level you're standing on. The classic use is labeling stash floors so you remember which one held the bag.

`v` (or `#chronicle`) opens the **chronicle**, a chronological journal of major events from this run: first kills, conduct breaks, artifact gifts and crownings, prayer outcomes, level milestones, and entries into major branches. Mainly for end-of-run storytelling; for current conduct state use `#conduct`.

Customization

NetHack’s defaults are sensible, but a handful of options dramatically improve quality of life. Flip them in-session with `O` (capital O), or persist them in your rcfile: `~/.nethackrc` on macOS/Linux, `nethack.cnf` in the install folder on Windows, or the `NETHACKOPTIONS` environment variable.

Status display

hilite_status colorizes the bottom status line — HP, hunger, AC and the other fields can each carry their own threshold rules. Pair it with **statushilites**, which turns the system on; without it the rules below parse but nothing colors. Concrete HP and hunger rules:

```
OPTIONS=statushilites
OPTIONS=hilite_status:hitpoints/<66%/yellow/\
<50%/orange/<33%/red&bold/<15%/red&inverse
OPTIONS=hilite_status:hunger/Satiated/yellow/\
Hungry/orange/Weak/red&bold/Fainting/red&inverse/\
Fainted/red&inverse+blink
```

The trailing `\` continues each rule onto the next line; the rcfile parser only merges lines that explicitly end in a backslash. This is the single most-recommended setting in community rcfiles.

menucolors colorizes menu entries by pattern. The two most-useful rules are the BUC tags, so anything cursed jumps out red and anything pre-blessed reads as cyan:

```
MENUCOLOR=" cursed "=red
MENUCOLOR=" blessed "=cyan
```

The leading and trailing spaces matter — they prevent matching inside other words like “unbleached” or “blessed-cure-injury”.

force_invmenu opens a pop-up menu of the eligible items whenever a command asks you to pick from inventory (read, drop, wield, and so on), instead of the default “*What do you want to read? [j-k or ?*]*” single-letter prompt. You see the candidates laid out and pick with one keystroke; no need to press `?` first or to remember which letter is which.

pile_limit:5 triggers the pile menu when 5 or more items are stacked on a tile.

Safety

paranoid_confirmation:Attack pray Remove quit requires you to type the full word **yes** for the listed actions: attacking peacefuls, praying, removing worn gear, and quitting. Catches many fat-fingered accidents.

Pickup

autopickup picks items up as you walk over them, filtered by **pickup_types** (e.g. `pickup_types:?$` for gold, scrolls, potions, rings, and wands). The **m** prefix on movement suppresses autopickup for one step. Press **@** any time to toggle autopickup on or off for the rest of the session.

autopickup_exception layers per-pattern rules on top: `autopickup_exception:">rock"` skips rocks even when the type filter would grab them; `autopickup_exception:"<holy water"` always grabs holy water.

pickup_burden:unencumbered stops autopickup the moment a pickup would push you into Burdened. The default is **S** (only stop at Stressed), which means autopickup happily slides you through Burdened first; setting **U** keeps you nimble.

Movement

number_pad turns the numeric keypad into movement keys (1–9 for directions). Off by default; enabling it changes digit-prefix behavior so you press **n** first to enter a count.

runmode:walk slows the travel command down enough that you stop on interesting messages (default run blasts through everything until you hit something).

Verbosity

verbose turns on extra descriptive messages. Turn it off if the message log feels noisy.

A starter rcfile. A few lines that cover most of the above:

```
OPTIONS=statushilites
OPTIONS=hilite_status:hitpoints/<66%/yellow/\
<50%/orange/<33%/red&bold/<15%/red&inverse
OPTIONS=hilite_status:hunger/Satiated/yellow/\
Hungry/orange/Weak/red&bold/Fainting/red&inverse/\
Fainted/red&inverse+blink
MENUMCOLOR=" cursed "=red
MENUMCOLOR=" blessed "=cyan
OPTIONS=force_invmenu,pile_limit:5
OPTIONS=paranoid_confirmation:Attack pray Remove quit
OPTIONS=autopickup,pickup_types:$?!=/
OPTIONS=pickup_burden:unencumbered
OPTIONS=runmode:walk
```

Curses for a paneled UI. A bigger interface shift requires a different binary. NetHack built with the **curses** windowtype (`nethack-curses` on most distributions, or a custom build with curses support) draws a properly paneled UI inside the terminal. Set `windowtype:curses`, `align_message:right`, `align_status:bottom`, `perm_invent`, and `windowborders` in your rc, open a 120×40 terminal, and you get a permanent inventory column, a multi-line message panel, and bordered status and map regions. Plain tty NetHack pins the message line at row 0 no matter what you set.



Sokoban Solutions

Sokoban is a four-level boulder puzzle branch that goes *up* from its entrance. Each level has two possible layouts, chosen randomly. You push boulders onto pits to fill them and create a path to the next staircase. The penalty for cheating (squeezing past or stepping onto a boulder instead of pushing it, destroying boulders with wands, reading a scroll of earth in Sokoban) is a -1 Luck penalty per infraction, and it stacks. Digging walls doesn't work in Sokoban: the rock is too hard. Flying and levitation don't help either: *"Air currents pull you down..."* if you try to fly over an unfilled pit. Play fair.

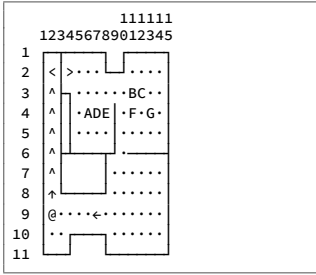
Solutions originally compiled by Boudewijn Waijers, with contributions by Jukka Lahtinen and others, for the steelypips.org NetHack archive maintained by Kate Nepveu. Adapted for 5.0 and reformatted for this guide.

In the maps below, boulders are labeled A through T so the solutions can reference them. The ^ symbols mark pits; < marks the upstairs. Your starting position is marked @.

The arrows mark rolling boulder traps. In sokoban, a boulder pushed onto one keeps rolling in the direction you pushed until it falls into a hole or hits something.

After solving a level, push leftover boulders into corners so they can't block you if you return later. Items sometimes hide under boulders.

A note on mirroring. Sokoban levels may be flipped horizontally and/or vertically in 5.0. The solutions still work; just mirror the directions.

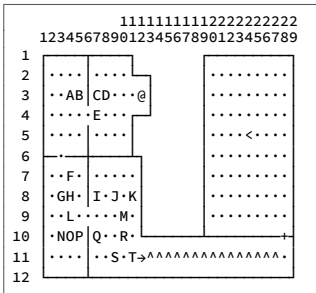


1. Push C down one square.
2. Push B left to (6,3).
3. Push G down one square, then left to (10,5).
4. Finish G.
5. Finish C and F like G.
6. Move B right to (11,3), then down two squares, then left to (10,5).
7. Finish B.
8. Move A up one square.

9. Finish A like B.

Two boulders (D and E) remain. The scrolls at (2,10) and (3,10) are scrolls of earth.

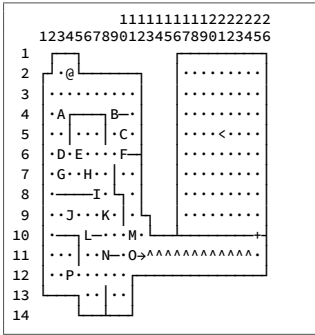
Level 2, Version A



1. Push E left to (3,4).
2. Push L right to (9,9).
3. Push R right one square.
4. Finish T, S, M, R, K, J, and L.
5. Finish N, O, P, G, and E.
6. Push F left one square.
7. Finish H.
8. Push F up to (3,4).
9. Finish F and A.

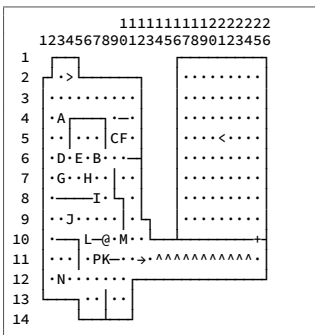
Five boulders (B, C, D, I, and Q) remain.

Level 2, Version B



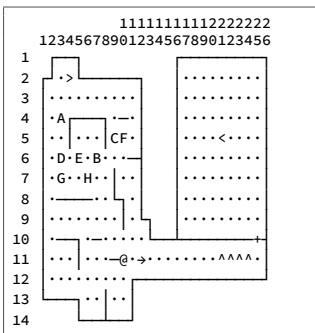
1. Push B down two squares.
2. Push C left one square.
3. Push P right three squares, then up one square, to (7,11).
4. Finish O.
5. Push N down one square, then left to (3,12).
6. Push M left one square.
7. Push F up one square.
8. Push B left two squares.
9. Push K down two squares.

The map now looks like this:



1. Push M right one square, then down to (11,11). Finish M.
2. Push N right to (10,12), then up to (10,10). Finish N like M.
3. Push K down one square, then left to (3,12). Finish K like N.
4. Push P right one square, then down one square. Finish P like N.
5. Push L down two squares, then left to (3,12). Finish L like N.
6. Push I down one square, then right one square, then down to (8,12). Finish I like N.
7. Push J right to (8,9), then down to (8,12). Finish J like N.

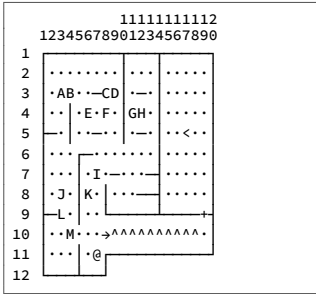
The map now looks like this:



1. Push H left one square.
2. Push B down one square, then right one square, then down to (8,12). Finish B.
3. Push C down one square, then left two squares, to (7,6). Finish C like B.
4. Push F left one square, then down one square, then left to (7,6). Finish F like C.
5. Push G right one square. Push D up one square.
6. Push E right two squares, to (7,6). Finish E like F.

Four boulders (A, D, G, and H) remain.

Level 3, Version A



1. Push M left one square. Finish M.
2. Push J right one square.
3. Finish L, J, A, and B.
4. Push D down to (9,6).
5. Finish I.
6. Push K down two squares, then left to (3,10). Finish K.
7. Push E up one square.
8. Push F right one square, then up one square, to (9,3).
9. Push E down one square, then left one square, to (5,4).

10. Push E up one square, then left two squares. Finish E.

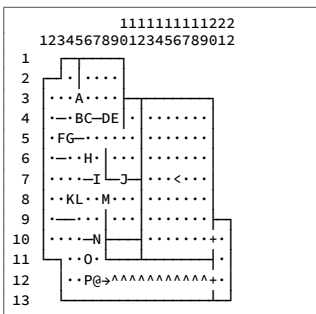
11. Push C down one square, then left three squares, to (5,4). Finish C like E.

12. Push D right two squares, then left to (8,6).

13. Push D up two squares, then left to (5,4). Finish D like E.

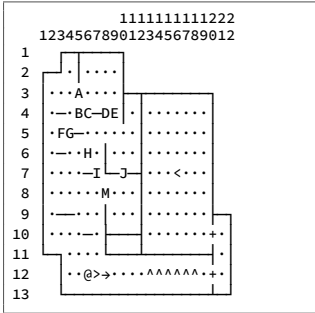
Three boulders (F, G, and H) remain.

Level 3, Version B



1. Push O left two squares, to (4,11).
2. Finish P and N.
3. Push L down one square, to (5,9).
4. Push O up one square, to (4,10).
5. Finish L.
6. Push K right one square, to (5,8). Finish K.
7. Push O right one square, to (5,10). Finish O.

The map now looks like this:

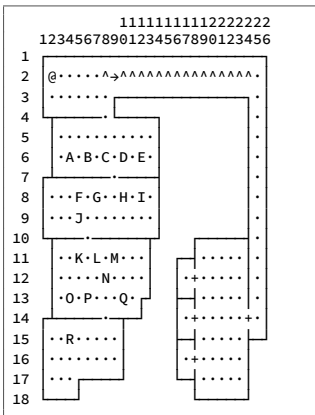


1. Push G down to (4,8), then one square right, to (5,8). Finish G.
2. Push F one square right. Finish F like G.
3. Push M two squares right, to (10,8), then left to (5,8). Finish M.
4. Push J up two squares, to (10,5).
5. Finish I.
6. Push H right one square. Finish H.
7. Push A right two squares, to (7,3).
8. Push C down two squares, to (6,6). Finish C like H.

Five boulders (A, B, D, E, and J) remain.

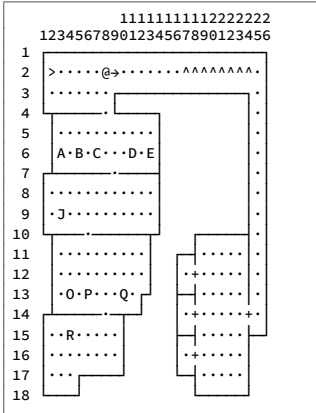
Level 4, Version A

The prize on this version is usually a bag of holding, with a 1 in 4 chance of being an amulet of reflection instead.



1. Push A left one square.
2. Push B left one square.
3. Push C left one square.
4. Push E right one square.
5. Push D right one square.
6. Push G to (9,8), then up three squares, then left one square. Finish G.
7. Finish H and I like G.
8. Push J left two squares, to (3,9).
9. Finish F like G.
10. Push N right three squares, to (11,12).
11. Push L to (6,11), then up three squares. Finish L.
12. Finish M and K like L.
13. Push N left three squares, then up one square, to (8,11). Finish N like L.

The map now looks like this:

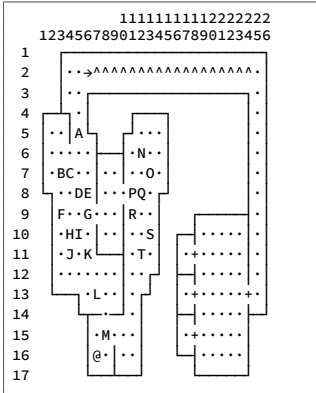


1. Push R to (8,15), then up four squares. Finish R like L.
2. Push Q to (8,13), then down three squares, then left to (3,16). Push Q up one square. Finish Q like R.
3. Finish P and O like Q.
4. Push J to (6,9), then down three squares. Finish J like L.
5. Push C to (9,6), then down three squares. Finish C like J.
6. Finish B and D like C.

Two boulders (A and E) remain. There is a bag of holding in one of the small chambers ((17,12), (17,14), or (17,16)) next to the treasure zoo.

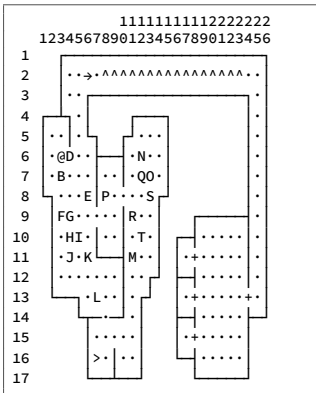
Level 4, Version B

The prize on this version is usually an amulet of reflection, with a 1 in 4 chance of being a bag of holding instead.



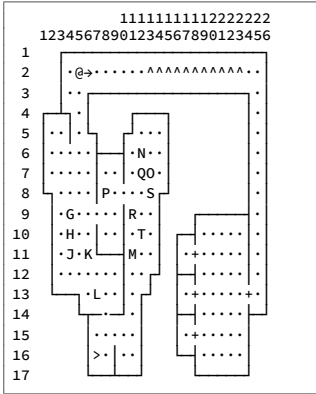
1. Push M right three squares, then up four squares.
2. Push T up one square.
3. Push S up two squares.
4. Push Q up one square.
5. Push P left three squares.
6. Push G left two squares.
7. Push D up two squares, then left one square.
8. Finish A.
9. Push B up one square.
10. Push C right one square. Finish C.
11. Push B down one square.

The map now looks like this:



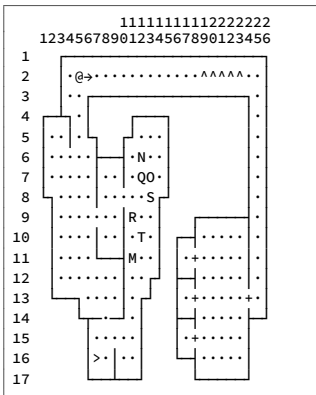
1. Push D right one square. Finish D.
2. Push B right two squares. Finish B.
3. Finish I.
4. Push E down one square, then left one square. Finish E.
5. Push F up three squares, then right two squares. Finish F.

The map now looks like this:



1. Push G right one square. Finish G.
2. Finish H and J like G.
3. Push P down one square, then left three squares, to (5,9). Finish P.
4. Push K to (6,9), then left one square. Finish K.
5. Push L right one square, then up one square, then left two squares. Finish L like K.

The map now looks like this:



1. Push T down one square.
2. Push R to (11,8), then left three squares. Finish R like P.
3. Finish M like R.
4. Push T left one square. Finish T like R.
5. Push N right one square.
6. Push Q down to (12,9), then left one square. Finish Q like R.
7. Push N left one square. Finish N like Q.

Two boulders (O and S) remain. There is an amulet of reflection in one of the small chambers ((17,11), (17,13), or (17,15)) next to the treasure zoo.



