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# Dungeon Master® FOR DUMMIES®

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**Richard Baker**

Authors of Dungeons & Dragons®  
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# ***Dungeon Master<sup>®</sup>*** FOR ***DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>***

**by Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker**

**Foreword by Jeff Grubb**



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# About the Authors

**Bill Slavicsek** began playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game with his friends during his formative teenage years in New York City. This was in 1977, the same year that *Star Wars* and *Sword of Shannara* debuted. This trilogy of epic fantasy combined with comic books and horror novels were to forever influence Bill's outlook on life and entertainment. In 1986, Bill's hobby became his career when he joined the staff of West End Games. There, as an editor and game designer, Bill worked on a number of board games and roleplaying games, including *Ghostbusters*, *Paranoia*, *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, and *Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars*. Later, Bill went on to use his vast knowledge of the *Star Wars* films and associated extensions to write two editions of *A Guide to the Star Wars Universe* for Lucasfilm, Ltd., and published by Del Rey Books.

In 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc., then publishers of the DUNGEON & DRAGONS game lines, as a game designer and editor. His design credits for the company include the *ALTERNITY Science Fiction Game* (which he co-designed with Richard Baker), the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, the *d20 Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, the *Star Wars Miniatures Game*, *Urban Arcana*, *Council of Wyrms*, and the *EBERRON Campaign Setting*.

Since 1997, Bill has been the Director of Roleplaying Games Research and Development for Wizards of the Coast, Inc., the company that now publishes all DUNGEONS & DRAGONS novels and game products. He oversaw the creation of the d20 Roleplaying Game System and the newest edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Bill leads a talented staff of game designers, developers, and editors who produce award-winning game products for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS and other d20 System game lines, including roleplaying game supplements and accessories, adventures and campaign books, and preprinted plastic miniatures. He lives with his wife Michele, two cats, and more comics, toys, and books than he knows what to do with — and that's okay by him.

**Richard Baker** is an award-winning game designer and a best-selling author. He's worked on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game lines since 1991. Rich traces his D&D experience back to 1979, when he began playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game as a 7th-grader. He spent a significant amount of his high school and college years playing D&D at every opportunity, and after serving as a surface warfare officer in the United States Navy, Rich decided to take a shot at working on the game he grew up playing — and so he joined the staff of TSR, Inc., and became a game designer.

Rich's list of D&D design credits numbers over 50 game products, including the Origins Award-winning *BIRTHRIGHT Campaign Setting*, the *ALTERNITY Science Fiction Roleplaying Game* (which he co-designed with Bill Slavicsek), and the newest edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He has also served as creative director for the *ALTERNITY* and *FORGOTTEN REALMS* game lines. As an author,



Rich has published eight fantasy and science fiction novels, including *City of Ravens*, *Forsaken House*, and the New York Times bestseller *Condemnation*.

Rich is currently employed as a senior game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and works every day on new products for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He married his college sweetheart, Kim, in 1991; they have two daughters, Alex and Hannah. When he isn't writing (a rare occurrence), Rich likes to hike in the Cascades, play wargames, and root for the Philadelphia Phillies — who just don't seem to be getting any better, darn it.

## Dedication

**Bill Slavicsek:** To DMs everywhere, past, current, and future. The world needs you, now more than ever. Dream it up, play it, and have fun!

**Richard Baker:** To Kim, Alex, and Hannah for putting up with a lot of work in evenings and on weekends for many months now. “Understanding” is an understatement.

## Authors' Acknowledgments

Many exceptional people have contributed to the D&D game. We'd like to say a word of thanks to the game designers and editors who helped us to get started in this business, including Jim Ward, Kim Mohan, Zeb Cook, Jeff Grubb, Steve Winter, Bruce Nesmith, Tim Brown, Troy Denning, Roger Moore, Ed Greenwood, Harold Johnson, Andrea Hayday, Jon Pickens, Skip Williams, Bill Connors, and especially Dave Sutherland. Dave passed away a few months before this book published, but millions of D&D fans know and love his monster illustrations and dungeon maps from the earliest days of the game, most of all the 1st Edition *Monster Manual*. We both worked with Dave on many D&D projects in our early days at TSR. We're going to miss him.

We owe a special thank you to the folks at Wizards of the Coast who worked so hard to breathe fresh life into the D&D game, including Peter Adkison, Ryan Dancey, Skaff Elias, Lisa Stevens, and many others.

We've had the pleasure of playing in many D&D games over the years, so it seems especially appropriate to thank the folks who have been our own Dungeon Masters over the years. Rich would like to thank Bud Stiles, Greg Wingo, Thomas Reid, John Rateliff, Ed Stark, Warren Wyman, and Dave Noonan. Bill wants to say hi to his Thursday Night Game Group, past and present, which has included such players as Michele Carter, Jeff Grubb, John Rateliff, Chris Perkins, Ed Stark, Thomas Reid, Larry Weiner, Stephen Schend, Dale Donovan, Cindy Rick, David Wise, Lester Smith, and others who played an adventure or two or stuck around for entire campaigns. Thanks!

**Bill Slavicsek:** The current edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game owes its existence to a lot of talented people. The work that Rich and I have done on this *For Dummies* book would not have been possible if not for the original effort of a formidable team of creatives and business people. Peter Adkison, for purchasing TSR, Inc., merging its products and staff with Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and providing the vision for what the new edition of the game would be. My creative team on the massive re-design project, which included Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, Kim Mohan, Julia Martin, John Rateliff, Ed Stark, Dawn Murin, Todd Lockwood, and Sam Wood. The business team, past and present, who help bring D&D products to market, which includes Ryan Dancey, Keith Strohm, Cindy Rice, Mary Kirchoff, Anthony Valterra, Chris Toepker, Liz Schuh, Mary Elizabeth Allen, Charles Ryan, Kevin Wilson, Linae Foster, and Scott Rouse.

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# Foreword

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**W**elcome to the next level.

Bill Slavicsek and Richard Baker put together the original *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* book with an eye toward making D&D, an intriguing and complex system, more accessible and friendly to both first-time players and long-term fans. Now they're back, ready to take on an even greater challenge.

The art of Dungeon Mastery.

Being a DM is a quantum leap up from merely playing the game. You aren't keeping track of a single character but rather coordinating a full-fledged world. You're not worrying just about what is behind the next door but about how the epic adventure will ultimately resolve. You have to be ready for anything that a group of creative, inventive, and downright devious players will throw at you over the course of a game session. You are host, team leader, narrator, head bad guy, playwright, supporting cast, ringleader, and ringmaster, all at the same time.

It is a very tall order, and Bill and Rich put it all together in one package for you.

I can personally vouch for Bill's DM credentials. For the past few years, a group of us creative types, present and former members of Wizards of the Coast, have gathered at his house every Thursday night for our weekly game. Bill has used us as a test-bed for new projects he has worked on, including the *Star Wars* RPG, *d20 Modern*, and most recently the newest D&D campaign setting, *EBERRON*. Yes, we get to play the first drafts (and take the initial lumps) of the new systems. It's a tough job, and Bill makes it a heckuva lot of fun.

Rich is no slouch in the DM department either, as an author and game designer with world-building credentials from way back, including most recently managing Wizard of the Coast's sprawling, chaotic, eternal campaign, the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*. Oh, and in one of his first projects, for a D&D-in-space campaign called *SPELLJAMMER*, he put battleship guns on an asteroid and took it out for a spin. So he thinks outside the box as well as any devious player.

*Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* gives you a box of tools. *Dungeon Master For Dummies* shows you what you can build with those tools. *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* gives you a rainbow of paints. *Dungeon Master For Dummies* shows you what you can portray with those paints. *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* opens the door to a new world. *Dungeon Master For Dummies* goes through that door, and shows you how to create your own worlds and delight and entertain your players. It is the next level of play.

Enjoy.

### **Jeff Grubb**

Co-founder of the DRAGONLANCE campaign setting and co-creator of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting, Jeff is the author of over a dozen novels, two dozen short stories, and more game products than is either polite or proper to mention. His most recent characters in Bill's Thursday Night Games have been Gomez the gnome artificer, Moondog Greenberg the kabalistic biker, and Whappamanga the Wookiee.



# Introduction

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**T**he DUNGEONS & DRAGONS roleplaying game has been exciting and expanding the imaginations of players around the world for more than 30 years. The key components to a good (or better yet, *great*) game of D&D include enthusiastic players, a fun adventure, and a good (or better yet, *great*) Dungeon Master. The Dungeon Master (also known as the DM) applies imagination, game rules, and creative flair to make every game session fun and memorable for the entire game group. Indeed, DMs firmly believe that the role they take on in the D&D game provides the most rewarding, creative, and fun experience available.

It's good to be the DM!

We've carefully crafted this book to make the role of Dungeon Master more accessible to D&D players. Not everyone has the temperament and mindset — or the desire — to be the DM for a gaming group. But if the idea of creating scenarios or even entire worlds of adventure for your friends appeals to you, you owe it to yourself to explore the role of the DM.

And, if you're already DMing for your gaming group, the hints and tips layered throughout this book will help you become a better DM . . . perhaps even a *great* DM. Goodness knows that the D&D game — and the world, really — needs more great DMs.

## About This Book

We wrote this book because the nice folks at Wiley Publishing, Inc., liked our previous one (*Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*) and they asked us to write another. But we also wrote it because we have a passion for the D&D game, and we want to share that love with as many people as possible. We wrote in our previous *For Dummies* book that the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game speaks to and feeds the human condition. As a game of the imagination, D&D builds on the myths and fantasies that shape our culture. In an age when so many activities involve isolated people, D&D is a social experience. Nothing else — no computer game, no board game, no movie — comes close to delivering the interactive and unlimited adventure of the D&D experience.

It's the Dungeon Master who makes much of that creative, social, and interactive experience possible. Simply put, you can't play the D&D roleplaying game without a Dungeon Master. The DM is essential, and a good DM is worth his or her weight in gold pieces!

Even if you've run a hundred games, this book provides the advice you need to expand your gaming techniques. Experienced Dungeon Masters will find hints, tips, and advice designed to elevate your game to new levels: From improving your game sessions to creating adventures and crafting campaigns, we cover it all. If you've never run a game as the DM, this book is a great place to start. We explain the ins and outs of Dungeon Mastering and offer plenty of advice on how to become the best DM you can be.

## *Why You Need This Book*

New Dungeon Masters need this book because it's written by D&D experts to serve as a comprehensive guide for DMing. Before this book, great Dungeon Masters had to be born with an innate knack for the role. Sure, books like the D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* provide some level of advice, but none of them have been written as training manuals, and none of them have been written in a straightforward, direct manner (the *For Dummies* style).

With this book, you'll discover facts about running the D&D game that many seasoned DMs have never realized. Do you know how to build balanced encounters to best challenge your party? Do you know the tricks to keeping a game session moving? Do you know how to wing it when your players try something really unexpected? How do you make a ruling when they try something that goes beyond the boundaries of the game? Thanks to our years of experience and our unprecedented access to the Wizards of the Coast's Research and Development department, we've filled this book with insider knowledge and examples that can't help but make you the best DM you can be.

Seasoned Dungeon Masters can always be made better, and we try to share our knowledge and experience in every chapter of this book. The D&D game is as unlimited as the imaginations of its players, and something fresh and new is always waiting to be discovered. We shine a light in all the myriad corners of the game to help you find details you never knew were there, or at least remind you of something you haven't used in a while. We want to make you a better DM because better DMs make for better games.

## *How to Use This Book*

You can use this book in many ways. You can read it cover to cover, in chapter order, and follow along with our loose narrative that explains the concepts of Dungeon Mastering from the basics to the most advanced applications of the role. Alternatively, you can glance at the Table of Contents and jump around to the chapters that most interest you. That works fine, too.

If you're new to the idea of being the Dungeon Master, we suggest starting with Part I. It helps explain the DM's role more fully and provides the foundation for the chapters and parts that follow. If you've run a few game sessions, explore the information in Part I to see whether you're fully utilizing the tricks and tools available to you. Then move on to Part II to take your DM style to the next level. If you're an old pro, jump to whatever section of the book strikes your interest. Even in chapters that seem below your level of experience, we bet you'll find something new and fresh to try at the gaming table. And we're sure that everyone will find something exciting and fun in the Part of Tens.

This book assumes you have at least some experience with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. If this isn't the case, we suggest you start with this book's companion volume, *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*. You might also want to buy the *D&D Basic Game* from Wizards of the Coast.

We wrote this book assuming that, as a somewhat experienced D&D player or DM, you have the core D&D game books — *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. We refer to these volumes often throughout these pages. This book isn't a replacement for any of your D&D game books; it's a companion piece designed to make the information in those volumes clearer and easier to understand, while adding new information specifically designed to make you a better Dungeon Master.



This book's Cheat Sheet contains cardstock cutouts that feature tools to help your D&D game run more smoothly and efficiently. The Character Cards can be used to keep track of player characters in the game. The Monster Cards, likewise, can be used to record monster statistics. Together, they make a great resource for setting the initiative order and tracking any changes by simply re-ordering the cards as combats unfold.

## D&D Terminology

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, like other intensive activities, has a lot of jargon that can sometimes make comprehension a bit tricky. We wrote this book using as much plain language as possible, but you're still going to need to know some of the terms that long-time players take for granted.

Here's a quick recap of a few common terms that we use over and over:

- ✓ **DUNGEONS & DRAGONS:** The original roleplaying game of medieval fantasy and adventure. In the game, players take on the role of imaginary characters defined by a series of statistics, cool powers, and magical abilities. The game is played around a table or other comfortable location where players can spread out books and papers and roll dice. D&D (the short form of the name) is a game of the imagination, part group storytelling

game and part wargame. There are no winners or losers in this game; the point is to build an exciting fantasy story through the actions of the characters and the challenges set forth by the Dungeon Master.

- ✓ **Dungeon Master:** One player is the Dungeon Master (the DM). Although other players control single characters, the DM controls all the monsters and enemies, narrates the action, referees the game, sets up the adventures, and develops the campaign. Every D&D game needs a DM.
- ✓ **Player character:** The character controlled by a player is called a player character (PC). A player character might be a powerful fighter, a sneaky rogue, a crafty sorcerer, or a charismatic cleric, for example.
- ✓ **Nonplayer character:** A character controlled by the Dungeon Master is called a nonplayer character (NPC). An NPC might be a friend, a hireling, a merchant, or a villain, for example, that the player characters interact with in some way.
- ✓ **Adventure:** The player's character is an adventurer in a fantastic world of magic and monsters. Other characters (controlled by other players) join the adventuring party to explore dungeons and battle amazing creatures such as dragons and trolls. Each quest (or mission, or story) is called an adventure. An adventure might last for a single session of play or stretch over the course of several game sessions.
- ✓ **Campaign:** The D&D game doesn't have to end with a single adventure. When the same characters continue from one adventure to another in an ongoing storyline, the overall story is called a campaign.
- ✓ **Dice:** The D&D game uses dice to resolve actions and determine other factors where the outcome isn't certain. The twenty-sided die is the most important, as all major actions in the game are resolved using it. The game also uses a four-sided die, a six-sided die, an eight-sided die, a ten-sided die, and a twelve-sided die. You often see abbreviations used for dice where *d* is followed by the number of sides for that particular die, such as d20, d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12. Sometimes you need to roll multiple dice of a specific shape, such as four six-sided dice, which is abbreviated as 4d6. Sometimes you need to roll multiple dice and add a modifier, such as two four-sided dice plus two, which is abbreviated as 2d4+2.
- ✓ **Player's Handbook:** The first of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume contains the basic rules of play and character creation. No D&D player should be caught without one.
- ✓ **Dungeon Master's Guide:** The second of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume contains the information the Dungeon Master needs to run the game, set up adventures, build campaigns, and award treasure and experience to the player characters.
- ✓ **Monster Manual:** The third of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume is packed with monsters to challenge even the toughest D&D heroes, and contains information that every player and DM needs to know.

## *How This Book Is Organized*

*Dungeon Master For Dummies* consists of five parts. The chapters within each part cover specific topics in detail. In each chapter, we start with the basics of the topic and build from there. Whenever a point needs further clarification, we reference the appropriate chapter so you can immediately find any additional information you need. Whenever it comes up, we also refer you to the appropriate place in one of the core D&D game books, or even in *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* if we think something in that volume will help.

### *Part I: Running a Great Game*

Dungeon Master, meet your game. Game, meet your Dungeon Master. The chapters in this part assume you're a new to moderately experienced DM and provide all kinds of tips and methods for running and improving your D&D game. This part also includes a sample dungeon you can use to practice what we preach.

### *Part II: Advanced Dungeon Mastering*

The chapters in this part are designed to take your Dungeon Mastering skills to the next level, with advanced discussion topics, techniques, and options. Even experienced DMs can find something new and exciting in this part.

### *Part III: Creating Adventures*

Ultimately, every DM wants to try his or her hand at creating an original adventure. In this part, we provide advice and guidance on how to craft memorable adventures, and we wrap up this part with another sample dungeon that shows the techniques in action.

### *Part IV: Building a Campaign*

This part explores methods for stringing individual adventures together to create an ongoing campaign. Discussing themes, villains, and plots, we get to the heart of what turns a series of adventures into a memorable and exciting campaign.

## Part V: The Part of Tens

No *For Dummies* book is complete without this section of top-ten lists. We take this concept to a new level by presenting not only classic lists of the best D&D adventures of all time, but by including encounters, maps, and traps that you can use in your own D&D games.

## Icons Used in This Book

To guide you along the way and to point out information you really need to know, this book uses the following icons:



This icon points to tips and tricks that simplify or speed up some aspect of DMing the D&D game.



Remember these important nuggets and you'll be a better DM.



If you see this icon, read and follow the accompanying directions. This information can prevent you from having a bad game session.



