



ADVENTURE ESSENTIALS:
INNS, TAVERNS,
AND RESTAURANTS

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PREVIEW

A Brief Word From Johnn



Thank you for downloading this special preview of *GM Mastery: Inns, Taverns & Restaurants*.

Within the full tome you will receive practical tips on how to build these establishments, add them to your campaigns and roleplay and fight within them.

Design is so important to great GMing. Showing up with great layouts, plots and plans makes a ton of difference in game sessions. Your players will

notice and appreciate your efforts (if they don't, knock some heads!).

Design is just plain fun. Half the time I start with a map and go from there. That's why I spent quite a bit of attention in Chapter 1 on crafting interesting layouts for your buildings. It's amazing how a few layout tweaks makes the different between ye old stranger just sitting in the corner versus the intriguing conversation taking place in the smoky, curtained booth on the upper level.

Inspiration is the other hobgoblin of GMing. Sometimes I just need a new idea to get me going. So that's what Chapter 3 is all about – glorious tables and charts to get the noggin' whirring.

If you've read my NPC Essentials book, you'll know how much I love NPCs and how important I think they are to great games. Chapter 2 goes beyond your standard NPC information and helps you make your places truly alive with a vibrant cast of characters, including making the business itself an interesting character!

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INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: How To Design 6	Plot Fix	46
Uses and Purposes	Plot Fix Methods	47
A Place To Meet	Bar Brawls	47
A Place To Eat	Bar Brawl Tips	49
A Place Of Employment	Maps and Mapping	50
A Place For News		
A Place To Entertain	Chapter 2: Design Elements... 55	
A Place To Show Off	Two Approaches	56
A Place To Stay	Neighborhood	56
A Place To Game And Gamble	Building, Structure, Architect..	57
A Place To Start Adventures	Age	57
A Place To End Adventures	Size	58
A Place To Unclog Adventures	Materials	58
A Place To Roleplay & Intrigue	Appearance	59
A Typical Design Process	Room Types And Quantities	60
Design Based On Game Role	Number Of Licensed...	65
Design For World Building	Building and Design Hooks	66
Design For Adventure	Theme, Hook, Style, Atmo	67
Design For Encounters	Name	68
Upgrading Categories	Food, Drink, And Services	69
Add Conflict To Your Designs	Perspectives	70
Types of Conflict	Goods & Services Tips	72
Conflict Factions	Prices	74
Conflict Situations	Business Hours	76
Conflict Formula	Reserve Unusual Hours...	76
Conflict Tips	Ideas For Interesting Hours	77
Hook	Daily Cycles	77
AIDA	Example: Cindro's Fountain	79
Purposes of Hooks	Clientèle	81
Sources of Business Hooks	Clientèle Archetypes	82
# of Businesses In An Area	Reuse NPCs For One-Shots	84
Designing Menus & Services	Staff Members	85
Create a Template	Good Help Is Hard To Find	85
Create a Default Menu	Designing Staff	85
Create An Easter Egg	Owner	86
Sample Menu Items	Manager	91

INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bartender	93	Tavern/Inn Names Sailor	240
Servers	96	Menu Drinks	241
Greeter	98	Menu Food	242
Bouncers	100	Menu Food	246
Cook	102	Furnishing Ideas	247
Kitchen Help	104	Room List	248
Stablemaster	105	50 Room Quirks	250
Stable Helper	107	100 Interesting Patrons	252
Spouse	108	100 Events or Encounters	255
Magicker	109		
Entertainer	111		
Magic	113		
Indirect Versus Direct Magic	113		
Theft of Magic	114		
Special Cases	114		
Don't Forget Curses	114		
Categories of Magic	115		
Magic Ideas	117		
Events	122		
NPC Count	124		
Event Structure	124		
Examples of Event Types	125		
Origins, History, & Background	133		
Age	134		
Previous Owners	136		
Past Events	138		
Brief Summary For Reference	139		
Summary Tips	140		

Chapter 3: Charts & Tables 141

50 Example Themes and Hooks	142
Random Tavern/Inn Names	149
Tavern/Inn Names Warrior	236
Tavern/Inn Names Arcane	237
Tavern/Inn Names Divine	238
Tavern/Inn Names Rogue	239

Maps Made with Skeletonkey Games' e-Adventure Tiles.