Voluntary Challenges

The game tracks a set of optional self-imposed restrictions called **conducts**. You can check which ones you've maintained at any time with `#conduct`. When you die or ascend, the end-of-game summary lists every conduct you kept. No conduct is required for victory; they exist for players who want a harder game or a more impressive ascension.

The conduct system was documented in Dion Nicolaas's Conduct Spoiler, originally posted to RGRN and archived at steelypips.org. The information below has been updated for 5.0 of the Mazes.

Conducts are not declared in advance. The game simply watches your actions and records whether you've broken each restriction. If you eat a corpse on turn 1, you've broken foodless, vegan, and vegetarian for the rest of the run. There's no going back.

The Food Conducts

These form a hierarchy: foodless is stricter than vegan, which is stricter than vegetarian.

Vegetarian. Don't eat meat. Specifically, don't eat the corpses of non-vegetarian monsters, and avoid items made from animal products (meat sticks, eggs from carnivorous creatures). In practice, this means living on permissible corpses and globs. Lichens, jellies, fungi and molds, and gray ooze or brown pudding globs are all safe. Fortune cookies, lembas wafers, and whatever vegetable food you find on the ground also work. Green slime is technically vegan, but eating its glob slimes you. The vegetarian monster list is broader than you might expect: all `b` (blobs), all `j` (jellies), all `F` (fungi and molds), all `v` (vortices), all `y` (lights), all `E` (elementals) except stalkers, and all `'` (golems) except flesh and leather golems. Many vegetarian corpses grant useful intrinsics. Vegetarian-safe is not the same as safe. Yellow mold corpses poison, violet fungus paralyzes, and acid blobs sting going down. Monks are a good role to play vegetarian; they already pay an alignment penalty for meat.

Vegan. Follow all vegetarian restrictions, plus avoid eating eggs, pancakes, lumps of royal jelly, cream pies, candy bars, *and* fortune cookies. (Yes, fortune cookies are vegetarian-safe but not vegan-safe. They contain eggs.) The conduct fires only on *eating*: carrying or using animal-derived items is fine, so vegans can still light the Candelabrum with wax or tallow candles, wear leather armor, and apply bone horns. Vegan also excludes puddings.

Foodless. Don't eat anything at all. Your only nutrition sources are prayer (which cures hunger from Hungry status onward, not just Weak/Fainting), the spell of stone to flesh on rocks in your inventory (which creates meatballs, but eating them breaks the conduct), and a ring of slow digestion (which slows hunger almost to a halt). Most foodless runs rely on finding a ring of slow digestion early or praying through hunger until one appears. Wishing for the ring is the usual plan if a wand of wishing or magic lamp turns up. Chewing through walls also breaks this conduct (it counts as eating rock).

Atheist

Don't interact with the divine. Specifically: don't #pray, don't #offer corpses at altars, don't #turn undead, and don't #chat with priests. The altar BUC flash also counts: any non-coin item you drop on an altar increments the conduct counter, so the original identification trick is off-limits too. This removes your safety net for starvation, stoning, illness, and cursed items. You'll need to solve every problem through items and knowledge alone.

Atheist runs require careful resource management. Without prayer to cure hunger, you need reliable food sources. Without sacrifice or altar BUC, identification is harder and you'll get no artifact gifts. The final Amulet offering for ascension is exempt, so a clean atheist ascension is mechanically possible.

Weaponless

Never hit a monster with a wielded weapon or weapon-tool. You can throw weapons, fire them from bows and crossbows, and use wands and spells. You can also fight bare-handed or with martial arts (Monks excel here). What you cannot do is swing a sword, axe, mace, aklys, pick-axe, unicorn horn, or any other weapon-class or weapon-tool item in melee while it's in your wielded slot. The one ranged exception that *does* break the conduct: using a wielded polearm at range via #apply.

This is less restrictive than it sounds. Monks start with strong martial arts and get better. Other classes can rely on spells, wands, and thrown daggers. A wielded cockatrice corpse still works (it's not a weapon). The main sacrifice is giving up the damage output of late-game artifact weapons.

Pacifist

Don't kill any monsters. Not directly, not with pets, not through any means that the game attributes to you. The pacifist runs on pets doing the fighting, on conflict to make monsters attack each other, on Elbereth to keep them at bay, and on creative use of the dungeon environment.

Pacifist ascensions are possible but require deep knowledge of the game's mechanics. The canonical late-game plan is a **figurine of an Archon** (wished, broken, then re-tamed if it turns hostile) as your champion fighter, the spell of *charm monster* for crowd pacification, and a ring of conflict for fights you can't talk your way out of.

Illiterate

Don't read anything. No scrolls, no spellbooks, no fortune cookies, no T-shirts. You also can't engrave anything more than a single "x" or "X" (the traditional illiterate's signature). You don't lose the conduct if you read blank scrolls or spellbooks, or Hawaiian shirts, the Book of the Dead, or messages already engraved on the floor.

Without scrolls, you lose access to identify, enchant weapon/armor, teleportation, remove curse, and genocide in their most common forms. Without spellbooks, you can't learn new spells or refresh old ones, so any starting spell you have will eventually fade. This forces extreme reliance on wands, potions, and creative workarounds. The standard workarounds are **pet-step BUC testing** (does the dog walk over it?) and **price-ID** (looking at a shopkeeper's quote doesn't count as reading), which together cover most of the ID table that scroll of identify would have handled.

No Genocide

Never genocide any monster. Genocide is prompted by reading a **scroll of genocide** (uncursed picks one species; blessed wipes the whole class) and by **sitting on a throne**: one outcome in the throne-effect table (case 8 of 13) prompts you to genocide a single species. To preserve the conduct, type **"none"** at the prompt. Don't just press Enter, because empty input re-prompts and on a *cursed* scroll the game will eventually conjure random monsters instead of letting you escape.

This means you'll face the full bestiary throughout the game, including master and archliches, mind flayers, cockatrices, and everything else that experienced players routinely eliminate. You'll also have to cross the **Plane of Water** the hard way: the standard tactic of

genociding class ; to clear out the eels and krakens is off-limits, so bring magical breathing and pay attention to where the sea monsters can reach you.

This is one of the milder conducts: many players ascend without genociding anything simply because they never find the scroll and never roll case 8 on a throne. But deliberately maintaining it against late-game threats takes discipline.

Polymorph Restrictions

Two related conducts track polymorphing:

No polymorph. Never let your form change. Obvious sources: potion or ring of polymorph, wand or spell of polymorph (zapped at you), and polymorph traps. Less obvious: a genetic engineer's claw; eating a chameleon, doppelganger, or mimic corpse; and failing to cure slimedness (turns you into a green slime). The Amulet of Unchanging blocks every path. A failed system shock does *not* break the conduct. Keeping this conduct forgoes the advantages of powerful monster forms (master mind flayer, xorn, various dragons).

No polymorph objects. Never polymorph items. Don't zap items with a wand of polymorph, don't dip items in potions of polymorph, and avoid other means of transforming objects. This eliminates a powerful item-generation strategy (polypiling) that many players use to obtain specific high-value items.

Wishing Restrictions

Two related conducts:

Wishless. Never make a wish. Refuse wishes from wands, fountains, smoky potion djinn, thrones, and all other sources. **Picking up the Amulet of Yendor also triggers a wish prompt:** wish for "nothing" (the literal string) and the counter doesn't tick. Wishing for "nothing" is the standard escape hatch for any forced wish. Keep it in mind whenever something hands you an unwanted wish. This is extremely challenging because wishes are the primary way to obtain critical items (silver dragon scale mail, speed boots, a bag of holding) when the dungeon doesn't provide them.

No wishing for artifacts. Make wishes, but never wish for an artifact. This prevents the most efficient wish strategy (wishing for Grayswandir, the Eye of the Aethiopia, or similar game-changing artifacts) while still allowing wishes for mundane necessities. The counter ticks even for *denied* artifact wishes (when the game gives you "something in your hand" instead), so be sure you can get the artifact before asking.

Combining Conducts

The real prestige comes from combining multiple conducts. A vegetarian atheist run is substantially harder than either alone. A pacifist illiterate vegan foodless atheist weaponless run is the stuff of legends (and has been done). The game's end screen lists all maintained conducts. For scale: on the public NAO server, about one in nine ascensions is wishless, and only one in eighty is foodless.

Recent editions of the Mazes have added several more tracked conducts:

Nudist. Never wear any armor, shirt, cloak, gloves, boots, helmet, or shield. Set the `nudist` option at game start. You fight the entire dungeon in your underwear. Officially tracked since 3.6.

Blind (Zen). Play the entire game without sight. Set the `blind` option at game start. You'll need telepathy and other senses to navigate. Officially tracked since 3.6.

Mazes 5.0 added five more tracked conducts: Pauper, Petless, Permadeaf, Sokoban, and Bonesless. Pauper, Permadeaf, Petless, and Bonesless are start-of-game options (you opt in or out before play). Sokoban is tracked automatically based on what you do during the run.

Pauper (new in 5.0)

Start with absolutely nothing: no gold, no inventory, no armor, no starting weapon. Set `OPTIONS=pauper` in your `rcfile` (`rcfile` or `NETHACKOPTIONS` env only; the in-game 0 menu cannot toggle it). Pauper implicitly sets `nudist`. It is a permanent conduct you never lose: it does not forbid acquiring or spending gold later, just starting empty.

To keep the start from being impossible, the game compensates: you get two unspent weapon-skill slots and your role knows one signature spell or item. Wizard knows `force bolt`; Healer knows `healing`; Cleric, Knight, and Monk all know `protection` (Cleric also knows `water`); Archeologist knows `touchstone`; Cave Dweller knows `flint`; Rogue and Tourist know `sack`; Samurai knows `gunyoki rations`. The supply chests on early levels (see `What to Pack` (p. 9)) can provide much of your first kit.

Petless (new in 5.0)

Never have a pet. Set `OPTIONS=petty:none` in your rcfile to skip the starting companion entirely (this overrides per-role defaults). After that, you lose the conduct the moment anything becomes tame. The game won't stop you. Scrolls of taming, the charm monster spell, food thrown at hostile dogs and cats, and magic-trap accidents all still work; each one just breaks Petless on the spot.

Permadeaf (new in 5.0)

Never hear anything. Set `OPTIONS=permadeaf` (or `OPTIONS=deaf`) in your rcfile. This option is set-in-config only; the in-game 0 menu cannot toggle it. (Don't confuse `permadeaf` with the unrelated `acoustics` flavor toggle, which doesn't earn the conduct.) The game then runs as if you had the Deaf intrinsic from turn one and never recovered: all the "you hear water falling", "you hear someone counting money", "you hear a door open" messages and the ambient monster sounds ("you hear a slurp" and friends) are suppressed.

The catch: only the *messages* are suppressed. A shrieker still shrieks and still summons monsters and aggravates the level; you just don't get the warning that it happened. Treat empty silence near a F-class monster as the same threat as the usual SCREECH.

Monster warnings, environmental cues (vaults, fountains, doors opening off-screen), and status messages all arrive as sounds. Permadeaf navigates by sight and logic alone, which is possible, and educational about how much information you normally get for free.

Sokoban (new in 5.0)

Complete Sokoban without breaking the rules. Each cheating action costs **1 point of Luck** and increments the conduct counter: **squeezing past** a boulder via a small or empty-handed form, **fracturing** a boulder with a wand of striking, **polymorphing** a boulder, reading a **scroll of earth**, or **dismounting** onto a boulder. The game tracks violations automatically.

Bonesless (new in 5.0)

Never inherit from another player's grave. Set `OPTIONS=!bones` (see Saving and Bones (p. 71)); a run that just happens to find no bones doesn't count.

Shopping and Shopkeeper Pricing

Shops do more than sell: their pricing system is your most powerful identification tool. You can find full mechanics and interactive price tables in Part Four, *The Price Is Right*. What follows here is the rest: credit, debt, combat, and non-obvious rules.

Credit and Debt

Each shopkeeper keeps a per-customer ledger with three numbers: credit, debit, and loan. The most common confusion is around credit, so spell out exactly when it appears.

How you get credit. Two ways, neither automatic for a successful sale:

1. **Shopkeeper runs short of gold while paying you.** When you sell an item, the shopkeeper pays in gold by default. If they don't have enough gold to cover the offer, the game prompts: "Shopkeeper cannot pay you at present. Will you accept *N* zorkmids in credit for that?" Answering yes converts the shortfall (or the whole price, if they have zero gold) into credit. A *normal* sale where the shopkeeper has enough gold just pays you in cash, no credit involved.
2. **You drop gold on a shop floor square.** Any gold you drop or throw inside the shop is added to your credit balance (after paying off any existing debt first). This is the "shop as safe-deposit box" trick: credit can't be stolen by nymphs, can't fall into pits, and can't be lost to a polymorph trap.

How credit gets used. When you buy something, the shopkeeper applies your credit against the purchase price first ("the price is deducted from your credit"). Any remainder comes out of your gold. Credit is per-shop and per-shopkeeper, and cannot be withdrawn back to gold.

Is paying from credit better or worse than paying in gold? The price itself is identical: credit is deducted from the *post-Charisma*, *post-Tourist*, *post-angry* cost at a strict 1:1 ratio, with no markup or discount either way. The differences are about how *safe* and *liquid* your money is, not how far it stretches:

- **Better** in that credit can't be stolen by nymphs, can't fall into a pit when you die, can't be lost to a polymorph trap, and doesn't bog you down with carry weight. A shop you'll come back to is a strong bank.

- **Worse** in that credit is locked to one shopkeeper. If you over-accumulate at a shop that doesn't have items you want (or the shopkeeper dies, or you anger them and they go hostile), the credit evaporates. You also can't tip altar donations, can't pay shrine fees, and can't bribe a demon out of credit.

Practical balance: park spare gold as credit at a shop you intend to keep visiting (the Gnomish Mines)(#the-gnomish-mines) general store is a popular choice), but don't deposit more than you expect to spend there.

(A more inventive use, called *credit cloning*: drop gold inside the shop, then lure a gold-loving monster such as an orc or a leprechaun to pick it up, walk it outside, and kill it. The credit stays with the shopkeeper and the gold comes back to you. It is one of NetHack's older shop-cheese routines.)

Debit is the inverse: it accrues when you *use* an unpaid item inside the shop (read a scroll, quaff a potion, zap a wand) and you haven't completed the purchase. You're charged a fraction of the item's price as a usage fee; future gold drops or sales pay it down before any new credit accumulates.

Loan appears only in the unusual case where the shopkeeper has *lent* you gold: you carry their coins as part of your inventory. Dropping gold in the shop pays this off before adding credit.

Walk-out hazard. Leaving the shop with unpaid items or unpaid debt turns the shopkeeper hostile. The Keystone Kops will pursue you through the dungeon, and the shopkeeper themselves is one of the toughest melee NPCs in the game: high HP, low AC, and unfazed by Elbereth. Pay the bill at the door.

Shopkeeper Behavior

A shopkeeper is one of the toughest NPCs in the game: high HP, good AC, hits hard, and unfazed by Elbereth or by the kind of clever escape that works on other monsters. They also see everything: the shopkeeper tracks every item you pick up and every item that enters the shop, even when you are invisible. The practical consequences for the player:

- Shopkeepers block the door whenever you have unpaid items.
- If you break something in the shop (a potion, a wand), you pay for it.
- Digging through a shop wall or floor doesn't escape the bill. The dig works, but the shopkeeper bills you for wall damage and the chase happens anyway. Tunnel-out is no shortcut.
- Artifact items are priced at special high prices. For most named weapons that lands in the 10,000–30,000 zm range. An unidentified long sword priced at 16,000 zm is not something to glance over: that exorbitant price is a give-away.
- A shopkeeper *can* be killed for the entire stock plus the till (1,000–4,000 zm and a skeleton key on death), but they're a tough fight, and killing them summons a wave of Keystone Kops to pursue you, and costs you a chunk of alignment. Two techniques worth knowing: **polymorphing the shopkeeper first** (via wand or trap) means killing them no longer counts as murder, which is the preferred approach for Lawful and Neutral characters. And **chaotic humans** can sacrifice the shopkeeper's corpse on an unaligned altar to convert it, which is a niche but real motive. Strong late-game players sometimes do clear shops anyway, but it's not a casual mid-game move.

Beyond the rules, a few tactical habits pay off:

- **Drop everything at the door to see your bill.** Standing on the door square, drop your whole inventory and the shopkeeper's bill highlights the items you owe for. The shopkeeper isn't guessing (the game tracks unpaid items precisely), but it is a handy way to recall what you actually picked up when the shop has a hundred lookalikes.
- **Sell to build credit.** Credit acts as gold you can spend in that shop, and credit doesn't get stolen by nymphs or fall into pits. Selling a stack of useless daggers to a weapon shop is a way to "bank" gold safely while you're shopping in town.
- **Bones-shop gotcha.** When you find a shop in someone's bones file, all the items inside still belong to the dead adventurer's ghost shopkeeper; pick up anything and you owe the new shopkeeper full price. The shop floor is not free loot.
- **"Closed for inventory" engraving on a door.** This marks a shop whose door spawned **locked**, not an abandoned one. The shopkeeper is still inside, and the stock is still unpaid. Kicking the door down earns you a normal shop visit plus an angry shopkeeper (the broken door is on your bill), but picking the lock with a skeleton key, credit card,

lock pick, or wand of opening unlocks it cleanly with no damage and no anger. (In Orcus Town the shopkeepers are usually dead by the time you arrive, killed by Orcus's ambient aura, so the items there often *are* ownerless.)

