

SO WHAT EXACTLY DID WE FIND?

"You find 100 gp worth of barter goods" is pretty generic and boring. You might as well just say you find a token that reads "100 gold pieces" and be done with it. On the other hand, I've found that no matter how I describe the amazing and cool item the players find, if it's not a tech item, they just want to know the value. So consider this section (like everything else in this game) optional.

Loot, well described, is more than just a means of tracking a de facto "score". It tells you something about the world, can be clues to future adventures, can set the tone and feel of a setting or a region. It can also be a challenge -- if the party scores loot worth 1000 gold pieces, but it weighs 300 lbs... getting it to a merchant is an adventure in itself.

One method which can serve as a prod to the DMs imagination without being a detailed list of items is the following, a system for determining generic "types" of treasure items while leaving the specific details to the DM.

Step 1: What's it Worth?

A Treasure Unit, or TU, represents 1/10th the expected monetary loot for a given level. Thus, at first level, the expected value of monetary treasure is 720 gp, so a TU represents 72 GP. A piece of loot worth 3 TU is worth 3 * 72, or 216, gp. Treasure worth less than 1 TU should only be awarded as incidental or unexpected loot, if the players decide to search an area where you realize there should be something of value but hadn't really placed anything, or they mug a generic NPC.

You should decide how many TU you want to give out for a given encounter, and how many items it is divided amongst. For example, you may wish to give out one TU, divided into three items -- one worth 1/2 of a TU, and 2 worth 1/4 of a TU each.

Step 2: So What Is It?

Roll 1D20 and consult the following table to begin. Note that these categories are very broad and not entirely mutually exclusive -- they're designed to get you thinking, not give you an absolute answer. A wristband which plays music in accordance with the wearers emotions could fall under art, entertainment, consumer, or luxury, for example.

Roll	Result	Description	Size Mod	Unit Mod
1	Art	Objects whose prime purpose is aesthetic. This includes holographic images, sculpture, painting, musical recordings, pleasant scent emitters, and arrangements of colored rocks.	0	-3
2	Antique	The item is very old -- even by Earth Delta standards. It is a relic from prior to the 20th century. Roll again to get an idea of what it might be; if you roll Antique a second time, it is <i>extremely</i> old, first century AD or earlier.	+1	0
3	Clothing	Things people wear, with no special abilities or function. Cloaks with ever-changing geometric patterns, completely transparent but well insulated fabrics for Alaskan nudists, ten pairs of good ol' Levis, a naughty schoolgirl outfit, a starport worker's coveralls.	-1	-2
4	Consumer	Goods aimed at creating a previously unknown need and then meeting it. Small appliances, fusion cooking units, VR goggles, microincinerators, adaptive cutlery, or semi-AI sex toys.	+1	-2
5	Edible	Food! And it's still good! This can be a pack of shockadillo jerky (mmm.. sparky!), MREs (Mutated Radioactive Entrails), a six pack of "Budweiser", the fabled nectar of the Ancestors, twinkies (still fresh), or soylent cola.	-2	-4
6	Entertainment	Items designed to make the citizenry forget the drear dullness of daily life in a	0	0

