

# The Nose Knows

Explorers of deep underground tunnels, castle dungeons, and sealed chambers in ancient tombs all have one common experience: the strange and overpowering smell of these places. Describing smells to your characters can add depth to their experience, create a sense of horror and dread, and give important clues about recent events or foreshadow the next encounter they're about to have.

## Places

Places smell. Places deep inside a dungeon or cave system, with little air circulation, can really smell. Think about each of the rooms in your castle or dungeon. Is one newly excavated and smelling of fresh earth, or is another an old cave that has the chalky odor of wet limestone? Is the furniture made of rotting oak? Is the bedding full of mold and dead vermin? If there were a fountain of blood in the center, or a river of flowing lava, what would that smell like? If the chamber was sealed up tight centuries ago, what exactly decayed and filled the air with its remains?

The air in a tomb may be saturated with thousands of years of rot and decay, enough to burn the party's throats and make their eyes water. The dungeon of a castle beside the sea may be fraught with a disturbing mix of odors from filthy, dying prisoners, salt brine, and rotting fish. The sickly sweet smell of the ant-demon queen and a strange, sedating scent similar to formaldehyde may be inescapable in the lower chambers of her nest. Adventurers wandering a deserted cavern deep below the ground may trigger the release of a trapped pocket of deadly sulfuric gases. The tangy metallic taste and smell of a giant's foundry may reach the heroes long before they find it. And when the adventure is over, the familiar, though not pleasant, waft of the tannery in their home neighborhood may welcome them back to town.

## Creatures

Creatures smell. Even the wealthiest folk in most civilized societies do little to slough their natural odor, though they may mask it with perfumes. Creatures living in the deepest caverns or the chambers of a neglected dungeon most assuredly emanate an eye-watering funk.

While you should be careful not to give all of your characters the equivalent of a bloodhound's ability to scent odors, you can use smells to warn them about creatures up ahead and build suspense. They might get a whiff of the bugbear barracks on the

other side of the door, or the acrid tang of a huge plant growing out of control in the cave below. If they are hiding from patrolling sentries, they may smell the guard's musky sweat as he paces by, even if they cannot see them.

Creature smells can also add drama to encounters. Should not a paralyzed hero wither beneath the malodorously heavy and sour breath of the demon about to seal his fate with a kiss? Does the pungent intestinal reek of decades of guano burn the adventurers' throats and make their stomachs quiver as they fight a gargantuan bat in its lair? Will they experience the sharp, intensely interesting aroma of a succubus as she drains their levels, or the smell of decay and failed digestion in the last breath of the dying old man that gives them their next clue? Should not the party, and everyone they pass, notice the smell of the remains of the dead party member they are bringing back to the city to be interred?

## Things

Lots of things smell. Describing the distinctive smells of ordinary objects encountered by the party can help them imagine themselves in their setting. Do they smell the caustic, suffocating fumes from a large iron forge, or the aroma of eastern spices used to prepare a rakshasa's most recent meal? Can they detect the tangy essence of sparks flying from the picks of goblin miners? Will a hint of burning oil lamps and fatty candles lead them to the main temple area? Can they follow fermentation smells to a dwarvish brewery? Are the kobolds up ahead aromatically spit roasting a monitor lizard? What does a healing potion smell like, or fresh ink on a scroll?

## Magic

Some types of magic smell. As a required part of spell casting, one regularly crushes a wide variety of material components, burns them, or releases them into the air.

While few spells create smells as a primary effect, many might conjure up odors as a side effect. Does the air fill with smoke and ash and burnt flesh after a *fireball* kills creatures and destroys everything flammable? Does a *lightning bolt* tinge the air with ozone? Will a summoned fiendish tiger reek of noxious fumes from the abyss? Would the fragrance of pine forest and wildflowers leak from a shimmering portal to an arboreal plane of unadulterated nature? Does a sophisticated illusion include smells? Do spells, in general, fill the air with the smell of their material components?



## Adventurers

Sometimes adventurers smell. If your typical adventure involves days of traveling in the wilderness or sleeping in deep caverns without chance to bathe or remove armor, the smell of your party may be as strong as that of any creatures they encounter. Think about every environment they have passed through, everything they are carrying, their mounts and animal companions, and the curses and diseases that afflict them. Ask your players to think about what their characters do and what they might smell like. Add a "smells like:" line to their character sheets.