The best strategy is usually to play fair: sell what you don't need, buy what you do, and use the pricing system to identify as much as possible before spending your gold on scrolls of identify.

Gem Identification Through Selling

Selling unidentified gems is **not** a reliable price-ID method. Shopkeepers offer 3 to 8 zm for any unidentified gem, real or glass alike, and the exact amount varies by both the gem's true identity and the shopkeeper. Real diamonds and worthless glass diamonds both quote in the same 3-8 zm range; you cannot tell them apart by price. Selling the same gem at two different shops gives different prices for *any* unidentified gem, not just glass.

The practical method is a **touchstone** (gray stone, base price 45, guaranteed at Mine's End and sometimes found elsewhere). Rubbing an unidentified gem against a **blessed** touchstone names the gem outright; with a merely uncursed touchstone you only get a streak color. (Archeologists and Gnomes get the full name from a non-cursed stone, a racial perk.) Hardness doesn't matter; every gem works. Once identified, real gems sell for their real value (often hundreds of zm each) while glass sells for almost nothing.

Real-gem prices

Once you know what a gem is, its type determines its base price. Real gems are tiny piles of liquid gold by weight: every gem weighs just 1, and gems of the same identified type stack into a single inventory slot regardless of count, so the only cost of hoarding a heap of identified rubies is one slot's worth of clutter.

Every real gem, with the unangry-shopkeeper buy price.

The Mohs column is real-world mineral hardness on the Mohs scale (talc 1, diamond 10), and the game uses it in two places. Gems of Mohs 8 or higher count as "**hard**", and hard gems do two things softer gems and glass can't: they can be used as a stylus to *engrave* Elbereth and other messages permanently into the dungeon floor (instead of the temporary dust scratch a finger or soft gem leaves), and they have about a 50% chance to *survive* being thrown rather than shattering on impact. Below Mohs 8, the gem only writes in dust and breaks on impact like glass. Hardness doesn't affect touchstoning: every gem can be identified by a blessed touchstone regardless.

Price	Gem	Color	Mohs	Notes
4500	Dilithium crystal	white	5	rarest white gem
4000	Diamond	white	10	hardest material in the game
3500	Ruby	red	9	
3250	Jacinth	orange	9	one of two orange gems
3000	Sapphire	blue	9	
2500	Black opal	black	8	
2500	Emerald	green	8	
2000	Turquoise	green	6	
1500	Citrine	yellow	6	
1500	Aquamarine	green	8	
1000	Amber	yellowish brown	2	softest gem; only dust-writes
900	Topaz	yellowish brown	8	
850	Jet	black	7	
800	Opal	white	6	
700	Chrysoberyl	yellow	5	
700	Garnet	red	7	
600	Amethyst	violet	7	
500	Jasper	red	7	
400	Fluorite	violet	4	
300	Jade	green	6	
200	Obsidian	black	6	
200	Agate	orange	6	
0	(worthless glass)	any color	5	sells for 3–8 zm unidentified

The decision is rarely “carry or drop”; it’s “if I’m slot-pressed and have to thin the heap, which colors do I drop first.” Black opals, emeralds, and rubies are usually keepers; agate and obsidian first to go.

A few rules of thumb:

- **Every real gem is equally good for unicorn luck.** A 200 zm agate throws at an orange unicorn for the same +5 luck as a 3250 zm jacinth. Don’t sell off your “junk” gems before you’ve found an alignment-matching unicorn to feed them to.
- **The price column matters only when selling or wishing.** If you’re not in a shop and not weight-pressed, the price ranking is irrelevant.
- **If you must drop some gems** (you’re in a Mine’s End slot-crunch, or you’re consolidating before a stash), drop *duplicates of the cheap colors first*. Keep at least one of every identified type, because the touchstone work is already done.

- **Top tier** (≥ 2500 : dilithium, diamond, ruby, jacinth, sapphire, black opal, emerald) are worth selling individually as you find shops that buy them: 3000+ zm per gem is a real bankroll. Don't fire-sale them to a non-gem-buying shop for half price.
- **Worthless glass never costs luck.** Glass thrown at a unicorn is either rejected ("not interested in your junk") or quietly accepted. The Luck risk only fires on *real* gems thrown to a **wrong-alignment** unicorn (random -3 to $+3$).

Read the table as a **selling guide**, not a discard guide: real gems near the top are worth making time to sell at a gem dealer and worth wishing for if you're flush on wishes. Lower-priced gems aren't trash. They still feed unicorns and still touchstone-identify other gems by hardness comparison.

Weapons Tables

Damage is shown as **vs small** / **vs large**, the dice rolled before enchantment and excluding silver/material bonuses. **Wt** is unit weight; **Cost** is the unenchanted shop base price in zorkmids. **Hit** is the to-hit bonus baked into the weapon itself (most are 0). Two-handed weapons that prevent shield use and two-weapon combat are flagged in the notes. Weapons are grouped by their skill class so you can see your options within each skill tree at a glance. Samurai-language names for a handful of weapons are shown in parentheses (a Samurai sees them on screen by those names; same underlying item).

Dagger

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
dagger	1d4 / 1d3	10	4	+2	iron	Stackable; Expert-skill Rogues can multishot up to four in a single throw.
elven dagger	1d5 / 1d3	10	4	+2	wood	Stackable. Sting is the artifact form.
orcish dagger	1d3 / 1d3	10	4	+2	iron	Stackable.
silver dagger	1d4 / 1d3	12	40	+2	silver	Stackable. Silver damage to demons, vampires, lycanthropes, shades, and imps. Common Rogue/Ranger off-hand.
athame	1d4 / 1d3	10	4	+2	iron	Stackable. Engraving with an athame doesn't dull the blade.

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
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Knife

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
scalpel	1d3 / 1d3	5	6	+2	metal	The Healer's starter.
knife (shito)	1d3 / 1d2	5	4	—	iron	
stiletto	1d3 / 1d2	5	4	—	iron	
worm tooth	1d2 / 1d2	20	2	—	bone	
crysknife	1d10 / 1d10	20	100	+3	bone	Reverts to a worm tooth when dropped (unwielding is fine; only dropping triggers it). An erodeproof one reverts only ~10% of the time.

Short sword

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
short sword (wakizashi)	1d6 / 1d8	30	10	—	iron	The Rogue's starter.
elven short sword	1d8 / 1d8	30	10	—	wood	
orcish short sword	1d5 / 1d8	30	10	—	iron	
dwarvish short sword	1d7 / 1d8	30	10	—	iron	

Saber

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
scimitar	1d8 / 1d8	40	15	—	iron	
silver saber	1d8 / 1d8	40	75	—	silver	Silver does bonus damage to demons/weres/vampires/imps. Artifact forms: Grayswandir and Werbane (see Artifacts (p. 161)).

Broadsword

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
broadsword (ninja-to)	1d4+1d4 / 1d6+1	70	10	—	iron	
elven broadsword	1d6+1d4 / 1d6+1	70	10	—	wood	
runesword	1d4+1d4 / 1d6+1	40	300	—	iron	Stormbringer is the chaotic artifact form.

Long sword

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
long sword	1d8 / 1d12	40	15	—	iron	At XL 5+, dipping in a fountain rolls 1-in-30. Knights get 1-in-6. On a hit, Lawfuls get Excalibur . Others get the sword cursed. Artifact forms: Excalibur, Frost Brand, Fire Brand, Giantslayer, Vorpall Blade, Sunsword.
katana	1d10 / 1d12	40	80	+1	iron	+1 to-hit baked in. Snickersnee is the artifact form.

Two-handed sword

Two-handed weapons get a **3/2 Strength damage bonus** in 5.0: your STR damage contribution is multiplied by 1.5 when wielding a bimanual weapon. Combined with the high base dice below, that is a big chunk of why two-handed swords compete with one-hand-plus-shield even though you forfeit the shield slot. The same bonus applies to the battle-axe, dwarvish mattock, bardiche, and any other bimanual weapon.

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
two-handed sword	1d12 / 1d6+2d6	150	50	—	iron	Two-handed (no shield, no off-hand weapon). No dedicated artifact form.
tsurugi	1d16 / 1d8+2d6	60	500	+2	metal	Two-handed. The Tsurugi of Muramasa is the artifact form.

Axe

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
axe	1d6 / 1d4	60	8	—	iron	
battle-axe	1d8+1d4 / 1d6+2d4	120	40	—	iron	Two-handed (gets the 5.0 3/2 Str damage bonus). +1d4 small, +2d4 large. The Barbarian quest artifact Cleaver is a battle-axe.

Pick-axe

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
pick-axe	1d6 / 1d3	100	50	—	iron	Weapon-tool. Apply to dig through walls or down through floors (creates pit, then hole). Same <i>pick-axe</i> skill as the mattock.
dwarvish mattock	1d12 / 1d8+2d6	120	50	-1	iron	Two-handed (3/2 Str damage bonus). Digs through walls like a pick-axe. Slight to-hit penalty (-1).

Club

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
club	1d6 / 1d3	30	3	—	wood	Caveman starter.
aklys	1d6 / 1d3	15	4	—	iron	Returns when thrown if wielded as your primary weapon (it's tethered); occasional misfire.

Mace

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
mace	1d6+1 / 1d6	30	5	—	iron	The Priest's guaranteed first sacrifice gift, Demonbane: a silver mace with +1d5 to-hit and double damage versus demons, plus a banish invoke.

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
silver mace	1d6+1 / 1d6	36	60	—	silver	+1d20 versus demons, weres, vampires, shades, and mostimps.

Morning star

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
morning star	1d4+1d4 / 1d6+1	120	10	—	iron	+1d4 small, +1 large. Punches above its weight for a one-hander.

Flail

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
flail (nunchaku)	1d6+1 / 1d4+1d4	15	4	—	iron	+1 small, +1d4 large; one-handed.
grappling hook	1d2 / 1d6	30	50	—	iron	Tool, not a primary weapon, but trains P_FLAIL. #apply to hook and pull a target toward you.

Hammer

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
war hammer	1d4+1 / 1d4	50	5	—	iron	Mjollnir is the artifact form (Valkyrie sacrifice gift; its alignment will match the player's).

Quarterstaff

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
quarterstaff	1d6 / 1d6	40	5	—	wood	Two-handed but light; the Wizard's starting weapon.

Polearms

All polearms are two-handed. To strike at range, #apply the weapon (not wield-and-attack): you can hit at distance 2 orthogonally at Basic skill, with extra positions opening up at Skilled. You can still hit an adjacent monster the normal way with a polearm in hand, but the attack is treated as bashing — damage clamps to 1d2 base before bonuses and the weapon-skill bonus doesn't apply (Strength still does). Reach is what makes polearms worth carrying, and it works the same across the class. Notes below describe each entry's extra damage.

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
partisan	1d6 / 1d6+1	80	10	—	iron	Reach.
ranseur	1d4+1d4 / 1d4+1d4	50	6	—	iron	+1d4 small, +1d4 large.
spetum	1d6+1 / 1d6+1d6	50	5	—	iron	+1 small, +1d6 large.
glaive (naginata)	1d6 / 1d10	75	6	—	iron	Reach.
halberd	1d10 / 1d6+1d6	150	10	—	iron	+1d6 large.
bardiche	1d4+1d4 / 1d4+2d4	120	7	—	iron	+1d4 small, +2d4 large.
voulge	1d4+1d4 / 1d4+1d4	125	5	—	iron	+1d4 small, +1d4 large.
fauchard	1d6 / 1d8	60	5	—	iron	Reach.
guisarme	1d4+1d4 / 1d8	80	5	—	iron	+1d4 small.
bill-guisarme	1d4+1d4 / 1d10	120	7	—	iron	+1d4 small.
lucern hammer	1d4+1d4 / 1d6	150	7	—	iron	+1d4 small.
bec de corbin	1d8 / 1d6	100	8	—	iron	Reach.

Spear

All spears share the same skill (trident uses a different class (see below). The Valkyrie starts with one and can train to Expert. The **Caveman** is the actual spear-multishot specialist: Cavemen get +1 multishot on any thrown spear (regular, silver, javelin alike), so a stack of javelins is real ranged firepower for them.

Spears get a **+2 to-hit bonus** when used against the big monsters (xorns, dragons, jabberwocks, nagas, and giants): the kebab bonus.

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
spear	1d6 / 1d8	30	3	—	iron	Throwable. Valkyrie's starting weapon.
elven spear	1d7 / 1d8	30	3	—	wood	
orcish spear	1d5 / 1d8	30	3	—	iron	
dwarvish spear	1d8 / 1d8	35	3	—	iron	
silver spear	1d6 / 1d8	36	40	—	silver	Silver damage to demons and weres.
javelin	1d6 / 1d6	20	3	—	iron	Stackable thrown weapon; Cavemen can ranged-spam them.

Trident

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
trident	1d6+1 / 1d4+2d4	25	5	—	iron	One-handed. +4 to-hit vs swimmers in water, +2 vs eels and snakes : the trident's signature bonus. Outside water it's an ordinary side-arm.

Lance

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
lance	1d6 / 1d8	180	10	—	iron	One-handed, P_LANCE skill. Mounted only: chance to joust for +2d10 primary (+2d2 off-hand) extra damage; a critical can shatter the lance. No bonus on foot.

Whip

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
rubber hose	1d4 / 1d3	20	3	—	plastic	Joke weapon; never spawns randomly.
bullwhip	1d2 / 1	20	4	—	leather	Archeologist's starter. Apply to disarm an adjacent monster (only when the target is wielding a weapon), or to yank yourself out of a pit (anchors on a nearby boulder, furniture, or big monster).

Bow

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
arrow	1d6 / 1d6	1	2	—	iron	
elven arrow	1d7 / 1d6	1	2	—	wood	
orcish arrow	1d5 / 1d6	1	2	—	iron	
silver arrow	1d6 / 1d6	1	5	—	silver	Silver damage to demons and weres.
ya	1d7 / 1d7	1	4	+1	metal	
bow	—	30	60	—	wood	
elven bow	—	30	60	—	wood	
orcish bow	—	30	60	—	wood	
yumi	—	30	60	—	wood	The Samurai's bow.

Crossbow

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
crossbow bolt	1d4 / 1d6	1	2	—	iron	Stackable.
crossbow	—	50	40	—	wood	Bolts pierce. Multishot kicks in at Str 18 (Str 16 for gnomes, who also get a baseline +1 multishot); below that, one bolt per turn. Rogues and Rangers reach Expert, Knights Skilled.

Sling

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
sling	—	3	20	—	leather	Launches rocks, flint stones, and gems. Caveman starting weapon.

Dart

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
dart	1d3 / 1d2	1	2	—	iron	Poisonable. Tourist starts with a stack of ~21–40 at +2.

Shuriken

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
shuriken	1d8 / 1d6	1	5	+2	iron	

Boomerang

Weapon	Damage (S/L)	Wt	Cost	Hit	Material	Notes
boomerang	1d9 / 1d9	5	20	—	wood	Curves back on a clear path; stops on a monster, wall, door, or sink. Low Dex or Fumbling means you catch it in the face.



Armor Tables

AC is the armor-class bonus the piece provides (higher number = more protection; this is the amount subtracted from your displayed AC). **MC** is the magic-cancellation level (1-3) — higher MC reduces the chance of magic attacks landing. **Wt** is weight; **Cost** is shop base price. The **Notes** column folds in the intrinsic property granted while the piece is worn, and tactical caveats. Armor is grouped by slot. Dragon scale mail is listed separately because of its sheer importance to the endgame. Samurai-language names for a few pieces are shown in parentheses (same underlying item).

Body armor (suits)

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
plate mail (tanko)	+7	2	450	600	iron	Spellcasting penalty.
crystal plate mail	+7	2	415	820	glass	Never rusts. Spellcasting penalty.
bronze plate mail	+6	1	450	400	copper	
splint mail	+6	1	400	80	iron	
banded mail	+6	1	350	90	iron	
dwarvish mithril-coat	+6	2	150	240	mithril	Light, but mithril is metallic so the spellcasting penalty still applies (smaller than plate, larger than zero). Wizard mid-game goal.
elven mithril-coat	+5	2	150	240	mithril	Light, expensive. Mithril is metallic, so a casting penalty still applies (smaller than plate but not zero).
chain mail	+5	1	300	75	iron	
orcish chain mail	+4	1	300	75	iron	
scale mail	+4	1	250	45	iron	
studded leather armor	+3	1	200	15	leather	No spellcasting penalty.
ring mail	+3	1	250	100	iron	
orcish ring mail	+2	1	250	80	iron	
leather armor	+2	1	150	5	leather	
leather jacket	+1	—	30	10	leather	
gray dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	1200	dragonhide	Magic resistance. Endgame body-armor goal.