		society with sapient robots, anti-grav sporting gear, orbital colonies, and semi-AI sex toys. Recordings of plays or movies, books, popular music, interactive games, and pi-sided dice.		
7	Industrial	Crates, barrels, and vats of processed materials used in industry, or heavy equipment or gear. Storage containers, sheets of rolled steel, hardware, and polydiamond hexatubing.	+3	+3
8	Information	Knowledge is power! This can be anything from a microchip containing the last copy of wikipedia (Entry on Pokemon: 4.1 petabytes. Entry on World War 2: "Hitler lost. (Citation Needed)"), to a collection of 20th century Boy Scout manuals, to a guide to the hand signs of a Cataclysm Cult.	-2	-1
9	Jewelry	Items of very high value and very small size, designed at least partially for aesthetic value. From traditional rubies and diamonds to octahedral pearls and origami gems formed of multiple folded layers of carbon structures.	-4	+2
10	Living	It's <i>alive!</i> This category includes modern (post-Cataclysm) pets and livestock and plants, riding beasts, captured prisoners or slaves, and cryogenic tubes containing revivable entities from the pre-Cataclysm era.	+1	-2
11	Luxury	Goods which serve no purpose other than to show off your disposable income, which can include high value, extremely refined and elite representatives of any other category here -- roll if you need more inspiration. Furs, weapons and armor which have been decorated with gems, frictionless sheets, toy soldiers equipped with fully aware AI, or perfect 1/10th scale models of complex vehicles.	-1	-1
12	Military	Arms and armor and anything related to same, from a crate of gun polish to a half-dozen Bloodger-made shortswords to a set of entrenching tools to a badly stained and barely legible manual for a vintage 1942 jeep.	0	+1
13	Medical	Anything related to the healing arts -- a first aid kit, a pack of broad-spectrum antibiotics, bandages, a surgical scalpel, spray-on living skin, or a spare kidney sealed in a stasis bag.	-1	+3
14	Organic	Formerly-living items, such as wood planks, bone powder, tanned leather, mulch, or pulped organs. May or may not be perishable.	+1	+2
15	Post-Collapse	Anything made after the collapse. Can be any of the above categories. May well include plot-useful items or clues.	+1	+1
16	Robotic	Robot parts, robot manuals, repair kits, clay statues of robots made by a tribe of slightly crazed bearoids, a robot hand that keeps crawling around disturbingly, or a holographic recording of a performance of R.U.R.	0	+1
17	Scientific	Anything relating to scientific experimentation, research, or education. Test tubes, beakers, doctor honeydews, machines that go 'ping', manuals or textbooks, experimental technology, dehydrated lab rats (just add water), and chemistry sets.	-1	+2
19	Survival	These items were designed to help people protect themselves from the elements, wild animals, and possibly each other. Self-drilling tent spikes, sleeping bags, GPS systems permanently locked on "Recalculating", dehydrated water (just add lab rats), maps, and insulated clothing.	+1	+2
19	Unprocessed	Raw materials -- raw lumber, ore, plastic resins, etc. Valuable because materials which have been extracted or purified but not yet turned into anything are pretty rare these days.	+3	+4
20	Vehicle	Anything relating to vehicles, which can include mounts. Fuel containers, mechanics kits, sound systems, spare seats, extra tires, or a coupon good for ten mega-credits off your next hyper-oil change at FutureLube. (Expired 250+1d20 years ago)	+2	-1

Step 3: So How Big Is It?

Is that "art" object a box of holographic miniatures for Battlemace 12th edition, or a life size statue of Abraham Ford Lincoln, inventor of the automobile? Roll on the following chart!

Roll (3d6)	Result	Unit Mod
<3	Diminutive (about finger size)	-6
3-5	Fine (about palm size)	-3
6-14	Tiny (about the size of a load of bread)	-1
15-16	Small (about the size of a large dog)	0
17-18	Medium (about the size of an unchanged human)	+4
19+	Large (bigger than a man)	+8

Step 4: Can It Be Subdivided?

An item of loot is worth the established number of Treasure Units... but do you need to take the whole thing? Add the Unit Mod determined by both the Category and Size columns to a 3d6 roll.

Roll (3d6)	Number Of Units	Size And Subdivision ⁴
<5	1	Cannot be subdivided.
6-9	2	Units are considered the same size
10-14	4	Units are considered the same size
15-16	8	Each unit is -1 size category
17-19	64	Each unit is -2 size categories
20+	128	Each unit is -3 size categories

The result is how many easily divisible units there are. Each unit is worth an equal percentage of the total value. The "Size and Subdivision" column show how big the units are. Thus, each unit of a Large item is Fine size, and worth 1/128th of what the item is worth.

Step 5: Anything Else Interesting?

This is a pretty optional step and is here mostly to give the DM's imagination a kick in the nuts, if needed... and any DM who says he's never needed to have his imagination kicked in the nuts is lying, even if he is a "she" and doesn't have any nuts.

