Heavy Metal Adventures Presents

Dungeon Crawl Companion #4:

Use of Light, Shadows, and Ceilings in Dungeons

By Banjo Destructo

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Greetings

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Dungeon Crawl Companion series. A series of RPG mini-zines in which I hope to expand certain aspects of the Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG in relation to ideas and circumstances that may come up during play. I hope to bring some inspiration and ideas to my fellow gamers to help unleash your imagination and decision-making skills. This time I wanted to expand on how light and shadows can be used in game as well as being communicated and tracked during gameplay. And I wanted to expand a little more on an often-ignored aspect of dungeons, the ceiling and crawling/climbing spaces.

If you have any feedback or questions about the content of this issue, please email me at HeavyMetalAdventures@protonmail.com with the subject line "DCC#3 Feedback" or "Light, Shadows, and Ceilings Feedback".

Introduction

I really love the Thief class in DCC RPG, but it relies on using the environment to be an effective class. If a Player or Judge doesn't take the ceilings of dungeons into account, or the lights and shadows that would exist in a dungeon, then the Thief is just a weak class that is worse at fighting than the Warrior and is unable to make use of its strengths. Other characters can also take advantage of the ideas of paying attention to light sources and shadows, as well as trying to take advantage of rafters and high ceilings inside of dungeons. Clever Judges can even make deadly threats or difficult enemies by having them take advantage of these ideas as well, and if they are adopted broadly in the hobby, I think playing RPGs would be better and more interesting for everyone.

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Torches and Lanterns in Combat

Torches. Torches may be used in melee as a club. If a melee attack hits, the opponent must make a Reflex Save VS the Attack Roll or be set on fire for 2 combat rounds, taking 1d6 fire damage per round.

Torches may alternatively be held close to an opponents face in order to attempt to temporarily blind them. Make an attack roll as normal. Your target must make a Reflex Save vs the Attack Roll, if the target fails, they will suffer a -2 AC penalty and any attack rolls they make will suffer -1D on the action dice. Opponents will be blinded for 1d3+1 combat rounds.

Lanterns. A lantern may be smashed against an opponent as a melee or thrown missile attack. If the attack hits, no Reflex Save is possible, the lantern will smash against the opponent and set them on fire for 4 rounds causing 1d6 fire damage per round.

Lanterns often have shutters for focusing or blocking the light that comes from their oil fire. On the fly a character may try to focus the light from the lantern to shine into an opponents face in order to try and blind them temporarily. Make an Attack Roll, and your target must make a Reflex Save vs the Attack Roll or be temporarily blinded. While blinded they will suffer a -2 AC penalty and any attack rolls, they make will suffer -1D on the action dice. Opponents will be blinded for 2 combat rounds.

Dousing Torches, Lanterns, Braziers, and other light sources.

If players or the Judge (via NPC) wanted to douse or smash a light source in order to gain the advantages of additional darkness or shadows it may create. I suggest allowing players to make an attack action against light sources, light sources that are part of the environment such as those mounted on walls, hanging from ceilings, or any freestanding decorations with burning material should be automatically hit and doused by attacks directed at them. If the players or Judge (via NPC) attack any light sources that are actively being carried, it may seem unexpected to the carrier so an AC10 would be assumed for the first such attack in a combat, and the carrier's AC would be used to hit the lamp/torch on any other attacks. If the attack hits the light source should be assumed to be put out with only some glowing embers remaining, strewn on the ground or floor.