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
silver dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	1200	dragonhide	Reflection.
black dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	1200	dragonhide	Disintegration resistance + drain resistance.
yellow dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Acid resistance + stoning resistance. Rare.
orange dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Sleep resistance + free action.
white dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Cold resistance + slow digestion.
red dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Fire resistance + infravision.
green dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Poison resistance + sickness resistance.
blue dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Shock resistance + speed, same tier as speed boots.
gold dragon scale mail	+9	—	40	900	dragonhide	Hallucination resistance + permanent light (only body-slot light source).

Dragon scales

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
gray dragon scales	+3	—	40	700	dragonhide	Magic resistance. Make-into upgrade to scale mail.
silver dragon scales	+3	—	40	700	dragonhide	Reflection.
black dragon scales	+3	—	40	700	dragonhide	Disintegration resistance + drain resistance.
yellow dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Acid resistance + stoning resistance.
orange dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Sleep resistance + free action.
white dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Cold resistance + slow digestion.
red dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Fire resistance + infravision.
green dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Poison resistance + sickness resistance.
blue dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Shock resistance + speed, same tier as speed boots.
gold dragon scales	+3	—	40	500	dragonhide	Hallucination resistance + permanent light.

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
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Shirts

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
Hawaiian shirt	+0	—	5	3	cloth	Tourist starter. Worn under body armor.
T-shirt	+0	—	5	2	cloth	Worn under body armor.

Cloaks

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
mummy wrapping	+0	1	3	2	cloth	Blocks invisibility while worn.
elven cloak	+1	1	10	60	cloth	Stealth.
orcish cloak	+0	1	10	40	cloth	
dwarvish cloak	+0	1	10	50	cloth	
oilskin cloak	+1	2	10	50	cloth	Resists grab attacks.
robe	+2	2	15	50	cloth	Casting bonus. Cancels most of the metal-armor penalty.
alchemy smock	+1	1	10	50	cloth	Poison resistance. Fantastic early-game safety.
leather cloak	+1	1	15	40	leather	
cloak of protection	+3	3	10	50	cloth	Highest MC of any cloak.
cloak of invisibility	+1	1	10	60	cloth	Invisibility.
cloak of magic resistance	+1	1	10	60	cloth	Magic resistance. The lightest source.
cloak of displacement	+1	1	10	50	cloth	Displacement.

Helmets

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
elven leather helm	+1	—	3	8	leather	
orcish helm	+1	—	30	10	iron	
dwarvish iron helm	+2	—	40	20	iron	
fedora	+0	—	3	1	cloth	Tourist starter; Eye of the Aethiopia base.
cornuthaum	+0	1	4	80	cloth	Clairvoyance. Wizards only; blocks other clairvoyance for non-Wizards.

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
dunce cap	+0	—	4	1	cloth	Int/Wis → 6. Auto-curses on wear. Needs remove curse to take off.
dented pot	+1	—	10	8	iron	
helm of brilliance	+1	—	40	50	glass	Adds enchantment value to both Int and Wis while worn (a +3 helm gives +3 Int and +3 Wis).
helmet (kabuto)	+1	—	30	10	iron	
helm of caution	+1	—	50	50	iron	Warning.
helm of opposite alignment	+1	—	50	50	iron	Flips your alignment while worn. Cursed 90%.
helm of telepathy	+1	—	50	50	iron	Telepathy while blind.

The helm of opposite alignment is mostly a trap, but the alignment flip is sometimes useful on purpose: sacrifice on a cross-aligned altar, claim the opposite alignment's quest artifact, or, on the Astral Plane, change which altar accepts the Amulet.

Gloves

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
leather gloves (yugake)	+1	—	10	8	leather	
gauntlets of fumbling	+1	—	10	50	leather	Causes frequent fumbling. Generated cursed 9 times in 10. Avoid.
gauntlets of power	+1	—	30	50	iron	Sets Strength to 25.
gauntlets of dexterity	+1	—	10	50	leather	Adds enchantment value to Dex while worn (a +3 pair gives +3 Dex).

Boots

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
low boots	+1	—	10	8	leather	
iron shoes	+2	—	50	16	iron	
high boots	+2	—	20	12	leather	
speed boots	+1	—	20	50	leather	Very fast. Free extra action on 2/3 of turns.
water walking boots	+1	—	15	50	leather	Water walking. Critical for the Castle drawbridge.
jumping boots	+1	—	20	50	leather	#apply to leap to a chosen nearby square.
elven boots	+1	—	15	8	leather	Stealth.

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
kicking boots	+1	—	50	8	iron	
fumble boots	+1	—	20	30	leather	Causes frequent fumbling. Generated cursed 9 times in 10. Avoid.
levitation boots	+1	—	15	30	leather	Levitation. Generated cursed 9 times in 10. Cursed boots can't be taken off, so this is a trap item.

Shields

Armor	AC	MC	Wt	Cost	Material	Notes
small shield	+1	—	30	3	wood	
shield of drain resistance	+1	—	30	50	wood	Drain resistance.
shield of shock resistance	+1	—	30	50	wood	Shock resistance.
elven shield	+2	—	40	7	wood	
Uruk-hai shield	+1	—	50	7	iron	
orcish shield	+1	—	50	7	iron	
large shield	+2	—	100	10	iron	Blocks two-handed weapons.
dwarvish roundshield	+2	—	100	10	iron	
shield of reflection	+2	—	50	50	silver	Reflection. Saves the body-armor slot.



Spell Tables

The complete spellbook catalog, sorted by school then level. **Lvl** is the spell level; **Pw cost** is always 5×level. **Type** distinguishes how the spell targets:

- **aimed.** You pick a direction; the spell hits one square at that vector.
- **ray.** A beam from the caster through every square in a line until it stops.
- **untargeted.** No direction needed; the effect is on you, the level, or a fixed area.

Upgrade is the behavior change at **Skilled** rank or above in that school (except for protection, which upgrades at Expert, and jumping, which scales continuously).

Spell	School	Lvl	Type	Effect	Upgrade
force bolt	Attack	1	aimed	2d12 magical hit	—
chain lightning	Attack	2	untargeted	Shock damage to nearby monsters	—
drain life	Attack	2	aimed	Drains an XP level from target	—
magic missile	Attack	2	ray	2d6 force ray; Antimagic blocks it	—
cone of cold	Attack	4	ray	4d6 cold ray	Aimed explosion
fireball	Attack	4	ray	4d6 fire ray	Aimed explosion
finger of death	Attack	7	ray	Death-magic beam; monsters with magic resistance resist. (Against the player it's an instakill with no Antimagic check; only nonliving or demon forms are immune.)	—
healing	Healing	1	aimed	Restore hit points	—
cure blindness	Healing	2	aimed	Removes blindness	—
cure sickness	Healing	3	untargeted	Cures food poisoning and illness	—
extra healing	Healing	3	aimed	Heals more HP	—
stone to flesh	Healing	3	aimed	Statue → corpse; cures stoning	—
restore ability	Healing	4	untargeted	Restores one drained stat	Blessed: all stats
detect monsters	Divination	1	untargeted	Reveals monsters on level	Blessed: longer duration
light	Divination	1	untargeted	Lights the current room	—
detect food	Divination	2	untargeted	Reveals food on level	Blessed: identifies the food
clairvoyance	Divination	3	untargeted	Periodic glimpses of nearby map	Skilled: also detects nearby monsters during each pulse

Spell	School	Lvl	Type	Effect	Upgrade
detect unseen	Divination	3	untargeted	Reveals invisible monsters and traps	—
identify	Divination	3	untargeted	Identifies one inventory item	Blessed: multiple items
detect treasure	Divination	4	untargeted	Reveals gold and gems	Blessed: more detail
magic mapping	Divination	5	untargeted	Reveals the entire level	—
confuse monster	Enchantment1	aimed		Next melee hit confuses target	Blessed: multiple hits
slow monster	Enchantment2	aimed		Slows target's speed	—
cause fear	Enchantment3	untargeted		Visible monsters flee	—
sleep	Enchantment3	ray		Puts targets in line to sleep	—
charm monster	Enchantment5	untargeted		Tames monsters in a 3×3 area	Blessed-scroll behavior
protection	Cleric	1	untargeted	Temporary AC bonus paid from Pw	Expert: 2× duration
create monster	Cleric	2	untargeted	Summons a random monster nearby	—
remove curse	Cleric	3	untargeted	Uncurses worn/wielded items	Blessed: all carried items
create familiar	Cleric	6	untargeted	Creates a tame companion	—
turn undead	Cleric	6	aimed	Damages/turns undead and demons	—
jumping	Escape	1	untargeted	Jump to a chosen nearby square	Range scales with rank
haste self	Escape	3	untargeted	Temporary fast movement	Blessed: longer duration
invisibility	Escape	4	untargeted	Become invisible	—
levitation	Escape	4	untargeted	Float over pits and water	Blessed: longer duration
teleport away	Escape	6	aimed	Teleports target away	—
knock	Matter	1	aimed	Opens doors, picks locks	—
wizard lock	Matter	2	aimed	Closes and locks a door	—
dig	Matter	5	ray	Digs through walls, rock, floor	—
polymorph	Matter	6	aimed	Polymorphs target	—
cancellation	Matter	7	aimed	Removes magical properties	—

The to-hit chance of most rays (sleep, magic missile, finger of death, and the unskilled forms of cone of cold and fireball) also scales with rank.



Bestiary Tables

Every monster you might meet. Grouped by ASCII symbol so you can flip to the right page mid-game. **Lvl** is the base monster level. **Spd** is movement rate (12 is normal player speed). **AC** is armor class (lower is better). **MR%** is the percentage chance the monster resists your spells and magic attacks. **Attacks** lists each attack's mode, damage dice, and side effect; multiple attacks separated by · are made per turn. **Notes** folds in the most tactically-relevant trait flags (flies, sees-invis, regenerates, poisonous-corpse, etc.) alongside specific heads-ups for monsters that deserve one.

Ants and insects a

Insects, often in groups. The soldier ant is the early game's infamous killer: its poison sting can two-shot a low-level hero. Killer bees swarm; the queen bee in a beehive room is tough on her own.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
giant ant	brown	2	18	3	0	bite 1d4	
killer bee	yellow	1	18	-1	0	sting 1d3 poison	flies, poisonous-corpse, pois-res. Stings carry poison; a pack can wipe out an unprepared early hero.
soldier ant	blue	3	18	3	0	bite 2d4 · sting 3d4 poison	poisonous-corpse, pois-res. Poison sting. The most lethal a you'll meet in the early dungeon.
fire ant	red	3	18	3	10	bite 2d4 · bite 2d4 fire	fire-res.
giant beetle	black	5	6	4	0	bite 3d6	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
queen bee	magenta	9	24	-4	0	sting 1d8 poison	flies, poisonous-corpse, pois-res.

Blobs b

Slow, mindless, immune to a lot. Don't melee an acid blob with bare hands or a metal weapon you care about: the passive acid corrodes both. Gelatinous cubes paralyse on touch.

All blobs are mindless, sleep-resistant, and poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
acid blob	green	1	3	8	0	passive 1d8 acid	amorphous, acid-res, ston-res. Passive acid damage; punching one corrodes your gloves.
quivering blob	white	5	1	8	0	touch 1d8	
gelatinous cube	cyan	6	6	8	0	touch 2d4 paralyse · passive 1d4 paralyse	fire-res, cold-res, shock-res, acid-res, ston-res. Slow but paralyzes on touch. Don't melee without free-action.

Cockatrices c

Medieval bestiary creature: a chicken with a serpent's tail whose touch turns flesh to stone. Carry a lizard corpse, fight gloved, and never wield a cockatrice corpse as a weapon unless your role explicitly resists stoning. See Petrification (p. 76).

All cockatrices are poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
chickatrice	brown	4	4	8	30	bite 1d2 · touch petrify · passive petrify	ston-res. A small cockatrice. Same petrify rules apply.
cockatrice	yellow	5	6	6	30	bite 1d3 · touch petrify · passive petrify	ston-res. Touch petrifies. Always carry a lizard corpse.
pyrolisk	red	6	6	6	30	gaze 2d6 fire · bite 1d6	fire-res.

Dogs and canines d

Wild canines hunt in packs. Domestic ones can be tamed by feeding (see Making Friends (p. 86)). Werejackals and werewolves can give lycanthropy.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
jackal	brown	0	12	7	0	bite 1d2	The first thing that ever killed you.
fox	red	0	15	7	0	bite 1d3	
coyote	brown	1	12	7	0	bite 1d4	
werejackal	brown	2	12	7	10	bite 1d4 lyc	regenerates, poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
little dog	white	2	18	6	0	bite 1d6	tameable. Guaranteed Caveman/Ranger/Samurai starting pet.
dingo	yellow	4	16	5	0	bite 1d6	
dog	white	4	16	5	0	bite 1d6	tameable.
large dog	white	6	15	4	0	bite 2d4	tameable.
wolf	gray	5	12	4	0	bite 2d4	
werewolf	gray	5	12	4	20	bite 2d6 lyc	regenerates, poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
winter wolf cub	cyan	5	12	4	0	bite 1d8 · breath 1d6 cold	cold-res.
warg	black	7	12	4	0	bite 2d6	
winter wolf	cyan	7	12	4	20	bite 2d6 · breath 2d6 cold	cold-res.
hell hound pup	red	7	12	4	20	bite 2d6 · breath 2d6 fire	fire-res.
hell hound	red	12	14	2	20	bite 3d6 · breath 3d6 fire	fire-res.

Eyes and spheres e

The floating eye's passive paralysis gaze is the most famous early-game death in the dungeon: never melee one without free action, blindness, or a ranged attack. Once it's dead, eat the corpse: it grants intrinsic telepathy.

All eyes and spheres fly. All except *floating eye* also are mindless.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
gas spore	gray	1	3	10	0	death-burst 4d6	
floating eye	blue	2	1	9	10	passive 0d70 paralyse	amphibious. (no mindless) Passive gaze paralyzes on melee if you and the eye can both see each other. Use ranged, or wear a blindfold or towel to break sight. Corpse grants telepathy.
freezing sphere	white	6	13	4	0	explode 4d6 cold	cold-res.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
flaming sphere	red	6	13	4	0	explode 4d6 fire	fire-res.
shocking sphere	bright-blue	6	13	4	0	explode 4d6 shock	shock-res.

Felines f

Cats. Kittens are common starting pets (Wizards always start with one; Valkyries and Tourists roll 50/50 between kitten and little dog). Wild felines (jaguar, lynx, panther, tiger, displacer beast) are hostile by default.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
kitten	white	2	18	6	0	bite 1d6	tameable. Common pet.
housecat	white	4	16	5	0	bite 1d6	tameable.
jaguar	brown	4	15	6	0	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · bite 1d8	
lynx	cyan	5	15	6	0	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · bite 1d10	
panther	black	5	15	6	0	claw 1d6 · claw 1d6 · bite 1d10	
large cat	white	6	15	4	0	bite 2d4	tameable.
tiger	yellow	6	12	6	0	claw 2d4 · claw 2d4 · bite 1d10	
displacer beast	blue	12	12	-10	0	claw 4d4 · claw 4d4 · bite 2d10	

Gremlins g

At night, their touch strips a random intrinsic (fire resistance, telepathy, etc.). In water or fountains they split into more gremlins. Kill them on dry land, ideally during daylight.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
gremlin	green	5	12	2	25	claw 1d6 · claw 1d6 · bite 1d4 · claw curse	swims, poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, pois-res.
gargoyle	brown	6	10	-4	0	claw 2d6 · claw 2d6 · bite 2d4	ston-res.
winged gargoyle	magenta	9	15	-2	0	claw 3d6 · claw 3d6 · bite 3d4	flies, ston-res.

Humanoids h

Dwarves and similar. Dwarves carry better-than-average loot (weapons, armor, pick-axes) and can wreck low-level heroes with that loot.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
hobbit	green	1	9	10	0	weapon 1d6	
dwarf	red	2	6	10	10	weapon 1d8	tunnels.
bugbear	brown	3	9	5	0	weapon 2d4	
dwarf lord	blue	4	6	10	10	weapon 2d4 · weapon 2d4	tunnels.
dwarf king	magenta	6	6	10	20	weapon 2d6 · weapon 2d6	tunnels.
mind flayer	bright-magenta	9	12	5	90	weapon 1d4 · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int	flies, sees-invis. Tentacle attacks drain Int; if Int hits 3 you die. Wear any helmet (blocks 7/8 of tentacles) or kill from range.
master mind flayer	bright-magenta	13	12	0	90	weapon 1d8 · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int · tentacle 2d1 drain-Int	flies, sees-invis. Five tentacles per turn. Catastrophic adjacent without a helmet. Any helmet blocks 7/8 of tentacles.

Imps and minor demons i

Mostly annoying small fry. Imps insult you and miss; quasits drain Dexterity. A homunculus's bite can put you to sleep, which is very dangerous. Without sleep resistance, fight at range.

All imps and minor demons follow you up and down stairs. All except *imp* are poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
manes	red	1	3	7	0	claw 1d3 · claw 1d3 · bite 1d4	sleep-res. No corpse.
homunculus	green	2	12	6	10	bite 1d3 sleep	flies, poisonous-corpse, sleep-res.
imp	red	3	12	2	20	claw 1d4	regenerates. (no pois-res)
lemure	brown	3	3	7	0	claw 1d3	Gehennom-only, regenerates, sleep-res. No corpse.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
quasit	blue	3	15	2	20	claw 1d2 drain-Dx · claw 1d2 drain-Dx · bite 1d4	regenerates.
tengu	cyan	6	13	5	30	bite 1d7	teleports, teleport-control.