Whenever you see this icon, you know we're directing you to more detailed information in one of the D&D core rulebooks — the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, or *Monster Manual*.

## Where to Go from Here

We recommend starting with Part I, but feel free to turn to whatever chapters interest you. Just remember to have fun! Approach this book in the spirit of the D&D game, trust us and the wisdom we try to impart, and you'll be well on your way to becoming a DM or to improving the DMing skills you already possess.

# Part I

## Running a Great Game

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



"He's a much better Dungeon Master when he's  
not taking his Ritalin."





## *In this part . . .*

**T**his part of *Dungeon Master For Dummies* speaks to all D&D Dungeon Masters. Whether you're thinking about running a game of D&D, have recently joined the ranks of DM, or have a bit of DMing experience under your belt, the chapters in this part provide all kinds of tips and techniques for improving your D&D game. The final chapter in this part provides the first of two sample dungeons you can find in this book. After mastering the techniques in the earlier chapters, the sample dungeon makes a great practice tool to hone your DMing skills. (Plus, it's a fun adventure!)

# Chapter 1

## The Role of the Dungeon Master

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Discovering the role of the Dungeon Master
- ▶ Finding what you need to play D&D
- ▶ Exploring the many expressions of Dungeon Mastering
- ▶ Understanding the goals of Dungeon Mastering

**Y**ou know what DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is. It's the original roleplaying game, the game that inspired not only a host of other roleplaying games, but most computer roleplaying games as well. A *roleplaying game* allows players to take on the roles of characters in a story of their own creation. Part improvisation, part wargame, the D&D game provides a wholly unique and unequalled experience. For a game such as D&D to work, one of the players in a group must take on a fun, exciting, creative, and extremely rewarding role — the role of Dungeon Master.

Thanks to the presence of a Dungeon Master (DM), a D&D game can be more interactive than any computer game, more open-ended than any novel or movie. Using a fantastic world of medieval technology, magic, and monsters as a backdrop, the DM has the power of the game mechanics and the imagination of all the players to work with. Whatever anyone can imagine can come to life in the game, thanks to the robust set of rules that are the heart of the D&D game. The rules and imagination can take your game only so far, however. The heights your game can reach and the fun you can have with it depend on the creativity and involvement of the Dungeon Master.

Do you have a burning desire to create adventures or even entire D&D worlds? Do you enjoy being at the center of the action, helping your friends have a rollicking good time? Then maybe the role of Dungeon Master is right for you.

In this chapter, we look at the role of the Dungeon Master and see how a good DM makes for a good game of D&D.

## *What Is a DM?*

A Dungeon Master is one of the players in a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game group. The other players each create a single character and use that character to interact with the imaginary world depicted in the game, but the DM plays a pivotal role that goes beyond that of the other players. In short, the Dungeon Master runs the game. You can get along without a fighter or a rogue or a cleric character, at least for a game session or two, but you can't play a game of D&D without a DM.

Because the D&D game is as wide open as the imaginations of the players, the presence of a DM to act as a moderator, story designer, and narrator is essential. The players interact with each other and the imaginary environment through the actions of their characters, and the DM describes each scene, directs the action, and plays the roles of the monsters, villains, and all the other people (the butcher, the baker, and the innkeeper, for example) that the characters meet on every adventure.

As the DM, you aren't competing against the players. You set up interesting, exciting, even challenging situations, and then use the game rules to fairly and impartially allow events to play out. You don't know how things are going to turn out, and neither do the players. That's one of the elements that makes the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game so much fun. When you and the players get together to play out a compelling group story, everybody wins!

## *So You Want to Be the Dungeon Master?*

The Dungeon Master (or DM) plays a special role in the D&D game. The DM controls the pace of the story and referees the action as it unfolds. The power of creating worlds and controlling dragons resides in the hands of the DM. As DM, you are the master of the game. The rules, the setting, the action, and ultimately the fun all radiate from you. Sounds like something you just have to do? Well, being the DM involves having a great deal of power. We show you how to use that power wisely and with great responsibility so that you and the other players have a fun experience.

We also show you that the role of DM doesn't have to mean a lot of work and hardship. The fun, excitement, creativity, and decision making of running a game session are in your hands. We provide plenty of tips and shortcuts to help you along the way. Although Dungeon Mastering can sometimes be as easy as showing up to the game (just like the other players), more often than not the DM has to do a little bit of upfront preparation so that the game session unfolds smoothly. With our hints and techniques, it can look as though you spent hours working on your adventure. Granted, some DMs *do* spend hours on their craft, creating the adventure before the game session, and that's a big part of the fun for them. But for those of you like us, who don't

have a lot of free time to devote to our roles as DMs, we think you'll appreciate the time-saving suggestions we provide in this book.

So you want to be the Dungeon Master? From the moment we saw the original *Dungeon Master's Guide* to those many years ago, so did we. So come along. You're in good company!

## What Do You Need for Playing?

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game has few requirements but lots of options. In addition to players, a Dungeon Master, and an adventure, you need (to a greater or lesser extent) the following items to play the game:

- ✓ **The game itself:** D&D is a unique type of game, a roleplaying game, that's presented in three core books — *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. There's also a *Basic Game* that comes in a box for people new to the hobby.
- ✓ **Dice:** The D&D game uses a unique collection of dice, each with a different number of sides. Dice add a random element to the game, and in fact, turn D&D into a *game* (as opposed to merely an improvisational activity). A set of D&D dice includes the following:

<i>Number of Dice</i>	<i>Type of Dice</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
1	Four-sided dice	d4
4	Six-sided dice	d6
1	Eight-sided dice	d8
2	Ten-sided dice	d10
1	Twelve-sided dice	d12
1	Twenty-sided dice	d20

In addition to the basic set of dice, it pays to have extras of certain types of dice. For example, you might find it handy to have several extra d4s or d8s when rolling damage for spells such as *magic missile* or *searing light*. The players ought to have several sets of dice (one set per player is best), so that they don't have to waste time collecting the dice they need from all over the table.

- ✓ **Character sheets:** Every player needs a character sheet that details the character he or she is playing. You can photocopy a character sheet out of the *Player's Handbook* or purchase a pack of deluxe character sheets. Players should use a pencil to fill out their character sheets because the game stats change as the character gains experience and picks up loot. Some Web sites also provide PDF versions of the character sheet that you can download and print for personal use.

- ✓ **DM screen:** As DM, you need a DM screen. It provides useful charts and tables you need in the game and helps you hide your maps and notes and other accouterments so that the players can't peek at what's to come.
- ✓ **Miniatures and a battle grid:** The *Dungeon Master's Guide* provides a ready-to-use battle grid, a play surface where your miniatures can represent tactical situations (such as combat encounters). Other play surfaces are available wherever fine hobby games are sold. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Miniatures* booster packs contain a variety of cool monsters and hero figures that you can use to represent characters in tactical situations. Although miniatures and a battle grid aren't technically necessary, they do speed up play and help players better visualize the fantastic situations you put their characters in. (They're also pretty cool and fun to collect, and you can play a more competitive version of the game with them, if you're into that.)
- ✓ **Pencils and paper:** D&D players need a way to keep notes, track their progress through a dungeon, write down what kind of treasure they find, and otherwise record important game information. For this reason, it pays to have a lot of pencils (with good erasers), paper, and graph paper handy during a game session.

## *The Expressions of Dungeon Mastering*

In many ways, the Dungeon Master is the focus of a D&D game. When you decide to become a DM, you decide to take on a special role that sets you apart from casual and dedicated players alike. You moderate the game rules. You set the pace of the story and action. You determine the challenges that the player characters must face, and you give depth and reality to the game world you create.

It boils down to this fact: The Dungeon Master takes on a lot of functions in the game. To help you better understand this fact, we've divided the role into its many expressions. This division is kind of artificial, set up so we can discuss the role of the DM in a logical and clear manner. In reality, many of these expressions blend into each other or might not even come into play in a typical game session. Still, exploring the role of DM is easier when you look at it in this fashion. We discuss each of these expressions of DMing in the sections that follow, and we delve deeper into each expression in later chapters.

### *DM as rules moderator*

When the players gather around the table for a game of D&D, as the DM, you're in charge. This means that you make the call when the game rules aren't crystal clear or when the written rules can be interpreted in different ways. Like an umpire at a baseball game or a referee moderating a basketball

game, you have to use the rules as you understand them and apply them to the situations that present themselves.

The DM also makes the call when players attempt to do something that isn't exactly covered by the rules. Sure, the rules clearly spell out how to make attacks, cast spells, and use physical skills such as Climb or Jump. The fun of a roleplaying game such as D&D, however, is that players can — and often do — try to have their characters accomplish amazing things that sometimes go beyond the limits of the rules.

Just remember to be fair and consistent. If you treat every player in the same way and follow the logic of your past rulings, everything should work out fine. If you come up with a way to handle a specific type of action, apply that same ruling the next time that action or something similar occurs.



The best moderator DM has a solid understanding of the rules of the game. You can't interpret the rules if you don't know them. Make sure that the players know about any changes (or *house rules*) you're incorporating into the game. When a situation comes up that isn't covered by the rules, make a decision. Don't be afraid to ask the players for suggestions, but remember that your decision is final. The adventure must go on, so decide on a ruling and get back to the action of play as quickly as possible.

The DM has the ultimate authority over the game, even over something that is clearly covered in a rulebook. Use this power wisely. If you decide to overturn a rule for the game, clearly explain to the players why you are doing it and then make a note of the change so that you can fairly and consistently apply the rule change in the future. The same goes for house rules and new rules you create to cover situations unique to your campaign. The players must trust you in this role, or the game will come crashing down around you. Nothing earns that trust better than when you make fair and consistent rulings on a regular basis.

So, the best moderator DM is fair and consistent and has a solid grasp on the rules.

## ***DM as narrator***

Your campaign exists in your imagination and the imaginations of the players. For everyone to get the most out of the game, it falls to the DM to serve as a narrator for the action.



This doesn't mean that you tell the players what their characters do. The decisions regarding player character actions should always rest in the hands of the players. Instead, you should serve as the portal into the imaginary world, the eyes and ears (and other senses) of the characters. If you do this well, the game really comes alive.

As the narrator, you describe what happens as the player characters interact with the world. You tell them what they see, what they hear, what they smell. (But never what they do!) In a roleplaying game, the action scrolls across the imagination of the players, and anything you can do to paint a vivid and accurate picture of the scene makes the action more immediate and immersive.

You describe the monster that just leaped out of the clinging shadows. You describe the stench of evil that wafts out of the dark, gaping chasm. Don't just give the players the facts. Make sure to tell them what their characters see, hear, smell, and even what they feel and taste when appropriate. Make sure to describe everything from the player characters' point of view. Don't reveal anything they shouldn't have immediate access to, such as what's beyond the closed door or what's inside the locked chest. Be descriptive, using words that show the players what's around their characters — what they can see and otherwise sense about the immediate environment.



Don't give everything away in your description of a scene, though. Provide enough information to give the players a sense of where their characters are and what they can gather with a brief examination of the area. Hold back enough information to make the players curious and get them thinking about questions they should ask. You can even decide to leave some clues for the game to handle, for when the player characters make Spot, Listen, or Search checks in the area. By only describing the most obvious details, you get the players to draw their own conclusions and decide on their next course of action.

As narrator, you also get to be the special effects technician for the movie that plays out in the imaginations of the players. When it comes time to describe fantastic environments and otherworldly vistas, you get to create whatever special effects you can imagine and describe. When the action really takes off, you get to determine how the magic spell the wizard casts appears, how hot the fire playing along the edge of the fighter's flaming sword feels, and how terrible the monster charging toward the player characters looks and sounds.

A good narrator DM shows players the results of their characters' actions by using evocative, exciting, and vibrant words and descriptions.

## *DM as a cast of thousands*

Each player controls one character in the game. You, as the DM, control the entire supporting cast, called *nonplayer characters* (NPCs). Everyone from the bit characters to the prominent allies and adversaries that inhabit your campaign are yours to use as you see fit. These are the people (and creatures) that the player characters interact with, and they're all yours to breathe life into. Most of your NPC cast of thousands will require only a key descriptor or a single detail that helps you play a role, as well as a single skill or other key statistic that might come into play. Some NPCs can even be improvised on



the spot as the need arises. You need to create full-on game statistics for an NPC only if that character is an opponent or a major ally. Otherwise, just like in the movies, you need to put together only as much as you think you're going to use in the game.



Whether an NPC serves as a walk-on or has a minor or major role in the story, play each one as an individual. Roleplay! Nothing makes an NPC come alive like roleplaying a key feature to give him or her personality and pizzazz. For major NPCs, such as the dastardly villain or the regal king who hires the adventurers, roleplay to the hilt. Ham it up, act it out, and make each character memorable in the scene.

As a cast of thousands, a good DM needs to separate his or her role as DM from his or her role as the controller of the supporting characters. Your NPCs shouldn't know everything that you know about the story and the previous actions of the player characters. Also, your NPCs shouldn't become the heroes of the story, outshining the player characters and stealing the spotlight from them. Be fair (there's that phrase again) and play each NPC within the confines of the specific role you imagined for him or her. Sure, you want to sometimes get the drop on the player characters, but most of the time, if the players make smart choices or the dice fall in their favor, don't use your power to get the upper hand. If the player characters have set a perfect ambush for your goblin raiders, let the goblin raiders stumble into it.

Remember to apply the same standards you use as game moderator to your nonplayer characters as well as to the player characters. Provide good challenges so that a good story can develop, but don't view yourself as the players' opponent. And don't alter the rules to make your supporting NPCs more powerful or important. Let that develop naturally or leave it alone and keep the action moving.

The best DM as a cast of thousands uses a variety of voices, mannerisms, attitudes, and accents to make each NPC interesting and unique.

## Relax and have fun!

D&D is a game. We aren't going to come to your house and give you a test on all this stuff, and we certainly won't hold it against you if you make a mistake or two along the way. Learn the rules in stages, adding elements as you and the other players need them. For example, if you're starting a 1st-level adventure, don't worry about trying to learn all the ins and outs of higher-level spells that won't come into play.

Be entertaining and allow the players to entertain you. Ham it up, play it straight, go for the dramatic, or do whatever is appropriate for the scene and the adventure you've set up.

You and your fellow players are playing a game. Use the rules as you see fit, be fair and consistent, and have fun. That's the key to a good D&D experience.



## *DM as player*

The DM as player covers some of the same ground as the DM as a cast of thousands. However, whereas the DM as a cast of thousands really speaks to the roleplaying aspects of D&D, the DM as player speaks to the parts of D&D that are all game. The DM gets to play too, and much of a DM's enjoyment comes from rolling dice and seeing what happens — just like any of the other players.

So, when the monster needs to decide what to do during an encounter, or when the villainous lich lord ponders which of its many necromantic powers

to use, or when the hired scout weighs her options when deciding whether to help the adventurers or flee to a safer place, that's when the DM gets into character, decides on a course of action, and rolls some dice.



The DM must keep a solid separation between his or her functions as a player and the near-omniscient abilities he or she possesses as moderator, narrator, and creator. In most cases, the DM should try to have a preset plan for how monsters and other nonplayer characters will behave. This plan doesn't need to be elaborate; it just needs to provide a guideline or two on how to run the character or monster in an encounter. If you use a published adventure, those cues are built into the text. If you make up your own adventure, you need to set the cues.

Cues should be simple and straightforward. Monsters usually fight to the death, though some might attempt to flee or surrender when reduced to half or one-quarter hit points. Some monster cues might include tactics such as "attack the strongest fighter first" or "pile on the spellcasters as soon as you see them." Other cues might provide guidelines on how and when to use the monster's special abilities. Just jot down enough information so that you have an idea about how you want the encounter to play out. You can always make changes on the fly, in the heat of the battle. But always stay fair to the role of the monster, its purpose in the adventure, and what it should reasonably be able to figure out from its own perspective (not the near-omniscient perspective you have as DM).

When it comes to rolling dice, it pays to decide on the conventions you want to use when you put on your metaphorical DM's hat. Here are your options:

- ✓ **Make all rolls secretly:** Some DMs make all their rolls behind the DM screen. This gives them the option to change the results on occasion to make for a better game. (We call this *DM fiat* or *DM cheating*, and you should use it only sparingly. We discuss this important DM tool in more detail in Chapter 10.)
- ✓ **Make all rolls openly:** Some DMs make all their rolls in the open, allowing the dice to fall as they will, regardless of the circumstances. This can make for an exciting and sometimes deadly game session where PCs and NPCs alike are left to the whims of fate.
- ✓ **Make some rolls secretly, some openly:** Some DMs might roll openly or behind the screen, depending on who they're rolling for and what's currently going on (minor encounters rolled in the open, major encounters rolled in secret, or vice versa). For example, rolls whose results the characters can't observe, such as a villain's Spot or Sense Motive check, are best done secretly, behind your DM screen, to keep the players in suspense. Rolls with clear and immediate results in the game world, such as a monster's attack rolls, are best done openly, so the players can see the results of the rolls and can't contest when the dice don't fall in their favor.

The same mantra for all good DMing applies to being a good player DM. Be fair and be consistent. Don't favor your nonplayer characters over the player characters. Don't try to force the story in any particular direction. Set up the situations, play your NPCs and monsters, and let the adventure develop as it will. After all, surprises and unexpected results make for memorable and fun D&D moments.

## *DM as social director*

We've said it before, and we'll say it again. D&D is a social experience. As such, the role of social director more often than not falls to the Dungeon Master. The DM usually hosts the game group, invites the players, sets the schedule, and provides a portion of the entertainment by running the game. Now, all these functions can be spread out among the gaming group, but we discuss the role of social director as an expression of the DM for purposes of explanation.

First, you must form your gaming group. This can happen naturally among friends with a common interest, or you can go out and actively recruit players from a gaming club, in a gaming store, at school, or at work. Because you can't play D&D without a DM, it is the DM who usually goes about forming the gaming group.