None of the "Interesting Bits" listed here should change the value of the item; rather, use them as a factor in determining what the item might be. For example, suppose you roll "Pristine", and you're generating a 500 gp item in the Entertainment category. You might have it be a plastic crate containing a selection of 20th century paperback novels with titles like "Love's Passionate Promise", "The Passionate Promise of Love", and "Love Promises Passion". Normally, such books are worth far less, but they're usually faded, waterstained, or falling apart; the fact they're in perfect condition elevates the price to meet the predetermined value.

Either look at this table below until you feel inspired, or roll 1d6 for the column and 1d6 for the row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Pristine	Unusual Color	Inhuman	Flexible	Liquid	Alien
2	Corroded	Unusual Shape	Anachronistic	Fraudulent	Particles	Unusually Heavy
3	Disassembled	Unusual Size	Relevant to PC	Beautiful	Childish	Unusually Light
4	Incomplete	Disguised	Foreign	Dual-Function	Useful	Bifurcated Condition

⁴ Not a lost novel by Jane Austen.

5	Battle-Scarred	Concealable	Emits Sounds	Stuck	Salvageable	Historic
6	Modified	Translucent/Transparent	Unusual Odor	Gaseous	Unusual Texture	Ornate

So what does all this mean?

Alien: The item does not seem to have been made on Earth or for use by any easily identified species.

Anachronistic: The item is "out of time", such as a clockwork calculator or a chainmail made from carbon nanotubes.

Battle-Scarred: The item has been damaged in combat, and may show carbon scarring, sword wounds, or tooth marks.

Beautiful: Whatever the item is, it was designed to look extremely good.

Bifurcated Condition: The item's condition varies along a well-defined line. For example, a partially-buried turbo-shovel might be worn and rusty where it was exposed to the air, but in great condition where it was buried. It may not always be obvious what caused one part of the item to be different than the other.

Childish: The item is intended as a toy or otherwise primarily for children.

Concealable: The item is designed to be hidden. For larger items, this might mean some sort of camouflage system or just a convenient sheet.

Corroded: The item is badly pitted and partially decayed, showing significant exposure to the elements.

Disassembled: All of the parts are here, but they need to be put together. The item is stamped with the holy symbol of Eyekeeyah, God of Frustration And Hexagons.

Disguised: The item is not what it first appears to be, and examination is needed to discover its true nature.

Dual-Function: The item has two fairly different uses. (It may have more than 2; a Swiss Army Knife is a good example.)

Emits Sound: The item makes odd noises, whether it was intended to or not.

Flexible: The item can be spindled and folded without being mutilated.

Foreign: The item was manufactured for a culture different than the one in which it was found -- for example Japanese interactive holo-manga found in the ruins of Detroit.

Fraudulent: The item was designed to appear to be something, but is somehow deceptive as to quality or functionality -- for example, a laser gun that is in fact a movie prop.

Gaseous: The item is a gas or vapor of some kind, presumably in a tank or sealed bottle.

Historic: The item has value beyond its actual utility, and this value will be generally recognized by the properly educated. This could be a historical artifact of the pre-Cataclysm past, or something relevant to a nearby community, such as the armor of a local hero who vanished decades ago.

Incomplete: Some vital part is missing (and will most likely not be found). The item is stamped with the holy symbol of Eyekeeyah, God of Frustration And Hexagons.

Inhuman: The item was designed for use by non-humanoids. A computer system intended to be used by super-intelligent genetically engineered dolphins is one example. A toy bone for a dog to gnaw on is another.

Liquid: The item is a liquid of some kind, presumably in a tank or sealed bottle.

Modified: Whatever the item originally was, it has since been changed somewhat. This may be a "pimped out" item, or one which was heavily altered from its original function.

Ornate: The item is exceptionally overworked, with many fripperies and add-ons that have little to do with its function.

Particles: The item is in the form of fine particles or tiny components, such as sand grains or ball bearings or polyhedral dice.

Pristine: The item is in incredibly good condition, most likely in the original packaging. It's not possible to tell that any time has passed since its manufacture, and it was manufactured well.

Relevant to PC: The item is somehow relevant to a PC -- it might tie in to his family or history, or play off his current circumstances.

Salvageable: The item may be instantly converted to tech or natural salvage for use in manufacturing items. (See **Error! Reference source not found.**, page 244).