Does your barbarian remove his boots and rub his feet whenever the party stops for a rest? Does he have a strong odor after he fights? Is a diseased character spreading their foul breath and the reek of their festering sores? Do your wizard carry bull dung, bat guano, and rotting meat as material components for spells? Has mold set in on wet undergarments that have passed through many swamps, but have not seen the light of day for weeks? Does your warrior grease his chain mail with animal fat to keep it from rusting? Does your dwarf have intestinal distress from eating human food? Does your thief wear too much cologne? What does an adventurer smell like if she is returned from the dead?

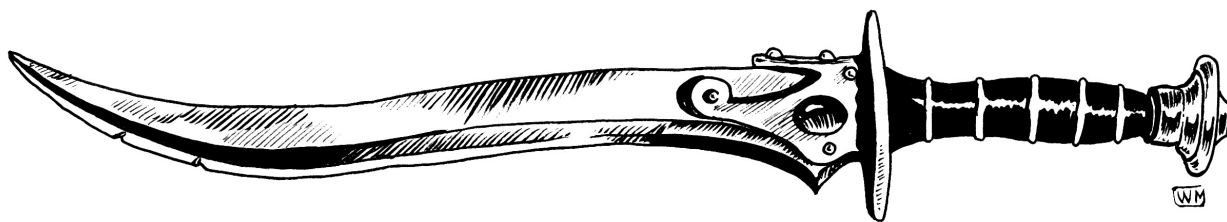
## Smells as a Storyline

It is possible to make smells knit together the stories in your campaign. Does a peculiar scent always precede the appearance of a recurring villain? Can a specific odor trigger lost memories of one of the heroes or send the party into a flashback encounter? Are the adventurers hired to rid a town of the rotten smell hanging over it? Could you use the aroma of fresh baked bread to lure them to the inn where their patron waits? What would the world be like for a hero that used a spell or potion to acquire the ability to track a fleeing enemy by scent? Does temporary blindness or complete darkness force your party to rely more on their noses? Consider using smells as the clues that get your characters from encounter to encounter in your campaign.

## Evoking Smells

Smells can be difficult to describe to the party. The words we use to describe smells are not terribly precise, and comparing a smell to another smell can be difficult. Do you warn adventurers that there is a ghoul ahead by telling them they smell putrid flesh, or do they detect a heavy stench, like an animal carcass left in the open sun for days? Does a salamander smell like fire, or do the adventurers feel a gust of warm, sulfurous air? The list of words in the sidebar may help you come up with your descriptions.

Many judges make a habit of giving the party drawings or physical props to represent some of the items they come across. They may also imitate the sounds the adventurers hear. Why not add one more level of sensorial depth and simulate the smells encountered during the adventure? Use scented candles or air fresheners to set the mood for a temple encounter. Dig out an old chemistry set and burn a little sulfur. Duct tape an old fish to the bottom of the table. Get creative, but be sure you are in a well-ventilated room so you can get rid of the smell when your characters move on.



# Describing Smells

Here are some words that might help you describe the smells in your dungeons.

Acrid	Heady	Revolting
Aged	Hearty	Rich
Alcoholic	Heavy	Roasted
Ammonia	Herbal	Rotting
Aromatic	Horrific	Salty
Ashy	Intense	Scalded
Bitter	Intestinal	Scent
Baked	Intolerable	Sharp
Bouquet	Ionic	Sinister
Burning	Irritating	Sickly
Caustic	Jasmined	Sooty
Chalky	Lemony	Sour
Charred	Lingering	Spicy
Cheesy	Lovely	Stagnant
Corrosive	Malodorous	Stench
Crisp	Mellow	Stifling
Damp	Metallic	Stink
Decomposing	Meaty	Subtle
Disgusting	Minty	Sulfurous
Dusty	Moldy	Sweet
Earthy	Mottled	Tang
Evil	Musky	Tangy
Exotic	Nauseating	Thick
Fermenting	Necrotic	Tinge
Festering	Noxious	Unsettling
Fetid	Odor	Uplifting
Fishy	Offal	Visceral
Floral	Overpowering	Viscous
Foul	Overripe	Waft
Fragrant	Ozone	Warm
Fresh	Pine	Waste
Fumes	Pungent	Whiff
Funk	Putrid	Woody
Garbage	Rapturous	
Gassy	Repulsive	





## Noxious Substances

So the adventurers think they've seen disgusting, eh? Our revolting poisons and concoctions, harvested from the most dangerous monsters and locations, are sure to widen eyes and turn stomachs.