INTRODUCTION: INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Inns, taverns, and restaurants – these are the places of role-playing legend. Well, maybe not so much restaurants, but places to eat are important too! Such businesses are often the first place characters go when they enter a city, and the last place they leave before waving goodbye. In the history of RPGs, taverns have spawned more adventures than any other location. Inns are important too, because they serve as urban home bases and refuges for recuperation. Restaurants are less common game elements, though I hope this book will change that. They are a fresh break from typical locations, and are places for PCs and NPCs to meet, intrigue, and plan.

In many campaigns and groups, inns and taverns are gamed so much they've stopped being special. They've become clichés. Many GMs run the same ideas and concepts over and over, stuck in a rut they might not even know they are in. If it isn't broken, don't fix it, right? However, breathing new life into these classic pillars of your game sessions is important. Nothing should be taken for granted. Don't let things become mundane, stale, and uninspired. This is a sure route to burnout and player apathy.

Next time the characters enter an inn, tavern, or restaurant, surprise them. Let them know things are different this time around. Make them second-guess their assumptions. Inspire them to look around with fresh eyes, and bring the wonder back to your game.

It starts with fun and interesting designs. This book is about helping you craft cool, useful, and entertaining establishments. It will help you create locations that feel real and interactive.

This book will also guide you in creating important puzzle pieces that snap into your games. There's little point designing campaign elements that have small story payoff. You have little enough time for preparation as it is, so this book

INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

is about earning double or triple wins from your designs: world development, campaign development, and encounter development. If you make a single inn, tavern, or restaurant serve all three needs, you've saved time and improved your game sessions in one swoop. Let this book help you craft locations of superior quality. Your players will notice.

It's interesting to note that inns, taverns, and restaurants often overlap in gaming. Inns serve food and offer entertainment. Taverns and restaurants might sell lodgings in the back or upstairs. All three types of businesses have similar design elements, so by considering one, you'll learn and be inspired to design all three. That's why I wrote this book—to cover each of these types as a group to save you time and energy rather than writing three separate books. You can apply the tips and advice that follow to any inn, tavern, or restaurant—learn once, design often.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

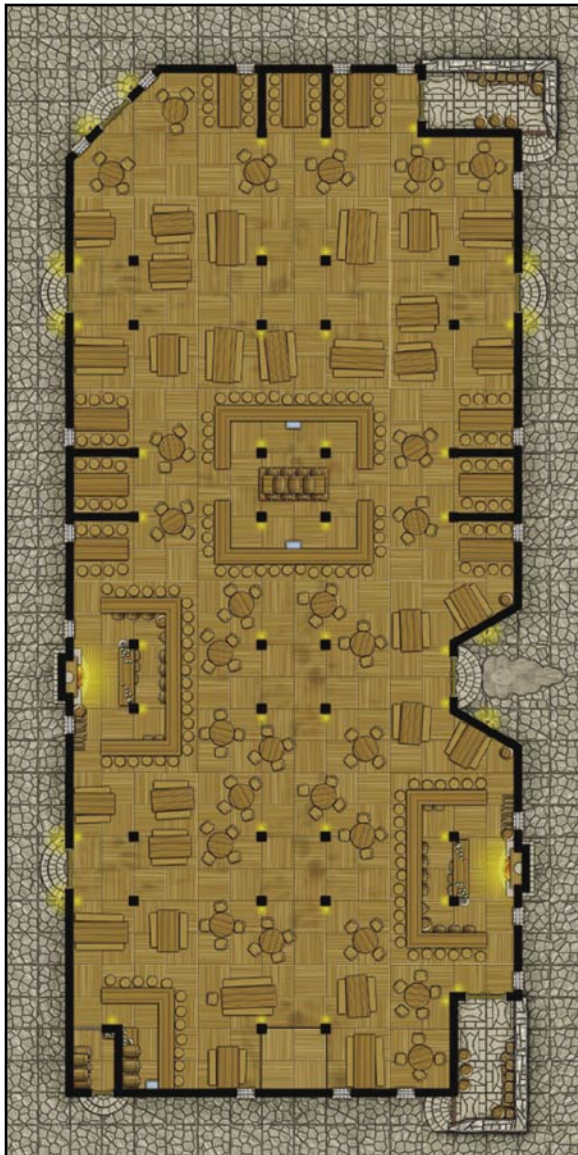
Wisdom on the Internet and from other sources says you should have fun while you design and that you should not design more than you need. This book provides detailed advice for crafting many different parts of inns, taverns, and restaurants. For gameplay purposes, you don't need to tackle everything for each business you build. Instead, use this guide to give you a constant stream of fresh ideas and new design angles so your craft—your art—stays new and interesting.