Stuck: The item is affixed to the ground or floor, or to another treasure item. Removing it is the PCs problem, but it should not be too hard.

Translucent/Opaque: The item can be seen through if it normally can't, or can't be if it normally can.

Unusual Color: The item is very oddly colored for what it is, such as a hot pink LAW rocket launcher.

Unusual Odor: For many items, any odor at all is unusual; for others, it emits the wrong kind of odor.

Unusual Shape: The item is very oddly shaped for what it is, such as a hexagonal coffee pot.

Unusual Size: The item is much larger or smaller than what it would normally be. (The rolled size doesn't change; think of something normally *not* that size.) This may indicate a toy or model item, or something scaled up for an unknown purpose.

Unusual Texture: The item feels very odd or weird - glass with a sandpaper like texture.

Unusually Heavy: The item weighs more than most items of its type.

Unusually Light: The item weighs less than most items of its type.

Useful: The item is useful to the PCs, either in the immediate short term or generally. This might mean rations if they're low on food, a well-preserved map of the region, a clue to a mystery, or something else. It still retains its normal loot value.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE SYSTEM IN ACTION

Our harried and overworked DM decides that he will give out two Treasure Units. He further decides that this will consist of one item worth 1 TU and 4 items worth 1/4 of a TU each. It's a fifth level game, so each TU is worth 1000 gp.

A roll of 1d20 gives a roll of 20, Vehicle. This gives a +2 size modifier and a -1 unit modifier. A roll of 9 on the size chart, +2 for Vehicle, gives an 11. It's typical "loot" size, a tiny item. This gives a total unit modifier of -2. A roll of 5, minus 2, equals 3 -- it's a single unit. A vehicle item worth 1000 gp in barter... the DM ponders for a moment, and decides it's a box of things that look like crystalline spark plugs with softly glowing cores, used in most gravitic engines, and valuable to anyone who needs to repair or maintain such engines.

The next item is worth 1/4 of a Treasure Unit. A roll of "9" says jewelery, with a -4 size mod and a +2 unit mod. The size roll is 7, minus four is 3, so it's about palm size. The total unit mod is now -1, and a roll of 4, minus 1, is 3, so this is also a single unit. It's worth 250 gp. The DM decides this is a glowing wristband that causes a hovering "Coke" logo to appear. The wristband is in perfect condition and made of a bright, shiny, metal.

The next item is also worth 1/4 of a treasure unit. A 15 gives "Post Collapse", and the DM rolls again, 10 -- organic! This gives a total of +2 to size and +3 to unit. The size roll is 9, plus two is 11, so a typical Tiny item, and the unit mod is now +2. A roll of 6 gives an 8, or 2 units, each worth 125 gp. The DM decides this is a pair of newborn maul rats (see the Mutant Manual), likely to be of value to an animal trainer, taxidermist, or demented chef. The DM also notes the amusing possibilities involved in trying to transport two such animals and keep them alive long enough to sell them.

CHALLENGING ITEMS

The combination of rolls and the DMs imagination might lead him to decide a particular item of loot isn't an easy sell. The baby maul rats above are a good example. Items that are extremely heavy or bulky, or which represent some other sort of difficulty, likewise fall into this category. Now, if you're a real old-school DM (and good on ya, mate, if you are), you just say "Fine! Make the little bastards work for every copper piece!" If you want to keep things more in the 4e spirit of "You killed the monster, you get the loot, cue the next encounter", you can just keep the challenge as wholly flavor text. There's no way for the PCs to lose the loot before they can sell it, and it's just some amusing fluff to throw in. Or, you can declare the loot 'challenging'. Challenging loot gets an increase in potential value, but also has risks of loss. The concept of including 'challenging loot' should be discussed and decided before the game. For each piece of challenging loot, decide if the challenge is Easy, Moderate, or Hard.

- Easy Challenging Loot is worth 5% more per challenge roll.
- Moderate Challenging Loot is worth 10% more per challenge roll.
- Hard Challenging Loot is worth 15% more per challenge roll.

So what's a challenge roll? This is where you decide circumstances warrant a die roll to determine if Something Bad happens to the loot. Generally, there should never be more than one challenge roll per encounter, and, in more games, one challenge roll per day of abstracted travel is enough, unless there are special circumstances.

