



# BITS OF DARKNESS: CAVERNS

**Written by:**

Daniel Brakhage  
Mark Potter  
Vicki Potter  
Nicholas Brakhage

**Layout by:**

Edward Wedig  
[www.docbrown.net](http://www.docbrown.net)

**Cover Art**

***“Surrounded by Adventure”*** by  
Gillian Pearce  
[www.hellionsart.com](http://www.hellionsart.com)

**Edited by:**

Vicki Potter  
Elizabeth Brakhage

**Interior Art created by**

Jesus and Javier Carmona  
[www.CarmonaArt.com](http://www.CarmonaArt.com)

**Border Art by**

Daniel Brakhage

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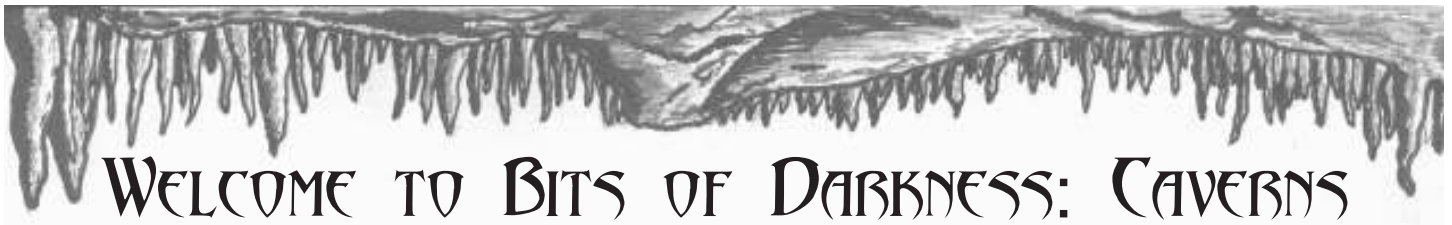




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# WELCOME TO BITS OF DARKNESS: CAVERNS

## A Word About Caverns

If you are like me you have never given caverns their due in your game. To help you make caverns unique and exciting (and different from your dungeons), we have included two articles that can assist in familiarizing you with caverns and how to explore them. It also might be worth your while to read about climbing and falling in the rules of the gaming system you are using because they will show up a lot here. Falling is the number one accident caverns have and the Bits reflect some of this danger. However, we have designed Bits of Darkness: Caverns to be a “Buy it Today, Play it Tonight” product and you don’t have to spend a lot of time reading the articles before you play. They are there in case you want them, as a resource for you!

If you expect to have a lot of caverns, it might be fun to plan a trip to a nearby cavern as a group. We had fun with that prior to doing this project. However, even today caves can be places of great danger and you should only enter into their mysteries in the company of an experienced caver. Therefore, keep your players and yourself safe by limiting your expeditions to caves that have already been explored and offer tours for you to enjoy in safety. If you don’t have time for “field trips,” you could also have your players gather around a computer and oooh and aaah over the spectacular images at the highly-inspirational Virtual Cave ([www.goodearthgraphics.com/virtcave.html](http://www.goodearthgraphics.com/virtcave.html)). It would be a good visual prelude for what their characters might see.

*If you are familiar with Bits of Darkness: Dungeons, you will find the introduction to this product substantially similar. A couple of observations have been made since we introduced our first product, however, and you may find those of interest. If you are new to the Bits of Darkness series then we hope this introduction is useful to you.*

– The Overlord

## The Harried Game Master

Have you ever lamented not having the time you want to spend on your game? Have you had friends call up when you didn’t have anything ready and say, “Hey, let’s play tonight. I had a rough day and I want to kill something”? Welcome to Tabletop Adventures’ line of products for the Harried Game Master. These Shards and Bits are created for your convenience, as a time-saving but game-enhancing device. It seems that the more rushed

or frazzled the GM becomes, the more mechanical the game tends to be. With these Shards and Bits, you can focus on the crunch. We provide the fluff and atmosphere, giving you the best of both worlds even in a pinch.

One thing we had noted in some games and modules was that if a room in a dungeon or a chamber in a cavern was merely empty, it often had very little description. If the GM or module actually described something, it was usually significant to the story. This occasionally produces interchanges like: “You see a broken arrow lying on the floor.” “We draw our swords and fan out!” “Why?” asks the GM. “Uh, we have a psychic premonition that something important is happening?”