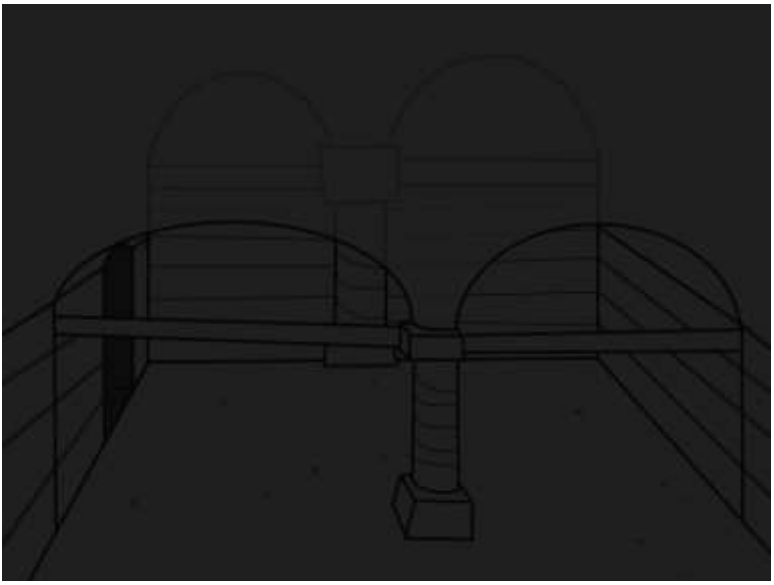
Working With Light and Shadows

There is quite a spectrum of people who enjoy playing RPGs, ranging from those who like to track a lot of details such as weight/encumbrance, daily rations/water, distances and locations of all characters on a grid map, or any number of details, all the way down to people who like to play things fast and loose withing worrying too much about details as long as people are having fun. Along the way I have noticed when I play RPGs that light sources and the shadows associated with them are frequently forgotten and often downplayed, even in places such as dungeons which should be very dark indeed. This will be the first issue in which I will attempt to make my points clearer, or easier to imagine, using images to highlight the points I am trying to make. Using shadows is not normally something people may want to pay attention to, but it is almost built in to the playing experience required by Thief characters in order to survive and thrive.

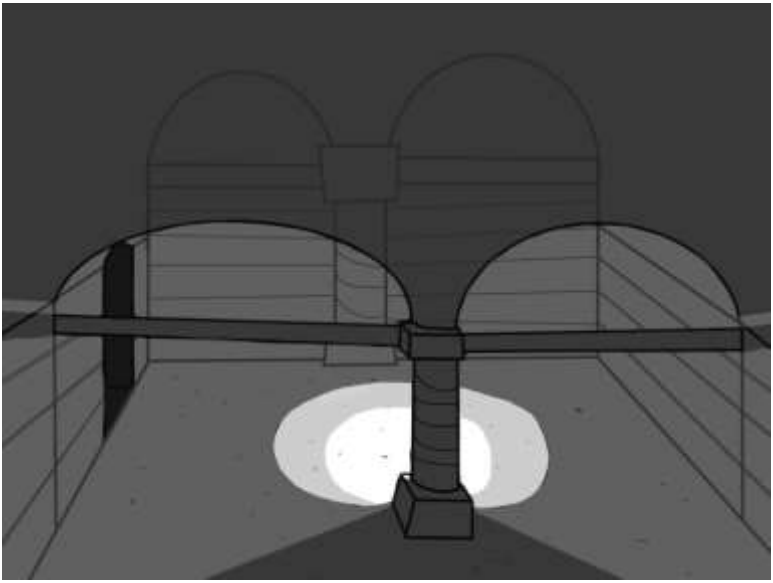
I would mainly like to draw attention to players and Judges that lighting is important, and some general thought should be placed to it, whether in high detail or as a consideration in your fast and loose style. Torches and Lanterns can shine some good light but in a very limited way, and these light sources would also cast shadows from objects or characters. I want people to consider if and where lights might be placed that are already inside dungeons, as well as the lights carried by the adventuring party in order to navigate the dungeon.

One exercise I like to engage in myself in order to help visualize what exploring a dungeon might be like is to try exploring my own basement with the lights off. Depending on the windows you might have in the basement you could have some sunlight come in during the day, this may be a good representation of what a "well lit" dungeon might feel like, you could probably see everything but its still dark and not all details are easy to make out, of course it may be thought of as being better lit than what you experience in a lit dungeon. Then perhaps walking through your basement with the lights turned off during the night, and using a small flashlight to see your way through would feel like what its like going through a cave or a dungeon when the only light you have available is the torch or lantern that you have brought with you.

