

The background of the cover is a rich, dark, and atmospheric scene. On the left, a massive, gnarled tree trunk or rock formation rises vertically, covered in intricate, glowing structures and platforms. To the right, a similar structure is partially visible. In the center, a vast sea of bright orange and yellow lava flows, with a large waterfall cascading down. In the foreground, two small, dark figures with glowing eyes and horns walk along a path. The ground is covered in large, glowing purple and pink mushrooms. The sky is a deep purple, with a few small, glowing objects floating in the air.

JOURNEY RULES PREVIEW

DOWN
CRAWL
2ND EDITION

ENDLESS ADVENTURES IN A CURIOUS UNDERWORLD

AARON A. REED

DOWNCRAWL

2E

Journey Rules Preview Oct24 Edition

Aaron A. Reed

This is a prerelease extract from the *Downcrawl* 2E Ashcan, without final art, layout, or text. Visit downcrawl.textories.com for news on the latest release.

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WELCOME DOWN

THE DOWNCRAWL RULES will help you run randomly generated, open-ended adventures in a weird and fantastical underworld, a place so far from the surface that the sun and sky are only legends, and so vast that no bounds can be placed on its dimensions or contents. We call this place **The Deep, Deep Down...** or just **the Down** for short. Here are some of its essential qualities:

THE DOWN IS VAST.

Three-dimensional, unmappable, and more or less infinite, the Down stretches its tunnels and tendrils through all the vast dark spaces of the earth. There is far more Down Here than there is Up There. Navigation is hard, even between familiar waypoints. Rather than a fixed set of races and enemies, there are a boundless number of cultures, powers, and threats: many beginning but few endings.

THE DOWN IS CHALLENGING.

Food, water, even air may be rarities. Compasses don't work. Routes once wide and navigable might collapse or twist toward new, unstable



JOURNEYS

WHEN THE PARTY TRAVELS from one Volume to another, they leave one pocket of safety and stability and move into the uncharted depths of the Deep, Deep Down. While Volumes are often centered around sources of food, light, warmth, or protection, these resources may be scarce in the places between.

Several general rules apply during journeys:

- ❖ **Journey Moves.** Journeys are simulated through a series of moves presented in this chapter, beginning with **Plan Your Journey** ¹⁰.
- ❖ **Abstracted Movement.** Progress is made by taking a series of **journey steps**, rather than tracking specific distances and directions. This number is determined when you Plan Your Journey.
- ❖ **No True Rest.** Characters may not take a long rest, full recovery, or otherwise regain their full strength while traveling between Volumes. These interstitial spaces are profoundly unsafe and magically unstable: equilibrium is not easily restored, and you'll need to marshal your resources carefully.
- ❖ **No Perfect Navigation.** Any skills, spells, or abilities from your core system that say you “never get lost” or “always find the right path” won't work as advertised in the Down. You should work with your guide to find alternatives.

DANGERS

As you travel the Down, you will be seen. A **Danger** is a looming threat that is stalking you, searching for you, or growing nearer with each step. Track Dangers on a list shared by the whole party, either on an index card or separate sheet of paper (or directly on your Map).

The list of Dangers begins empty and can have up to three items on it.

Certain moves will ask you to **add the current number of Dangers** to influence an outcome. Other moves might direct you to **Add or Remove a Danger** 6.

Whenever you **ASK THREAT** 47, you may instead **choose for a Danger to fully reveal itself** and become the current Threat. If you conclusively deal with this danger in the aftermath, you can **Remove the Danger** 6.

ADD A DANGER

When a move tells you to Add a Danger, ASK PORTENT 7 for an ominous sign or hint of impending trouble. Select a corresponding Index from the right three columns by choosing blind or rolling **d3**; record the number along with the Portent on the list of Dangers.

If there are already three Dangers, choose one instead and explain how the danger seems to be getting stronger, closer, or more obvious. Alternatively, reveal a new **PORTENT** that has the same Index number.

If this Danger later reveals itself, ASK THREAT 47 using the Index number you wrote down for this Danger.