You might start with a skim of chapter one: How To Design An Inn, Tavern, Or Restaurant. This chapter covers general design advice as well as GMing tips. Perusing this chapter first lets you know what advice is on these pages so you can turn to it when needed.

Next, skim the tables in chapter three. These are meant to inspire you and supply random ideas and generators. Know what's contained here so you save time while designing.

Make chapter two your final stopping point. It contains the meat of this book. It details all the elements and parts of inns, taverns, and restaurants into a kind of content inventory. If you need help designing one particular thing, then find it in this chapter and read the advice and information. If you need help in general, then pick any part that seems interesting, or start at the beginning until you have enough to plunk your creation in front of your players.

CHAPTER I: HOW TO DESIGN AN INN, TAVERN, OR RESTAURANT



USES AND PURPOSES FOR INNS, TAVERNS, AND RESTAURANTS

In addition to providing characters food, shelter, and a place to party, inns, taverns, and restaurants are wonderful player and GM tools. GMs sometimes fall into the trap of running the same variations of establishments over and over. They build a limited menu of options, and because these places are common in cities, this robs gameplay of potential richness and entertainment.

Players use such locations as part of their tactics. Public places might be safer or make for easier escapes. They might force NPCs to act one way or another due to crowds, witnesses, or neutral territory. Such places are also good bases and places to gather information to plot their next move. The better you are able to GM these locations, the more options and interest players will have.

Following are some uses and purposes you might consider for your city's dining, drinking, and lodging businesses.

A PLACE TO MEET

When it comes to having a place to meet, there's nothing better than an inn, tavern, or restaurant. It offers food, drink, and entertainment in one place. With such inviting accommodations, many organizations reserve a large section of the floor for their regular meetings. The organizations are usually mundane groups whose membership can include prestigious individuals of the town, businessmen, and fraternity members. With simple, unassuming names like the Farmers Cooperative, the Civic Improvement Club, or the Money-Changers Guild, they are often more than what they appear.

In meetings, members network among one another, always using the organization to help better their financial or social position. Such meetings can provide interesting plot hooks for PCs if they're willing to eavesdrop. The Farmers Cooperative might be complaining about how the crops have been spoiled since the Witch Lord disappeared. The Civic Improvement Club might be rallying to put an end to the gargoyle problem. And the Money Changers might decide to hire out some mercenaries to destroy the orc raiders on the city's northern border.

Individuals like such places for meetings as well, for they offer neutral ground if the parties involved are in conflict. They are also fairly public places, though this doesn't stop some from casting spells and wreaking havoc. The relative anonymity of a hazy barroom appeals to many meeting participants.

INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

A PLACE TO EAT

The menu is a great tool for the GM to inject flavor into a game (pun intended!). Tavern food is legendary. Some provide a meal so succulent that a king would be envious, while others don't even wash the dirt off their turnips before mixing them into their stew. Restaurants' main service is dishing up food; it's often their exclusive service, so they produce the best menu possible. Inns might supplement their services by offering food, whether it's prepared in-house or brought in from a nearby restaurant or pub.

Varying food quality might incur an occasional Fortitude save for patrons. Those who fail might feel ill for a few hours, and suffer an action penalty, or serious cases might result in temporary Constitution point loss. This would definitely make an otherwise standard meal a memorable event! On the flip side, PCs might receive a temporary skill boost or other boon from sitting down for a good meal, particularly after they come in from a long adventure where they've subsisted on trail rations for weeks. Offering such a bonus might convince especially thrifty PCs they shouldn't always eat trail rations.

Your city will have its own eating customs, such as popular foods, standard eating times, and expected portion sizes, so be sure to make your eating establishments reflect them. Other ways you can use to make meals different and interesting are:

- **Type of dining:** buffet, smorgasbord, live animals, "normal"
- **Dishes and drink holders:** type, size, shape, pattern, material
- **Eating utensils, if any:** purpose, types, size, shape, material
- **Seating arrangements:** types of furniture, seating position and location
- **Servers:** many NPC opportunities here, plus types, nature, and quality of service
- **The bill:** who's expected to pay, payment rituals and processes

A PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT

At the start of many adventures, an employer and adventurers meet to discuss what needs doing. It's there that deals are struck and heroes begin their journey. This common theme can have interesting twists. Perhaps choose a different set of heroes—not the PCs—to pitch the scenario them for reasons they don't reveal. Maybe the PCs are not the ones chosen to partake in the adventure, but they overhear all the details about the job and can decide if they want to try beating their rivals to the location.