Then, you have to set up the particulars of when and where your gaming group will meet. This isn't all that dissimilar to planning a party or other social get-together. You need a *when* that works for the majority of the group, a regular time when the group will get together for the express purpose of playing D&D. This could be every week (for example, every Thursday evening from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.); or every other week (the second and fourth Sunday of every month, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.); or once a month (the first Saturday of every month, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.); or whatever other consistent schedule works for you and the group. The *where* can be the DM's house, or you can rotate playing locations among the group, or you can meet in a conference room at work or school, or wherever everyone can get to and be comfortable while playing the game.

It isn't the DM's responsibility to provide a place to play the game, but many DMs do. If you can't provide a place to play, work it out with the rest of the group. Chances are good that someone in the group can accommodate the game and the schedule that everyone agrees to. You just need a place where the group can gather, spread out the books, character sheets, and battle grid (if you use one), and roll dice. It should be a comfortable location because a game session might last for four hours or more, depending on the needs and desires of the group. As a social experience, the group should work out how snacks and drinks will be provided. Will everyone bring their own? Will everyone bring something to share? Will one member be charged with catering

the event while everyone else chips in? Anything can work, and it usually falls to the DM to get the group talking and making plans in advance of game day.

As a social experience, it falls to the DM as social director to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to have a fun experience. That means allowing time at the beginning and end of the game session for general conversation. Don't rush to start the game. Let everyone catch up and ease into the mood at their own paces. When a suitable amount of time has passed, announce that the game is going to start and request that non-game-related conversations come to an end. But don't be an ogre about this. Someone will inevitably break character or make a pop culture reference sometime during the game, and that's okay.

Sometimes the good social director DM must also play mediator when the players themselves have a disagreement. Disagreements are inevitable. Just strive to keep everyone civil and respectful of each other, and do your best to help them reach an equitable solution. Sometimes this can be as simple as having them roll dice if the disagreement involves dispute over an in-game item, such as a piece of treasure or a newly discovered magic item. Sometimes more work needs to be done, and it's okay for you to ask them to table the argument for now and get back to it after the game session ends so that the rest of the group can get back to the game. (We discuss this and other potential game group problems in Chapter 9.)

A good way to keep in contact and make sure everyone knows when and where the next game session will be held is e-mail. Sending out reminders is a great way for the DM to stay on top of the social director role. And if you handle the e-mails with a little bit of flair and creativity, you can even treat them as an extension of your game world. Perhaps the reminder for the next game session is sent out by the villain the group has been tracking for the last couple of sessions, degrading them (in the villain's voice, of course) for being unable to catch him. That should get everyone to the gaming table on time!

The best DM as social directors makes sure that every player gets his or her time in the spotlight during the game.

## ***DM as creator***

You might be the type of Dungeon Master who only uses published adventures and campaign setting books. Or you might be the type of DM who looks to such purchased items for inspiration but tends to create adventures from scratch. Either way, you have a role as a creator when you're the DM.

Every decision, every rules call, every utterance by a monster or a villain, every descriptive flair you add to your narration of a scene — all of these

things and more reveal the creator inside you. The DM creates whole worlds one encounter at a time. That's a big part of the fun of being the DM: You get to lay the foundation for the story, the adventure, and the world that will unfold with every game session you play. Sure, the players add to the story and the world through the actions of their characters, but it all begins with the DM.

Even if you decide to use published adventures, you still get to express your creativity by making subtle changes to better fit what has happened earlier in your campaign or to react to something unexpected that the player characters do. We dive into this expression of Dungeon Mastering in more detail later in the book, especially in Parts III and IV.

The best DM as creator rewards the players who make the effort to immerse themselves in the game world by providing an experience that's every bit as engaging as a well-written book or great movie.

## *The Goal of Dungeon Mastering*

The earlier sections in this chapter cover, in broad strokes, the many hats worn by the Dungeon Master. But what's the goal of being the DM? Why do you do it? A number of goals exist, but it boils down to this: to have fun. The DM gets to have fun by running the game, crafting the adventures, and narrating the story of the player characters. When the DM and the players both have a fun and satisfying experience, the game of D&D really shines as a social experience.

Whether you like moderating the rules, narrating the story, or creating the adventure — or taking on any of the other expressions of DMing we discuss in this chapter — the reason to be the DM, the only reason, is because you enjoy it. When you have fun, the whole group has fun, and that's what games such as D&D are all about.

## Chapter 2

# Preparing for Play

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Building a game group
  - ▶ Deciding whether to use a published adventure or to create your own
  - ▶ Making preparations before a game session
  - ▶ Understanding game etiquette
- 

**B**efore swords are drawn and deadly spells are whispered in the dark, someone has to arrange a game session. Usually, that someone is the Dungeon Master. You'll need to find some players, pick a time and place to play, and figure out what sort of adventure you can throw at them. Without players, the adventure you create or pick out doesn't get played. Without an adventure, you've got nothing for the players to do.

## *Gathering a Game Group*

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game requires a group of people to play. The group can be as small as two (a Dungeon Master and a single player) or as large as eight or more. The best size depends on what you're comfortable running, but we've found that groups of five to seven people work out best (one DM and four to six players). You want a number of people that provides a good group of adventurers, but not so many that players have to wait a long time for their turns to come around again.

Here's an interesting fact: All of the current D&D products are written with the assumption that your game group contains four player characters. That's how the writers and game developers of D&D products balance the encounters and determine the level of difficulty of a challenge — what would be challenging for a party of four characters of a specific level? If your group has fewer than four player characters, you might want to tone down encounters that you find in published material. On the other hand, if your group has more than four player characters, you might want to increase the number of opponents or otherwise compensate to increase the challenge for the party.

(Part II of this book provides tips and advice on how to do this and other advanced DMing techniques.)



You want to recruit players from among those people who like to play games, have an interest in fantasy, and enjoy stories about action and adventure. People who love fantasy films such as *The Lord of the Rings* movies, enjoy reading books by authors such as Terry Brooks or George R. R. Martin, or engage in computer games such as *Neverwinter Nights* or *World of Warcraft* all possess at least the tendency to enjoy the D&D game.

## ***Finding players***

Some people are lucky enough to have a group of friends ready and willing to play the D&D game. Everyone else has to go out and find players to participate in an adventure. You can accomplish this in a number of ways; we discuss a few of the ways you can find players for your D&D game in the following subsections.

### ***Friends and relatives***

Existing friends and relatives (ideally, siblings and cousins) make good sources to draw D&D players from. Of course, you want to ask only the people you feel might have at least some interest in this kind of activity. It doesn't pay to try to turn someone who hates games or who despises fantasy into a D&D player. Such attempts often just result in a bad experience for everyone involved.



Some of the best groups we've ever run contained siblings, significant others, and parents and children. However, not all couples or relatives should play together, and you should be on the look out for behavior that can destroy your gaming group. Sometimes siblings or couples (or even close friends, for that matter) bring real-world problems to the gaming table. Or sometimes one half of a couple tries to tell the other half how to play his or her character. The game table is not the place to work out relationship issues or to rehash old arguments. If you see this kind of behavior, take the players aside and ask them to each play their own characters. If the behavior persists, you might have to ask one or both of the offending parties to leave the group. See Chapters 5 and 9 for help in this area.

### ***School***

Many high schools and colleges have game clubs of one kind or another. These extracurricular activities provide a good source of players and might



even provide you with access to existing D&D game groups. If you're of school age, check to see whether your school has an active game club — and if not, look into starting one!

### ***Work***

If school is behind you, your place of business might contain folks with an interest in D&D who might join your regular game group. Or, depending on your work environment and how strict management is, you might even be able to play D&D at your workplace during lunch or after work hours. You can use lunchtime or after-hours games to kick off a workplace campaign. If you're lucky enough to have a workplace with conference rooms and interested players, you have almost everything you need right there to get a gaming group started. (We use conference rooms at the Wizards of the Coast building to run D&D games at lunch and in the evenings for fun, and we often play as part of work at other times during the day!)

### ***Game store***

Your local game or hobby store might have space dedicated to in-store play where you can meet players from your area. If not, most such businesses provide a message board where players can post “gaming wanted” ads and make connections. Through your gaming store, you should be able to hook up with players who are interested in getting into a D&D game.

### ***Conventions***

Conventions devoted to D&D and other roleplaying games take place all over the world throughout the year. Huge conventions such as GenCon ([www.gencon.com](http://www.gencon.com)) and Origins ([www.originsgames.com](http://www.originsgames.com)), as well as smaller regional game conventions, provide weekends full of more gaming than you can imagine. The local cons are better for finding gamers to play with on a regular basis, but nothing beats the larger cons for nonstop D&D action at a scale that could leave you breathless. In addition, many genre conventions (such as the San Diego ComicCon, [www.comic-con.org](http://www.comic-con.org)) run gaming tracks where you can get in some D&D in between panels, special presentations, and wandering the exhibit halls.

### ***RPGA***

The ROLEPLAYING GAMERS ASSOCIATION (or RPGA) is devoted to making it easier to enjoy face-to-face DUNGEONS & DRAGONS experiences. Run by Wizards of the Coast's Organized Play department, the RPGA is a global gaming group that runs sanctioned roleplaying events all over the world. Joining the RPGA is easy, and your free membership lasts a lifetime. Because finding a gaming group can be challenging and because creating new adventures can be

time-consuming, the RPGA provides free DM material and makes an event calendar available to members so they can find games happening in their community. Check out the RPGA online at [www.wizards.com/rpga](http://www.wizards.com/rpga).

### *Wizards of the Coast Web site*

Another good source of helpful DM information (and D&D information in general, such as news about upcoming products) is the Wizards of the Coast Web site ([www.wizards.com/dnd](http://www.wizards.com/dnd)). A robust online community hangs out at the Web site, engaging in message board discussions and debates, participating in online conventions, and attending online seminars. Between the D&D pages and the RPGA pages, you can find gaming stores in your area, upcoming D&D events and conventions, and other information that can help you build your gaming group.

## *Inviting players to the game*

When you go about inviting potential players to play the game, you might not want to initially start out looking for an ongoing commitment. You want to make sure the people you invite to play enjoy the experience, and you want to make sure that each person is a good fit for the group. Start out slowly, with a single event. In some ways, think about this first session as you would any gathering with friends. There isn't a lot of difference between planning for an evening of D&D and planning for an evening of playing poker or watching DVDs.

In fact, when you establish it, your weekly (or monthly, or whatever) D&D game resembles a weekly poker game. You and your gaming buddies get together at regular intervals, either in the same place or at alternating locations. You play at a table with game pieces (in the case of the D&D game, dice and miniatures and books instead of cards and chips). And the table usually overflows with snacks and cool, refreshing beverages of one sort or another.

Before you invite the players to the first game session, decide on the following:



- ✓ **When should the players create characters?** Decide if you want the players to create characters before they arrive or at the table.

If you're playing with people who are totally unfamiliar with the game, you might want to use pregenerated characters for this initial game session. You can find ready-to-use player characters in *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.) and in the *D&D Basic Game*. After you and the group get a session or two of the game behind you, you can start over and let everyone create exactly the characters they want to play. After seeing the game in action, everyone will be able to make better informed decisions concerning class, race, and how to apply ability scores and skill points to best effect.

- ✓ **When and where are you playing?** For the first session, you need to pick a location to play and a time that's convenient for you and the players.
- ✓ **How long do you and the players feel comfortable playing the first time?** We find that two to four hours makes a good beginning session length.
- ✓ **Who's in charge of snacks and beverages?** Do you want to suggest that everyone bring snacks and drinks to share, or do you want to make it a bring-your-own-snacks kind of event? Either way is fine, just so long as you let everyone know what's expected of them.

Make sure that you ask the players to let you know whether they plan on attending the game. Inevitably, someone is going to get sick, become busy, or otherwise be unable to attend, so you want to have prior warning. If you invite six people into the game and only four can make it, you still have enough players for the game to go on. If the number falls too low, you want to have time enough to reschedule or to let those players who are attending know that you might have to change your plans for the evening. (Some rousing battles using the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Miniatures Game*, or a favorite board game, can fill the space when you don't have enough players for the adventure.)

## Using a Published Adventure

As the Dungeon Master, you have to determine what adventure you want to run for your game session. If this is going to be your first adventure (for you or your group or the players' newest characters), we recommend starting with something official. The *D&D Basic Game*, *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*, and this book (see Chapters 7 and 20) all have ready-to-use adventures designed for 1st-level characters. If you're looking for an adventure for an established group of higher-level characters, you can turn to a number of sources.

### Online gaming

If you can't establish your own group of local players or if you can't find a local gaming group to join, you can always look for RPGA events and conventions in your area. Of course, most people want to play D&D more often than that. Another method is to hook up with people online (through the D&D message boards, for example) and play a game over the Internet. We've

seen D&D games take place in chat rooms, as play-by-e-mail posts, and with instant messaging. Some of the immediacy and face-to-face social aspect of the D&D experience is lost, but you still get to play the game. If you have a hard time finding players who live close by, playing D&D online might be a good alternative for you.

## *Wizards of the Coast products*

As the publishers of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, Wizards of the Coast makes a number of adventures, and new adventures are being published all the time. Current in-print adventures include *Shadows of the Last War* (2nd to 3rd level), *Sons of Groomsh* (4th to 5th level), and *Red Hand of Doom* (6th to 11th level).

D&D adventures provide solid plots, exciting encounters, and great villains to throw at the player characters. The great thing about published adventures, whether they're designed for generic D&D or one of D&D's campaign worlds (such as FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON), is that they provide a good basis for your work. You can run them exactly as they're written, or you can make subtle to sweeping changes to make the adventure uniquely your own.



Here's a secret that so few DMs seem to be aware of: You don't have to be running an EBERRON (or whatever) campaign to use an EBERRON (or whatever) adventure. Take any published adventure that catches your eye, change names and locations to suit your campaign, and you have a ready-to-play adventure where most of the hard work of crafting encounters and creating monster stats has already been done for you.



Another resource to look for is the *Fantastic Locations* series of D&D products. Each title in this series features two double-sided, fully illustrated battle maps of key encounter locations, as well as an encounter booklet. You can develop your own adventure around the suggested encounters, or you can create something brand new that uses the cool locations depicted on the maps. *Fantastic Locations: Fane of the Drow*, for example, features miniature-scaled battle maps of a drow enclave, and others in the series depict monster lairs, dungeons, and ruins of all sorts — just the kinds of places that player characters love to explore.

## *Dungeon Magazine*

Paizo Publishing works with Wizards of the Coast to produce the official *Dungeon Magazine*. This monthly periodical contains all kinds of tips and advice for DMs, as well as providing encounters, lairs, and three or four full-length adventures for characters of varying levels in every issue. It makes a great resource for DMs looking for something to run on a moment's notice or for exciting encounters to drop into any campaign. Find out more about *Dungeon Magazine* and Paizo at [www.paizo.com](http://www.paizo.com).

## RPGA

Members of the RPGA gain access to tournament-style adventures for all levels of play. You can use these adventures to run sanctioned events or to play D&D games with your friends. Check out [www.wizards.com/rpga](http://www.wizards.com/rpga) for more information.

## Other d20 publishers

Because the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is produced under an open license, other companies can produce material — including adventures — for use with D&D. Look for the d20 SYSTEM logo, shown in Figure 2-1, for products that are compatible with D&D.

**Figure 2-1:**  
The d20  
SYSTEM logo.



## Creating Your Own Adventures

If you really want to get into it, you can create your own adventures for your campaign. Most DMs (ourselves included) use a mix of published adventures and their own creations to generate their ongoing campaigns. Creating a D&D adventure from scratch can be a lot of fun, but it can also be a lot of work. We recommend that new DMs start out by using published adventures to get a feel for how adventures come together, and then start altering published adventures to suit the purposes of their campaigns. After you've had some experience, go ahead and make your own. Part III of this book is devoted to helping you in this endeavor.



Even when you get to the point where you're creating your own adventures on a regular basis, you still want to utilize published adventures in your campaign. Running a published adventure every so often gives you a break from adventure creation. Plus, we're confident that you'll find something in every published adventure that you can lift out and use in your adventures. Use every available resource to your best advantage, we always say.

## Making Preparations before the Game

Before the big night (or afternoon, or whatever) of your game session, in addition to informing the players about the particulars of character creation, time, location, and snack expectations (as we describe earlier in this chapter), you have a few more things to do to get ready. As Dungeon Master, you need to have a working knowledge of the rules of the game. More often than not, the players will turn to you to explain how a particular portion of the game works or to ask how to accomplish something in the game. You need to be ready. This doesn't mean that you need to memorize the *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* from cover to cover. But you do need to know and understand the basics of play — combat, task resolution, movement. For everything else, you just need to have a sense of where to go in the rulebooks to look something up.

If you're using the *D&D Basic Game* as the foundation of your first game session, you have less material to know and deal with. If you're diving right in with the full version of the game, you have a bit more material to peruse before game night. There are no tests; this isn't school. D&D is a game and it's fun, so don't sweat the details. Just be ready for the big picture, and you'll do fine.



When in doubt about where to find a rule, use the rules you do know and make something up. The goal is to keep the adventure moving, not to necessarily make sure that a player character's grapple attempt against the owl-bear goes exactly according to the rules. You can always research the rule in question after the game. If it turns out that your ruling was way off and had an adverse effect on the player characters, you can decide to make it up to the players in some way at the next game session. Part II of this book deals with these kind of advanced DMing issues and techniques in greater detail.

The other thing you want to do before the game session is prepare your adventure. If you're using a published adventure, read through it and make notes on things you want to change or add or on rules you might need to refer to for particular encounters. If you're using an adventure of your own creation, make sure you finish creating it — or at least as much of it as you plan to run at the session — before the time of the event. You can't play D&D without an adventure, and the DM must be prepared.