Jellies j

Stationary or near-stationary. The blue jelly's passive cold and the spotted jelly's passive acid bite even when you hit them.

All jellies are amorphous and mindless.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
blue jelly	blue	4	0	8	10	passive 0d6 cold	corpse: cold + poison resistance.
spotted jelly	green	5	0	8	10	passive 0d6 acid	corpse: temp acid + stone resistance.
ochre jelly	brown	6	3	8	20	engulf 3d6 acid · passive 3d6 acid	corpse: temp acid + stone resistance.

Kobolds k

Weak early-game fodder. Most are poisonous to eat. Leave the corpses unless you have poison resistance.

All kobolds have poisonous corpses and are poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
kobold	brown	0	6	10	0	weapon 1d4	
large kobold	red	1	6	10	0	weapon 1d6	
kobold lord	magenta	2	6	10	0	weapon 2d4	
kobold shaman	bright-blue	2	6	6	10	cast spell	

Leprechauns 1

Steals gold and teleports away. The fix is to carry no gold near them, or to kill from range. The corpse drops the gold back.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
leprechaun	green	5	15	8	20	claw 1d2 steal-gold	teleports. Steals gold and teleports away. Carry no gold near them.

Mimics m

Disguised as items, walls, or fountains. Common in shops and zoos. The giveaway is the wrong object on the wrong square.

All mimics are amorphous, hide, and are acid-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
small mimic	brown	7	3	7	0	claw 3d4	
large mimic	red	8	3	7	10	claw 3d4 sticky	
giant mimic	magenta	9	3	7	20	claw 3d6 sticky · claw 3d6 sticky	

Nymphs n

Steals one item and teleports to a random spot on the same level. Engage from range, block her path with pets, or engrave Elbereth. If she gets a hit in, sweep the level for her corpse, which drops what she stole.

All nymphs teleport.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
wood nymph	green	3	12	9	20	claw steal-item · claw seduce	
water nymph	blue	3	12	9	20	claw steal-item · claw seduce	swims.
mountain nymph	brown	3	12	9	20	claw steal-item · claw seduce	

Orcs o

Pack hunters with mediocre loot but real numbers; bring a chokepoint to the Mines.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
goblin	gray	0	6	10	0	weapon 1d4	
hobgoblin	brown	1	9	10	0	weapon 1d6	
orc	red	1	9	10	0	weapon 1d8	pois-res.
hill orc	yellow	2	9	10	0	weapon 1d6	pois-res.
Mordor orc	blue	3	5	10	0	weapon 1d6	pois-res.
Uruk-hai	black	3	7	10	0	weapon 1d8	pois-res.
orc shaman	bright-blue	3	9	5	10	spell	pois-res.
orc-captain	magenta	5	5	10	0	weapon 2d4 · weapon 2d4	pois-res. Hits hard. Drops decent loot.

Piercers p

Clings to the ceiling and drops on you when you walk under. Hits hard for its level; you can't avoid the drop without flying or a clear ceiling.

All piercers hide.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
rock piercer	gray	3	1	3	0	bite 2d6	
iron piercer	cyan	5	1	0	0	bite 3d6	
glass piercer	white	7	1	0	0	bite 4d6	acid-res.

Quadrupeds q

Mixed bag. Rothes are early-game wreckers (three attacks per turn). Mumakil are slow but hit for 4d12 and shrug off blows.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
rothe	brown	2	9	7	0	claw 1d3 · bite 1d3 · bite 1d8	
mumak	gray	5	9	0	0	butt 4d12 · bite 2d6	
leocrotta	red	6	18	4	10	claw 2d6 · bite 2d6 · claw 2d6	

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
wumpus	cyan	8	3	2	10	bite 3d6	clings.
titanothere	gray	12	12	6	0	claw 2d8	
baluchitherium	gray	14	12	5	0	claw 5d4 · claw 5d4	
mastodon	black	20	12	5	0	butt 4d8 · butt 4d8	

Rodents r

Mostly nuisance fodder. Giant rats are common in the early dungeon; their corpses are safe food. Don't eat wererats.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
sewer rat	brown	0	12	7	0	bite 1d3	
giant rat	brown	1	10	7	0	bite 1d3	
rabid rat	brown	2	12	6	0	bite 2d4 drain-Co	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
wererat	brown	2	12	6	10	bite 1d4 lyc	regenerates, poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
rock mole	gray	3	3	0	20	bite 1d6	tunnels, eats metal. Will chew through your bag of gold or unattended weapons.
woodchuck	brown	3	3	0	20	bite 1d6	swims, tunnels.

Arachnids and centipedes s

Includes scorpions and centipedes. Many have poison stings. Spider-class monsters are common as the source of poisonous-corpse food poisoning.

All arachnids and centipedes are poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
cave spider	gray	1	12	3	0	bite 1d2	hides.
centipede	yellow	2	4	3	0	bite 1d3 poison	hides.
giant spider	magenta	5	15	4	0	bite 2d4 poison	poisonous-corpse.
scorpion	red	5	15	3	0	claw 1d2 · claw 1d2 · sting 1d4 poison	hides, poisonous-corpse.
Scorpius	magenta	15	12	10	0	claw 2d6 · claw 2d6 steal-amulet · sting 1d4 disease	poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, ston-res.

Trappers and lurkers t

Stationary engulfers that look like a piece of dungeon. Stepping into one starts a swallow attack you can't easily escape. Identify with ; (farlook) before walking into obvious-trap squares.

All trappers and lurkers hide and follow you up and down stairs.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
lurker above	gray	10	3	3	0	engulf 1d6 wrap · engulf 2d6	flies.
trapper	green	12	3	3	0	engulf 1d8 wrap · engulf 2d8	

Unicorns and horses u

There are two equine u-class creatures. **Horses** (pony, horse, warhorse) spawn hostile in the wild but can be tamed, saddled, and ridden; the Knight starts on a saddled pony.

Unicorns (white, gray, black for Lawful, Neutral, Chaotic) are powerful kickers, peaceful when your alignment matches theirs and hostile otherwise. Killing a co-aligned unicorn is a -5 Luck penalty (the game tells you "You feel guilty..."). Killing a cross-aligned one has no Luck consequence either way. If you don't want the fight, throw any gem (even worthless glass) to pacify a hostile unicorn at no cost; throwing real gems also adjusts your Luck (see Luck and Fortune (p. 147)). A killed unicorn drops its horn.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
pony	brown	3	16	6	0	kick 1d6 · bite 1d2	tameable. Knight's starting steed.
white unicorn	white	4	24	2	70	butt 1d12 · kick 1d6	pois-res.
gray unicorn	gray	4	24	2	70	butt 1d12 · kick 1d6	pois-res.
black unicorn	black	4	24	2	70	butt 1d12 · kick 1d6	pois-res.
horse	brown	5	20	5	0	kick 1d8 · bite 1d3	tameable.
warhorse	brown	7	24	4	0	kick 1d10 · bite 1d4	tameable.

Vortices v

Engulfing elemental clouds. Different colors deal different damage types: blinding sand, cold, shock (which also drains Pw), and fire. Only the fog cloud is slow; the rest move at speed 20-22 and will close on you.

All vortices fly, are mindless, and leave no corpse.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
fog cloud	gray	3	1	0	0	engulf 1d6	amorphous.
dust vortex	brown	4	20	2	30	engulf 2d8 blind	
ice vortex	cyan	5	20	2	30	engulf 1d6 cold	
energy vortex	bright-blue	6	20	2	30	engulf 1d6 shock · engulf 2d6 drain-Pw · passive 0d4 shock	
steam vortex	blue	7	22	2	30	engulf 1d8 fire	
fire vortex	yellow	8	22	2	30	engulf 1d10 fire · passive 0d4 fire	

Worms w

Long worms become a maze of tail segments as they grow. Purple worms swallow you whole and digest. Don't get cornered.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
baby long worm	brown	5	3	5	0	bite 1d4	
baby purple worm	magenta	8	3	5	0	bite 1d6	
long worm	brown	9	3	5	10	bite 2d4	drops a worm tooth.
purple worm	magenta	15	9	6	20	bite 2d8 · engulf 1d10 digest	

Xans and fantastic insects x

Grid bugs are trivial; xans, the bigger relatives, sting your legs and cut your carrying capacity.

All xans and fantastic insects are poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
grid bug	magenta	0	12	9	0	bite 1d1 shock	shock-res.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
xan	red	7	18	-4	0	sting 1d4 leg-wound	flies, poisonous-corpse.

Lights y

Yellow light bursts on contact and blinds you for 10d20 turns. Black light bursts and hallucinates you for 10d12 turns. See Light Bursts (p. 70).

All lights fly and are amorphous and mindless.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
yellow light	yellow	3	15	0	0	explode 10d20 blind	
black light	black	5	15	0	0	explode 10d12 hallu	sees-invis.

Zruties z

Slavic folklore; a hairy wild man of the woods. One species, one role here: a nasty mid-game brute. Good XP if you can handle the three-attack flurry.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
zruty	brown	9	8	3	0	claw 3d4 · claw 3d4 · bite 3d6	

Angelic beings A

Powerful late-game spellcasters with weapons. Astral-Plane Angels guard each High Priest. See The Ascension Run (p. 177).

All angelic beings follow you up and down stairs. All except *Aleax* also fly. All except *couatl* also see invisible.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
couatl	green	8	10	5	30	bite 2d4 poison · bite 1d3 · hug 2d4 wrap	pois-res. (no sees-invis, no corpse)
Aleax	yellow	10	8	0	30	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6 · kick 1d4	(no flies)

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
Angel	white	14	10	-4	55	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6 · claw 1d4 · spell 2d6 magic	
ki-rin	yellow	16	18	-5	90	kick 2d4 · kick 2d4 · butt 3d6 · spell 2d6 spell	
Archon	magenta	19	16	-6	80	weapon 2d4 · weapon 2d4 · gaze 2d6 blind · claw 1d8 · spell 4d6 spell	regenerates.

Bats and birds B

Erratic flyers, mostly nuisance. Vampire bats drain Strength with a poisoned bite (poison resistance blocks it).

All bats and birds fly.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
bat	brown	0	22	8	0	bite 1d4	
giant bat	red	2	22	7	0	bite 1d6	
raven	black	4	20	6	0	bite 1d6 · claw 1d6 blind	
vampire bat	black	5	20	6	0	bite 1d6 · bite drain-Str	regenerates, poisonous-corpse, sleep-res, pois-res.

Centaur C

Half-horse archers with strong physical attacks. Forest centaurs wield bows; plains and mountain centaurs wield crossbows. They shoot at range.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
plains centaur	brown	4	18	4	0	weapon 1d6 · kick 1d6	
forest centaur	green	5	18	3	10	weapon 1d8 · kick 1d6	
mountain centaur	cyan	6	20	2	10	weapon 1d10 · kick 1d6 · kick 1d6	

Dragons D

Each adult dragon breathes its element type. Reflection bounces the ranged breath back. **Babies don't breathe**; they're just biters until they grow up. Adults are the source of dragon scale mail. See Dragon Scale Mail (p. 221).

All except *Chromatic Dragon* also fly.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
baby gray dragon	gray	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby gold dragon	yellow	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby silver dragon	bright-cyan	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby red dragon	red	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby white dragon	white	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby orange dragon	orange	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby black dragon	black	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby blue dragon	blue	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
baby green dragon	green	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	poisonous-corpse.
baby yellow dragon	yellow	12	9	2	10	bite 2d6	
gray dragon	gray	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 magic · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Anti-magic breath. Magic resistance helps; reflection doesn't.
gold dragon	yellow	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 fire · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Fire breath. Drops gold-colored scales (light source).
silver dragon	bright-cyan	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 cold · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Cold breath plus reflection scales: your reflection target.
red dragon	red	15	9	-1	20	breath 6d6 fire · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Cone of fire. Get fire resistance before you meet one.
white dragon	white	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 cold · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Cone of cold. Cold resistance.
orange dragon	orange	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d25 sleep · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Sleep ray. Sleep resistance trivialises.
black dragon	black	15	9	-1	20	breath 1d255 disint · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Disintegration breath. Disint resistance OR reflection.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
blue dragon	blue	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 shock · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Cone of lightning. Shock resistance.
green dragon	green	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 poison · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis, poisonous-corpse. Poison breath; poison resistance is enough.
yellow dragon	yellow	15	9	-1	20	breath 4d6 acid · bite 3d8 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d4	sees-invis. Acid breath; rare.
Chromatic Dragon	magenta	16	12	0	30	breath 6d6 rnd-breath · spell spell · claw 2d8 · steal-amulet · bite 4d8 · bite 4d8 · sting 1d6	sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, follows stairs. (no flies)
Ixoth	red	15	12	-1	20	breath 8d6 fire · bite 4d8 · spell spell · claw 2d4 · claw 2d4 steal-amulet	sees-invis, follows stairs.

Elementals E

Air engulfs and suffocates, fire deals fire damage, water drowns if you're adjacent in water, earth is slow but tough.

All except *stalker* also are mindless.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
stalker	white	8	12	3	0	claw 4d4	flies, sees-invis, follows stairs. (no mindless)
air elemental	cyan	8	36	2	30	engulf 1d10	flies.
fire elemental	yellow	8	12	2	30	claw 3d6 fire · passive 0d4 fire	flies.
earth elemental	brown	8	6	2	30	claw 4d6	fire-res, cold-res, pois-res, ston-res.
water elemental	blue	8	5	2	30	claw 5d6	swims, amphibious, pois-res, ston-res.

Fungi and molds F

Stationary. Lichen corpses never rot; keep one in your pack as iron rations. Brown, green, and red molds bite back on melee with elemental passive damage (cold, acid, fire). Yellow mold stuns on passive contact; violet fungus has an active touch attack with sticking.

All fungi and molds are mindless.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
lichen	bright-green	0	1	9	0	touch sticky	
brown mold	brown	1	0	9	0	passive 0d6 cold	cold-res, pois-res.
yellow mold	yellow	1	0	9	0	passive 0d4 stun	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
green mold	green	1	0	9	0	passive 0d4 acid	acid-res, ston-res.
red mold	red	1	0	9	0	passive 0d4 fire	fire-res, pois-res.
shrieker	magenta	3	1	7	0	—	pois-res.
violet fungus	magenta	3	1	7	0	touch 1d4 · touch sticky	pois-res.

Gnomes G

Mines residents. Gnomish PCs find most of them peaceful. The gnome lord and gnomish wizard are real threats; the gnome king is rare but dangerous.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
gnome	brown	1	6	10	4	weapon 1d6	
gnome lord	blue	3	8	10	4	weapon 1d8	
gnomish wizard	bright-blue	3	10	4	10	cast spell	
gnome king	magenta	5	10	10	20	weapon 2d6	

Giant humanoids H

Boulder throwers. Storm / fire / frost giants match the dragon elements; titans cast spells. Eating a true giant's corpse raises Strength; the ettin and minotaur don't count as giants for this purpose.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
giant	red	6	6	0	0	weapon 2d10	
stone giant	gray	6	6	0	0	weapon 2d10	
hill giant	cyan	8	10	6	0	weapon 2d8	
fire giant	yellow	9	12	4	5	weapon 2d10	fire-res. Throws boulders.
frost giant	white	10	12	3	10	weapon 2d12	cold-res. Throws boulders.
ettin	brown	10	12	3	0	weapon 2d8 · weapon 3d6	
storm giant	blue	16	12	3	10	weapon 2d12	shock-res. Throws boulders for big damage.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
titan	magenta	16	18	-3	70	weapon 2d8 · spell spell	flies. Tough humanoid with magic missiles. Casts spells.
minotaur	brown	15	15	6	0	claw 3d10 · claw 3d10 · butt 2d8	Two claws plus a butt. Heavy hitter; roams the Gehennom mazes.
Cyclops	gray	18	12	0	0	weapon 4d8 · weapon 4d8 · claw 2d6 steal-amulet	follows stairs, ston-res. Healer quest nemesis. Throws boulders.
Lord Surtur	magenta	15	12	2	50	weapon 2d10 · weapon 2d10 · claw 2d6 steal-amulet	follows stairs, fire-res, ston-res. Valkyrie quest nemesis.

Jabberwocks J

The monster from Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky* (“O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”). Tough, hits hard, and moves at player baseline speed: you can’t simply walk away. Free XP if you’re set up for the fight; lethal if you walk into one early. Vorpal Blade was made for beheading it.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
jabberwock	orange	15	12	-2	50	bite 2d10 · bite 2d10 · claw 2d10 · claw 2d10	flies. Powerful; baseline speed. Free XP if you’re set up.