What would our favorite fantasy RPG games be like if we could utilize the modern-day wonder of scratch 'n sniff? Hmmm...

\* Judge passes out a sheet of stiff paper to the players.\*

Judge: "As you approach the dank cavern, an unpleasant odor greets you. Scratch block #3, please."

\*Players scratching.\*

\*Players sniffing.\*

Player 1: "Ewww! It smells like troll ass."

Judge: "Right you are! Roll for initiative."

## Inverted Goblin

To create this foul item one must stuff a goblin's stomach with its own fleshy remains and innards, then hangs the stuffed pouch to bloat and fester in the sun for several weeks until decomposition gases cause it to swell to the size of a humanoid head. When bashed over an opponent, the stomach ruptures spilling the inverted goblin all over the target, nauseating it and possibly infecting it with parasites and disease. Some swing inverted goblins on a rope, while others hurl them as a splash weapon with a 10-foot range, or use them in traps.

## Dagon's Dark Humor

As certain abhorrent monstrous fish age and their hormonal compositions shift, the organ that passes for their body wide lung, responsible for exuding the runny mucus that coats them, may undergo a weakness, causing blood, spittle, and pus to leak out through said mucus. Those piscine horrors afflicted by this degradation develop an enlarged membrane in one of their many ventral orifices, and collected within this membrane is a toxic distillate of all the rank fluids and semisolids that have passed through. This foul substance also acts a potent contact poison, inducing temporary paralysis (Fort save DC 27, Duration 1d7+3 rounds).

Additionally, paralyzed victims gain temporary empathic and telepathic abilities; specifically, for the duration of the paralysis, victims will share only in those emotions and thoughts others direct at them. As a result, victims afflicted by Dagon's dark humor will hear their approaching enemies decide to eat them; feel their foes drooling anticipation for hero flesh; share the relished memories of tearing adventurer meat from a living leg with thousands of weensy serrated teeth.

Typically, a poisoner or torturer harvests the dark humor by digging a pointy, long handled spoon into the side of an aged monstrous fish's inflamed ventral orifice, post mortem, puncturing the sac membrane within and scooping out the cavity contents. On a living creature, more bold collectors will insert a spoon and with a practiced jab and flick manage to puncture the sacs and scoop out the humor in one smooth motion.

## Ground Onyx Coral

Native pearl divers have long used onyx coral as a toxic weapon against those who come to rob the reefs of their treasures. After carefully harvesting the toxic coral, it is left to dry for several days before it is ground into powder and forced into an eggshell, becoming a grenade weapon with a 10-foot-radius burst. The dried powder is harmless to the touch, but inhaled it lodges into the lungs causing them to rot (DC 15 Fort save; 1d6 Stamina on a successful save; damage is permanent on a failed save). If the individual dies from exposure, their lungs collapse and spew out another cloud of toxin.

## Devil's Ink

Distilled from the ink of a rare and highly poisonous stinging cuttlefish, when devil's ink dries, it forms a mind-numbing contact poison (DC 16 Fort save, causing unconsciousness for 1d6 x 10 hours and 1d3 points of permanent Personality loss on a failed save) oft used to sabotage letters, suicide notes, paintings, and scrolls. Unlike many contact poisons, it is inert when in liquid form and can be safely handled and applied. It becomes toxic when dry, about 10 minutes after coming in contact with air.

## Ghoul-Grub Mash

Ghoul-grub mash is a pasty substance made, primarily, from the ground grubs that burrow in the skin of ghouls and other undead prone to skin conditions. The paste, once ingested (no save), weakens its victim's ability to resist diseases for 3d12 days.