## Establishing the Ground Rules: Gaming Etiquette

As in any social experience, a D&D game benefits from common courtesies and ground rules that are followed by players and DMs alike. The following sections provide some of the unwritten ground rules of a game session, now written down for everyone to use.

## *Being ready to run the game*

The DM needs to be prepared to run the game session. If you aren't ready, the game session isn't going to turn out well. Review the rules, particularly any special rules that might come up in the adventure. Know your adventure. If you're familiar with the plot and pacing of the adventure, it will run that much more smoothly. Plus, your knowledge of the adventure allows you to deal with the unexpected actions of the player characters — and the players will do things that you don't expect. That's part of the fun of the game.

Being ready also means being organized. Have your adventure materials and notes set up before the game session begins. Gather the miniatures you want to use ahead of time. Use sticky notes or bookmarks so you can easily find the sections of the rulebooks you know you'll need to refer to, especially the pages in the *Monster Manual* you might need to turn to for likely encounters.

The players expect you to be ready, so it's only a common courtesy that you don't disappoint them.

If you're ready, that's one thing that can take care of itself and you can focus on running a great game session.

## *Hosting chores*

You need a place to play. Providing a place to play isn't the responsibility of the DM, though you might host the game session. Discuss this with the entire gaming group. Determine who has the space and the desire to host the game. Find out which of the possible locations are most convenient for the majority of the gaming group. You might decide to rotate your regular game among a number of locations, sharing the responsibilities. You might discover that one location is going to work out best all the time and the host is fine with that.

A lot of what goes into this decision involves where you want to play. You have two options:

- ✓ You can play in a **public place**, such as a library or game store or coffee shop. This assumes that the staff and management of the place is okay with you playing there, you follow any rules the place sets up, and you keep the noise down so as not to disturb others using the public place.
- ✓ You can play in a **private place**, such as the home of one of the members of the gaming group. Certain rules and common courtesies do go along with playing in a friend's house. Follow them, and the host will continue to make space available. Break the rules or show disrespect for the location, and you'll probably need to find a new location for future game sessions.

Prior to the game, the host should make sure the play space is clean and that distractions are kept to a minimum. (Keeping pets and young children away from the gaming area is probably a good idea.) After the game, the entire gaming group should pitch in to clean up by throwing trash away, putting away dice and other gaming accouterments, storing any remaining snacks, and so on.

## *Setting a time limit*

Set a time limit for the game session. This allows the other players to plan accordingly and gives you an idea of how much material you need to have prepared for the game. Bear in mind that the time limit is only a guideline. If you and the other players want to keep playing, you can adjust the time limit to everyone's satisfaction.

## *Bringing or chipping in for refreshments*

The gaming group should reach a consensus before the game about how to handle food and drink. Will people eat lunch or dinner before coming to the game, or will a meal be part of the event? If the meal is part of the event, will everyone chip in for take-out or will everyone bring a dish to share? D&D is a group activity, so it shouldn't be the responsibility of a single group member (including the host or the DM) to take on the entire burden of feeding the group. Everyone chips in and one person buys for the group, everyone brings something to share, or everyone is expected to fend for themselves. Any choice is fine as long as the group knows what to expect at the game.

Bill's original gaming group used to meet in a friend's basement, even though Bill almost always served as the DM. The host set up expectations that everyone in the group adhered to. The host provided the play space and drinks, and the other players each brought a snack to share. Bill's current group, where he also serves as DM, meets at his house every week. Bill provides drinks, and the entire group chips in for a take-out dinner before every session.

Make sure that the group agrees to food choices that work for everyone, or at least have options for all of the players. Some people don't like certain things, and others have special dietary needs or allergies. Try to take all of that into account as the group comes up with a refreshment plan. And for long game sessions, the DM should plan breaks for food and drink so as not to disrupt the adventure.

Come up with a system that works best for your group and spreads the responsibility around. Then be courteous and live up to your end of the bargain.



## *Eliminating outside distractions*

At the start of the game session, the DM needs to provide time for the players to socialize. Players like to catch up, discuss the news of the day, talk about favorite TV shows and movies, and generally shoot the breeze. D&D is as much about social interaction as slaying monsters, so this kind of activity is encouraged — as long as it's kept in its place. Fifteen minutes to a half hour of this, before the game starts, is fine, or perhaps over a meal (if one is part of your game session). When the DM calls for the game to begin, however, courtesy demands that all players turn their attention to the game.

The host can help by making sure that other distractions aren't easily accessible. The TV shouldn't be on when you're playing D&D. If the majority of the players want to watch the big game of the sport of their choice, maybe you should reschedule the game session. Likewise, keep the computer and console games out of sight, put the pets away, and send the younger children to their rooms to play their own games. (Better yet, hire a babysitter.)

Sometimes, a player just isn't in the mood for D&D. He or she might have had a rough day at the office, might not be feeling well, might have a ton of homework, or maybe there's something else he or she would rather be doing. Don't try to strong-arm a player into showing up and playing. If a player doesn't think he or she will have fun, encourage the player to take the night off from the game. The player can always jump back into things for your next game session.

Distractions are going to occur. Someone is going to tell a joke, relate a story, or otherwise disrupt the flow of the adventure. A little of that is okay and even fun. But stifle any distractions that derail the adventure and make it hard for the other players to enjoy the game. Etiquette and courtesy demand that players and DMs get their heads in the game for the game session so that everyone can have a good time.

## *Making sure everyone understands the in-game rules of conduct*

These rules of conduct aren't revolutionary, but it's good to review them with your gaming group so that everyone knows what's expected of them when they come to play D&D:

- ✓ **It's the DM's show.** Players need to be kind to the DM and accept the DM's authority over the game. Likewise, when the DM makes a mistake (and it will happen), he or she should be willing to change a decision if that decision had negative repercussions for a player character.

- ✓ **Play fair.** Players shouldn't cheat, even to save their characters' lives. There are ways to deal with bad rolls (even ones that will result in a character's death) that don't force a player to stoop so low as to cheat.
- ✓ **Accentuate the positive.** Players should compliment the DM on a good game. Likewise, DMs should praise players when they have their characters do something especially clever or heroic or just plain fun.
- ✓ **Let the players play.** The DM needs to be kind to the players, treating them fairly and letting them make their own decisions. The DM shouldn't force the player characters to follow a specific path through the adventure, shouldn't punish them for being clever, and shouldn't intentionally and maliciously try to kill them.
- ✓ **It's the players' game too.** The DM needs to treat players with respect and should ask them for their opinions on difficult rules interpretations.
- ✓ **Eliminate the negative.** The DM and the players should leave the real world behind when they play D&D, including any disagreements or lingering bad feelings that might otherwise color the way they play for a particular session. The DM and players should avoid distractions that make it hard for everyone to enjoy the game.
- ✓ **And most importantly, have fun!**

## Chapter 3

# Running the Game

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding the DM's role
  - ▶ Exploring the parts of a game session
  - ▶ Discovering ways to end a game session
  - ▶ Examining out-of-session activities
  - ▶ Planning future game sessions
- 

**Y**ou've gathered a group of players. You've invited them to a game. You've made all your preparations, planing a number of interesting encounters and even a few surprises. Now comes the moment of truth. Now comes the game session.

There really aren't any hidden secrets to making the game session come off well so that everyone has fun. Still, it might be good to review with you what a typical game session might look like. Sure, your particular experience might vary, but forewarned is forewarned, or something like that. In this chapter, we explore the game session by breaking it down into its component parts. Then we provide tips and advice on how you can make the most out of each of those parts.

This chapter covers the basics of running a game session. In Part II of this book, we expand upon many of the topics we discuss in this chapter.

## *Taking Charge as Dungeon Master and Running the Game*

As we point out time and again in this book, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game features a unique element that makes it different from all other games — the role of the Dungeon Master. The DM is a movie director, storyteller, and computer processor all in one. The DM tells the players what their characters see and hear, determines the outcomes of their actions (with the help of the rules and the dice), and keeps the adventure moving. Because of the presence of the DM, players can have their characters try anything, go anywhere, or risk

everything. The only limits are the imagination of the gaming group and the dice rolls the players make.

During a game session, the DM narrates the adventure, runs all the characters and monsters not controlled by the other players, and determines the course of the story by evaluating the actions of the player characters and the results of the dice rolls.

## *DM laws*

The DM is the final authority when it comes to a rules question or dispute. In the following list, we give some pointers for being a good arbiter in your role as the DM:

- ✓ Make it up when you're in doubt! It's better to keep the game moving and the story progressing than to get bogged down looking up rules or arguing about a result.
- ✓ Have fun! It's better to make a generous interpretation that rewards the players for doing something creative and interesting than to look for a reason why something fun won't work.
- ✓ Use ability checks to determine success if the players try to do something that isn't otherwise covered by any other rules.
- ✓ Remember that you as the DM aren't competing against the players. Instead, you're like a referee who helps advance the story and challenge the players.
- ✓ Don't think of the adventure as your story. Don't think of the adventure as the players' story. It's the *group's* story. Let everyone participate in advancing the story.
- ✓ Be fair above all else. If you determine that a rule should work in a specific way, make sure it works that way in the future. Don't play favorites. Be consistent.

Do these things and everyone will have a good time.

## *DM basics*

The DM runs the game, so even if you're using a published adventure and not creating your own, you need to read the adventure before the game session and think about possible outcomes and twists and turns. Then the DM brings the adventure to life as the players make their contributions to the tale through the actions of their characters. Why read a published adventure beforehand? Because the game session will go more smoothly if you as the

DM have a feel for the pace of the story and know how to adjust the plot based on the actions of the player characters.

After setting the scene for any particular encounter, pose a question to the players, such as “What is your character going to do?” Asking a question gets the players thinking and makes them imagine the scene so they can decide what to do. The answer to the question leads to all kinds of action, excitement, and surprises for everyone involved. Use your own imagination, the game rules, and the results of the dice to determine what happens as the action unfolds.

## *Narrating*

When you narrate an adventure, you bring the imaginary adventure to life. Narration takes a number of forms. First, you present a scene to the players, which usually ends with the question, “What is your character going to do?” If you use a published adventure, this material is often provided to you in the form of *read aloud text* (portions of the adventure meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players). If you’re using your own adventure or if the players ask a question that isn’t covered by the read aloud text, you get to make something up. Be careful, though. Don’t reveal more details than the characters would be able to acquire with a casual glance. If the players want their characters to spend more time studying or examining something, let them know that time passes. You might even want to call for a Search check or other appropriate skill use check.

The second form of narration occurs after a player answers your question about what his or her character is going to do and you call for the appropriate die roll. You interpret the results and feed it back to the players in as engaging and imaginative a method as you can muster. Don’t just say, “Okay, you got an attack result of 18. That’s a hit. Roll damage.” Liven it up with more descriptive words and phrases. For example, “Redgar takes a mighty swing with his greatsword and hits the orc squarely in the chest. The orc appears to be staggered by the blow, but it doesn’t fall down!”

## *Running NPCs and monsters*

When the player characters meet nonplayer characters, monsters, and villains in the course of an adventure, the DM gets to run them. Play these nonplayer characters according to their Intelligence and Wisdom scores, any notes you have concerning their goals and motivations, and in response to the actions of the player characters (PCs). Even a friendly character or creature can be driven to violence if treated poorly by the PCs. Remember to play the monsters fairly and to keep your knowledge as DM separate from what the monsters can be expected to know according to the story and what has happened previously in the adventure.

## *Winging it*

At some point, the players are going to step off the anticipated path of the adventure or try to do something strange and unexpected. That's okay. In fact, it's encouraged! That's what makes the D&D game a unique and wondrous experience. More to the point, the DM is there for just such an occasion. When a situation comes up that you haven't planned for, make something up! When the player characters leave the map, wing it! Be fair, be consistent, have fun, and everything will work out. See Chapter 10 for more on this important DM technique.

## *Playing through the Game Session*

The game session provides the means for you to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. It's the time that you and the other players have set aside for the express purpose of playing D&D, of exploring imaginary dungeons and battling mythical monsters of all descriptions. In the following sections, we examine the game session from two perspectives: the first game session and a typical game session in an ongoing campaign.

## *Setting ground rules*

After you've formed a game group and picked an evening or weekend afternoon or other convenient time when everybody can spend a few hours playing D&D, set up the ground rules as outlined in Chapter 2. Make sure everyone knows and agrees to the ground rules and understands the basics of how the game is played. (We discuss how you can best teach D&D in Chapter 6.) Remember your time limit; you're going to want to wrap up about 15 minutes early so that you and the players can deal with after-game notes, cleanup, and other post-game activities.

If a meal (or two) makes up part of your game session, make sure that everyone knows when you plan to break for eating and what contribution everyone is expected to make to the meal.

## *Settling in as everyone arrives*

When the players arrive, give everyone a chance to get settled and socialize. This is a time-honored ritual for the beginning of D&D games everywhere, and you shouldn't try to fight it. D&D is as much a social event as it is a game, so let the players talk and joke and catch up before the game swings into high gear.

If this is your first game, have the host show everyone where to put coats and jackets, as well as point out where the bathroom and other necessities can be found. If the host has any ground rules concerning his or her home, make sure that the players know them and follow them. Remember that courtesy to the host means you'll be invited back to play there again. If the host asks players to remove their shoes before walking across the carpet, to use coasters to keep refreshing beverages from leaving a ring on the table, or whatever, the players should abide by these requests. Don't forget the introductions if some of the players don't know each other!

If this is an ongoing game, everyone knows the rules and all of the accessible and important locations associated with the play area. They each have a favorite place to store their outer garments and they know where to find the glasses and bowls and silverware. The thing to watch with an existing group (and this really isn't too much of a problem) is that the opening socializing can go on and on. Allow this settling in period to continue for a little while, but eventually you'll want to ask everyone to wrap up their conversations and move to the gaming table so you can get started.

## *Gathering around the game table*

The *game table* is the term we use for where you play a game of D&D. In reality, it might be a table surrounded by comfortable chairs, such as found in a kitchen or dining room. It might be a coffee table surrounded by couches and chairs, such as found in a living or family room. As long as you have places to sit, flat surfaces to roll dice on and spread out battle grids and miniatures, and space to put snacks and drinks and books, you have a D&D game table.

The play area should be situated in such a way that the DM can spread out his or her material while still being seen and heard by all the players. The DM needs room for a DM screen, notes, game books, miniatures, and whatever other accouterments he or she needs for the game session. Much of this material needs to remain hidden from the players to maintain the mystery and surprises associated with the adventure.

As game groups play from session to session, you'll see some interesting habits begin to develop. Players will inevitably take the same seats from session to session. Indeed, sometimes a player will complain to no end if another player takes his or her seat. Watch for these habits. Be amused by them. Let them develop. They give your game group personality and color that you'll remember for years.

When everyone has found a place and gotten ready, you can begin the game.

## *Creating and updating characters*

If this is your first game session, you should have set up in the ground rules concerning whether the players would create characters before coming to the game, whether they would create characters at the game, or whether you would provide pregenerated characters (see Chapter 2 for details).



### *Characters that the players create before the game*

If you want the players to create their characters before the first game session, make sure to tell them what method of character creation you want them to use. Chapter 6 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* describes various methods for character generation. Use the method that feels best to you, but when in doubt, just have the players use the method described in Chapter 1 of the *Player's Handbook*. In addition, let the players know whether you're using any additional rules in your campaign that they might want to incorporate when creating their characters. These additional rules might include those found in *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, *Eberron Campaign Setting*, *Magic of Incarnum*, or some other D&D rules supplement.

You'll want to spend a few minutes at the start of the first session reviewing the characters that the players have created, answering any questions they may have concerning their characters, asking them to make adjustments (if necessary), and allowing any stragglers to finish up the creation process. (There will always be a player or two who didn't quite finish — or start, even! — before the game session.)

### *Characters that the players create at the game*

If you'd rather spend a portion of your first game session for character creation, you can help the players through the process and check what they're doing as they do it. Also, creating characters at the game table allows the players to discuss options and form a more compatible party of adventurers. ("We need a cleric! Who wants to be the cleric?")

You still need to lay the ground rules for generating ability scores and which sources other than the *Player's Handbook* (if any) you want to allow in the game. If this is everyone's first game, we recommend limiting players to material in the *Player's Handbook* the first time out. You can add supplemental material that interests you and the other players in a future game.

### *Pregenerated characters*

The last option for player characters is to allow players to select a pregenerated character. The *D&D Basic Game* and *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.) both include ready-to-play characters that you can



allow players to choose from. This is by far the easiest and fastest method available, and it allows you to get into the game relatively quickly. Of course, this method takes the fun and creativity out of the hands of the players as far as characters are concerned, but it provides a great way to get started playing quickly for those people new to the game.

If two or more players want the same character, the DM needs to decide how to adjudicate the issue. When all else fails, have the players roll the d20. High roll selects first, and so on, in die result order.

To add a bit of creativity to this method, ask the players to name their characters. They don't have to use the names provided with the pregenerated characters, and indeed will feel a slightly closer connection to the characters they chose if they provide unique and meaningful (to them) character names.



Later, after everyone has gotten a feel for the game, we recommend abandoning the pregenerated characters and starting over. Allow the players to make their own 1st-level characters and run them through a new 1st-level adventure. Consider the adventure that used the pregenerated characters to be practice for everyone involved.

### ***Characters that the players advance to the next level***

Existing campaigns eventually reach the point when the player characters have earned enough experience points (XP) to advance to the next level. You need to decide whether you want to allow the players to update their characters on their own time or whether you want to set aside a portion of the game session for this activity to take place. Again, if you have them level up at the table, you can participate in the process, answer questions, and make sure they're following the rules correctly.