While experienced gamers may not be so obvious about their reactions, they still tend to have a general knowledge that something important is about to happen and their demeanor changes accordingly. Now, instead of saying “There’s nothing here,” a GM can whip out one of our descriptions and say, “Lying near the side wall is a backpack that has been slashed to ribbons by a set of sharp objects set parallel to each other [claws]. There are stains on the pack, and if you look closely you can see an old, faded smear leading from that spot to the opposite entry [blood].” There is still effectively nothing there, but it’s a little more exciting for the players and keeps up their level of interest. It is no longer just “another empty room.”

Description is also a very important part of adventuring in caverns. In a cave, nothing is ever “just an empty room.” Every location has some natural feature that makes it unique. It’s difficult to give the feel of a cavern without some kind of description for each place, and that’s where our product comes in.

## What Are Shards and Bits?

Shards and Bits should be viewed as small pieces of an adventure. Bits are tiny pieces of description that can be thrown in anywhere to provide “color” or add a little excitement to what might otherwise be a dull spot. Shards are longer and more elaborate, meant to be selected rather than added randomly. They can describe a specific place or set a feel for an area.

This tool provides the GM with a way to stimulate





the characters' senses and the players' imaginations without having to use game-changing information. The descriptions can give players a "feel" for a situation, a better image of what is happening or what their characters are experiencing without all of those experiences leading directly to combat or treasure. While these bits are not intended as occasions for combat, they can enhance role-playing by encouraging character building, reaction, and interaction.

### How to Use this Resource

**Bold print is to be read to the players;** light print is for the GM. One thing to remember in the use of this product is that the Bits are here to add drama. Therefore, delivery is important. When you are reading the Bits they will be much more effective if read as a storyteller might tell them. The way you choose to deliver the Bits of Darkness can make all the difference in the world.

In addition, most of these Bits assume that someone in your party has normal or low-light vision and requires the use of lighting. The Cavern Bits are written as if the adventurers have a light source with them. If your entire party has darkvision and no one is using a light, you should be aware that some of the Bits may need adjustments.

As with our previous product, these Bits of Darkness have been numbered so that a GM can roll percentile dice and randomly generate a dash of description to put into an adventure. Indexes are provided in case a Bit is needed to fit a particular situation.

These descriptions need not be followed verbatim. The GM should feel free to adapt them however he or she needs in order to use them to greatest effect. For instance, if a body of a fallen adventurer is described, the GM could add to the description of the body so that it fit into the story that was being played out. Similarly, there may be "whisperings" that are heard by adventurers. (Or are their ears just playing tricks on them?) In this case the whisperer could be the spirit of someone who has fallen to a monster ahead. The spirit could even re-appear with a personality if the GM wanted to add it to the story. If the GM has set an orcs' lair in a cavern and drums are heard in the deep, when the orcs are finally discovered perhaps there are drums in their lair. Even that is not necessary. These Bits are for whatever you

want! If a piece sparks your imagination (or that of your players) and you want to build on it, then go for it.

Another consideration is that, while most Bits do not add encounters, in some situations a minor encounter is possible if the GM allows it. In these cases you will find the information you need for an encounter in the printed text of the work or in the Appendix. This is for your convenience so you do not have to be suddenly scrambling for a book. These statistics are written using material from the System Reference Document but they can be modified relatively easily to other systems and their use is totally optional.

These pages can be printed out on regular paper. However, the final pages are formatted to be printed on card stock. As cards they can be shuffled and drawn randomly during play or sorted ahead of time, with the GM selecting certain Bits for use and placing them with the appropriate map or other materials. If you don't want to work with cards, you can roll randomly and read the description to the players, or write the appropriate number in the room or hallway of the GM's map and refer to it when the party arrives there.

We have taken care so that the descriptions can be used to enhance most settings without "clashing" with your existing campaign or information. Some mechanics are offered for your convenience in places, but you should feel free to adapt them to either the circumstances or game system as needed. Similarly, if you should roll or draw a "bit" that doesn't seem to fit your game or the situation, simply roll or draw again and use another. These are made for you, to ease the lives of Harried Game Masters everywhere.