*Return to: Journey On*12; *Lost*13; *Encamp*15

REMOVE A DANGER

When a move tells you to Remove a Danger, cross one off the list and explain how this threat has lessened for now, perhaps because you've left a dangerous area or acted cleverly to give a foe the slip.

*Return to: Encamp*15; *Journey's End*14; *Recovery*53

PORTENT

Describe the portent, then pick an Index or roll d3; record it along with the Portent. When a Danger is revealed, **ASK THREAT** ⁴⁷ with the Index.

	1	2	3
1-1 passageway choked by webs	3-4	1-1	4-1
1-2 a spectral, unnatural cold	1-5	3-5	1-2
1-3 distant rumblings	3-3	1-4	3-6
1-4 disturbed, looted tombs	2-5	1-2	2-3
1-5 terrible nightmares, or waking hallucinations	1-5	1-3	3-5
1-6 regurgitated skeleton	1-6	3-4	1-4
2-1 freshly knifed corpses	2-3	2-1	2-2
2-2 sketch of a party member	2-4	2-2	2-1
2-3 route intentionally diverted	3-1	2-3	2-2
2-4 increasing amount of evil runes or warning glyphs	1-2	3-2	2-5
2-5 mute shell-shocked survivors, or a severed limb	5-3	2-6	3-4
2-6 bloody chains, or corpse in a cage	2-6	1-2	2-3
3-1 passage increasingly wet and dripping	1-3	3-6	3-1
3-2 crushed body	3-6	3-2	1-4
3-3 sign or note warning you to turn back	3-1	1-1	3-4
3-4 passage more and more overgrown	3-4	2-4	1-6
3-5 intense headaches	6-6	1-5	3-5
3-6 hastily abandoned camp	2-6	2-1	5-3
4-1 more and more claustrophobic passages	3-1	3-6	1-1
4-2 tracks of massive animal	1-4	2-5	3-4
4-3 ominous silence	2-2	1-2	3-5
4-4 terrible stench	3-5	1-4	1-6
4-5 threatening note	2-3	2-1	2-2
4-6 increasing number of fleeing tiny insects	5-3	1-1	3-3
5-1 eyes watching you in the dark	1-2	2-1	2-2
5-2 scorch marks on walls	3-2	1-3	5-3
5-3 raving lunatic warning about end times	3-3	5-3	1-3
5-4 trail of blood that suddenly stops	1-6	2-6	1-1
5-5 pathway dangerously eroded	3-6	3-1	3-3
5-6 too-cheerful traveler: "you'll meet a friend soon"	2-4	1-3	6-6
6-1 water stops showing your reflections	6-6	2-5	1-2
6-2 small items missing from camp each morning	1-6	2-3	1-2
6-3 empty crushed potion vials with foul odor	1-5	2-4	2-5
6-4 recurring evil-looking symbol carved into rock	2-6	1-3	3-2
6-5 moss and fungus all dead, only bare rock	3-5	3-6	3-4
6-6 echoing chitters or whispers	2-3	1-1	1-2