If you decide to make character updating part of the game session, it probably should be done at the beginning of the session. If you have the players do the updating away from the table, use a portion of the beginning of a session to review what the players did to their characters. As DM, you aren't just checking to see whether the characters are legal; you need to know what direction the players have taken their characters and what abilities are in the group so you can better plan future adventures.

## ***Opening with the prologue***

You've had the out-of-game-socializing portion of the game session. You've had the character creation/review/update portion of the game session. Now it's time to get to the adventure!

If this is your first game session with this group (or with this group of characters), start out with what we like to call the *prologue*. Like the prologue of a novel or the part of a TV show or movie before the main title and credits roll, the prologue for a D&D game sets up what is to come. Use it to set the scene of your campaign world or at least to establish where the player characters are as the adventure opens. Don't make your opening too elaborate or too long. You want to get to the action as soon as you can, not have the players sit around and listen to you wax poetic about your world's dozen moons or the ruling members of the kingdom or whatever. Just provide enough information to set the scene and get things off and running. You can work in other details naturally as the adventure unfolds.

Another good thing to do at the beginning of your first game session is to let the players introduce their characters. Let them briefly describe their characters' names and classes, what they look like, and what others might notice upon seeing them for the first time.



Don't worry about it for the first time you play, but when you start a new adventure or campaign in the future, you might want to get information (such as character background, old enemies, most feared monsters, or long-term character goals) on the player characters beforehand so that you can work that information into the plot or background you want to establish for the campaign. Nothing roots the players and their characters in your world more than having a place for their characters to immediately fit into. If the player characters have a bit of history in the world, the world feels a bit more real. See Chapter 12 for explicit ideas in this area.

We have one last consideration for you before the adventure gets going. Do the player characters have a history with each other? Do they know each other? Or are they meeting for the first time when the adventure begins? There's no correct way to do this, but you should be aware of what each direction might mean to the game:

- ✓ **If the player characters start the adventure already knowing each other**, you can establish that they have a rapport and a desire to help each other right from the beginning. This can be a little artificial, but without this connection, you can run into some bad player character interaction for no reason. Possible starting connections include that the player characters grew up together in the same village or town, that they have been working together for a short time prior to the start of the adventure, that they all serve the same master or patron who has provided their training to date, or that they all got together to face a menace in the past and continue to work together as they seek to find it and destroy it. These are just examples. You can and should include the players in a discussion to set up party connections if this is something you want to establish right off the bat.

- ✓ If the player characters meet for the first time at the start of the **adventure**, you run the risk of one player character's goals going against the goals of another player character or the entire party. This can still work out, and it's often fun to see the players develop connections naturally as the adventure plays out, but it can be risky. At the very least, you should have the players come up with compatible goals and choose compatible alignments so that party cohesion doesn't suffer. (See the sidebar in this chapter, "Player character alignment.")

## *Recapping the previous session*

If you're running an ongoing campaign, then at the beginning of most game sessions, the prologue is replaced by the recap. (At the start of a new adventure or at other key story moments in a campaign, it might be appropriate to have another prologue moment.) The recap helps get players back into the story and gets them thinking about what happened last time and what they might be expecting (or dreading!) in the upcoming session.

Now, you as the DM might give the recap of the previous session, but what's the fun or advantage in that? You know what happened, and you also know the behind-the-scenes stuff that you don't want to inadvertently give away if you tell everyone what happened last time. Better to have the players give the recap. This accomplishes three main things for you:

- ✓ It lets you see what the players remember and think they've figured out about the events and situations that they've previously encountered.
- ✓ It lets you get a feel for the story from the players' points of view (which are always going to be at least slightly different from your own).
- ✓ It allows the players to make conclusions and throw out ideas that you can use to best advantage later in the adventure.

Start a game session by asking the players for a recap of the previous session. Bill starts his game sessions by asking his players "What happened last time?" or "Where were we?" (Of course, his players often respond "You were about to give us experience points!" What started long ago as a way to see whether their DM was paying attention has since become a running gag around the game table.) Let each player add something to the telling. You get to see what they remember, what they think is important, and sometimes what they think is going on behind the scenes. You know what? Sometimes what they come up with is better than what you have planned. Here's a secret: They'll never know whether you decide to take one of their ideas and use it in place of yours. You wind up looking good and they feel clever — everybody wins!

## *Taking on encounters and challenges*

The heart of every adventure, the unit in which adventures and game sessions are built, is the encounter. Most encounters in a game of D&D include a battle with one or more monsters. The following list describes the types of encounters you're likely to have in a typical game session:

- ✓ **The combat encounter:** Combat encounters are structured in rounds, where most of the rules of the game come into play. Most of the encounters in your adventure are, or will evolve into, combat encounters.
- ✓ **The roleplaying encounter:** Roleplaying encounters present players with situations in which they can roleplay their characters and interact with the other player's characters and with characters controlled by the DM (known as nonplayer characters or NPCs). Sometimes the players use skill rolls, but often the dice never come out for these types of encounters. Trading, talking to locals, or asking for help from a nearby baron all fall into this encounter category. Depending on how the roleplaying goes, this kind of encounter can quickly develop into a combat encounter or into the last type of encounter, the challenge encounter.
- ✓ **The challenge encounter:** Challenge encounters often require skill or ability checks, or even saving throws, to navigate as the player characters attempt to defeat a natural hazard, a deadly trap, or a locked door.

During a game session, you might run a single encounter with a complex battle scene and multiple monsters or a number of short encounters. It all depends on not only the encounter you've developed but the actions of the player characters. Even an encounter you thought would take the whole session can be cut short by clever play, the use of a powerful spell, unexpected diplomacy, or simply by the player characters turning south in the dungeon instead of going north. Let this kind of thing play out naturally. Never force a battle or a specific kind of encounter. The fun of the game is seeing what the players do with the situations you set up — let them play out with the player characters' actions.



You don't have to lose that exciting encounter you were planning with the dracolich just because the player characters didn't open the right door in the dungeon. Save it for another time or move it to another place in the dungeon as you see fit.

When you run roleplaying encounters, you don't have to keep track of whose turn it is or exactly where every character is standing on the battle grid. Just make sure that all the players get a chance to participate and don't let any single player (including yourself!) hog the spotlight. Challenge encounters might need the battle grid and initiative checks to run, depending on the challenge in question. Certainly, however, combat encounters work best when run in strict initiative order and with the use of a battle grid and miniatures.

## Player character alignment

The D&D game allows for players to choose any alignment for their characters. Alignment is a tool for developing a character, not a carved-in-stone proclamation about how a character must behave. It's a guideline, not a decree.

That said, we've found that, at the very least, characters in a party need to have compatible alignments. Nothing can destroy a campaign faster than good-aligned characters and evil-aligned characters in the same party deciding

to work against each other. Frankly, we've found that evil alignments are better left to the monsters and villains; player character parties work out better when the characters take on good or neutral alignments. Motivations for adventures come together easier, character interaction goes more smoothly, and the heroic aspects of D&D shine through in ways that just don't happen when players play evil characters.

For combat encounters, think about what will make for visually interesting and dynamic battles. (We cover this in more detail in Chapter 14.) Consider not only the monsters or other opponents to throw at the party, but think about the terrain in which the fight will occur. Fighting in a plain dungeon room of stone is fine, but battling it out in a cavern filled with a lake of molten fire is really exciting and turns the terrain into a participant in the battle.

## *Ending a game session*

Time management comes into play during a D&D game session. Remember that you and the group agreed to a specific end time for the session, and you want to wrap up play about 15 minutes prior to that so you can cover record-keeping and other post-game activities (see the following section). Make sure that you don't let the PCs start a long battle just before you're ready to wrap up the session.

How do you end a game session? If the adventure reaches a natural conclusion, you're set. But many adventures require multiple sessions to play through. In this case, you might consider the cliffhanger approach. Let the player characters get to the start of the next encounter. Let them see what's waiting for them. Then leave them hanging and wanting more by saying, "To be continued next game session!" This leaves everyone ready and eager to get back to the game at the next available opportunity. Just be careful not to actually start the encounter. It's tough to keep track of a combat or challenge encounter in the middle of the action. Better to start the battle fresh at the next game session.

## The best combat encounters

Although it might be easiest to design, pitting a single monster (no matter what its Challenge Rating) against a party of adventurers rarely makes for a fun or exciting encounter. The party gets to act four or more times in a round (depending on how many player characters are in the group), but even the fiercest, most powerful monster gets to act only once. Those odds are just too much in favor of the PCs. For more interesting (albeit harder to run) encounters, we

suggest designing encounters that pit the adventuring party against two to five opponents. Those opponents might be of the same type (four skeletons) or a mixed band (an evil sorcerer and four skeletons). Multiple opponents give the PCs more to think about, give the monsters more chances to do things in a round, and make the battlefield more exciting and dynamic as PCs and opponents move around to gain tactical advantages.

## *Closing with an epilogue*

Save about 15 minutes or so at the end of the game session to handle the epilogue. Here's where you let the players have a brief post-game discussion, where they can make a few preliminary plans within your hearing (to help you plan for the next session better) and where you can provide information that needs to be jotted down in notes or on character sheets.

Review the encounters for the session and calculate experience points for the party.



You can find the XP tables and the rules for calculating experience points on page 38 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Allow the players to review with you any treasure and magic items they found so that you can tell them what they found or remind them that they might have to use research or magic in a future session to discover just what that strange glowing wand actually does. You might also want to set up some post-game activities for the players to deal with between sessions. Have them decide what they want to do next (if you haven't left them at an obvious next step in the adventure) and let you know before the next session. If the break occurred at a place where this is possible, let them go shopping for their characters, upgrade their characters, or look for a new rules supplement to add to the game for the next session — all pending your approval, of course.

## Chapter 4

# Narrating the Adventure

### *In This Chapter*

- Understanding D&D as a storytelling experience
- Exploring what makes for an interesting and exciting D&D story
- Checking out the story-related roles of the DM
- Bringing your adventure to life

**A**t its best, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is more than a just a series of extended combat encounters. It's the ultimate interactive story, where players and Dungeon Master alike help determine what happens next. To make sure that the story gets as much of your attention as moderating the rules, we use this chapter to get you into the basics of the DM's role as narrator and a cast of thousands. With a better understanding of how to approach those two related roles, a DM can improve the story-related aspects of the D&D experience.

## *Understanding D&D as a Storytelling Experience*

Without even trying, the D&D game tells a story. That story revolves around the player characters, and it grows with every action the player characters perform, every monster they defeat, and every challenge they overcome. Imagine what happens if you do a little planning and preparation! With foreshadowing, plotting, memorable villains, and spectacular locales, the story aspects of the game can shine through in exciting, tense, and fun ways.

## *The group story concept*

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game provides a fun, interactive method for telling group stories in a fantasy setting. What's a group story? A group story is a story told cooperatively by a group of people. A D&D group story uses the setting and game mechanics to provide a framework for how a group story unfolds. It isn't a story in the traditional sense; the scenes that make up the story come together as the players play the game.

The DM contributes to the group story by providing the world in which the game takes place, establishing the setup and background for every adventure, and by playing the monsters, villains, and other nonplayer characters that inhabit the world.



Speaking of the world, the DM can simply let the implied world of D&D shine through or use an existing campaign world, such as FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON (both of which require relatively little work), or the DM can create his or her own campaign setting for the adventures. (See Chapter 23 for advice and suggestions for creating your own campaign world.)

The players contribute to the story by creating the characters they're going to play. These are the heroes of the story, the protagonists that eventually become the true movers and shakers of the campaign — if you play long enough for them to reach the highest levels of the game. Remember that the player characters provide the interface for interacting with the imaginary world of D&D. But they can be so much more than that. As players imagine the backgrounds and personalities of their characters, their quirks and mannerisms, their goals and desires, they use these tools to contribute to the group story.

When the player characters encounter monsters or some other form of danger, and when the dice hit the table, that's when the actions of players and Dungeon Master alike contribute to and influence the ongoing group story. Because everyone contributes to the story and because of the randomizing element of dice, no one knows what's really going to happen next. And therein lies the power and fun of the D&D game.

## *An ongoing epic*

Other games have a set beginning, middle, and end. Each session of D&D that you play, however, is just one tale in a continuing epic set in a medieval world where magic and monsters fill the land. This epic stars the characters that the players create, characters that improve and develop from one adventure



to the next. Events have consequences. Treasure, equipment, and magical items that the player characters find can be saved and used in subsequent adventures, and monsters and villains can escape to trouble them again in a future game session. So, your adventures — your group stories — operate just like the episodes of a weekly television series or like individual novels in a trilogy or series.

## *The DM's role*

So, to bring it all back to you, the Dungeon Master, here's an overview of your role in all this:

1. You select the adventures to run for the players (either creating them yourself or using published adventures).
2. You create the campaign in which these adventures take place (either overtly, with lots of planning, or just by letting the world develop naturally with each adventure you run).
3. You narrate the adventure by setting each scene and describing the results of the player characters' actions.
4. You portray the cast of thousands that inhabit the world, playing all the characters that aren't the player characters — the extras, the friends and foes, the monsters. (It really never adds up to thousands, by the way. That just sounds more impressive than "a cast of dozens.")

## *Telling Interesting and Exciting Stories*

Rule number one: Don't get too attached to your story idea. Sure, the DM sets up the particulars of a story, but the group determines how it plays out. Really, your task as the DM is to set up the story idea (or premise), a background, a cast of monsters and any nonplayer characters you think you need, and the opening event that kicks off the adventure. After that, you have to let the player characters lead the way. If you try to push them in a direction they don't want to go, the story will feel forced and the game might break down. Let the player characters do what they want and go where they will, and the story will come together naturally and in surprising ways.

You have plenty of tools to help you with this, not the least of which are the encounters you've prepared (either on your own or by using a published adventure). Encounters make up the scenes of the story, but they usually aren't constructed to happen in any particular order. Sure, in the sample

adventure presented in Chapter 7, we number the encounters and present them in a particular order. How the player characters navigate the dungeon, which doors they open or pass by, which corridors they decide to explore and in what order, determines when and how the encounters are . . . well . . . encountered.



Here's the big secret to running a great adventure and telling a fantastic group story: The action and the drama take place in the encounters. As good as the premise you create might be, as intricate as the plot you decide to weave becomes, the story happens in the encounters. That's where the players and DM come together to perform actions, make decisions, and ultimately advance the story with good roleplaying, good tactics, and a lot of dice rolling. So, as the DM, you have to let the encounters and what happens in them override whatever plot you imagined for the story. Again, it isn't your story. It's the group's story. And the group needs the freedom to tell it.

Does this mean that your perfectly crafted plot (whether you made it up yourself or purchased an adventure) is subject to the whims of the player characters? For the most part, yes. You can use advanced techniques to steer the plot or get the story back on track if it strays too far from your outline (as we describe in Chapter 11), but for now just go with the flow and see where the group's imagination takes the story.

## *Making a story a D&D story*

D&D adventures are all set in world that's roughly equivalent to medieval Europe. The rules of D&D become the physics of the world — magic works, monsters are real, and heroic adventurers journey across the land. Every typical D&D setting needs to follow certain conventions:

- ✓ **D&D worlds are medieval.** *Medieval* in this context means that no modern technology is available in the world. Characters wear armor and wield melee weapons such as longswords and battle axes. The best mundane ranged weapon is the longbow because gunpowder doesn't exist in the worlds of D&D. The world has progressed to something akin to the medieval period of European history, but the knob has been turned up as far as the fantasy is concerned. Castles and temples dot the landscape. People walk or ride horses (or more exotic mounts) to get around. Farms are plentiful in the settled lands, but vast reaches of unexplored wilderness spread out around these pockets of civilization, and when the maps say "Here be dragons," you should really heed those words. Note that this isn't historical medieval, but instead is the medieval world of fairy tales, novels, fantasy movies, and, well, of D&D. It's all Camelot and knights and Robin Hood, as seen in movies and novels.

- ✔ **D&D worlds are permeated with magic.** From magic-using classes (such as wizards, sorcerers, druids, and clerics) to magic items of all descriptions, the wonders of spells and arcane knowledge make for exciting and mysterious trappings for stories and encounters. Because of the presence of magic, the medieval setting becomes wondrous and frightening. With magic, heroes can accomplish miracles, villains can launch plots to take over or destroy the world, and a sense of wonder (both dark and light) fills the land.
- ✔ **D&D worlds are filled with monsters.** The monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Some are relentlessly evil, others overtly friendly, and many can show up to help or hinder adventurers as their own whims and the needs of the story dictate. In many ways, monsters are the ultimate manifestation of magic in the land, for most D&D creatures depend on magic to exist, if not to survive. Undead monsters, misshapen creatures, giants, and constructs of all descriptions — the monsters of D&D fill volumes and provide you with a huge toolbox of opponents to challenge the player characters.

Some DMs break these conventions when they create their own campaign worlds, but we don't recommend that until you have some experience and rules knowledge under your belt. Indeed, some believe that if you change these fundamental concepts too much, you are no longer playing the D&D game. We say that as long as you start with these concepts and use the game system, feel free to take your game in the direction that best suits you and the players and leads to a fun and rewarding experience for everyone involved.

## *Choosing an adventure premise*

As a new DM, you should start with simple adventure premises. You can always go for bigger and more complex story ideas later, when both you and the other players have a better feel for the game. Adventure premises can come from anywhere, just as long as you couch the premise in the conventions of D&D. Pull a plot from a movie or novel and think about how it would work set in a D&D world. You can draw inspiration from all kinds of sources. The following list describes some simple adventure premises:

- ✔ **Capture:** The adventurers take a job to capture the leader of a marauding band of goblins that have been raiding the village and the surrounding area.
- ✔ **Discover:** The adventurers seek to discover the hidden tomb of the Knight of the Flaming Sword.