I would be happy to hear any comments or suggestions you may have. Please send them to me at [overlord@tabletopadventures.com](mailto:overlord@tabletopadventures.com). If you have problems or complaints, on the other hand, please contact our Complaint Department at [executioner@tabletopadventures.com](mailto:executioner@tabletopadventures.com). Thank you.

Enjoy, have fun, and create fun for others!

The Evil Overlord and his minions  
...er...I mean,  
the good people at Tabletop Adventures  
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# CAVERN SHARDS

## Entrances

**1. CLIMBING BY A WATERFALL** – As you walk along through the trees, you begin to hear the murmur of flowing water and you spy a small stream meandering along nearby, flowing from the direction you are heading. Further down the path, the splashing sound of falling water comes to your ears. You can see the stream coming from what seems to be the base of a cliff ahead of you. As you come into a clearing, you notice that the water that feeds the little stream is falling from an opening in the rock face about 20 feet above the valley floor, less than halfway up its height. The opening through which the rivulet falls is a circular hole about 8 feet in diameter. Though the rock face is vertical, there are plenty of handholds between the ground and the cave opening. There also seems to be a shallow stone shelf next to the opening itself. [A Climb check at DC15 is required to reach the cave, DC20 if the GM wishes to consider the entire surface to be wet and slippery.]

**2. THROUGH THE LAIR** – After defeating the monsters and looking around amongst the trash, bones, offal and mud that make up their lair, you notice a severely-dented old shield leaning against the wall at the back of the cave. While the shield is rusted and useless, it is of interest because you realize that it seems to be covering a hole in the wall. After moving the shield, an opening roughly three feet square is revealed. The air that flows from the opening is cool and fresh compared to the foul stench present in the lair. Looking into the hole with a light source, you can see that the narrow crawlway seems to go about ten feet and then opens up into a larger chamber. [This could be the lair of almost any medium-size or larger creature. The larger size means that the entrance to the rest of the cavern would not be used on a regular basis.]

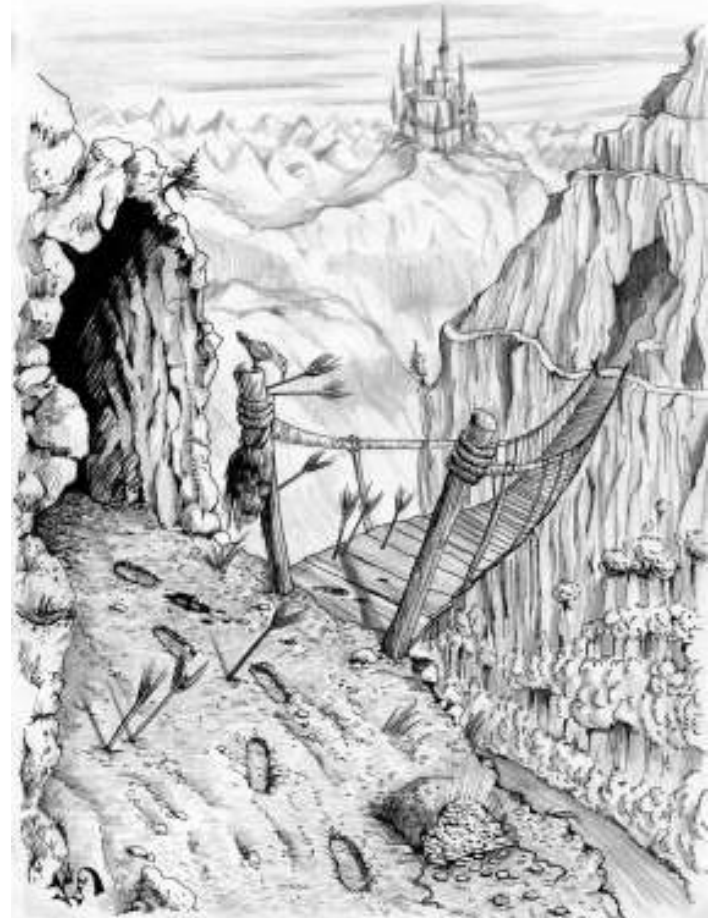
**3. CAVE IN A CLEARING** – There seems to be a small clearing in the woods at the foot of the hills that are directly to the north. As you enter the clearing you notice that much of the space seems to be taken up by a deep hole in the ground. This hole is at least twenty feet across and drops to a floor about twenty feet below the ground's surface.