CHAPTER ONE

Inn, taverns, and restaurants offer many mundane employment opportunities as well. These jobs are ideal for characters who live in the city, for PCs who need a temporary income, and for party members performing undercover work. The type and nature of establishment will dictate how the PCs can serve, but some example jobs are:

- Waiter, waitress
- Bouncer
- Stablehand
- Maid, manservant
- Butler, stewardess
- Maitre de, hostess
- Bellboy
- Messenger
- Cook, chef
- Bartender
- Manager

A PLACE FOR NEWS

Whether the news comes from a town crier who stops by once a day, a community bulletin board, or regulars who come in to gossip, inns, taverns, and restaurants are great locations to catch the PCs up on the latest rumors, plant plot hooks, and guide players to more productive paths.

Independent of PC and GM needs, many communities will meet at these places to exchange information, whether the news is true or not. Every community is unique in membership and flavor, and this will impact the establishment. Town guards will hang out with fellow guards at a traditional location that other citizens will probably avoid; mages will sip liqueurs at a tavern they insist on calling a club; sailors will drink and eat places full of cheap, non-breakable furniture.

Here's a sampling of news types to keep in mind when designing:

- New laws and how people think they'll be affected
- Recent events and their interpretations
- Engagement announcements
- Help wanted notices
- Important personages visiting the city
- Foreign relations and world events

In addition to news, PCs and NPCs might use these places to exchange messages:

INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

- Someone could post a mysterious warning: "The great gray beast lurks below." Such postings might provide clues to the PCs in their adventures. These might be posted by a villain who wants to lure the PCs into a trap or by a villain's hireling who is developing a conscience, but is afraid to cross his master openly.
- An adversary can exchange threats with the PCs: "Biddle Sickleleaf's bow has about as much pull as the boot shiner." While appearing to be simple insults, they help build a character's story. Through the bulletin board, a PC can swap barbs with an unseen adversary instead of swapping blows. Tension increases, as does the PC's appreciation of his counterpart. As the story plays out on the board, a variety of surprises can await the PC as to the identity of the poster. It could be the king, a former school mate, a polymorphed dragon, a monk under a vow of silence.
- A character can brag about his exploits: "On this day, Tantiv V, 1023, let it be known that Sir Frewtic of the Mountains did defeat a foul, evil black dragon of resounding strength, malicious magic, and vile intent, known as Tylkoputak. The destruction of this beast has ensured the continued safety of the City of Woodharp. Signed, with greatest appreciation, Mayor Grig Tarberry." Such postings provide excellent incentive for paladins and other PCs to brag about their deeds, let their exploits be known, and provide valuable public relations, which could lead to future missions. They are also a fun reward by issuing proclamations that bring honor. The PCs can use such proclamations as a resume of sorts as they travel.

A PLACE TO ENTERTAIN

The tavern is a fantastic place to find great live entertainment. Amazingly, there's a wide variety of it to be had: comedy, plays, acrobats, jugglers, weapon experts, song, and dance. In a high-fantasy world, those don't have to be the limits though. Other on-stage entertainment can include illusionary stories (a story of the gods), trained monster acts (Calavini and his Blink Dogs), magic shows (summon monster spells are always impressive), and even miracle shows (watch the Amazing Macu bring the dead back to life). Response to such shows vary from city to city; some will be stunned and amazed while others will think it's about as ordinary as a farmer plowing his fields.

Every bard knows the best tips come from drunkards who don't know how much they're spending—or spilling. Because of this, entertainers provide GMs plot opportunities in the guise of spies, informants, plot hooks, and encounter situations.

A PLACE TO SHOW OFF

Everyone has favorite haunts, and it's no different in a fantasy world. Politicians will have a favorite establishment, as will the president of the local thieves' guild. It's at these places PCs can find out who bends the ear of whom. In addition, if important people patronize an establishment then they'll draw a crowd of their own that contains servants, groupies, sycophants, and hangers-on. When a powerful person claims a tavern or other business as "his own," he approves who comes in and who's allowed to stay. He is always interested in whatever is happening inside. For example, if the PCs bust up The Fallen Acorn—the second home to the city guard captain—there will be retribution.

A PLACE TO STAY

Most inns' primary revenue source is offering shelter for coin. Taverns and restaurants are also places one can find room and board. Owners might clear the floor to be a common room at night, and rooms—often little bigger than a closet—above and at the back of the establishment might be made available to certain patrons.

PCs new to a city won't have permanent residence, thus they'll naturally go to these places seeking room and board. They might not think of restaurants and taverns as places to stay though, so you might have an NPC plant the idea in their heads. Such quarters might be a nice break from the classic night-at-the-inn routine.