- ✓ **Escape:** The adventurers have been captured by the evil cleric of Hextor and must find a way to escape the dungeon beneath the vile temple.
- ✓ **Protect:** The adventurers have been hired to protect the baron's envoy and get her safely to the meeting in Wellford, a village that lies on the other side of the Forsaken Forest.
- ✓ **Rescue:** The adventurers must rescue the dwarf prince from the troll Nurgu before the monster feasts on its captive's royal flesh.
- ✓ **Search:** The adventurers come across an ancient dungeon just waiting to be explored.

## *Mastering the Adventure Narration*

You could make the comparison that a D&D game creates a movie that the game group watches in its collective imagination. It's the most interactive and immersive movie ever created (at least until your next game session) but it kind of plays out as a movie nonetheless. Of course, you don't film or record this movie, and you can replay it only as a memory.

Still, just like a movie, your D&D game needs a few things. It needs stars, the roles filled by the player characters. It needs a director, cool special effects, and a cast of thousands, roles filled by the Dungeon Master. By manipulating these roles, the DM narrates the adventure and brings together the elements of the group story.

## *Directing the adventure*

The Dungeon Master directs the action by establishing scenes and providing a portion of the motivation that the player characters need to open the dungeon door, leap down the dark hole, or otherwise head to where the action is. When you use a published adventure, this material is provided for you. You get a ready-to-use scene with background and setup material, as well as some hooks and motivations to get the player characters (PCs) to interact with the scene.

When you set the scene, make sure to play up the drama and tension of the moment. Be descriptive. Show, don't tell, the players what their characters see and hear with strong adjectives and evocative language. Look to the sample adventure in Chapter 7 for examples of this in action.

Your enticements need to be subtle enough not to hit the PCs like a brick, but overt enough for them to notice. For example, in your description of the scene before them, you can slip in that they see a glint of gold among the blanket of

bones that cover the floor, or spot an ancient book lying open in a corner, or notice an arcane glow from among the pile of weapons and armor, or hear the muffled cry of a prisoner in distress. Not every scene or encounter needs this kind of enticement, depending on the overall story and motivation of the player characters, but once in a while it helps to move the PCs in a particular direction.

When the player characters take the bait, the encounter takes place in all its glory. Keep these do's and don'ts in mind:

✓ **DM as Director Do's:**

- Do set the scene, describing what the PCs see, hear, and smell.
- Do exude drama and tension and excitement in your scene descriptions.
- Do show the players what their characters see, hear, and smell with evocative language.
- Do entice the PCs to interact with the scene by subtly overt means.

✓ **DM as Director Don'ts:**

- Don't tell the players what their characters are doing; that's up to them to decide.
- Don't give away all the secrets of the encounter in your description; allow the players to experience the fun of working some of it out for themselves.
- Don't be boring; use evocative language when setting up encounters.

## *Adding special effects*

Good fantasy movies need good special effects, and your D&D game is no exception. The world where the player characters adventure is an imaginary one, but the game works best when you and the players suspend your disbelief and act as though it is real. The more real the characters and the world feel, the better the roleplaying experience will be. That's where the Dungeon Master comes in.

By thinking in terms of a movie, the DM tries to make the imaginary action of the D&D game as visual and as real as possible. The DM describes what the player characters see and otherwise sense — make those descriptions as vibrant and colorful as possible. Published adventures, such as the sample adventure in Chapter 7, help by providing the basics of such descriptions for you, but you need to breathe life into those descriptions by the way you present them.

When you describe a monster, imagine that creature as it would look in your favorite fantasy/science-fiction movie. When you narrate the effects of an arcane spell, imagine it as a cool special effect exploding across the screen. Remember that you have an unlimited budget for your special effects because most of the action takes place in your group's imagination, so spare no expense in the telling of the story.

Use all five senses when you narrate. Don't just tell the players what their characters see; tell them what they hear, smell, taste, and feel, when appropriate. A depth of sensory descriptions promotes believability in the world and a connection to the story.



Be consistent. No world, not even an imaginary one, should be arbitrary. If you describe a door in the north wall of the chamber, it should be there later when the player characters ask about it. And if it isn't there from one moment to the next, you need to have a good reason why not. A mysterious door that fades in and out of existence is cool — as long as that's what you meant to do with it.

You need to get used to improvising. No adventure — not a published one, not one you create from scratch — can account for every minute detail or every possibility. As the DM, you need to provide the little extras that make a scene believable, and you need to be ready to wing it when the player characters decide to do something that the adventure writer didn't think of. Be inventive, be creative, and have fun when these moments occur. In general, they lead to the scenes that everyone will remember most strongly.

Finally, you need to be responsive to the players. When the players need more information about what's around them, provide more detail. Let them ask questions, and provide the answers in ways that build the story, provide drama, and still make them work for the hidden details and the secrets of the encounter. On the other hand, when the players get bored with your exposition and want to get to the action, stop talking and start fighting!



Although most of the special effects at your command involve evocative descriptions, exciting delivery, and abundant imagination, remember that cool play surfaces and miniatures can help you and the players better visualize the action of the story. Illustrated battle maps, such as those available in many published adventures and *Fantastic Locations* accessory products, describe the area where an encounter takes place. Even dry erase or wet erase battle grids, where you make a rough sketch of the encounter area, help players get a better idea about the tactical situation their characters find themselves in. And miniatures or other tokens that represent the PCs and the monsters they face provide all the foundation you need to help everyone's imagination kick into high gear. See Chapter 11 for more on using visual and tactical aids in the game.

**✓ DM as Special Effects Wizard Do's:**

- Do treat the game as a cinematic event.
- Do describe what characters can discern with all five senses when providing narration.
- Do pull out all stops when describing your special effects — you do have an unlimited budget, after all.
- Do be consistent in your descriptions of people, places, and things.
- Do be willing to improvise when players try unexpected things.
- Do be responsive to the needs of the players; expand descriptions when they need more information and cut your narration short when they're ready to get to the action.
- Do use battle maps, miniatures, and other visual aids to help the players better imagine the scene.

**✓ DM as Special Effects Wizard Don'ts:**

- Don't use bland language and technical terms when narrating the action.
- Don't use gamespeak (rules, terms, and jargon) when narrating the story.
- Don't be arbitrary in your descriptions of people, places, and things.
- Don't refuse to improvise when the players take the unexpected path.
- Don't stick to your script when the players want more or fewer narrative elements from you.

## *Playing the nonplayer characters*

The players control the heroes of your D&D game, the player characters. You control all the other characters that inhabit the world — the monsters, the villains, the patrons, the villagers, and so on. We collectively call this cast of thousands the *nonplayer characters* (NPCs). Just like the players, you strive to give your characters unique personalities and memorable traits. When the details come together, your NPCs come alive.

You get to portray everyone in the world who isn't one of the player characters. These are your characters, and they run the gamut from the shopkeeper and innkeeper who provide goods and services for the player characters to the foul vampire lord raising undead monsters in the catacombs beneath the

ruined temple. Although your world might have thousands or even millions of people in it, you need to deal with only the dozen or so that the player characters might actually decide to interact with in a given adventure. The following subsections provide some tips for creating and controlling interesting nonplayer characters.

### ***Villains and other opponents***

As DM, you get to do something unique in the D&D game — you get to play the bad guys! Running the characters that challenge and oppose the adventurers is one of your primary roles, and it provides you with a lot of fun, too.

For the monsters and opponents that are meant to face the adventurers in a single encounter, you don't need to worry about details beyond what you need to run the encounter. For major villains and recurring opponents, give some thought to fleshing out their personalities and motivations. Consider why they're doing what they're doing, why they're in the location where the player characters encounter them, and how they interact with the things around them. (This is important when building dungeon environments especially.) Vary the intelligence of your opponents. Villains don't have to be stupid. Make some of your bad guys as dumb as rocks, others as smart as rocket scientists (or at least the medieval equivalent of rocket scientists), and let the rest fill the gamut between.



Don't be afraid to make your villains totally evil. The worse they are, the more satisfying it will be for the player characters to defeat them. That said, not every opponent that sets out to challenge your adventurers needs to be evil. Well-intentioned do-gooders, good NPCs with an agenda that conflicts with the player characters, or other adventurers who just want to get to the treasure first, can make for interesting encounters or even whole adventures every now and then.

Sometimes you'll plan for a villain to have a major role in your campaign. Other times, an opponent winds up proving just too evil and fun to use up in a single encounter. That's when you turn him (or her, or it) into a recurring character. A recurring villain can be a constant thorn in the side of the adventurers or could show up infrequently, when they least expect it, to cause no end of trouble.

### ***Allies, innocent bystanders, and everybody else***

Although playing villains and monsters certainly takes up a lot of your non-player character time, you also have to be ready to portray the rest of the world's population — at least those that come into contact with the player characters. These types of NPCs provide information, resources, resting places, expert assistance, background, obstacles, aid, motivation, amusement, and more for the player characters. They add color to the story. In many cases, these kind of NPCs require only a name, a brief description, and



a relevant skill or two. Since most if not all of the nonplayer characters that fill this role are never meant to get into combat, you don't have to worry about giving them a full set of game statistics (or "statting them out").



Although some techniques work well in movies or novels, they don't make for a satisfying and fun game of D&D. Remember that it's the player characters' story and that they should always get to be the heroes. For this reason, don't create NPCs that you use to constantly show them up, pull their fat out of the fire, or otherwise leave the player characters with nothing heroic to do. For example, never craft an adventure where the player characters need to be inactive to win the day. It might have worked as the climax to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but you never want the player characters to close their eyes and do nothing while someone or something else earns their victory for them. That just isn't good D&D.

#### ✓ DM as Nonplayer Character Do's:

- Do give your nonplayer characters personality by creating quirks, mannerisms, and oft-repeated phrases.
- Do ham it up and use different voices for different types of characters. (One DM we know imagines particular actors in the roles of his NPCs, and he imitates those actors when playing his NPCs. His imitations are terrible, but they add to the fun and make every NPC feel unique.)
- Do talk in character and encourage the players to do the same.
- Do be consistent, remember the names and mannerisms of the NPCs you introduce, and take notes so you can pick them up again when they appear in a future encounter or adventure.

#### ✓ DM as Nonplayer Character Don'ts:

- Don't waste time by overstating your nonplayer characters; give them only the stats and skills they'll need for the role you want them to play in the adventure.
- Don't use nonplayer characters to overshadow or outshine the player characters.
- Don't take the side of the monsters or players when running NPCs; instead, play NPCs to the fullest without actively making things easy or difficult for the player characters.

## *Bringing the Adventure to Life*

You've figured out how to narrate your adventure. You have a handle on running the monsters and nonplayer characters. Now all you need to do is make sure the rest of your adventure is as exciting and dramatic as you can make

it. The following sections provide a couple ideas to keep in mind, whether you're creating your own adventure or using a published one, such as the adventure we present in Chapter 7.

## *Creating fantastic locations*

Every DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure requires an amazing and imaginative location to help drive home the fantastic elements of the game. Sometimes the entire adventure takes place in a single area; other times the adventurers travel from one fantastic location to another to accomplish their goals. Because the only limit to the worlds you create is your own imagination, try to think big, think amazing, think strange and exotic, and think fantastic. Why set an encounter in just any old woods when you can send the player characters into the heart of the Everdark Forest? In a world where magic exists, you don't even have to be limited by mundane, real-world physics. Let the player characters scale a mile-high castle tower, or explore a coral maze deep beneath the Blood Sea, or invade the lava-filled mines deep below the Forbidden Mountains.

No matter what type of encounter you plan to run (combat, challenge, or roleplaying), you can make the encounter that much more memorable and fantastic by setting it in an extraordinary location. Imagine running a battle along a crystal bridge that spans a jagged chasm or challenging the player characters to cross a ruined expanse as fountains of flame erupt from the ground without apparent rhyme or reason. What about presenting a roleplaying encounter in an exotic marketplace filled with fantastic beings of all descriptions?



The adventures we present in Chapters 7 and 20, as well as the advice strewn throughout Part III, should provide you with plenty of examples of fantastic locations and advice on how to use them to get your own imagination flowing.

## *Describing intense battles*

At its heart, the D&D game revolves around combat. Heroic adventurers must often battle foul villains and vile monsters in order to save the day. When you get to a combat encounter, make sure that you narrate the action in such a way as to generate drama and excitement for everyone involved. The selection of opponents, both how tough they are and how many of them are involved, takes care of a lot of this, but you still need to bring the intensity and danger home with your narration of the action.



For example, don't just relay information in dry gamespeak. Liven it up with evocative imagery and powerful language. Paint a picture with your words. The following list shows a boring and a more interesting way of narrating combat:

- ✔ **Weak narration:** “The hobgoblin attacks.” [DM makes the attack roll.] “18 — that hits your character.” [DM rolls for damage.] “The hobgoblin does 6 points of damage. Then it takes a 5 foot step away from your character. Your turn.”
- ✔ **Stronger narration:** “The huge hobgoblin roars a challenge, and the terrible smell of its breath crashes against you like a wave. It swings its jagged longsword,” [DM makes the hobgoblin’s attack roll, sees that it succeeds, and rolls for damage] “connecting with a bone-rattling strike that deals 6 points of damage. With a wicked grin, the hobgoblin leaps back 5 feet and barks a guttural laugh as it prepares to strike again.”

Combat encounters demand opponents, a location, complications, and a goal to make things interesting. The following list briefly examines these concepts:

- ✔ **Opponents:** Although simple to run, a party of player characters against a single opponent makes for a weak encounter. You want to pit the player characters against multiple opponents, usually with a mix of different types of monsters. Why? Because if you throw a single monster at the party of adventurers, it gets to act once for every four (or more) times the player characters act in a round. That isn’t fun for you, it isn’t a particularly interesting challenge for the players, and it just doesn’t make for an exciting encounter. (Some powerful and complex monsters can work by themselves, but even they can benefit from having a little help in the form of weaker and simpler minions.) You’d do better to throw multiple monsters of the same type (six orcs, for example) at the player characters, or for a real challenge, make it a mixed encounter (say, two orcs and a worg).
- ✔ **Location:** Just like in a movie, your scene or encounter will become more exciting and memorable if it takes place in an exciting and memorable location. Why set up a fight in a plain old dungeon chamber when you can set it in a dungeon chamber with walls of glistening stone and a floor of black obsidian that makes for slippery footing? Or what if the floor is covered in the bones of the monster’s earlier victims? Remember that anything you can imagine you can throw into your encounter locations. Not every location needs to be fantastic and complex, so save the really cool stuff for your major encounters, but don’t be afraid to put a few twists and some detail into every location you present.
- ✔ **Complications:** Now, don’t overuse this technique, but you can make a standard combat encounter more exciting and dangerous by throwing in a complication or two. What do we mean? Well, the slippery floor in the preceding bullet shows one kind of complication. Suddenly, in addition to battling whatever opponents are in the encounter, the player characters must also worry about slipping and falling. Or what if the pile of bones they have to walk over shifts and slides and sometimes gives way

to plunge a character into bony darkness? Complications can also take the form of traps, hazards, innocents in distress, or anything else that forces the player characters to split their attention between their opponents and something else.

- ✓ **Goal:** The goal of most combat encounters is to defeat the opponents and move on. For example, the player characters might need to fight their way past the ogres guarding the gate of the evil sorcerer's keep, survive the sudden attack of a hungry umber hulk, or slay the foul bebilith who guards the holy relic they seek. How the player characters achieve that goal makes up the action of the encounter.

## *Giving the players exciting challenges*

Another type of encounter the player characters might face is the challenge encounter. A challenge encounter requires many of the same foundation items as seen in the combat encounter. However, the opponent in a challenge is the challenge itself.

What's a challenge? It's anything that requires the player characters to think, make skill checks or ability checks, or use spells or tools in clever ways to overcome the challenge and move on. Traps, natural hazards, locked doors, gaping chasms, and other environmental or constructed obstacles constitute challenges.

Perhaps more so than in the combat encounter, the DM's narration of a challenge encounter can make or break a scene. Because many challenges can be overcome or failed with a single die roll, you need to find other ways to build tension and heighten the drama. Some techniques include combining a challenge with a combat encounter (where the challenge becomes a complication of the battle), providing multiple challenges that must be overcome to advance, and creating a complex challenge that requires a series of skill or ability checks to defeat. See Chapter 14 for more on crafting good challenge encounters.

## *Setting up evocative roleplaying encounters*

All encounters should provide opportunities for roleplaying. In combat encounters, the player characters might exchange insults and taunts with the bad guys. In challenge encounters, the player characters might discuss, in character, the best methods for overcoming the challenge as time ticks by.

But you do have an encounter format to use to build adventures that requires roleplaying as the primary activity: the roleplaying encounter.

In roleplaying encounters, the player characters must talk to, convince, bluff, bribe, negotiate, intimidate, or otherwise interact with nonplayer characters to advance the plot. In addition to roleplaying their characters, players might be called upon to make skill checks — but only sparingly — to augment the roleplaying and help you determine the reactions of the NPCs. Roleplaying encounters can often lead to combat or challenge encounters, depending on where the interaction takes you. Use all the same tricks and narration techniques you would for other types of encounters, and roleplaying encounters will come together — often in ways that are more fun and memorable than combat or challenge encounters!

# Chapter 5

## Dealing with Players

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Examining D&D as a social event
- ▶ Understanding the game group concept
- ▶ Exploring the relationship between players and DMs
- ▶ Dealing with mistakes
- ▶ Exploring the idea of sharing the DM role

**T**he Dungeon Master has a unique relationship with the other players. In this chapter, we focus on the interaction between DM and players and how to use that interaction to make for a more memorable and enjoyable gaming experience.

### *D&D: A Social Experience*

Some people go bowling every Saturday night. Some people get together every other Thursday for a few hands of poker. Some people meet up once a week to have dinner parties, to watch DVDs, or to play board games. Some people do all these things and more and still find time to have a weekly or monthly DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game session. Just like any other social experience, a D&D game requires a time, a place, and a group of friends. The best way to keep your game group together and ensure that everyone wants to return for each session (and in most cases, can't wait for the next session) is to remember that a D&D session is a social experience and to treat it accordingly.