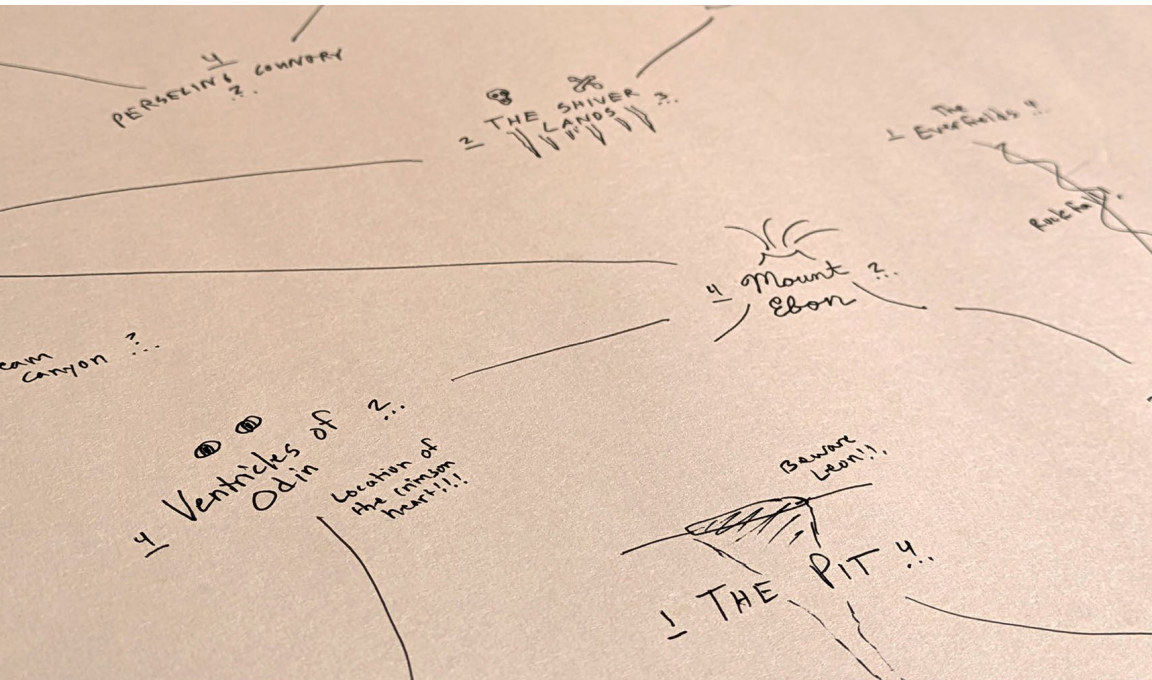
Return to Travel Encounter ⁴⁴; Add a Danger ⁶

Journey Rules Preview note: the Portent Index numbers correspond to entries on the Threat table (not reproduced here) which might be foreshadowed by each portent. For instance, “intense headaches” could be a sign of 3-5: Bad Air (Threat of Damage), 1-5: Foul Magical Creatures (animated armor, living curses, enchanted objects), or 6-6: Unwanted Complications with Reality (something is wrong with gravity, time, illusions, memories). You won’t know until the Threat reveals itself.

EXAMPLE

As a result of a journey mishap, the party must Add a Danger. Em rolls 4-6 on Portents for a result of *increasing number of fleeing tiny insects*, choosing at random the index option 3-3. She explains how the party is seeing more and more floods of insects of all kinds rapidly moving away from where they’re headed, and writes “fleeing insects - 3-3” on the list of Dangers.

Later, a Travel Encounter results in a Threat. Rather than rolling for a Threat, the party decides it’s time to confront the fleeing insects Danger. Consulting Threat with the index of 3-3 reveals a result of *Catastrophe (earthquake, avalanche, volcano, sinkhole, ceiling collapse)*. The group decides the threat that arrives is a volcanic explosion that spews forth hot lava into the cavern. “The beetles knew! They knew!! We should have listened!!” cries the bard...



SOME NOTES ON JOURNEYS

- ✦ **HOW MUCH TACK?** You are generally advised to begin a journey with more Tack than journey steps. See **In a Volume** [67](#) for various ways to acquire Tack.
- ✦ **HOW LONG?** Journey steps correspond to days of travel. Remember, though, that you cannot easily rest or recover resources until a journey is over.
- ✦ **TOO TOUGH?** If a journey seems beyond your means, one strategy is to **Visit The Map Room** [69](#) and choose **Research a Secret Route** or **Supply and Demand** (to discover a place, say, with an Abundance of Maps). You might also look for a guide, hunt for sources of more Details about the Volume, or first journey to an adjacent or closer Volume.
- ✦ **NO PIT STOPS.** The shortest path via routes serves only as a surrogate for approximate distance, and does not imply you'll be able to pass through the Volumes along the way for a pit stop: the quickest journey between two Volumes in three-dimensional space will rarely pass through any known territory. If you want to hit an interstitial Volume on the way, you'll need to split your trip into two smaller journeys.
- ✦ **CHANGING YOUR DESTINATION.** If you decide mid-journey you don't want to go to your original destination after all, discard your current journey and play **Plan Your Journey** [10](#) anew, as if you were still in the original Volume you set out from. You can't do this while lost.