Keystone Kops K

Police force triggered by stealing from shops or hurting shopkeepers. Mostly weak individually but they swarm, and dead Kops respawn: each fallen Kop has a 1-in-5 chance to come back near the down-stairs and a 1-in-5 chance to come back at a random location, so killing them isn’t a stable solution. Get away or genocide them instead.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
Keystone Kop	blue	1	6	10	10	weapon 1d4	
Kop Sergeant	blue	2	8	10	10	weapon 1d6	
Kop Lieutenant	cyan	3	10	10	20	weapon 1d8	
Kop Kaptain	magenta	4	12	10	20	weapon 2d6	

Liches L

Skeletal spellcasters. The arch-lich can cast touch of death; master and arch-liches both require magic resistance to survive their spell barrages.

All liches regenerate, leave no corpse, and are undead, cold-resistant, sleep-resistant, and poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
lich	brown	11	6	0	30	touch 1d10 cold · spell spell	
demilich	red	14	9	-2	60	touch 3d4 cold · spell spell	
master lich	magenta	17	9	-4	90	touch 3d6 cold · spell spell	fire-res. Casts wizard spells. Kill from afar.
arch-lich	magenta	25	9	-6	90	touch 5d6 cold · spell spell	fire-res, shock-res. Casts touch of death; magic resistance mandatory.

Mummies M

Mindless undead. Wand and scroll of undead turning shred them.

All mummies are mindless undead and leave no corpse.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
kobold mummy	brown	3	8	6	20	claw 1d4	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
gnome mummy	red	4	10	6	20	claw 1d6	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
orc mummy	gray	5	10	5	20	claw 1d6	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
dwarf mummy	red	5	10	5	20	claw 1d6	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
elf mummy	green	6	12	4	30	claw 2d4	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
human mummy	gray	6	12	4	30	claw 2d4 · claw 2d4	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
ettin mummy	blue	7	12	4	30	claw 2d6 · claw 2d6	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
giant mummy	cyan	8	14	3	30	claw 3d4 · claw 3d4	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.

Nagas N

Long serpentine bodies with ranged attacks. All nagas are poison-resistant. Black naga corpses confer poison, acid, *and* stoning resistance. That's easily the best of the four eats.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
red naga hatchling	red	3	10	6	0	bite 1d4	fire-res.
black naga hatchling	black	3	10	6	0	bite 1d4	acid-res, ston-res.
golden naga hatchling	yellow	3	10	6	0	bite 1d4	
guardian naga hatchling	green	3	10	6	0	bite 1d4	
red naga	red	6	12	4	0	bite 2d4 · breath 2d6 fire	fire-res.
black naga	black	8	14	2	10	bite 2d6 · spit acid	acid-res, ston-res.
golden naga	yellow	10	14	2	70	bite 2d6 · cast spell 4d6	
guardian naga	green	12	16	0	50	spit 1d6 poison · bite 1d6 paralyse · touch · hug 2d4 wrap	poisonous-corpse. Lawful PCs may find them peaceful.

Ogres 0

Big melee brutes that wield weapons. Drop decent weapons and armor.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
ogre	brown	5	10	5	0	weapon 2d5	
ogre lord	red	7	12	3	30	weapon 2d6	
ogre king	magenta	9	14	4	60	weapon 3d5	

Puddings and oozes P

Brown and black puddings split when you hit them with an iron or metal melee weapon. Brown puddings **rot** your wood/leather/cloth/bone armor on bite; black puddings **corrode** your metal armor on bite *and* corrode your wielded metal weapon on the passive return-hit. Gray ooze **rusts** metal armor but doesn't split. Fire-kill puddings so they don't multiply, or pick a chokepoint.

Green slime is a Gehennom-only exception: doesn't split, leaves a glob, and one touch starts a 10-turn countdown to becoming one yourself. Fight at range, burn yourself with fire to clear it, or wear an **amulet of unchanging** (blocks and aborts the transformation). Prayer doesn't work in Gehennom, so don't rely on it. See *Delayed Deaths* for the full cure list.

All puddings and oozes are amorphous, mindless, cold-resistant, poison-resistant, acid-resistant, and petrification-resistant. All except *gray ooze* also are shock-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
gray ooze	gray	3	1	8	0	bite 2d8 rust	fire-res. (no shock-res)
brown pudding	brown	5	3	8	0	bite decay	
green slime	green	6	6	6	0	touch 1d4 slime · passive slime	poisonous-corpse.
black pudding	black	10	6	6	0	bite 3d8 corrode · passive corrode	

Quantum mechanics Q

The **Q** class is two creatures, both with random claw effects. The **quantum mechanic** teleports you on a hit: the annoyance is the lost position more than the damage, but in dangerous neighbourhoods a random teleport **CAN** kill. The **genetic engineer** polymorphs you: unless you have *Unchanging* or magic resistance, one claw and you become something else.

Both species also teleport themselves at random, and both leave poisonous corpses.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
quantum mechanic	cyan	7	12	3	10	claw 1d4 teleport	Self-teleports. Corpse toggles intrinsic Fast.
genetic engineer	green	12	12	3	10	claw 1d4 polymorph	Self-teleports. Corpse triggers polyself.

Rust monsters and disenchanters R

Rust monsters rust iron equipment on touch. Disenchanters drain enchantment from your armor when they hit you, and drain enchantment from your weapon when you hit them (passive counterattack). Either way, strip irreplaceable kit before engaging, and switch to silver or non-iron weapons against the rust monster.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
rust monster	brown	5	18	2	0	touch rust · touch rust · passive rust	swims. Touch rusts iron. Strip armor before engaging or use silver.
disenchanter	blue	12	12	-10	0	claw 4d4 disenchant · passive disenchant	Gehennom-only. Active drains armor; passive drains weapon when you melee it.

Snakes S

Mostly poisonous. The pit viper and the cobra are the dangerous ones; garter snakes are fodder.

All snakes swim. All except *python* also hide.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
garter snake	green	1	8	8	0	bite 1d2	
snake	brown	4	15	3	0	bite 1d6 poison	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
water moccasin	red	4	15	3	0	bite 1d6 poison	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
python	magenta	6	3	5	0	bite 1d4 · touch · hug 1d4 wrap · hug 2d4	(no hides)
pit viper	blue	6	15	2	0	bite 1d4 poison · bite 1d4 poison	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
cobra	blue	6	18	2	0	bite 2d4 poison · spit blind	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.

Trolls T

Regenerates from corpses on a timer. Three reliable ways to keep a troll dead: **eat the corpse** before it revives; **kill it with Trollsbane wielded** (the artifact disables the revive timer); or **stone it** so it leaves a statue instead of a corpse. A troll left behind on an old level will be alive when you come back.

All trolls regenerate and follow you up and down stairs.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
troll	brown	7	12	4	0	weapon 4d2 · claw 4d2 · bite 2d6	
ice troll	white	9	10	2	20	weapon 2d6 · claw 2d6 · cold · bite 2d6	cold-res.
rock troll	cyan	9	12	0	0	weapon 3d6 · claw 2d8 · bite 2d6	
water troll	blue	11	14	4	40	weapon 2d8 · claw 2d8 · bite 2d6	swims.
Olog-hai	magenta	13	12	-4	0	weapon 3d6 · claw 2d8 · bite 2d6	

Umber hulks u

Confusion gaze. Don't melee without some way to dodge the gaze. Blindness defeats it (the gaze requires mutual sight); free action does *not* (it covers paralysis, holding, and sleep, never confusion). The confusion stacks and wrecks navigation, and confused spellbook study garbles the spell.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
umber hulk	brown	9	6	2	25	claw 3d4 · claw 3d4 · bite 2d5 · gaze confuse	tunnels. Confusion gaze. Hard to navigate around. Hits hard too.

Vampires v

Drains XL on bite. Shapeshifts to bat or cloud. Vlad the Impaler is the boss of Vlad's Tower.

All vampires fly, regenerate, are undead, follow you up and down stairs, and shapeshift.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
vampire	red	10	12	1	25	claw 1d6 · bite 1d6 drain-XL	
vampire lord	blue	12	14	0	50	claw 1d8 · bite 1d8 drain-XL	
Vlad the Impaler	magenta	28	26	-6	80	weapon 2d10 · bite 1d12 drain-XL	Vampire boss in Vlad's Tower. Has the Candelabrum.

Wraiths w

Drains XL on touch. The wraith corpse, however, **gives** a level when eaten: one of the best food items in the game. Always eat a wraith corpse if you can.

All wraiths are undead and follow you up and down stairs.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
barrow wight	gray	3	12	5	5	weapon drain-XL · spell spell · claw 1d4 · touch 1d4 cold	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
wraith	black	6	12	4	15	touch 1d6 drain-XL	flies.
Nazgul	magenta	13	12	0	25	weapon 1d4 drain-XL · breath 2d25 sleep	sees-invis.

Xorns x

D&D's three-armed, three-eyed creatures from the Elemental Plane of Earth. They **phase through walls** (no rubble, no dig) and eat metal items off the floor, including the orcsish dagger you were about to pick up. Their claws and bite are physical only, so worn armor and wielded weapons aren't directly at risk, but they hit hard for their level. The corpse grants temporary stoning resistance.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
xorn	brown	8	9	-2	20	claw 1d3 · claw 1d3 · claw 1d3 · bite 4d6	fire-res, cold-res, ston-res.

Apelike creatures y

Apes and great apes mostly; sasquatches are fast. Carnivore corpses are safe food.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
monkey	gray	2	12	6	0	claw steal-item · bite 1d3	
ape	brown	4	12	6	0	claw 1d3 · claw 1d3 · bite 1d6	
owlbear	brown	5	12	5	0	claw 1d6 · claw 1d6 · hug 2d8	
yeti	white	5	15	6	0	claw 1d6 · claw 1d6 · bite 1d4	cold-res.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
carnivorous ape	black	6	12	6	0	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · hug 1d8	
sasquatch	gray	7	15	6	0	claw 1d6 · claw 1d6 · kick 1d8	sees-invis.

Zombies Z

Slow undead. Easy to kite. **Zombies never leave corpses on death**, so eating is a non-issue, but undead-turning effects (scroll, spell of turn undead, wand of undead turning) deal heavy damage to the whole class. The **skeleton** doesn't generate randomly: it only appears from a skeleton trap or a fixed placement (e.g., Vlad's Tower). Big zombie populations live in morgues.

All zombies are mindless and undead.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
kobold zombie	brown	0	6	10	0	claw 1d4	poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
gnome zombie	brown	1	6	10	0	claw 1d5	poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
orc zombie	gray	2	6	9	0	claw 1d6	poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
dwarf zombie	red	2	6	9	0	claw 1d6	poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
elf zombie	green	3	6	9	0	claw 1d7	follows stairs.
human zombie	white	4	6	8	0	claw 1d8	follows stairs.
ettin zombie	blue	6	8	6	0	claw 1d10 · claw 1d10	follows stairs, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
ghoul	black	3	6	10	0	claw 1d2 paralyse · claw 1d3	poisonous-corpse, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
giant zombie	cyan	8	8	6	0	claw 2d8 · claw 2d8	follows stairs, cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res.
skeleton	white	12	8	4	0	weapon 2d6 · touch 1d6 slow	cold-res, sleep-res, pois-res, ston-res.

Humans and elves @

The catch-all @ class: shopkeepers, priests, watchmen, role nemeses, quest leaders, soldiers, ninja, doppelgangers, weres, Medusa, Croesus, the Wizard of Yendor, and the player. Most start peaceful; the ones that don't are very dangerous.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
human	white	0	12	10	0	weapon 1d6	
wererat	brown	2	12	10	10	weapon 2d4	regenerates, poisonous-corpse.
werejackal	red	2	12	10	10	weapon 2d4	regenerates, poisonous-corpse.
werewolf	orange	5	12	10	20	weapon 2d4	regenerates, poisonous-corpse.
elf	white	0	12	10	2	weapon 1d8	sees-invis.
Woodland-elf	green	4	12	10	10	weapon 2d4	sees-invis.
Green-elf	bright-green	5	12	10	10	weapon 2d4	sees-invis.
Grey-elf	gray	6	12	10	10	weapon 2d4	sees-invis.
elf-lord	bright-blue	8	12	10	20	weapon 2d4 · weapon 2d4	sees-invis.
Elvenking	magenta	9	12	10	25	weapon 2d4 · weapon 2d4	sees-invis.
doppelganger	white	9	12	5	20	weapon 1d12	shapeshifter.
shopkeeper	white	12	16	0	50	weapon 4d4 · weapon 4d4	starts peaceful. Don't anger one.
guard	blue	12	12	10	40	weapon 4d10	starts peaceful.
prisoner	white	12	12	10	0	weapon 1d6	starts peaceful.
Oracle	bright-blue	12	0	0	50	passive 0d4 magic	starts peaceful.
priest	white	12	12	10	50	weapon 4d10 · kick 1d4 · spell cleric	starts peaceful. Temple defenders. Convert their altars or sacrifice on them.
high priest	white	25	15	7	70	weapon 4d10 · kick 2d8 · spell 2d8 cleric · spell 2d8 cleric	sees-invis. Endgame altar guardian. Don't fight one head-on.
soldier	gray	6	10	10	0	weapon 1d8	follows stairs.
sergeant	red	8	10	10	5	weapon 2d6	follows stairs.
nurse	white	11	6	0	0	claw 2d6 heal	
lieutenant	green	10	10	10	15	weapon 3d4 · weapon 3d4	follows stairs.
captain	blue	12	10	10	15	weapon 4d4 · weapon 4d4	follows stairs.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
watchman	gray	6	10	10	0	weapon 1d8	follows stairs, starts peaceful.
watch captain	green	10	10	10	15	weapon 3d4 · weapon 3d4	follows stairs, starts peaceful.
Medusa	bright-green	20	12	2	50	weapon 2d4 · claw 1d8 · gaze petrify · bite 1d6 poison	flies, swims, amphibious, poisonous-corpse.
Wizard of Yendor	bright-magenta	30	12	-8	100	claw 2d12 steal-amulet · spell spell	flies, regenerates, sees-invis, fire-res, poison-res. Covetous: teleports to you in late Gehennom and on the planes. The final boss.
Croesus	magenta	20	15	0	40	weapon 4d10	sees-invis, follows stairs. Vault guardian on Fort Ludios. Wields a two-handed sword and hoards gold, gems, and magic items off the floor.
Charon	white	76	18	-5	120	weapon 1d8 · touch 1d8 paralyse	sees-invis, starts peaceful.
archeologist	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	tunnels.
barbarian	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	
caveman	white	10	12	10	0	weapon 2d4	
healer	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d6	
knight	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	
monk	white	10	12	10	2	claw 1d8 · kick 1d8	
priest	white	10	12	10	2	weapon 1d6 · spell cleric	Temple defenders. Convert their altars or sacrifice on them.
ranger	white	10	12	10	2	weapon 1d4	
rogue	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	
samurai	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d8 · weapon 1d8	
tourist	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	
valkyrie	white	10	12	10	1	weapon 1d8 · weapon 1d8	
wizard	white	10	12	10	3	weapon 1d6 · spell spell	
Lord Carnarvon	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · spell 4d8 spell	tunnels, starts peaceful. Archeologist quest leader.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
Pelias	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · weapon 4d10	starts peaceful.
Shaman Karnov	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · spell 2d8 cleric	starts peaceful.
Hippocrates	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 1d6 · spell 3d8 cleric · spell 3d8 cleric	starts peaceful. Healer quest leader.
King Arthur	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · weapon 4d10	starts peaceful. Knight quest leader. Holds Excalibur if you didn't get it.
Grand Master	black	25	15	0	90	claw 4d10 · kick 2d8 · spell 2d8 cleric · spell 2d8 cleric	sees-invis, starts peaceful. Monk quest leader.
Arch Priest	white	25	15	7	90	weapon 4d10 · kick 2d8 · spell 2d8 cleric · spell 2d8 cleric	sees-invis, starts peaceful. Priest quest leader.
Orion	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · spell 4d8 spell	swims, amphibious, sees-invis, starts peaceful. Ranger quest leader. Bow user.
Master of Thieves	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · weapon 2d6 · claw 2d4 steal-amulet	starts peaceful. Rogue quest leader; also Tourist quest nemesis.
Lord Sato	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · weapon 4d10	starts peaceful.
Twoflower	white	20	15	10	90	weapon 4d10	starts peaceful. Tourist quest leader.
Norn	magenta	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · weapon 4d10	starts peaceful, cold-res. Valkyrie quest leader.
Neferet the Green	green	20	15	0	90	weapon 4d10 · spell 2d8 spell · spell 2d8 spell	starts peaceful. Wizard quest leader.
Thoth Amon	magenta	16	12	0	10	weapon 1d6 · spell spell · spell spell · claw 1d4 steal-amulet	follows stairs.
Master Kaen	magenta	25	12	-10	10	claw 16d2 · claw 16d2 · spell cleric · claw 1d4 steal-amulet	sees-invis, follows stairs.
Master Assassin	magenta	15	12	0	30	weapon 2d6 poison · weapon 2d8 · claw 2d6 steal-amulet	follows stairs. Rogue quest nemesis.
Ashikaga Takauji	magenta	15	12	0	40	weapon 2d6 · weapon 2d6 · claw 2d6 steal-amulet	follows stairs. Samurai quest nemesis.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
Dark One	black	15	12	0	80	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6 · claw 1d4 steal-amulet · spell spell	follows stairs.
student	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d6	tunnels, starts peaceful.
chieftain	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d6	starts peaceful.
neanderthal	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 2d4	starts peaceful.
attendant	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d6	starts peaceful.
page	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	starts peaceful.
abbot	white	5	12	10	20	claw 8d2 · kick 3d2 stun · spell cleric	starts peaceful.
acolyte	white	5	12	10	20	weapon 1d6 · spell cleric	starts peaceful.
hunter	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d4	sees-invis, starts peaceful.
thug	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d6 · weapon 1d6	starts peaceful.
ninja	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d8 · weapon 1d8	
roshi	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d8 · weapon 1d8	starts peaceful.
guide	white	5	12	10	20	weapon 1d6 · spell spell	starts peaceful.
warrior	white	5	12	10	10	weapon 1d8 · weapon 1d8	starts peaceful.
apprentice	white	5	12	10	30	weapon 1d6 · spell spell	starts peaceful.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
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Major demons &

Major demons. Most can gate in reinforcements (a single barbed devil in your face can become five). Silver weapons and Demonbane do extra damage. Demon lords can be bribed with gold to leave.