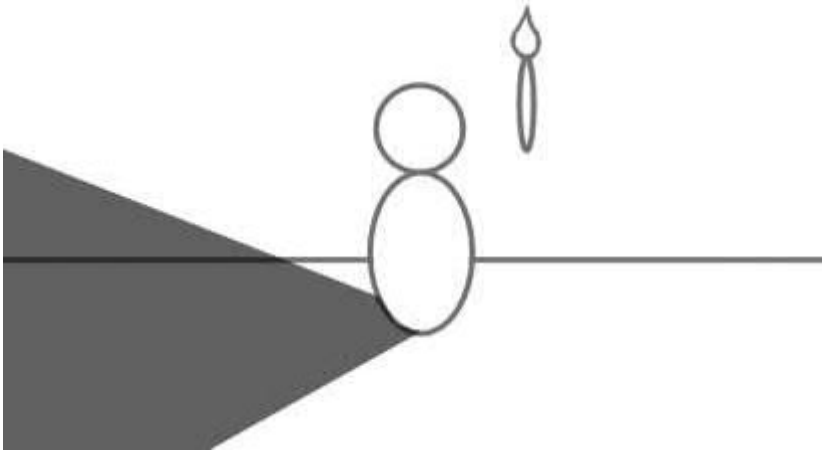
Lights and their Shadows



In this first image I have drawn what might be said to be one end of a room with a open hallway going off to the left, with no lighting inside of it. I left it barely light enough to see, but it would of course be pitch black if no light was available in this room. I wanted to start with this example to emphasize the importance of light sources in the game. I'm going to take this same image and show what it may look like with different points of light and shadow in the room. I also want to point out that the ceilings have arches and support beams. Flat ceilings are a somewhat modern convention, it would probably be more common for rooms to not have any ceilings that cover the support beams. This is important for Thief characters because the support beams of rooms provide excellent perches for them to climb up to, and to make good hiding places to launch an ambush from.

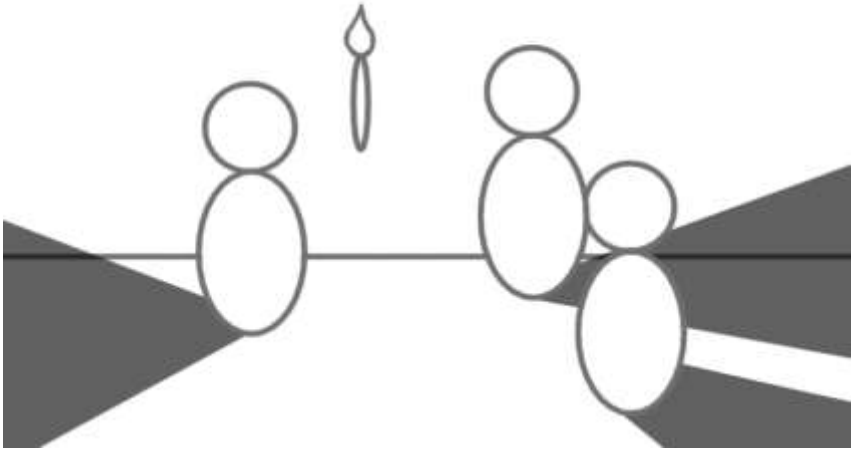


In this second picture I have attempted to show what it might look like in the room if a single torch was lit on the unseen side of the central pillar. The area immediately around the torch is fairly bright, and some light illuminates' details in most of the area around it, but there's still dark shadows being cast in areas where there wouldn't be a line of sight to the torch. Just like with a flashlight shining in your face in a dark room, the light of the torch may keep characters from seeing anything directly behind the torch because of the contrasting light being too much for eyes to adjust or focus. You could also imagine that if the light source or torch was on the other side of the pillar, it would cast a shadow in the far part of the room and illuminate the closer part of the room.



In this picture I wanted to show what it looks like with one character holding a torch in front of them. They light up the area in front of themselves but will cast a shadow behind them. If it's a player holding the torch, this is a good place for monsters to sneak up if they are using stealth. If it's an NPC holding the torch, it provides a good place for a player to sneak in the shadows without being seen.