THE JOURNEY MOVES

The following pages show all the moves you'll need to play for Journeys. Begin with **Plan Your Journey** [10](#) which will guide you through the other moves.

- ✦ **Plan Your Journey** [10](#)
- ✦ **A Day on the Road** [11](#)
- ✦ **Journey On** [12](#)
- ✦ **Lost** [13](#)
- ✦ **Encamp** [15](#)
- ✦ **Journey's End** [14](#)

PLAN YOUR JOURNEY

When you prepare for a journey to another Volume, determine the number of journey steps by beginning with the destination's Remoteness:

- ☛ 2 if **Known**
- ☛ 3 if **Sheltered**
- ☛ 4 if **Secret**, and you must be in an adjacent Volume

If the destination is connected to your current Volume via a series of routes, add the length of the shortest path (max 4).

If you can't reach it from here via any route, add 4.

If you know less than four Details about it, add 1.

If anyone you travel with has been there before, subtract 1.

Now take a tall index card and write a name for the journey along the top (such as "Journey from Bleakport to Beasthaven.") Add empty boxes down the left side of the card, one per line, equal to the number of journey steps. As your journey progresses, in each box you will either **log success** ✓ by checking the box, or **log failure** ✗ by Xing it out.

Put a second line around the final box: marking it will determine the final success or failure of your journey.

Begin your journey with **A Day on the Road** ¹¹.

*Journeys are **Ventures**⁷⁵, with the same index card and empty boxes technique useful for tracking other kinds of long-term goals.*



A DAY ON THE ROAD

When each day of a journey begins, first determine the terrain you pass through today by picking the first option that matches:

- ☛ **If this is the first day of the journey**, pick a Terrain Detail from your starting Volume.
- ☛ **If you Encamped or did not log success yesterday**, you're still in the same terrain.
- ☛ **If 2+ journey steps remain**, **ASK ASPECT** ⁶¹ + **TERRAIN** ⁶¹ or **SPECIAL TERRAIN** ⁶³.
- ☛ **If exactly 2 steps remain**, also ask what sign you see that you're getting close to your destination.
- ☛ **If only 1 step remains**, pick a Terrain Detail from your destination; **ASK ASPECT + TERRAIN** ⁶¹ for one if needed.

Note the terrain alongside the next unmarked box on the journey card, and tell what this landscape is like. (If a terrain is already written by the next unmarked box, perhaps because you Encamped or were lost, don't write anything.)

Now **play the first move that matches** from the list below:

- ☛ If only 1 step remains, try to reach your **Journey's End** ¹⁴.
- ☛ If you have no Tack, you're **Lost** ¹³.
- ☛ If you want a day of rest, **Encamp** ¹⁵.
- ☛ If you want to abandon your journey, change your destination to your Volume of origin, **log success** ✓ in all remaining boxes except the last, and continue on to today's **Travel Encounter** ⁴⁴.
- ☛ Otherwise, **Journey On** ¹².

In most cases after completing the move, you'll be instructed to proceed to a **Travel Encounter** ⁴⁴. Once it's resolved, the day's travel is done. If you've not yet arrived, spend a fitful night here (gaining no benefits from rest) then return to **A Day on the Road** ¹¹.

JOURNEY ON

When the group pushes on toward their destination, pick a leader for today's travel. They'll explain how their unique skills or abilities will help guide the way through this territory, and prepare to roll **2d6**, considering the following modifiers:

- ☛ **-1** if you've led a day of travel since the journey began or you last Encamped (fresh guides and fresh eyes are vital to traversing the Down)
- ☛ **-1** if there are multiple active Dangers
- ☛ **+1** for each point of Tack spent on this roll

Roll the dice and add them together:

- ☛ **10+**: You find a clear route forward: **Log success** ✓ in the next unmarked box.
- ☛ **7-9**: You find a route, but a rough one. Choose one:
 - ◆ You make little progress but avoid getting lost. Explain why this terrain is so difficult, but what hopeful sign you uncover. **Log failure** ✕ but **recover 1 Tack**.
 - ◆ You force your way through, but attract unwanted attention. **Log success** ✓, but **Add a Danger** 6 and explain what portent you see of a lurking threat.
- ☛ **6-**: You lose your way, hopefully temporarily. Choose one:
 - ◆ **Log failure** ✕ and say why this territory confounds all attempts to navigate through it.
 - ◆ Or, **try a desperate path**. Roll **d3**: if you can afford this much Tack, pay it and **log success** ✓. If you can't, lose all remaining Tack and **log failure** ✕; you're now lost.

Continue to a **Travel Encounter** 44.

LOST

When you begin a travel day with no Tack, you are lost. Pick a leader for today's travel. They'll explain how their knowledge of the Down, survival skills, or luck will help find a path, and prepare to roll a single **d6**, considering the following modifiers:

- ☉ **-1** if there are multiple active Dangers
- ☉ **+1** if you are a native of the Down
- ☉ **+1** if you successfully make a relevant skill or ability check

Roll the die, praying to whatever gods you think might hear.

☉ **6+**: Choose one:

- ◆ **Log success** ✓ *through dumb luck, but remain lost.*
- ◆ **Log failure** ✗ *but discover a route forward: gain d3 Tack.*

☉ **4-5: Log no progress** but make a discovery: roll **d3**.

1. Find a place where you may **Encamp** ¹⁵ for the day, and proceed immediately to that move.
2. Discover a route leading back to the place you set out from. If you choose to take this path, gain **d3** Tack, change your destination to your Volume of origin, and **log success** ✓ in any remaining journey boxes before the last.
3. Discover a route leading to a random Volume **adjacent to** your original objective (or a random unconnected Volume if this is not possible; **Spark a Volume** ⁶⁰ if necessary). If you choose to take this path, gain **d3** Tack and change your destination, leaving journey boxes unchanged.

☉ **1-3: Log failure** ✗, and **Add a Danger** ⁶.

Continue to a **Travel Encounter** ⁴⁴.

JOURNEY'S END

When facing your final box of the journey Venture, pick a leader to guide you through the home stretch. They'll explain how their leadership, guidance, and morale-boosting helps you through these final miles, and prepare to roll **2d6**, considering the following modifiers:

- ☉ **+1** if there are more successes ✓ than failures ✗ this journey
- ☉ **-1** if more failures ✗ than successes ✓
- ☉ **-3** if you're currently lost (out of Tack)
- ☉ **+1** for each point of Tack spent on this roll

Roll the dice to learn where you arrive...

- ☉ **10+**: You reach your destination easily: either *gain 2 Tack* or **Remove a Danger** 6.
- ☉ **7-9**: You reach your destination, but not without trouble. Choose one:
 - ◆ **An active Danger** ambushes you before arriving, and it's even stronger than expected...
 - ◆ **Trouble**: play **What's the News?** 71 and get immediately involved in this situation as you arrive, whether you want to or not.
- ☉ **6-**: There's a complication with your journey's final leg. Choose one:
 - ◆ **If you still have any Tack**, spend the last of it to reach your intended destination by the skin of your teeth.
 - ◆ You arrive at an unexpected place: a Volume adjacent to your intended destination.
 - ◆ You arrive at a **very** unexpected place: **Spark a Volume** 60 to learn where you've accidentally stumbled on, incorporating the most recent terrain as a Detail. Add a route (if possible) to your intended destination.

Whichever Volume you've arrived in, **ASK** for any unknown core Details of it: there should be two each of **THEME** 62, **ASPECT + TERRAIN** 61, and **RESOURCE** 63.

You can play **In a Volume** 67 to get oriented within a new Volume.

ENCAMP

When the party rests up for a day rather than pushing on during a journey, no progress is made towards your destination (and you don't mark a journey step, success or failure), but you have a chance to heal, reorient, and gather resources.