They all follow you up and down stairs.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
water demon	blue	8	12	-4	30	weapon 1d3 · claw 1d3 · bite 1d3	swims, poisonous-corpse, demonic.
amorous demon	gray	6	12	0	70	seduction (see Seduction)	flies, poisonous-corpse, demonic. Displays as succubus or incubus by the demon's own randomly-assigned gender.
horned devil	brown	6	9	-5	50	weapon 1d4 · claw 1d4 · bite 2d3 · sting 1d3	poisonous-corpse, demonic.
erinyes	red	7	12	2	30	weapon 2d4 Str-drain	fire-res, pois-res. Variable attacks; can be amplified by alignment abuse.
barbed devil	red	8	12	0	35	claw 2d4 · claw 2d4 · sticky · sting 3d4	poisonous-corpse, demonic.
marilith	red	7	12	-6	80	weapon 2d4 · weapon 2d4 · claw 2d4 · claw 2d4 · claw 2d4 · claw 2d4	sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic.
vrock	green	8	12	0	50	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · claw 1d8 · claw 1d8 · bite 1d6	poisonous-corpse, demonic.
hezrou	green	9	6	-2	55	claw 1d3 · claw 1d3 · bite 4d4	poisonous-corpse, demonic.
bone devil	gray	9	15	-1	40	weapon 3d4 · sting 2d4 drain-Str	poisonous-corpse, demonic.
ice devil	white	11	6	-4	55	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · bite 2d4 · sting 3d4 cold · touch 1d1 slow	sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic.
nalfeshnee	red	11	9	-1	65	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · bite 2d4 · spell spell	poisonous-corpse, demonic.
pit fiend	red	13	6	-3	65	weapon 4d2 · weapon 4d2 · hug 2d4	sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic.
sandestin	gray	13	12	4	60	weapon 2d6 · weapon 2d6	shapeshifter, ston-res.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
balrog	red	16	5	-2	75	weapon 8d4 · weapon 4d6	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic.
Juiblex	bright-green	50	3	-7	65	engulf 4d10 disease · spit 3d6 acid	flies, amphibious, amorphous, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res, acid-res, ston-res.
Yeenoghu	magenta	56	18	-5	80	weapon 3d6 · weapon 2d8 confuse · claw 1d6 paralyse · spell 2d6 magic	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res.
Orcus	magenta	66	9	-6	85	weapon 3d6 · claw 3d4 · claw 3d4 · spell 8d6 spell · sting 2d4 drain-Str	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res.
Geryon	magenta	72	3	-3	75	claw 3d6 · claw 3d6 · sting 2d4 drain-Str	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res.
Dispater	magenta	78	15	-2	80	weapon 4d6 · spell 6d6 spell	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res.
Baalzebub	magenta	89	9	-5	85	bite 2d6 drain-Str · gaze 2d6 stun	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res.
Asmodeus	magenta	105	12	-7	90	claw 4d4 · spell 6d6 cold	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, cold-res, pois-res.
Demogorgon	magenta	106	15	-8	95	spell 8d6 spell · sting 1d4 drain-XL · claw 1d6 disease · claw 1d6 disease	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic, fire-res, pois-res.
Death	hi_overlord30	12	-5	100		touch 8d8 death · touch 8d8 death	flies, regenerates, sees-invis, teleport-control. Rider of the Apocalypse. Vanquish three to ascend.
Pestilence	hi_overlord30	12	-5	100		touch 8d8 pestilence · touch 8d8 pestilence	flies, regenerates, sees-invis, teleport-control. Rider; spreads disease.
Famine	hi_overlord30	12	-5	100		touch 8d8 famine · touch 8d8 famine	flies, regenerates, sees-invis, teleport-control. Rider; drains nutrition to starvation.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
mail daemon	bright-blue	56	24	10	127	—	flies, swims, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, starts peaceful, fire-res, cold-res, sleep-res, shock-res, pois-res, ston-res. Delivers in-game mail. Don't attack one — they don't fight back.
djinni	yellow	7	12	4	30	weapon 2d8	flies, poisonous-corpse, pois-res, ston-res.
Minion of Huhetotl	orange	16	12	-2	75	weapon 8d4 · weapon 4d6 · spell spell · claw 2d6 steal-amulet	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic.
Nalzok	orange	16	12	-2	85	weapon 8d4 · weapon 4d6 · spell spell · claw 2d6 steal-amulet	flies, sees-invis, poisonous-corpse, demonic.

Golems †

Mindless constructs. Wood and leather golems are early-game fodder; iron, stone, and clay golems are dangerous. The rare gold golem is a walking treasure pile.

All golems are mindless, sleep-resistant, and poison-resistant.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
straw golem	yellow	3	12	10	0	claw 1d2 · claw 1d2	cold-res.
paper golem	white	3	12	10	0	claw 1d3	cold-res.
rope golem	brown	4	9	8	0	claw 1d4 · claw 1d4 · hug 6d1	
gold golem	yellow	5	9	6	0	claw 2d3 · claw 2d3	acid-res.
leather golem	brown	6	6	6	0	claw 1d6 · claw 1d6	
wood golem	brown	7	3	4	0	claw 3d4	cold-res.
flesh golem	red	9	8	9	30	claw 2d8 · claw 2d8	fire-res, cold-res, shock-res.
clay golem	brown	11	7	7	40	claw 3d10	
stone golem	gray	14	6	5	50	claw 3d8	ston-res.
glass golem	cyan	16	6	1	50	claw 2d8 · claw 2d8	acid-res.
iron golem	cyan	18	6	3	60	weapon 4d10 · breath 4d6 poison	no corpse. fire-res, cold-res, shock-res.

Sea monsters ;

Live in water. Eels and the kraken wrap you and drag you under to drown: instadeath without magical breathing. Stay off the water-adjacent square unless you have it.

All sea monsters swim and are amphibious.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
jellyfish	blue	3	3	6	0	sting 3d3 drain-Str	poisonous-corpse, pois-res.
piranha	red	5	18	4	0	bite 2d6 · bite 2d6	
shark	gray	7	12	2	0	bite 5d6	
giant eel	cyan	5	9	-1	0	bite 3d6 · touch wrap	
electric eel	bright-blue	7	10	-3	0	bite 4d6 shock · touch wrap	shock-res.
kraken	red	20	3	6	0	claw 2d4 · claw 2d4 · hug 2d6 wrap · bite 5d4	

Lizards :

Mostly harmless. **Lizard corpses cure petrification and never rot.** Carry one at all times.

This is the standard answer to cockatrices and Medusa.

Name	Color	Lvl	Spd	AC	MR%	Attacks	Notes
newt	yellow	0	6	8	0	bite 1d2	swims, amphibious.
gecko	green	1	6	8	0	bite 1d3	
iguana	brown	2	6	7	0	bite 1d4	
baby crocodile	brown	3	6	7	0	bite 1d4	swims, amphibious.
lizard	green	5	6	6	10	bite 1d6	ston-res.
chameleon	brown	6	5	6	10	bite 4d2	shapeshifter.
crocodile	brown	6	9	5	0	bite 4d2 · claw 1d12	swims, amphibious.
salamander	orange	8	12	-1	0	weapon 2d8 · touch 1d6 fire · hug 2d6 · hug 3d6 fire	poisonous-corpse, follows stairs, fire-res, sleep-res.



Intrinsic and Extrinsic Tables

NetHack tracks 68 properties on the player. The ones you actively want to attain fall into five families: damage resistances, senses and perception, movement and spatial behavior, combat and defense, and special utility. The tables below list each property, what it does, and every reliable source — broken into **intrinsic** (gained from corpses, role progression, race, or prayer) and **extrinsic** (granted by an item you carry, wear, or wield).

A few patterns worth knowing before you read further:

- **Corpses confer most resistances at a rate that scales with the monster's level** — a higher-level monster's corpse is more likely to grant its resistance than a low-level one. The tables below flag the few exceptions inline ($4\times$ or $15\times$ = much more likely to grant than the monster's level alone would suggest; $\frac{1}{2}\times$ or $\frac{1}{4}\times$ = less likely).
- **Intrinsic + extrinsic don't stack** — wearing the cloak of magic resistance over a Wizard with XL 17 antimagic doesn't double anything. But having both is **redundancy**: take the cloak off and the intrinsic still protects you.
- **The Monk has the broadest resistance ladder of any role.** Eleven intrinsics gained across levels 1–17, more than any other role.
- **Dragon scale mail is the universal extrinsic gateway** for the resistance system. Each color maps to one base resistance; several also grant a *secondary* effect on top (black gives disintegration *and* drain res, blue gives shock *and* fast, etc.). See the table for the full mapping.

Damage resistances

The widest, most-used family. Most are gettable from corpses early. Magic resistance is the late-game-defining piece and has the fewest sources.

Property	What it does	Intrinsic sources	Extrinsic sources
Fire resistance	Halves fire damage; blocks fire-trap injury, fire-breath weapons, and lava burns (you still drown in lava).	Monk XL 11; Priest XL 20; red dragon, fire ant, fire giant, hell hound, salamander, or red mold corpses; prayer rescue from lava.	Ring of fire resistance; red dragon scales / scale mail.
Cold resistance	Halves cold damage; blocks cold breath, cold blasts; lets you eat cold-resistant corpses safely.	Valkyrie XL 1; Monk XL 13; white dragon, frost giant, winter wolf, brown mold, or blue jelly corpses.	Ring of cold resistance; white dragon scales / scale mail.
Sleep resistance	Immune to sleep gas, sleep rays, monster sleep attacks.	Monk XL 1; Elf XL 4; any elf, homunculus, or dark one corpse; prayer-rescue.	Orange dragon scales / scale mail.
Disintegration resistance	Black dragon breath stops disintegrating you (still does ordinary damage).	Black dragon corpse.	Black dragon scales / scale mail.
Shock resistance	Halves electrical damage; blocks lightning breath.	Monk XL 15; blue dragon, electric eel, or shocking sphere corpses.	Ring of shock resistance; blue dragon scales / scale mail; shield of shock resistance (new in 5.0).
Poison resistance	Survive poison stings, poisonous corpses, poison breath.	Barbarian XL 1, Healer XL 1, Orc XL 1, Tourist XL 20, Monk XL 3; killer bee (4×), scorpion (4×), green dragon, naga, quasit, and other poisonous corpses.	Ring of poison resistance; amulet versus poison; alchemy smock (cloak); green dragon scales / scale mail.
Acid resistance	Survive acid damage. From corpses it's <i>timed</i> and resets on level change; from yellow dragon scales it's permanent for as long as they're worn.	Acid blob, brown pudding, yellow dragon corpses (½×, timed).	Yellow dragon scales / scale mail (permanent while worn).
Stoning resistance	Immunity to petrification (cockatrice touch, eating cockatrice/Medusa corpses). Timed from corpses; permanent from yellow dragon scales.	Acid blob, lizard corpses (¼×, timed).	Yellow dragon scales / scale mail (yes, both effects — and permanent while worn).

Drain resistance	Blocks level drain from wraiths, vampires, and drain-life weapons (Stormbringer, Vorpall Blade).	None from corpses; vampire / lich polyform confers it.	Black dragon scales / scale mail; shield of drain resistance (new in 5.0); wielding Excalibur, Stormbringer, or Staff of Aesculapius.
Sickness resistance	Blocks deadly disease, food poisoning.	None from corpses.	Green dragon scales / scale mail.
Magic resistance	Blocks death rays, magic missile, polymorph beams, the touch-of-death spell, and magic-trap effects at 100%. <i>Not</i> the same as MC.	Wizard XL 17 (called Antimagic); magic-trap polymorph from a magic trap can confer it randomly.	Cloak of magic resistance; gray dragon scales / scale mail; wielding Magicbane.
Hallucination resistance	Blocks hallucination from violet fungus, hallucinogenic potions, and gold dragon scale mail's emission.	Polyform-only (forms whose attacks cause hallucination, like the violet fungus).	Wielding Grayswandir.
Blindness resistance	Blocks light-flash blindness from yellow / black light bursts.	Polyform-only (forms whose attacks blind, like yellow light).	Wielding Sunsword.

Senses and perception

ESP and warning are the two senses that change how you *play* — both let you act on information you couldn't otherwise see.

Property	What it does	Intrinsic sources	Extrinsic sources
Telepathy (ESP)	Senses minded monsters anywhere on the level when you are blind (and partially when sighted). Floating-eye corpse is the standard early source.	Floating eye (15×, almost always grants), mind flayer, master mind flayer corpses.	Amulet of ESP; helm of telepathy; Eye of the Aethiopica (carried); Orb of Detection (carried); Platinum Yendorian Express Card (carried); Longbow of Diana (carried); Magicbane (wielded).
See invisible	See invisible creatures and yourself when invisible.	Monk XL 1; Ranger XL 15. No corpse path.	Ring of see invisible.
Warning	A digit appears next to a hostile creature whose hit-dice exceed yours; the higher the number, the bigger the threat.	Caveperson XL 15; Healer XL 15; Monk XL 7; Priest XL 15; Wizard XL 15; prayer rescue.	Ring of warning; helm of caution; Master Key of Thievery, Orb of Fate, Orcrist, Sting, Grimtooth (all carried).
Warning of specific class	The same indicator, restricted to one monster type.	None as intrinsic.	Orcrist / Sting (warn of orcs); Grimtooth (warns of elves); other class-specific artifacts.
Searching	Auto-search each step; reveals hidden doors, passages, traps without using a turn.	Archeologist XL 1; Monk XL 9; Ranger XL 1; Rogue XL 10; Tourist XL 10.	Ring of searching; carrying Excalibur.
Clairvoyance	Periodic magical-eye view of the surrounding dungeon.	None as intrinsic.	Cornuthaum (Wizards only).
Infra-vision	See heat signatures in the dark.	Dwarf, Elf, Gnome, Orc races at XL 1.	Red dragon scales / scale mail.

Movement and spatial behavior

The speed system, the air-walking gear, and the niche-access tools.

Property	What it does	Intrinsic sources	Extrinsic sources
Fast (intrinsic speed)	Each movement allocation has a ~1/3 chance of a +12 bonus. Raises effective speed from 12 to about 16.	Monk XL 1; Samurai XL 1; Valkyrie XL 7; Archeologist XL 10; Barbarian XL 7; Caveperson XL 7; Knight XL 7. Prayer rescue.	Speed boots (grant Very Fast , ~2/3 chance, effective ~20); blue dragon scales / scale mail (Very Fast).

Jumping	The #jump extended command — short controlled hop.	Knight XL 1.	Jumping boots; spell of jumping.
Teleport (uncontrolled)	Random teleport every few hundred turns. Useful when paired with control.	Tengu, homunculus corpses (1.5×).	Ring of teleportation.
Teleport control	Lets you choose your destination when you teleport.	Monk XL 17; Wizard XL 17; tengu corpse.	Ring of teleport control; carrying Master Key of Thievery; carrying the Amulet of Yendor (yes, the win condition grants TC).
Levitation	Constantly floating. Crosses water, lava, ice; can't descend stairs; can't pick up items.	None.	Ring of levitation; levitation boots (cursed = stuck on); carrying the Heart of Ahriman.
Flying	Like levitation but you can descend, pick up, and land voluntarily.	Polyform into a flying monster.	Amulet of flying.
Water walking	Cross water and ice as if it were floor; doesn't help in lava.	Polyform into the right form (some undead).	Water-walking boots.
Magical breathing	Don't drown when grabbed by an eel or kraken; survive a stinking cloud.	None as intrinsic.	Amulet of magical breathing.

Combat and defense

Layered defenses for the ascension kit: AC, reflection, free action, regen.

Property	What it does	Intrinsic sources	Extrinsic sources
Protection	Adds to your AC (lower is better). Also adds +1 MC per worn extrinsic source (+2 for amulet of guarding).	Donating gold to a same-aligned priest converts to prayer-pool protection: 400 zm per +1 (capped).	Ring of protection; cloak of protection (also MC3); amulet of guarding (also MC2); carrying Sceptre of Might, Mitre of Holiness, or Tsurugi of Muramasa.
Reflection	Bounces ranged magic (rays, breath) back at the attacker.	None as intrinsic.	Amulet of reflection; silver dragon scales / scale mail; shield of reflection; wielding Dragonbane or Longbow of Diana.
Regeneration	HP regenerates faster (about one per turn at high XL).	Troll polyform; high-XL natural regen by role.	Ring of regeneration; wielding Trollsbane or Staff of Aesculapius.