D&D is a game. A game session needs to be fun. D&D is a social experience. Social experiences need to be fun. (See a pattern developing here?) The best way to maximize your fun potential is to make sure that everything you need to feed both the game and the social experience are ready and available for the game session. Make sure that everyone in the game group shares in this aspect of the session — no one player (not even the DM) should be responsible for bringing all these things together. Social experiences require locations

and participants. In the case of D&D, you need a place to play and you need players. Social experiences need refreshments. For a D&D game, this could include a full meal (lunch or dinner) at most, snacks and drinks at least. Make sure that whatever plan you choose is agreed upon by the rest of the group and that everyone shares in the expense. Finally, you need the game itself, and that's mostly in the hands of the Dungeon Master to provide.

If you skipped Chapter 2, take a look at that chapter before pulling together a game session. It shows you how to prepare to run a game session, and the rest of this chapter discusses the relationship between the DM and the players.

## *Looking at the Game Group*

A D&D game group consists of at least one Dungeon Master (though sometimes multiple players share this role) and a number of players that regularly get together for the express purpose of socializing and playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Some game groups have just enough players, but others have a bigger membership with the idea that not everyone can make it to every game session. A few groups have such a small membership that players routinely control multiple characters in an adventure.

None of these group models is inherently better than the others. You work with what you have or what you feel comfortable with to get to the ultimate goal — to have fun playing D&D.

## *Comparing DMs and Players*

The Dungeon Master's primary role, especially from the players' perspective (though most players might not consciously realize this), is to help the players find the fun in the game. This happens in subtle ways, as the DM sets up situations, encounters, and adventure hooks. It happens in overt ways, when the DM controls the pacing of a scene to get the player characters to where the action is — even if the DM has to bring the action to them. Sometimes players fumble around following a false lead or going after an incidental occurrence that has caught their imagination but has nothing to do with the adventure the DM is running. In such a case, you might steer them back on track by inserting an encounter that gets them back into your plot, or you might wing it and see where the players' interest takes you. Winging it is a little harder, though, and we discuss the fine art of making stuff up in Chapter 10.



## *Being the DM*

The first rule to remember when you're the Dungeon Master is that neither you nor the players can learn everything at once. As you learn the rules, discuss them with the players so that they learn them, too. Take it slowly and have fun, and everything will work out fine.

Your role as the DM is to make the game fun for the players and for yourself. Nothing else should take priority over this DM responsibility. Whatever constitutes a fun experience for you and the players is the right way to go, even if that style of play goes against everything we say in these pages. That said, use this advice and tailor it so that it applies to you and your game group.



Your best skill, one that we can't teach you in the game or in this book, is communication. That's the key to excelling at all of the many roles that the DM must fill in the game. Become not only a good speaker but a good listener, and you will transform from a good DM into a great one.

## *Interacting with players*

The following list provides pointers to help you interact and communicate with the players in the best possible way:

- ✓ **Be fair.** You need to earn the trust of the players. When they trust you to treat their characters fairly, they'll cheerfully ignore rules mistakes and hesitations in the action as long as they believe you're playing fair and that you aren't picking on them.
- ✓ **Be consistent.** If a rule works a specific way on one encounter, it should work that way all the time. If a nonplayer character has a limp and talks with a strange accent, that character should behave the same way the next time the player characters meet him or her.
- ✓ **Be impartial.** You may play the monsters and villains as smart and powerful or dumb and weak, depending on their role in the adventure, but you still need to impartially interpret the rules when it comes to resolving actions between PCs and NPCs. If you don't deal impartially in this area, you will lose the trust of the players. And that's bad for you and for the game group.

As DM, you sometimes have to mediate disagreements between players, and in these situations you need to be impartial as well. Whether the players can't agree over the best way to divide treasure, or if one player's action harms another player's character, or whatever the issue winds up

being, you need to help them reach a fair and equitable resolution so that everyone can get back to the game. The game is fun; arguments aren't fun. Mediate the conflict with calm words, logic, and good humor. And, when all else fails, let the dice decide. Who gets the +2 *flaming longsword*? Either the character who can use it or would benefit most from it, or the character whose player rolls the highest result on a d20.

- ✔ **Be entertaining.** You are the narrator and the cast of thousands that inhabit the world. You are the window through which the players experience the fun and adventure, so strive to be as entertaining as possible. Play your villains and monsters with gusto. Make the players really despise or hate or feel sorry for the bad guy, as appropriate to the story. Use evocative and exciting language to describe environments, scenes, and the action of the adventure. Make every moment action-packed, suspense-filled, scary, funny, or tense, as appropriate for the scene and the situation. When the whole group gets caught up in the fun of the story, that's entertainment!
- ✔ **Be prepared.** You don't do yourself or the players any favors if you aren't ready to run the game session. Better to engage in a different activity than to try to run a D&D adventure when you haven't made all the necessary preparations. You can alleviate some of the work by selecting a ready-to-run adventure, such as the ones presented in this book, but even then you need to read and review that material before sitting down to run the game. When you use published adventures, study the way they are designed so you can use some of the same tricks when you get around to crafting your own adventures. Be organized, be ready, and be prepared, and the game session will run that much more smoothly.

## It isn't a competition

You aren't competing against the players. The D&D roleplaying game is a cooperative game, not a competitive one. The victory conditions consist of having fun and telling an exciting group story. The player characters work together to accomplish their team goals; they don't seek to beat, defeat, or otherwise achieve individual wins.

Likewise, it isn't you against them. Even though the DM runs the monsters and villains, the DM doesn't win the game by defeating the player characters. Sure, that result might happen

occasionally, as long as it happens fairly and still leads to a satisfying story. Many players' D&D memories include great tales of sorrow and tragedy as the heroes went down in a blaze of glory against a powerful and hated foe. But this should be the natural outcome of good and fair play. Never use your powers as DM to go out of your way to destroy the player characters. That isn't fair. It's just mean and will lead to the disintegration of your game group. It all goes back to that trust thing.

## *What do you want out of the game?*

Here's a great discussion topic for you and the game group to bat around before you get too far into your D&D play: What does everyone want out of the game?

As DM, you should honestly tell the players why you want to run D&D, what you hope to get out of it, and how you imagine the campaign developing if everyone sticks with it. Initially, this might be as simple as saying "I want to try this roleplaying game thing because it looks interesting and I think it will be fun." Later, you might develop deeper goals related to creativity, storytelling, world-building, and so on. Or, you might still just want to run D&D games because it's a fun thing to do.

Players might have all kinds of reasons for wanting to play, but initially they might not have any expectations. Some players like the creativity of building a character and playing a role, immersing themselves in the story and the fantasy of D&D. Others like the action and combat aspects of the game, and the highlights for them occur every time a new monster arrives on the scene to challenge them. Others get into the game mechanics, looking to maximize their characters through smart play and statistical optimization.

This eventually leads to deciding on the style of D&D game you want to run to best meet these expectations. Chapter 9 goes into this topic in more depth because it isn't something you should try to figure out as a new Dungeon Master. That said, here's a brief rundown on some typical game styles so you can get a sense about the different styles of the D&D game:

- ✓ **Hack'n'slash:** A straightforward, action-oriented style of play that focuses on fighting monsters and getting treasure. Little time is spent developing the roleplaying side of player characters, you provide few encounters that don't involve combat, and the story never strays very far from the dungeon. This style is also called *kick in the door* adventuring. We usually refer to players who prefer this style of play to be *power gamers*. Power gamers usually work to maximize their statistics and abilities to take full advantage of the game mechanics.
- ✓ **Deep-immersion storytelling:** Talking, roleplaying, and developing complex personas for every player character take center stage in this style of play. Entire game sessions might pass without a single die being rolled. The story is the thing here, as well as character development and character interaction. Combat encounters are few and far between as adventures deal with intrigue, negotiations, and political maneuvering. We usually refer to players who prefer this style of play to be *roleplayers*.
- ✓ **Something in between:** More than likely, your campaign and play style will eventually develop into something that falls somewhere between the hack'n'slash and deep-immersion storytelling extremes. The best adventures have a good mix of action, story, and interaction to keep all players happy.



In the end, there is no right or wrong way to play D&D. Just match the style to the overall personality and desires of the group so that everyone can have fun playing the game.

## *Increasing the fun quotient*

The DM can increase the game group's fun quotient by following a few simple principles, as we describe in the following list:

- ✓ **Understand the players.** Although discussing what they might want out of the game is a good start, a DM also has to observe indirect cues and play patterns to fully understand the players.
- ✓ **Provide something for everyone.** When you figure out what the players want (through discussion, observation, or both), you can adjust the adventures to cater to each of them. Depending on the group, you can deal with this collectively (by adjusting the play style) or individually (by providing encounters that speak to each player in turn).
- ✓ **Maintain a high level of energy.** Players take their cues from the DM, so you need to keep your enthusiasm up, your level of energy high, and your sense of excitement focused and on track. The players will respond and perform likewise.
- ✓ **Move it, move it, move it.** Pacing is everything. Never take away the players' sense of control over the actions of their characters, but develop the skills to nudge them along or reshape the adventure to minimize slow periods, keep the action going, and help bring the players back to the fun.



Periodically look around the gaming table and ask yourself this question: Are we having fun? If the answer is “yes,” don’t worry too much about pacing and action. If your group is enjoying a long negotiation with a swaggering bugbear, let the scene play out. If you look around and see players fiddling with their dice, looking bored, or starting to get distracted, the answer must be a resounding “no.” That’s when you need to make an adjustment, move the adventure along, and help the players find the fun. When all else fails, have a wandering monster show up, or have a villain kick in the door, or have some other event occur to get the group back to the action.

## *Setting Ground Rules and Expectations*

To help you get along with the players, we suggest that you work together to establish some ground rules that have nothing to do with the game itself but can help everyone know what to expect from the interactions around the table. The following sections describe some of the issues that might eventually crop up around the gaming table. It helps if you discuss these things with the players and decide on answers before you get too far into your campaign.

## *Staying serious or hungering for humor?*

Do you envision your D&D campaign as a serious story (in the tradition of *The Lord of the Rings*) or a humorous romp through the dungeon (in the spirit of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*)? Either can work and be used to create a fun experience, but it's better if you and the players agree on how you want to approach your fantasy before getting too far into an adventure. Nothing can destroy a game group faster than a DM intent on running a serious game when the players want to crack jokes and turn everything into a comedy. Bear in mind that even the most serious stories benefit from moments of humor, especially in the form of a wise-cracking hero or a funny villain.



We recommend that you approach your campaign and the adventures that comprise it in a serious manner. Let the humor come naturally, around the table, with you playing it straight so that the tone remains heroic and fantastic. Keep the in-game action tense and suspenseful, though it can be fun to throw in the occasional light-hearted encounter or adventure.

## *Naming characters*

The names you give to nonplayer characters say a lot about the world you're building. Strive for consistency so that your world feels real. Strive for reality, for the same reason. The same is true of place names, where just a little thought and care can help paint a fantastic picture of your D&D world.



Encourage the players to approach the naming game with the same care and creativity. Player character names should be of a similar style and consistency to help set the tone of the adventuring team. For example, a group that includes Elfy the elf, Joen of Arc, Regdar, Brightwand the wizard, and Barney the barbarian winds up coming off silly and comical. This can be bad if the DM is running a serious and tense campaign world.

## *Managing multiple characters*

The number of player characters per player might ultimately be decided by how many players are in the game group, but you and the players should come to an agreement. This is a two-fold question: How many characters can each player create, and how many can they play at the table?

In general, we recommend that a player creates and runs a single character at a time. If the players want to try their hands at different character concepts, you might try running short campaigns that start over on a regular basis, or

using multiple DMs in the group (as we discuss in the “Sharing DM Duties” section, later in this chapter).



On the other hand, if your game group doesn't have enough players for each to bring one character to the table and field an adventuring party of at least four characters, you might want to allow one or more of the players to create and play a second character. Always encourage the better or more experienced players to run the extra characters, and constantly remind them that they have to play the characters as individuals — not as a single character that gets to do twice as much in a round.

## *Handling no-shows*

It's going to happen. Someone is going to miss a game session. You need to decide how many people can miss a game and still have enough players for you to run the adventure. Then you have to determine what to do with the characters of the no-show players if you do decide that the game must go on.

There's no single answer to the question of how many players constitute a quorum for your game group. If you have a large group, you might decide that the game goes on as long as three players show up for the game. You might even be comfortable running a game for one or two players, though the rest of the group might prefer that the game wait for them. Talk this through with the group, come to a solution that works for the majority, and then stick to that solution.

If a player or two is missing and the game is going forward anyway, you also need to determine what to do with the characters whose players aren't at the table. Here are some methods for dealing with the characters of missing players:

- ✓ **Have another player run the missing player's character.** That means that for this game session, one player controls two characters. This is easiest on the DM but could be problematic if the fill-in player resents the extra work or if the missing player doesn't like what happened to his or her character during the session.
- ✓ **The DM runs the missing player's character as if the character were an NPC.** This approach can often be the best solution, but you should avoid this option if you think it will be too much work for you and might harm the rest of the session. Often when we do this, we keep the missing player's character away from the front lines, try to use the character's abilities in the same manner as the missing player, and usually have one of the other players roll dice for the character.
- ✓ **The character, like the player, misses the game session.** Depending on where you are in the adventure, this isn't always the most practical or

logical solution, but it does keep the character safe while the player is away. In this scenario, the character stays back to guard the camp, goes to town on personal business, travels ahead to secure lodging in the next village you plan to visit, or whatever other reason you can come up with to allow for the character to disappear for a session. Hopefully, the next session picks up at a point in the adventure in which the character can jump back in with a minimum of fuss and bother.

- ✓ **The character fades into the background for the session, following along but doing nothing.** Because this strains the credibility of the character and the world, it is the least desirable solution, but you can use it if that's what you and the players believe will work out best for your group.

## *Adding new players*

Players come and players go. It happens. People move. People get busy. People decide that they want to do something else with their time. Hopefully, you'll also have new players waiting in the wings to join the group when this happens. First, discuss a potential new player with the group to make sure everyone is comfortable with this person joining them. Then bring the new player up to speed on the campaign and the various house rules that you and the group use. Finally, you have to integrate the new character into the campaign in a logical and fun way. The group can meet the new character on the road, rescue him or her from the dungeon, find him or her at a guild hall, or any number of other ways you and the players can imagine.

You also need to decide what level to start the new character at. We recommend that the new player create a character that is the same level as the rest of the game group. So, if the players have 5th-level characters in the game, have the new player create a 5th-level character to join them.

## *Dealing with dice*

Encourage everyone to eventually get their own set of dice. Personal dice become associated with a favorite character, and all kinds of rituals concerning dice, luck, and the skill of the player will become wrapped up in a player's favorite set of dice.

You and the group need to decide how you want to treat dice in the game. Any answer is the right answer to these questions, just so long as everyone knows what to expect and you stay consistent.



- ✓ What constitutes a cocked die that needs to be rerolled? When it lands askew against a book, on a pencil, or atop a miniature?
- ✓ If a die falls off the table during a roll, do you use it as it lands or roll it again so it stays on the table?
- ✓ Do you as the DM roll your dice in secret or in front of the players? What about the players? Do you want to see their die rolls?
- ✓ Do you roll all the dice or do you let the players roll for their characters?
- ✓ Do you roll attack and damage dice at the same time, or do you roll them separately?

## *Bringing books*

What books do you want the players to have at the table, and do you want to allow them to reference them during the game? In general, the only thing you probably don't want players looking up during an adventure are the statistics in the *Monster Manual* of the monsters you just surprised them with, but that's up to you.

New D&D game supplements come out all the time. You need to decide how you want to introduce new rules or content from these supplements into the game. We recommend that when you find a new supplement or rule that you want to add to the game, inform the players of this during one of your after-session discussions. This way, they can explore the book and come back to you if they find something in it they want to try with their characters (new spells, feats, classes, prestige classes, or whatever). For new monsters or magic items, no discussion is needed. Just drop the new feature into the next logical location in your adventure.

On the other hand, players will also pick up D&D supplements that interest them, and you should encourage them to discuss with you any content they would like to try out in the game. If it looks okay to you, work with the player to make the new content available in your campaign.

However you decide to handle this, we encourage you to use a BYOB policy. It just makes good sense for everyone to "Bring Your Own Books" to the game. A player, for example, should have his or her own copy of the *Player's Handbook* instead of constantly borrowing someone else's during or after the game.

## *Debating rules*

We recommend that you establish that rules discussions should occur before the game starts or at the end of the session. That way, players won't question or challenge your rulings during the game itself, and the adventure can proceed without incident. Afterward, discuss any issues the players have with the way the game worked out. Minor mistakes on your part should be admitted, but allow the progress of the adventure to stand as is. If, on the other hand, you made a bad call that resulted in something terrible happening to the player characters, such as a character death, you should talk it through and determine whether the scene should be played over. See the section, "Making Mistakes and Deciding What to Do with Them," later in this chapter.

## *Managing off-topic discussions*

Insist that the players get all their off-topic discussions concerning work, school, new movies, the latest episodes of favorite TV shows, or whatever out of the way during the pre-game socializing period. During the game, everyone needs to stay focused on their characters and the adventure.

Still, people talk, and D&D is a social experience. Play it by ear and try to keep everything fun, but you don't want the entire game session to devolve into jokes and chatter. You are there to play D&D, after all.

## *Considering computers*

It's increasingly common for players to bring laptops to the table so that they can keep spreadsheets of their characters, notes on the campaign, and resources to reference. This is usually okay, unless you have players who spend so much time typing and looking at the screen that they aren't paying attention to the game.

