

Atlas Games Presents a *Backdrops*™ Preview:

THE BATHS

A NEW D20 SYSTEM™ LOCATION BY WILL HINDMARCH

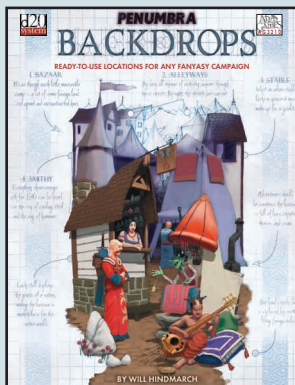
Backdrops is a collection of ready-to-use locations for your D20 System fantasy campaign. Each location is detailed in a two-page spread: this includes a scale map suitable for photocopying to use in miniatures play, and a page of background text and rules information to enrich your adventures, wherever they take place. Every set can be used immediately out of the book for staged scenes such as duels, escapes, trysts, secret meetings, and more. *Backdrops* is like paying a set designer to build a few stock sets on your campaign's back lot.

GMs who look closely will notice a few connections between the fourteen sets included in *Backdrops*, too; take the wharf and the ship, or the alleyway and the merchants' district, for instance. Cultivate these intertwinings to simulate a living world, or ignore them altogether. Link the sets to detail a single city, or scatter them across your campaign world. Use them as a foundation for more exotic travails for your PCs; put lava under the bridge, if you want, or place the bath house underwater. It's your game, after all. *Backdrops* just gives you more time to play it.

BACKDROPS

If you like what you see, be sure to ask for *Backdrops* at your friendly local game store. Besides giving you all the details of the baths, this 32-page sourcebook features thirteen more ready-to-use locations:

- The **bazaar** is a riotous maze of patterned tents, wooden stalls, and foreign wagons, each displaying the goods of a nation.
- Some describe an **athenaeum's** narrow, unlit corridors as catacombs for books ... but few realize that death may truly be as close as the brittle pages of an ancient tome.
- Many wealthy burghers have made their fortunes with the cargo carried in the fat bellies of great sea-going **ships**.
- A mess of fisherman's piers, the **wharf** is also home to an old seadog who consults his catalog of maps "from places past and years afar."
- An urban **stable** breeds a noble horse in which the wisdom of ancient tribal kings is scattered as a blessed reincarnation.
- In the secret **smithy**, three burning golden dwarves arrive from within the forge to craft wondrous items.
- Meant as a military defense, a brick **toll bridge** is a trap for soldiers, spies, and criminals.
- Magical candles light the way to Pilgrims' Houses, **temples** welcoming the travelers of many different gods.
- Small, fortified **caravanserais** offer protection and company to travelers and traders ... though bandits know that the most valuable thing in any caravanserai is the caravan visiting it.



- The **tavern** caters to locals and strangers alike. Anyone with good coin can feast on a hearty fare and perhaps enjoy the talents of a bard.

- Narrow **alleyways** wind like veins through the city ... and those who live there know that only three sorts of souls walk streets at night: lantern-bearing guards, cutthroats, and the undead.

- In the **merchants' district**, cobbled streets are clogged with horses, carts, hanging signs, and bustling customers patronizing the shops of hard-working craftsmen and artisans.

- The city **dungeon** houses burglars, cut-purses, housebreakers, and felons; those souls who cannot pay their fine in coin will pay it with time.

ORDERING INFORMATION

If you're interested in buying a copy of *Backdrops*, these are the "vital statistics" your store may need. (Usually a game store needs the stock number, while a bookstore needs the ISBN.)

Stock Number: AG3210

ISBN: 1-58978-009-4

Suggested Retail Price: \$8.95 (US)

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Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast.



CHAPTER THREE

BATHS

The bath house is a place to mingle, soak, swim, and socialize with nobility and aristocracy. It is a peaceful but busy place where fashion is escaped in favor of white towels and bare skin. Without posturing and costumes, jewelry or grandiose language, it is a common ground where the elite can speak simply and be comfortable.

But the bath house is also a place of whispers, threats, lies, and scheming. Beneath its tranquility it is a tense scene, where enemies face each other without swords or shields. It is a neutral ground where only wit, willpower, instinct and intrigue

matter. It's a good place to negotiate, intimidate, or be assassinated.

Although the baths were built to be a public space, they are maintained by grants from the merchant princes and nobility who frequent them. Tile mosaics and clay pots depict noteworthy, wealthy benefactors. The walls of some private bath chambers are painted with frescoes mimicking window views. Some portray landscapes, scenery, or cityscapes, while others show the palaces of the wealthiest guests. Complex, colorful patterns decorate arched doorways and round pillars, all shadowed by the complicated architecture and brass lamps that light the place. The most private chambers are adorned with scandalous, carnal sculptures; the stuff of gossip.

IN HOT WATER

The following tactics can be used in the bath house setting:

Charisma is important in the baths. Beauty will get you in the door, but guile gets things done. Skill checks like Bluff, Diplomacy, Sense Motive, Intimidate, and Gather Information should be at the core of scenes played in the baths. The shadows and steam create an atmosphere of tension that can be supported with secret die rolls. Social skill checks can require hours of careful observation or conversation on the part of characters before a die is rolled. Keep all the die rolls and DCs a secret, and reveal the results of skill checks through dialogue or narration. Don't forget body language. Charisma isn't just in the voice, it also wears the towel. Grant circumstance bonuses from +2 to +6 for great performances, using the reactions of the other players as a guide.