A challenge roll can be an individual check or a group check, depending on circumstances. The skill required is up to the DM, but should be logical. For example, suppose the loot is a barrel of industrial oil. The "challenge" of this loot is that it is large and bulky (so a group Endurance check might be needed each day to keep dragging the thing with them) and that it's highly flammable (a Technology check might be needed to keep it from going 'boom' if exposed to damage). General gameplay can lead to other challenges arising. For example, if the players need to cross a river, the DM may decide to require a Nature or Dungeoneering check to be able to move the barrel.

Each time the DM calls for a check, the value of the loot increases, as noted above. This does not mean the loot magically becomes worth more. It's a purely metagame concept that balances reward and risk. No matter how many rolls you make, the total value gain should never exceed 100%.

So what happens if you fail a challenge roll?

- Failing one challenge roll reduces the potential value of the loot by 20%.
- Failing two challenge rolls reduces the potential value of the loot by 80%.

- Failing three challenge rolls means you've lost the loot. New loot of equal value does *not* magically appear. The lost loot still "counts" for determining the total treasure per level.

Unlike value increase, which is abstract, value decrease can be modeled more directly. The barrel cracked open and some of the oil spilled out. One of the maul rats died or has become sickly and weak.

Allow for creativity. A player might respond to a request for a challenge roll with an alternate skill. If this makes sense to you, allow this, but consider raising the difficulty. Likewise, consider player actions that are not pure skill checks. Players who take the time to consider the problem in terms of "I am in the world, staring at this barrel of oil, what can I do to make it easier to carry?", and who come up with a clever plan, should get a circumstance bonus (usually +2) to any roll where their plan will help. Just be wary of anyone trying to game the system by deliberately forcing challenge rolls when they know they have the skill bonus to succeed. If confronted with munchkins of this type, feel free to be as despicable and underhanded as you wish. At the very least, remember this: No challenge, no reward. If there's no real risk of failure, there's no increase in value. Period.

DETERMINING CHALLENGE

Since the random loot system leaves it up to the DM exactly what a given item is, some ~~winners~~ players might complain. As a rule, challenging loot should show up only once or twice per tier, but, if you want, just roll 1d10 for each Treasure Unit. A "1" indicates one of the items is challenging. Then roll a d6; on a 1-3, it's an easy challenge, on a 4-5, it's a moderate challenge, and on a 6, it's a hard challenge. Of course, since you do all this before the game and no player sees you roll, you can lie through your teeth, which is a skill every good DM ought to have, anyway.

OTHER THOUGHTS ON LOOT

Generally, it's rare for a player to think too much about what to do with an emerald ring or a sack of 50 gold pieces, each one a perfect disk stamped "1 GP". But if you tell players they've got a polychromatic beebbleflotzer and six quarts of Bugwhomp Juice, they're going to start thinking that their characters might be carrying around actual items and not just tokens indicating they've been on the Ruined Science Lab ride, the Giant Mushroom Forest ride, and the Pit Filled With Hungry Scorpants ride. This could get them to try to use these items in some way beyond hauling them back to down and converting them to ammunition and equipment upgrades.

If the players find some particularly creative and useful use for loot items before they can be turned into currency, and this destroys the item, consider awarding bonus XP equal to the value of completing a minor quest for that level.

When generating random loot items, you might consider if there's any obvious or inobvious uses to which an item can be put, or even write one or two of them up as item powers. Again, don't feel compelled to do this for every box of rivets the characters find, and do be prepared to improvise on the spot if they come up with a legitimate plan you hadn't thought of. ("Nothing happens", "That doesn't work", and "You're giving me a headache" are also valid responses. Creative uses of items can be a huge amount of fun and being able to do things that aren't on a predefined menu of choices is part of what sets tabletop games apart from MMORPGs and board games -- but if a game starts turning into a 1980s era Infocom text adventure, with the players ignoring their powers, tech items, and class abilities in every encounter in favor of trying to defeat the rockworm with a nutcracker, a box of tissues, and a tube of Sparkly Toothpaste, something's probably gone seriously wrong.)