Energy regeneration	Spell points regenerate faster.	None as intrinsic.	Carrying Eye of the Aethiopica.
Half spell damage	Halves damage from monster-cast spells.	None as intrinsic.	Carrying Orb of Detection, Master Key of Thievery, Platinum Yendorian Express Card, or Orb of Fate.
Half physical damage	Halves damage from melee and physical ranged attacks.	None as intrinsic.	Carrying Master Key of Thievery or Orb of Fate.
Free action	Immune to paralysis (mind flayer hold, gas-spore explosion, monster-cast paralysis spells) and to slow.	Polyform into certain forms (e.g., master mind flayer corpse sometimes confers it).	Ring of free action; orange dragon scales / scale mail.
Stealth	Monsters don't wake when you walk near sleeping ones; you can sneak past.	Archeologist XL 5; Barbarian XL 15; Monk XL 5; Ranger XL 7; Rogue XL 1; Samurai XL 15; Valkyrie XL 3; prayer rescue.	Ring of stealth; elven boots; elven cloak; carrying Heart of Ahriman.
Invisibility	Monsters can't see you (and don't attack you unless they see-invisible, or unless you attack them).	Stalker polyform; potion of invisibility (timed).	Ring of invisibility; cloak of invisibility; carrying Orb of Detection.
Displacement	Monsters see you in a wrong nearby square; ranged attacks miss often.	None as intrinsic.	Cloak of displacement.

Special and utility

The grab-bag: digestion timing, polymorph behavior, the win-back-from-death amulet, and a few crowd-control items.

Property	What it does	Intrinsic sources	Extrinsic sources
Slow digestion	Burn nutrition at roughly one-quarter the normal rate. Hunger is no longer a serious concern.	None.	Ring of slow digestion; white dragon scales / scale mail.
Polymorph control	When you polymorph (from a trap, ring, scroll, or potion), you choose the form.	None.	Ring of polymorph control.
Unchanging	Locks your current form. Blocks polymorph (any source) and <i>also blocks the green-slime countdown</i> . The standard answer to "I just got slimed."	None.	Amulet of unchanging.

Sustain ability	Your six stats (Str, Dex, Con, Int, Wis, Cha) don't drift up or down from exercise, abuse, or scrolls.	None.	Ring of sustain ability.
Protection from shape changers	Nearby shape-changers (chameleon, doppelganger, foocubus) cannot polymorph.	None.	Ring of protection from shape changers.
Conflict	Nearby monsters attack each other instead of you. Highly disruptive in your favor; also keeps shopkeepers from selling things.	None.	Ring of conflict; carrying Sceptre of Might.
Life saving	When you would die, the amulet activates instead and restores you to one HP. The amulet is destroyed in the process.	None.	Amulet of life saving.
Adornment	+1 Charisma. Most useful for shopping prices and seduction immunity.	None.	Ring of adornment.

A handful of properties exist in the source but are essentially **polyform-only** for the player: *swimming* (rare aquatic forms), *passes walls* (xorn, earth elemental, ghost), and *detect monsters* (no persistent source — the wand and scroll give a one-shot pulse). They're real, but you don't build a strategy around them outside of polymorph play.



What Changed Since Last Time

If you're an experienced traveler returning after some time away, the 5.0 of the Mazes (NetHack 5.0.0, released May 2, 2026) includes several notable changes from 3.6.x, the last widely-played version before this one. The most significant:

- **Themed rooms** are now a regular feature of dungeon generation. You'll encounter rooms with specific monster or item themes that didn't exist before.
- **Four new monster species:** the displacer beast, genetic engineer, gold dragon, and baby gold dragon now roam the Mazes.
- **The helm of caution** is a new piece of armor that grants warning. The helm of brilliance now always appears as a "crystal helmet" rather than a randomized appearance.
- **Chain lightning** is a new level 2 attack spell. Shock damage spreads from the caster in all directions and chains from one monster to the next, so it scales with the density of the room rather than the caster's aim.
- **Spellbooks** can be applied to check how worn they are.
- **Mind flayers** no longer wipe your map or identifications (the old "amnesia" effect on tentacle hit). They still drain Intelligence and have a separate chance to forget memorized spells and weapon-skill experience.
- **Unicorn horns** no longer restore lost attributes. This is a major change. In previous editions, the unicorn horn was a cure-all; now you'll need other solutions.
- **Dragon scale mail** now provides two extrinsic resistances instead of one. This makes it even more desirable.
- **Bags of holding** no longer destroy their contents on explosion. Items are scattered on the floor instead, which is bad but not catastrophic.
- **Loadstones** now resist knockback from combat attacks (the new knockback mechanic). A niche use if you can keep one uncursed.
- **Sacrifice** for artifact generation now requires a minimum sacrifice value.
- **Priest donations** are now randomized. The old fixed $400 \times \text{XL}$ formula is gone. The priest rolls a baseline between 150 and 250 ($\times \text{XL}$), and offering the worst-case ceiling of $500 \times \text{XL}$ guarantees protection. Offering too little when you could afford more sets a "Cheapskate" flag on that priest that permanently inflates future baselines.
- **Artifact effects** have been broadened. Several previously flavour-only artifacts now have real tactical edges. The most notable: **Snickersnee** now grants one free polearm-style reach attack per turn ("Shkinng!") on top of normal melee. **Sunsword** gains a

#invoke blinding ray that works on any monster, not just undead, a 5-Pw on-demand Camera flash. **Trollsbane** regenerates while wielded, a real lifeline for an early character. **Amulet of flying** confers flight on your steed as well as you, turning warhorses into water-crossing cavalry.

- **Gehennom** levels are more varied and interesting.
- **Medusa's Island** now has four possible layouts.
- **Special levels** can now generate mirrored (flipped), so don't rely on fixed maps.
- **New conducts** are tracked: pauper, petless, permadeaf, and Sokoban (no cheating).
- **Touch of death** has been reworked: instead of an instant kill, an unresisted hit now deals heavy damage and drains max HP. Magic resistance still fully blocks the spell.
- **Black dragon scale mail** now grants drain resistance in addition to disintegration resistance: a second extrinsic that was historically hard to find outside artifacts.
- **Green dragon scale mail** now grants sickness immunity.
- **New wish sources:** Vlad's throne is guaranteed, and the Amulet of Yendor grants a wish on pickup. Either a magic lamp or magic marker is guaranteed in Orcus Town.
- **Charm monster** is now level 5 (was 3). **Sleep** is now level 3 (was 1). **Confuse monster** is now level 1 (was 2).
- **Cursed wands** may explode when used to engrave.
- **Monsters** can now use containers and unlock chests.
- **Valkyries** no longer start with a long sword. They start with a spear, making the Excalibur strategy less immediate.
- **Excalibur** fountain dipping is much harder for non-Knights: 1/30 chance per dip instead of the Knight's 1/6.
- **New amulets:** the amulet of flying grants flight, and the amulet of guarding provides +2 AC and +2 MC.
- **Minetown** has a 1/7 chance of generating as Orcish Town, with no shops and no priest.
- **Blessed potions of polymorph** now grant controlled polymorph, eliminating the need for polymorph control when using blessed potions.
- **Gehennom** has hot ground that can shatter dropped potions. Teleportation is now blocked only while a demon lord is present, not permanently.
- **Wand of speed monster** no longer grants permanent speed when self-zapped; use potions of speed instead.
- **Supply chests** now appear on the dungeon levels above the Oracle (about a 2-in-3 chance per level, placed in one random ordinary room), containing useful early-game items like healing potions and enchant scrolls.
- **Pets** can gain resistances from eating corpses, and dead pets can be revived by praying at a co-aligned altar while standing on their corpse.

- **Sink dipping (potions)** is new: pour potions down a sink and the message identifies the potion type without consuming a scroll.
- **Demonbane** is now a silver mace (was a long sword) and is the guaranteed first sacrifice gift for Priests.
- **Two-handed weapons** get a 50% increase to the strength damage bonus, making them more competitive with dual-wielding.
- **HP regeneration** uses a new formula: $(\text{experience level} + \text{Constitution})\%$ chance per turn. The regeneration intrinsic now heals 1 HP unconditionally every turn on top of natural regen.
- **Covetous monsters** (demon lords, liches) now warp to either upstairs or downstairs when fleeing to heal, not always upstairs.
- **Alchemy** is nerfed: diluted potion stacks only alchemize 2 potions instead of the whole stack. Wearing an alchemy smock reduces the random blast chance to 1/30.
- **Glass items** (crystal ball, crystal plate mail) now crack in stages instead of instantly shattering, and can be made crackproof.
- **Candle light radius** now uses a square root formula: more candles in a stack give more light than before.
- **The Castle** no longer generates master liches or arch-liches at level creation, making it significantly less dangerous on arrival.
- **Corpses, tins, and eggs** from intrinsic-granting monsters now have higher shop prices, making price identification of tins and eggs possible.
- **Monsters** no longer drop food items as death drops (except their own corpse), reducing food availability in the early game.
- **Shopkeepers** can now remove pits and webs around them, nerfing the classic pit-pinning kill setup. Walking into a peaceful shopkeeper now auto-pays any debts before the inventory prompt.



New Dangers

Sacrificing weak corpses no longer grinds Luck. If your current Luck exceeds the sacrificed monster's difficulty, you gain zero. A luckstone handles maintenance; sacrifice mid-tier monsters when you want to push higher.

Cleared but not cleaned levels lose loot. Monsters now loot unlocked containers and animate corpse piles. Lock your stash and don't haul speculative corpses through caster-heavy floors.

Gehennom shatters potions. Hot ground breaks any potion you drop. Carry, don't stash.

New Hacks

A few 5.0 changes have tactical implications worth pulling out:

Gold dragon scale mail is a light source. Its innate 2-square radius lets you skip the lamp and free that inventory slot.

A blessed potion of polymorph is now a self-contained controlled polymorph. No ring of polymorph control required: blessing the potion grants control for that one transformation. Single-use polymorph strategies (iron golem form for extreme AC, bat form to scout, pick something with a good intrinsic) are now accessible without needing to find or wish for the ring first. The ring is still useful for ongoing polymorphing, but for a single planned transformation, one blessed potion does the same job.

Vampire polymorph cycles between forms. A polymorphed vampire can #monster to switch between vampire, bat, and fog cloud. Fog passes through doors, bat flies, vampire fights. Plan routes by form rather than direction, so traversing the dungeon map can be a very different experience.

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You descend the stairs...

Acknowledgements

NetHack has been played, cursed at, loved, and documented since 1987. The game itself is the work of the NetHack DevTeam, a loose collective of developers who have maintained one of the longest-running continuously developed open source projects in existence. But the documentation, the strategy, the collected wisdom about how to actually survive the thing, that came from the players.

In the early days, knowledge spread through Usenet, on the newsgroup **RGRN** (more formally, `rec.games.roguelike.nethack`). Thousands of players posted questions, argued about strategy, and slowly assembled a shared body of knowledge about a game that refused to explain itself. This was before wikis, before Reddit, before Discord. If you wanted to know whether a cockatrice corpse could be wielded as a weapon, you searched the RGRN archives and hoped someone had asked before you. Someone usually had.

RGRN gave the community its vocabulary. A **YASD** (*Yet Another Stupid Death*) is the post you make after dying to something you should have known better than to do. A **YAFAP** (*Yet Another First Ascension Post*) is the post you make when you finally win. Both traditions persist today, in the wiki, on Reddit, in Discord.

Out of those conversations came the first spoiler files: plain-text catalogs of every item, every monster, every interaction. Written by hand, cross-referenced against the source code, and shared freely.

This guide stands on their work. Specifically:

Kevin Hugo compiled the first comprehensive spoiler set for NetHack 3.2.2, covering every item class, monster stat, spell formula, and score calculation in methodical detail. **Dylan O'Donnell** updated the entire set for 3.4.3, correcting, expanding, and maintaining the files over several years. Together, the Hugo/O'Donnell spoilers became the definitive reference: 38 files covering potions, scrolls, wands, rings, amulets, tools, weapons, armor, artifacts, food, monsters, spells, and more. The item data tables throughout Parts Four and Five of this guide are verified against their work. Published under BSD-like terms.

Paul Waterman wrote the WCST NetHack Spoilers (at Wheaton College in 1991), a single sprawling document that covered the entire game in a conversational, opinionated voice. Where Hugo and O'Donnell wrote reference manuals, the WCST was a travel guide. It

told you not just what things did but what to do about them. It was the original inspiration for the tone and structure of this guide, though no text has been copied from it.

Kate Nepveu maintained steelypips.org, the web archive that preserved the Hugo/O'Donnell spoilers, the RGRN community articles, and her own excellent guides (including the Elbereth FAQ cited in our traps chapter). Without Kate's patient archival work, much of this material might have disappeared when Usenet faded.

The following **RGRN community authors** contributed articles, FAQs, and guides that informed specific sections of this guide:

David Damerell wrote the Object Identification FAQ. **Kieron Dunbar** wrote the wand identification guide. **Trevor Powell** compiled the Instadeath Spoiler. **Arien Malec** wrote the Medusa guide. **Matthew Lahut** wrote the prayer guide. **Boudewijn Waijers** mapped all eight Sokoban variants. **Steven Bush** calculated spellbook reading success rates. **Gregory Bond** documented shopkeeper pricing formulas. **Dion Nicolaas** cataloged the conducts. **David Goldfarb** wrote the air elemental FAQ. **Hojita Discordia** documented XP value calculations.

And many others: Ray Chason, Pat Rankin, Geoduck, Topi Linkala, Geoffrey Eadon, Roger Broadbent, Sebastian Haas, Jukka Lahtinen, and the countless anonymous posters on the newsgroup who asked "has anyone tried..." and then reported back.

The NetHack Wiki has been an indispensable reference for this guide. Founded as "WikiHack" by Sgeo in 2005, it migrated to its own domain in 2010 and now contains over five thousand articles documenting every corner of the game. Its creators and maintainers include Pasi Kallinen, Drew Streib, Alex Smith, Shawn Moore, George Koehler, Tjr, ZeroOne, and Ray Chason. The wiki's NetHack 5.0.0 page is the community's living changelog and was a major reference for the 5.0 update of this guide.

The public servers where most NetHack is played today are nethack.alt.org (the longest-running public NetHack server, run by M. Drew Streib and Pasi Kallinen) and Hardfought (run by K2, which also hosts the major variants). Both are free to play and log every ascension; the cause-of-death and ascension statistics cited throughout this guide come from their public records (see NAO's top types of deaths).

The r/nethack community on Reddit has kept NetHack discussion alive for a new generation of players. Its moderators over the years have maintained a welcoming space where veterans and newcomers trade advice, share ascension stories, and argue about optimal wish choices. The community's collective knowledge, passed along in thousands of threads, has informed the practical advice throughout this guide.

Above all, this guide exists because the game itself exists. **NetHack** has been developed since 1987 by the NetHack DevTeam, founded by Mike Stephenson, Izchak Miller, and Janet

Walz. Izchak Miller passed away in 1994; the shopkeeper who bears his name in the Mines is a small measure of how much his work meant. The source lives at github.com/NetHack.

The game itself descends from earlier roguelikes. **Hack** was written by Jay Fenlason in 1982 as a class project at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, drawing on Toy and Wichman's *Rogue* (1980), and extended by Andries Brouwer through the mid-1980s. NetHack forked from Brouwer's Hack in 1987. Many of the most distinctive NetHack monsters, including the **grid bug**, the orthogonal-only critter whose name puns on both "insect" and "software bug" living on a character-cell grid (with a likely nod to the bugs in the 1982 film *Tron*), are inherited from Fenlason's original Hack. The dungeon is older than the game.

The development was not always continuous. After version 3.4.3 in December 2003, the DevTeam went quiet for twelve years: silent to the public, working in private. The running community joke during the gap was *The DevTeam is THINKING*. The dungeon was frozen. New players descended into the same unchanging corridors that had been killing people since 2003, writing new spoilers about a fixed game, dying in the same newly-documented ways. The accumulated community wisdom from those twelve silent years remained useful, and the game was deep enough to sustain a decade of fresh analysis without a single new line of code. Version 3.6 arrived in December 2015, and active development has continued since.

The current team, including Michael Allison, Ken Arromdee, David Cohrs, Jessie Collet, Kevin Hugo, Pasi Kallinen, Ken Lorber, Dean Luick, Patric Mueller, Pat Rankin, Derek S. Ray, Alex Smith, Mike Stephenson, Janet Walz, Paul Winner, Bart House, and Warwick Allison, has maintained and extended the game across nearly four decades. Everything in these pages is downstream of their work.

All data in this guide has been verified against the current game source code. Any errors are ours alone.



A Traveler's Companion to the Mazes of Menace 5.0 Launch Edition, compiled by David Bau, using Claude 4.7 Opus to collate and check facts.

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