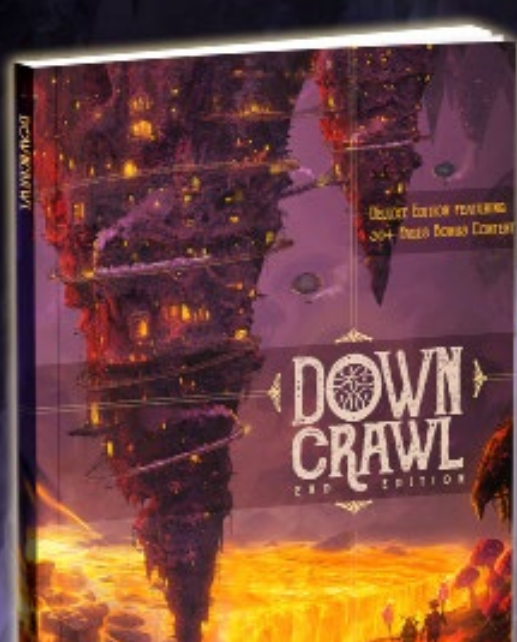
Each player can choose one activity from the list below. NPCs may take passive actions like *Heal* or *Recharge* but not make rolls. A Solo player may choose two activities.

- ☛ **Scout:** If you are not lost, make an roll for a skill or ability related to hunts, searching, or wisdom. On success, find 1 Tack; otherwise, describe something strange or beautiful you find nearby, or **ASK PROP** 93 for a discovery.
- ☛ **Cover Your Tracks:** Make an appropriate skill check: on success, **Remove a Danger** 6; otherwise, describe an ominous new portent of an existing Danger that you find nearby.
- ☛ **Forage:** find foodstuffs if you're tracking such things, or see **Fungal Foraging** 81.
- ☛ **Heal:** Restore half the damage you've taken. (If using Sliver of Fate, see **Catch Your Breath** 113.)
- ☛ **Recharge:** Say how you bond with one of your fellow travelers, and regain any special or "daily" abilities you've expended, such as magic spells.
- ☛ **Other:** Anything you could normally do on an off day in your system.

After your day of rest, return to **A Day on the Road** 11.

It's dangerous to stay at the same campsite too long. On the second or higher sequential day Encamped, **Add a Danger** 6 at the start of the day, and trigger a **Travel Encounter** 44 after resolving Encamp actions.

THE JOURNEY IS OVER, BUT YOUR ADVENTURE'S JUST BEGUN



FIND OUT MORE ABOUT DOWNCRAWL 2E HERE:

<https://tinyurl.com/downcrawl2e>

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THERE'S MORE IN THE FULL DOWNCRAWL RULEBOOK!

Your explorations in the Deep, Deep Down will continue in the all-new *Downcrawl 2E* rulebook, now 140 pages of delicious subterranean exploratory goodness.

Here's a quick guide to the rest of the book:

- ✦ **How To Crawl** provides an introduction to core ideas and mechanics in *Downcrawl*.
- ✦ **Session Zero** offers a script for your group to walk through to design your Down and characters together, setting yourselves up for an epic campaign.
- ✦ **Map & Volume** describes the structure of Volumes, key destinations within the Down, and how to map them.
- ✦ **Travel Encounters** offer a system for generating unique story-based encounters during journeys.
- ✦ **Meeting Folk** has info on how to generate the unique peoples of your Down.
- ✦ **Building Volumes** discusses creating memorable places.
- ✦ **Exploring Volumes** has moves to help you explore Volumes, discover news and rumors, recover, and learn more about the world.
- ✦ **Ventures** are a tool for managing long-term plans and challenges.
- ✦ **Drugs & Fungus** describes an optional system for foraging strange mushrooms granting unusual abilities.
- ✦ **Impromptu Play** has special moves and tips for groups playing without a GM, inventing their own spontaneous adventures together.
- ✦ **Solo Play** has moves and tips for solo explorers.
- ✦ **Sliver of Fate** is a basic core system you can use to run *Downcrawl* adventures with.

Find out how to get your own copy here:

<https://tinyurl.com/downcrawl2e>