Assassination is more common than combat here. Armor Classes are likely to be low. The slippery, irregular tile floors require Balance checks (DC 16) for anything but simple movement. Move Silently checks suffer a -8 penalty from the slick floors, quiet atmosphere, and loud echoes, but architectural nooks and deep shadows make Hide checks easy. Sneak attacks could be staged with masterful Bluff or Disguise checks, or the cover of a crowd. Invitations gain entry to private rooms, as do successful Forgery checks. Pools and tile floors make it easy to deny a Dexterity bonus to AC.

The baths themselves can be influential forces in a confrontation. Bribes can cause the caldarium to be overheated. Persons drowning in scalding water must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) or cry out in pain, forfeiting their held breath. Swallowing such water deals 1d4 subdual damage.

NEW POISON: SEVERUS' OIL

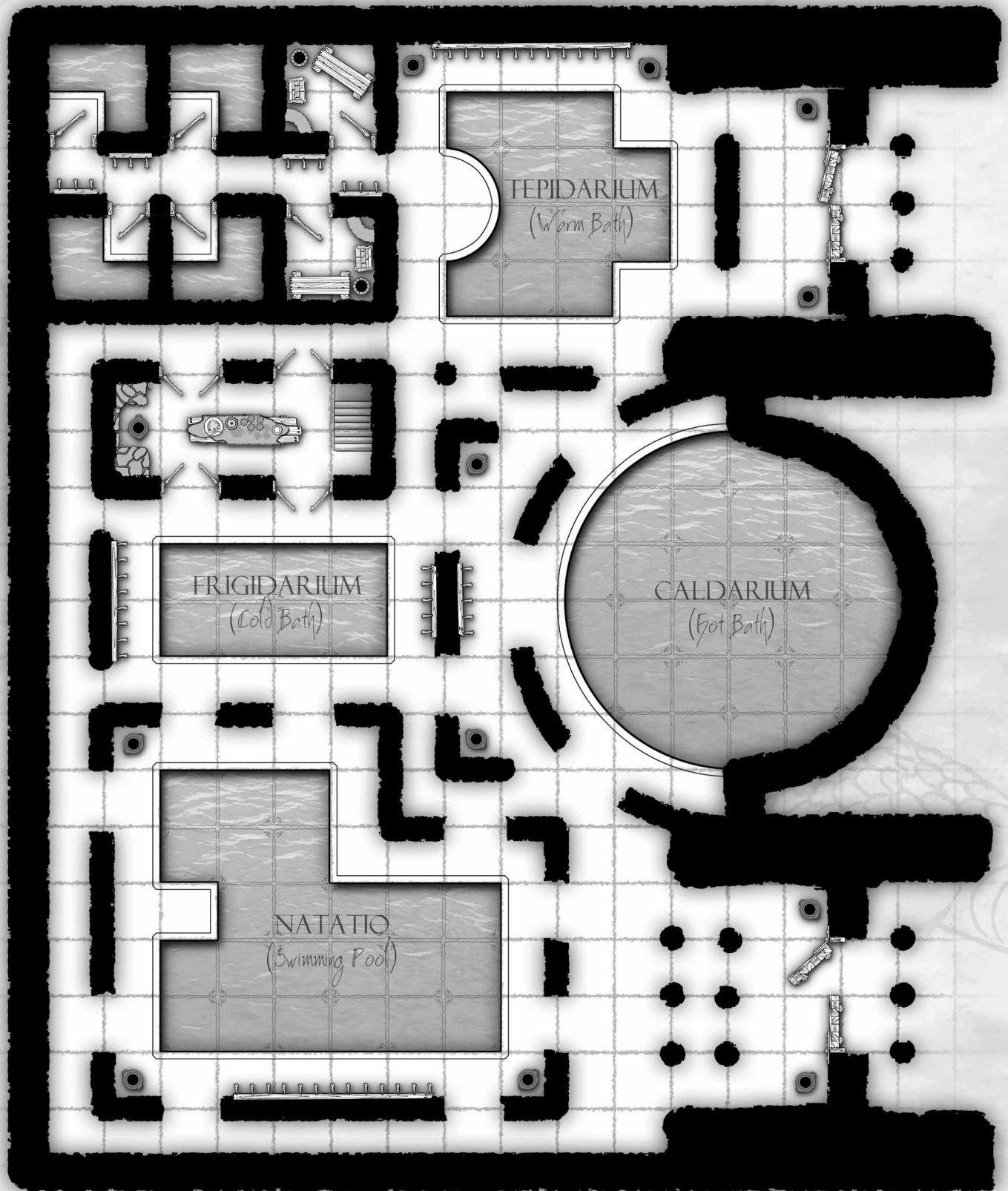
Pools or baths could be used to deliver a contact poison. Severus' Oil is an alchemical contact poison, used to weaken enemies for negotiations or interrogations. It is brewed from a select array of mind-affecting plants and distilled. The slightest touch numbs the senses and renders a subject complacent. The sensation would be terrifying, if victims could summon the will to care.

Delivery: Contact, DC 18; *Initial Damage:* 1d6 Wis + 1d6 Cha; *Secondary Damage:* 2d6 Wis + 1d6 Cha;
Cost: 1,000 gp

FIG. 3: PUBLIC BATHS

PRIVATE POOLS AND SAUNAS

KITCHEN
(Stairs lead
to furnace.)



GALLERY

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET
FOR 1-INCH SQUARES, ENLARGE TO 300%

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