Flavor of accommodations can vary greatly, so this element represents a great design opportunity. Consider mixing up these factors:

- **Cleanliness:** vermin, pleasant, too clean for bloody and dusty heroes
- **Size of rooms/space:** too small, huge, odd proportions
- **Furnishings:** lots, none, ruined, bizarre
- Quality of room service, if any
- **Sleeping arrangements:** small bed, four poster king-sized bed, palette on the floor, bunk bed, magical floating mat
- Private or common accommodation
- Quietness and peacefulness of location: busy intersection, serene inner garden, noisy club nearby

A PLACE TO GAME AND GAMBLE

Inns, taverns, and restaurants form natural places to game and gamble due to their public accessibility, willingness of management to accommodate, and access to alcohol. Local laws will dictate what games are allowed in public and

INNS, TAVERNS & RESTAURANTS

those that must be played outside of official eyes. Neighborhood customs will determine which games are popular.

Games are played for a number of reasons:

- Out of enjoyment, such as a pleasant game of dragon chess between scholars
- To bet on and support gambling
- Ego and bragging rights
- Neighborhood pride
- Public spectacle

Use these reasons to craft different encounter situations. The same game will play out different if competitors are motivated by defeating rivals versus trying to win a few coppers for supper.

A PLACE TO START ADVENTURES

Sowing adventure seeds and plot hooks are the classic GMing purpose for these public places. Though this GM tactic is often ridiculed and criticized on discussion boards these days, the truth remains that it's a fun, fast, and easy way to launch a new adventure or campaign. Unless your group is jaded and bored, it's ok to continue starting stories in these types of establishments. Most players enjoy roleplaying in familiar stomping grounds, and GMs often have a repertoire of tried and true tavern scenarios.

Next time you start an adventure in an inn, tavern, or restaurant, consider adding a slight twist to keep the players guessing:

- A bar fight breaks out and the plot hook is literally smacked out of an NPC. Perhaps the plot hook is fragile and the PCs must rescue and protect it until the fight is over.
- A mysterious stranger approaches the PCs with a job, but he's murdered before he can give them the details. Now the PCs must perform a pre-adventure investigation.
- A mysterious stranger approaches the PCs with a request for help. Then another stranger interrupts, denouncing the first NPC as a fraud and liar. Which NPC should the PCs trust? Which offer will they accept?
- While the PCs are negotiating a deal with a new employer, rival NPCs appear on the scene and try to lure the job away.
- The tavern is a trap. Patrons, barkeep, and wenches are all in on the scheme. As the floor opens beneath the PCs' table, a mysterious figure chuckles from the shadows.

A PLACE TO END ADVENTURES

Adventures are often born in places of food and drink, but they rarely end there, which is a shame—and an opportunity.

- Start your next adventure in a tavern and then be sure to have a celebration party in it once the world has been saved. This ties things up nicely, gives NPCs an opportunity to pat the PCs on the back, and provides satisfying closure.
- The villain's lair is a hotel, tavern, or restaurant. While there are some security issues to address, this would be a clever and interesting base of operations, and a cool location for a climactic battle.
- The mother of all barroom brawls. The final fight takes place in a tavern. The mighty spells and powers brought to bear during the battle turns the site into a place of legend within the city.

A PLACE TO UNCLOG ADVENTURES

If the PCs don't know what to do or where to turn next, bring them back to an inn, tavern, or restaurant. Such places make introducing clues, hints, and NPCs easy and logical. The party often stay or eat at such an establishment, so you can rely on the place to stage encounters that will get the game moving again.

A PLACE TO ROLEPLAY AND INTRIGUE

You never know who might be eating or staying at the local pub or inn. This gives you unlimited opportunities to introduce NPCs who are fun to roleplay with. Some groups enjoy gaming in-character for awhile without any plot considerations. Other groups prefer to roleplay with purpose. In either case, they can meet and chat with local and visiting non-player characters in uncontrived ways to their content.

A TYPICAL DESIGN PROCESS

It's important to optimize your design time because there's only 24 hours in a day and a GM always has a long to do list. More than once I've drilled down into a design only to come up for air and realize the game was a short time away and I hadn't started planning the session yet. Oof.

To avoid wasting time, below is a core design process for inns, taverns, and restaurants for gameplay purposes. Chapter two outlines many possible and interesting design elements you could craft, but I've hand-picked the essentials. If you develop the following for your establishment, you let your designs do their part to keep your campaigns and games thriving while minimizing in-game situations where you get caught off-guard or unprepared.