In the picture below I wanted to depict what it looks like if a torch is being held in the middle of a group of characters. It is effective at lighting up the area between the characters, but the shadows being cast by each character keeps the torch from providing a good amount of light in front of the two characters on the right. This is one thing to keep in mind when dealing with who should be holding the torch.



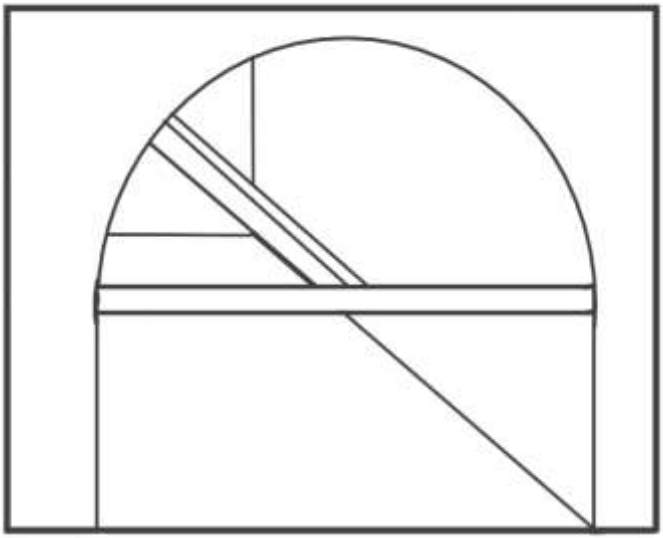
Summary of Light Sources

With all of the information discussed above, here's a nice little summary for players and judges to use when thinking about the effects of lighting in dungeons.

- Consider how many light sources are active in the room, and where they are.
- All lights will cast shadows, these will be good places for hiding
- All lights can create "bright blind" spots where it is hard to see something, kind of like getting a flashlight shined in your face
- Consider how dousing lights or lighting up more torches might give advantages or change the situation in your favor.
- Consider how using a weak character with lights can help blind opponents to assist the stronger fighters in winning fights faster

Ceilings and Climbing

It is my opinion that the **Thief** class is one of the most interesting classes because of how it has mechanics to interact with the environment in a stealthy way to avoid engagements with enemies as well as taking advantage of surprising them. In my years of experience playing a Thief I have found that one of the least used, or perhaps even understood aspects of the class is the *Climb Sheet Surfaces* skill. Climbing is one of those things where it makes sense for every character to have some ability or competence in doing, but DCC RPG is a game where mechanics are not entirely based in realism. The way I envision the climbing ability of the Thief class is being able to climb walls, ceilings, and other surfaces almost like a spider. Perhaps the most overlooked part of Climbing, however, is actually having places for the Thief to climb! It does not do the class any favors if the Judge and Player agree to the circumstances when the Thief gets to use their climbing if they never have the opportunity to climb. Similar to how I think lights in dungeons are a little misunderstood, ceilings in dungeons are also ignored or obfuscated. Most people are used to the idea of flat ceilings due to modern construction techniques, but the dungeons that would be represented in DCC RPG should have arched ceilings and would even have support beams and pillars to help support the weight of stones and prevent cave-ins and collapsing roofs. So, in actuality, a dungeon should, and would, have many different places where a Thief can climb if they wanted to hide above the heads of people in a dungeon.



In this example image I have included above, I wanted to show that a hallway in a dungeon would mostly likely have an arched ceiling and beams propped up to help support the arches. This idea can be continued through to rooms as well, in fact the bigger the rooms the more support they will need to keep the ceilings from collapsing, which means that rooms in dungeons should be at least 15 feet tall and have some beams arches and pillars for support. I would even go so far as to suggest that almost all climbing inside of dungeons should be about DC5. In combination with the idea that there should be a lot more opportunities for a Thief to climb, there should be greater considerations for the shadows that would exist, or could exist, for a Thief to use while also hiding near the ceiling.

Of course, other party members can benefit from ideas like this as well. Warriors could use their Deed to throw bad guys up into the rafters to get them trapped, or use the rafters to leap over groups of enemies to get to whatever prime target they want to face against.

Other characters could be boosted up or hide in the rafters while combats go on in order to avoid as much danger as they can while still being involved.

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