The pit seems to be natural and is lined with rock. As you look down into it you can tell that the shadow in the northwest corner of the cavity is an opening deeper into the earth. The first and best clue for this is the amount of cool moist air that is rising out of the gap; it smells damp and inviting. The inner opening is roughly 8 feet in diameter.

## 4. ENTERING A CAVE –

[This is a continuation of the previous setting and can be used in conjunction with it.]

Peering into this opening, it is difficult to see anything at first. As your eyes adjust to the darkness you see that the natural passageway before you leads down at a 30- to 45-degree angle.



*"Trail to Adventure"*

created by Jesus and Javier Carmona-Esteban  
for use by Tabletop Adventures, LLC.





# CAVERN BITS

## Formations

**01.** A damp coolness permeates everything. When you listen, a steady drip, drip, drip can be heard from almost every direction. The walls of this corridor are uneven, rounded as if worn away by water thousands of years ago; there are no tool marks on the walls or floor. In front of you out of the darkness rises a stalagmite, its base about five feet in diameter, tapering to a point eight feet from the floor. The minerals that make it up seem to appear in bands of color—reddish brown, dark grey, milky white, dirty yellow, and others, sometimes repeating colors as the rings approach the apex. You can see that this is one of the sources of the dripping sound as there are droplets steadily hitting the tip of the formation. [The moisture dripping down the stalagmite runs away from it in rivulets, wearing shallow ravines in the floor before disappearing into several small cracks in the stone.]



**02.** As you enter the next chamber, your light glimmers all across the walls. Some sort of tiny crystals are catching the light and reflecting it back. When you take a closer look, you see the sides of the chamber are covered with little groups of crystalline spikes. They look almost like brittle flowers, or frosty clusters of icy thorns. [They are extremely fragile; even brushing against them will crumble the more slender stems. It is easy to break off groups, but very difficult indeed to keep them whole. *If that is desired, success would require a Dexterity roll at DC 20.*]

**03.** The passage here is tall enough for you to stand, about 7' high in the center. The pale gray walls are smooth, slightly rounded, and appear bowed out. The floor of the passage is also slightly rounded, with the low spot running down the center and the rest of the floor slanting toward it. The ceiling is not as smooth as the walls; it has occasional cracks and broken places. The floor is not smooth either, being littered in places with debris fallen from the ceiling. The rocks on the floor vary in size from small pebbles to stones the size of a fist to rough rocks larger than a man's head. It will be necessary to make your way with care to avoid an injury. [-3 to Spot checks, Reflex save at DC 10 to avoid injury; failure indicates a fall doing 1d3 points of damage.]

**04.** The ceiling here is low. Creatures over 5 ½ feet tall have to stoop and move carefully to avoid hitting their heads. [-2 to Spot checks, Reflex save at DC 8 for each person to avoid hitting his or her head. Damage 1d2; a helmet can reduce the damage by one point.]

**05.** To your left lies an outcropping of rock and upon it is growing what appears to be a crystalline tree. The structure looks amazingly like a small tree or bush that has been caught in a sleet storm. It shimmers and glistens in the light like fine crystal and needle-like projections extend from its 'branches' like icicles on a frozen tree. It looks amazingly delicate and sharp. [This structure is actually a mixture of calcium and aragonite that forms naturally. Despite its appearance like crystal or quartz it is of no value. Anyone who touches it with a bare hand will have a one-in-three chance of pricking a







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CAVERNS

06

In the area you are entering there is a large pinkish domed pillar that is about five feet in diameter and eight to ten feet tall. To the right of it lies a shallow pool of water. Moisture dripping from the roof onto the dome trickles down into the pool. The surface of the pillar is slick but not smooth; it is veined and bumpy from hundreds of tiny stalagmites that have formed and are forming the pillar and its rounded dome. There is another similar formation on the other side of the pool that is about six feet tall but only one foot across. The pool itself has additional mineral deposits that make the edge and subsurface slick and treacherous.

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