The computer can also be a powerful tool for you to use as the DM, but not if it draws your attention away from the table and takes up too much time. Decide what you want the game table to look like and discuss it with the players so that you can set the right expectations for everyone.

## *Setting the table with miniatures and a battle grid*

The D&D game cries out for some kind of play surface and tokens to represent player characters and monsters. The game's tactical elements work so much better when the players can properly visualize the action. We suggest using prepainted plastic D&D *Miniatures*, but any kind of tokens or markers can suffice. Paper battle grids, such as the one in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or the beautifully illustrated maps found in the *Fantastic Locations* products, make great play surfaces. You can also find vinyl mats and plastic boards covered in one-inch squares that can be drawn upon with either wet- or dry-erase markers. Use what works best for you and your game group, or try a variety of play surfaces, depending on the encounter or adventure you're running.

At the very least, we recommend having each player find a miniature to represent his or her character. This can be a metal miniature painstakingly painted with tender, loving care, or a ready-to-use D&D *Miniature* that the player found in your collection or in a booster pack. Let players make the choice so that they feel a connection between the figures and their characters, and so they can readily identify them on the battle grid when the action gets hectic and chaotic — as battles are wont to do.

## *Making Mistakes and Deciding What to Do with Them*

It's inevitable. All DMs are human, and humans make mistakes. So, eventually, you're going to make a bad call while adjudicating a D&D game rule. That's okay. Sometimes, the players won't even notice, especially if they're caught up in the excitement of the story or the drama of the encounter in question. In general, as long as you followed some kind of logical approach to deciding on a resolution, things should work out fine even if you didn't follow the letter of the law.

However, sometimes you'll make a mistake and the players will call you on it. Ask them to hold the discussion for after the session, and then review the rule and the situation with them. Again, even if you got it wrong, most of the time the solution you came up with probably works just fine and the adventure can proceed without any need to redo a scene. When you get a rule wrong and the player characters pay dearly for that, consider redoing the scene in question.

## Who rolls the dice?

As a general rule, we recommend that you roll the dice for all monsters and NPCs, and that the players roll the dice for their characters. However, sometimes a die roll can reveal more than you want the players to know. For example, if a player rolls to search for a trap in a dungeon corridor, any result will color how that player treats that corridor moving forward. A poor roll tells the player that her character should proceed cautiously, because a trap could be somewhere ahead. A good roll, on the other hand, reveals a hidden trap or sounds the all-clear, allowing the characters to proceed without a care in the world. The adventure proceeds more satisfyingly if the player doesn't know for sure whether his or her character succeeded at the Search check, or the Move Silently check, or the Hide check, for example.

In cases where players shouldn't know the result of a die roll, the DM should make the roll in secret. Consider making the following skill checks for the players, rolling the dice in secret:

- ✓ Bluff
- ✓ Diplomacy
- ✓ Hide
- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Move Silently
- ✓ Search
- ✓ Spot

It won't destroy the game to let the players make these rolls, but you keep some of the suspense and tension up if you make the rolls for them.

What about DM rolls? Should you roll your dice in the open or behind your DM screen? If you

want to use the die results as they fall without making adjustments to help the story, make all of your rolls in the open. If you want the option to sometimes fudge the results to help the story along, make your rolls in secret. See Chapter 10 for a discussion on DM fiat or DM cheating and how to use it successfully and fairly to enhance the game.

How do you narrate these types of situations? Well, if you roll the dice for the player characters' Listen checks, for example, you tell them what they hear. Failed rolls indicate that you should narrate the scene without revealing any unusual sounds in the forest ahead, but successful rolls tell you to find a way to slip hints into your narration. Of course, a failed check and a check when there is nothing unusual to hear sound a lot the same when you narrate them. Here's what we mean:

- ✓ **Failed Listen checks or checks made when there's nothing to hear:** "You strain to hear any unusual sounds in the forest ahead. You hear the sounds of chirping birds, the gentle rustle of leaves as a calm wind whistles through the trees, and the distant rush of water from a nearby river."
- ✓ **Successful Listen checks when there's something unusual to hear:** "You listen intently. Birds chirp, leaves rustle in the wind, and the sound of rushing water from a nearby river can be heard in the forest around you. You also catch a few whispered words that you can't make out and the distinct sound that armor makes when someone wearing it is trying to be quiet. Someone must be hiding up ahead, trying not to be seen or heard."

In any event, everyone should learn from their mistakes. Look at what you did as compared to what the actual rule is. Sometimes, you might decide that your approach is better for your game group than the official rule. Discuss it with the players, make it a house rule, and remember to stay consistent. Everything works out in the end.

## *Sharing DM Duties*

Being the Dungeon Master is fun! Why should you get to have all that fun by yourself? And why shouldn't you get to be a player every now and then? We don't recommend starting off this way, but after a while, your game group might decide to spread its wings and try a few other approaches instead of just sticking to the tried and true method of one DM and one campaign.

### *One campaign, multiple DMs*

As time goes along, someone else in your game group might want to try his or her hand at DMing the game. You can continue with the campaign that you have already established, allowing the other players to continue playing the characters they have created and advanced, while you step into the role of player for an adventure or two and another player takes over the DMing duties for a while. This gives you a chance to just play a single character and experience the fun of seeing the adventure unfold from the other side of the table. It gives the other player a chance to be the DM, and the game can never have too many DMs.

If you have a really energized and creative group, you might have a number of players who would love to get a crack at being the DM. Let them each run an adventure over the course of a few sessions, with you picking up the campaign either between their adventures or after a few months of guest DMs. This can be a one-shot experience, or if everyone wants you can establish regular schedules for each DM to run an adventure for the group. The story retains continuity as long as everyone uses the same campaign and player characters, but the game group also gets to experience the variety and creativity of different styles of DMing.

### *Multiple campaigns, multiple DMs*

A variation on the theme of multiple DMs is to let each DM run his or her own campaign. So, in this way of sharing the DM duties, your game group not only

experiences different DMing styles, it also plays in a variety of different campaign worlds. Each player makes a new character for use in each new campaign.

This means that the group switches playing styles and characters a lot, but that isn't necessarily a bad thing. For example, our game group consists of Bill, Rich, Michele, Kim, James, and Chris. Bill, Rich, and Michele all take turns as the DM. Bill runs a D&D EBERRON game when he DMs, and the other players all create characters that fit into that setting. Rich runs a D&D FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, with a more classic and high-fantasy feel than Bill's game. Michele runs something different, using the d20 MODERN game rules (which are based on the D&D rules but formatted for running adventures in the modern world) to create a campaign where all the players run characters that work for a top-secret agency of super spies. With each DM in the group running a game in a different campaign setting, the group experiences a whole lot of variety, which keeps this particular game group fresh and exciting.

# Chapter 6

## Teaching the Game

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Discovering the DM's role as game teacher
  - ▶ Using teaching aids
  - ▶ Reviewing the key elements of the game with new players
- 

Depending on the makeup of your game group and the frequency with which players join or leave the group, eventually the task will fall to you to teach someone how to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Consider this a wonderful opportunity to help spread the word about the game you love to play. By teaching the game, you not only create new players for your game group (ensuring that you always have people to play D&D with), but you can make certain that you explain the rules in a way that best compliments the game you like to run.

Share your hobby with others, and it will grow and prosper. As we've said time and again: Play more D&D, it's good for you! For DMs, we amend that and say: Teach more D&D, it's good for everyone!

In this chapter, we suggest using the key elements of D&D (which we describe in more detail in the "Teaching Key Elements to New Players" section, later in this chapter) as the model for how you teach the game to new players. Using the key elements approach, you introduce new players to D&D in the following stages:

1. Provide new players with a brief overview about what D&D is and the campaign world you run.
2. Give new players a lesson on using the core mechanic and what their characters can do in the game.
3. Walk them through the character sheet. This is necessary whether you're preparing the new person to create new characters or to start out by using ready-to-play characters that you provide.
4. Run through the key house rules and expectations that your game group uses, including many of the nongame aspects, such as when you play, where, and what responsibilities the group shares.



5. Take new players through a game session. The best way to learn the game is to see it in action in a game session.

Make sure you keep the new player's first game session moving at a pace that encourages question asking and answering, and take the time to explain game concepts to the new players as they come up.

## *Dungeon Master as Teacher*

No matter how many *Basic Game* packages we create, or how many *For Dummies* books we write, or how many online game demos we build, the fact of the matter is that a game like DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is easier to learn if someone teaches a new player how to play. The concepts and activities are just novel enough to make some people scratch their heads when they try to wrap their minds around it without actually seeing the game in action. The reality is that the game, at its core, isn't really that hard or that complex. Getting to that core, however, can sometimes be tricky.

When you introduce new players to the game, remember that players who are taught by a good teacher in a fun game are more likely to have positive experiences with D&D. Fun experiences provide them with a foundation that can be built upon, and they're more likely to become D&D players for life.

Consider it an honor and a privilege to be able to introduce new players to your favorite game. Be patient with new players. Make them feel welcome and try to make the learning as fun and as simple as possible. Don't get frustrated because a new player doesn't understand all the rules right out of the gate. Use this opportunity to encourage the new player to become the sort of gamer you want to play games with. Answer all questions in simple terms, trying not to use too much jargon. You should stick to the basics of the game, though, and let some of their answers come as you play.

For you as the DM to be a good teacher, you need to keep a few things in mind, as we discuss in the following sections.

### *Teaching the basic rules*

To teach the game, you need to have a clear understanding of the basic rules of D&D. These key elements usually figure into the first things you teach a new player when explaining the game. We discuss these key elements in more detail later in this chapter (in "Teaching Key Elements to New Players"). The big thing to remember is that you shouldn't try to teach all the rules of the



game at once. That's too much for you to do, too much for the new player to absorb, and frankly, nobody needs to know all those rules right off the bat.



When you teach the game, we recommend giving a rundown of the basics and then getting the new player right into the action. Seeing the rules in play and having fun playing are the best ways to learn D&D.

## *Showing how to create a character*

You need to understand how to create D&D characters so that you can help a new player make a new player character. Ask the new player what kind of character he or she wants to play. Then point the new player to the right class and race to help him or her get going. If the new player doesn't know or have an idea for a character, briefly explain the race and class options and see whether anything interests the player.

Sometimes providing a new player with a ready-to-play character (such as the ones in *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*) works best for the purposes of teaching the game. After the new player gets a feel for things, he or she will have a better sense of the kind of character he or she wants to create and play for the long haul.



When in doubt, have a new player create a human fighter. It's one of the easiest characters to create and play, so it makes a good first choice for a new player just starting out with the game.

You also need to give the new player a quick rundown on the character sheet, so he or she knows how to read it. Just hit the highlights (as detailed later in this chapter in the section "Explaining the most important parts of the character sheet"); the rest of the sheet will make sense when the player needs to refer to it.

## *Relaxing and having fun playing the game*

D&D is a game. It's fun! When you teach a new player, you need to relax and have fun so that the new player relaxes and has fun, too.



Most of the rules of D&D are *situational* (that is, they apply only when specific situations come up). Just deal with the basics of the game and the characters (see "Teaching Key Elements to New Players," later in this chapter) before you start the first game session. Leave the explanation of the more intricate and detailed rules as they come up in game play, and everything will work out fine.

## *Making Use of Helpful Aids*

A number of aids are available to help you teach new players how to play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. We review these aids and how to best use them for this purpose in the following sections.

### *D&D Basic Game*

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Basic Game* is designed specifically to serve as a first D&D roleplaying experience. It comes with a configurable dungeon play surface, ready-to-play characters, ready-to-play adventure scenarios, basic rules, dice, and miniatures. You can use it to discover how to DM, to bring a new game group up to speed, or to teach new players the game. Or, you can use parts of it for any of those purposes.

### *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*

The companion volume to this book, *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*, explains the D&D game in simple, clear language. You can refer to it for advice on how to present the game's concepts to new players, or to brush up on your own understanding of the game. It makes a great recommended reading for new players, and we suggest that you let the new players know that it can help them get up to speed very quickly. It also contains ready-to-play characters that new players can use, and it features an adventure that you can run, either as an introduction to the game or just as part of your ongoing campaign.

### *Fantastic Locations*

The *Fantastic Locations* series of products (including *Fantastic Locations: Fane of the Drow* and *Fantastic Locations: Hellspike Prison*) provide wonderfully illustrated battle maps of, well, fantastic locations that you can use to set key encounters in if you use miniatures (such as official D&D *Miniatures*). They make great gaming aids and are especially useful when showing new players how to play D&D.

### *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures*

The D&D *Basic Game* comes with a selection of D&D *Miniatures*, and you can increase your collection with DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Miniatures* booster packs. Accessories such as battle maps and miniatures are especially helpful for new players because they give the game a more traditional look (board and

pieces) and help players better visualize the situations you throw at them. The tactical elements of the D&D game are best served with some kind of visual representations, so you might as well use the coolest and best-looking visual representations you can find. Plus, players love to associate their characters with a special and specific miniature figure.

## *Teaching Key Elements to New Players*

The following sections present one method for teaching the D&D game to new players. It isn't the only way, and after a while you'll develop your own method and style. But here's some advice and examples to help you out the first few times you get to bring new players into the fold.

### *Explaining the premise of D&D*

Start out by giving the new player a little background. What is the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game? It's a roleplaying game. It's kind of like a live version of a computer game, or a grown-up and sophisticated version of make-believe. It lets players participate in exciting adventures in an imaginary world of magic and monsters, where the only limit to what the player characters can do is the players' own imaginations.

D&D is different from other games in the following ways:

- ✔ **The player creates and plays a character.** In a D&D game, the player plays a character that he or she creates. This character improves over time, becoming more powerful and more famous in the imaginary world where your adventures take place. A character is defined by race (human, dwarf, or elf, for example), class (fighter, cleric, or wizard, for example), game statistics, and the personality the player develops for the character as he or she plays the game.
- ✔ **Play continues.** When the player creates a character for a D&D game, he or she plays that character from one game session to the next. The adventures are kind of like an ongoing television series, and the player characters are the stars. With each adventure the player participates in, his or her character grows and develops, becomes more powerful, and generally takes on greater and greater challenges as the campaign unfolds.
- ✔ **Nothing limits the action.** Unlike board games or computer games, there are no limits to what a player character can do in a D&D game. Not only can the character attempt to do anything imaginable within the confines of the character's powers and abilities, the game also offers endless adventure possibilities and a multitude of choices for developing a character over time.

- ✔ **Everyone wins.** The D&D game is a cooperative game. The players work together to overcome the challenges the Dungeon Master presents. The DM presents adventures and narrates the action. In this way, players and DM play the game and tell a group story. If the characters survive and overcome the challenges (or die spectacularly and memorably while trying) and everyone has a fun and exciting time, then everyone wins.

## *Describing the world of D&D*

No matter what setting you play in, the world of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game consists of a number of constant factors that remain true across every campaign. Some of these are defined by the background story of the game, and some by the rules of the game. These constant factors include:

- ✔ **A medieval world:** A D&D world is modeled after a fantastic version of the medieval period of European history. It's an imaginary, magical version that comes out of story books and legends more than out of any actual history text. The technology of the world matches what you probably think of when you think of the world of King Arthur or Robin Hood or fairy tales. People travel on foot or on horseback, gunpowder doesn't exist, and most battles occur using melee weapons such as clubs and maces and swords. The world contains castles and dark forests and knights and monsters, among other things.
- ✔ **A magical world:** Everything of fantasy exists in a D&D world, from fantastical creatures to magic spells to powerful arcane items. A forest might be an enchanted forest or a cursed forest. Good wizards and evil sorcerers abound. And player characters might find all kinds of magic items and artifacts — often as a result of a long and harrowing adventure or quest of some sort.
- ✔ **A world of monsters:** In addition to all kinds of magic, a D&D world is inhabited by monsters of every description and disposition. *Monster* is kind of a generic term, because monsters can be good or evil, helpful or harmful, depending on the situation and the adventure. From great dragons to small goblins, monsters come in all shapes and sizes.

## *Showing how to use the core mechanic*

The *core mechanic* of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is that you roll a d20 and hope to roll high. Everything else is just details.

You resolve any action in the game that has a possibility of failure associated with it (and a subsequent meaningful consequence) by using the core mechanic. These actions include making an attack, using a skill, or using an ability. To determine whether an action succeeds, follow these steps:

1. Roll a d20.
2. Add any relevant modifiers. You can explain to a new player that a modifier is a bonus or penalty that is added to the d20 die roll. Modifiers come from a variety of game statistics, such as ability scores and skills.
3. Compare the result to a target number.

The DM sets the target number either by using numbers that are predetermined (such as in an adventure or a monster's Armor Class) or by determining a target number using the rulebooks and the relative difficulty of the task as a guide. If the result is equal to or greater than the target number, the action succeeds. If the resulting number is less than the target number, the action fails.

## *Explaining what a character can do*

The D&D game is played fairly loose until a tactical situation (such as a combat encounter or some challenge encounters) comes up. Then everyone plays the game in rounds. In a round, a character can try to do anything the player can imagine, but it usually boils down to something within the following parameters. On a player's turn in combat, the character can do any one of the following actions:

- ✓ Move and attack
- ✓ Attack and move
- ✓ Just move
- ✓ Just attack
- ✓ Do something else (cast a spell, use a potion, draw a weapon, take cover, or anything else you can imagine)

## *Explaining the most important parts of the character sheet*

You need to walk a new player through the parts of the character sheet that come into play most often during the game. The sheet has a lot of stuff on it.

Tell the player that the following bits are the most important parts and that you'll explain everything else when it comes up in the game:



- ✓ **Character class and level:** This gives an idea about what role the character plays in the group, and how relatively powerful the character is.
- ✓ **HP:** This lists the character's *hit points*. When a monster or other opponent successfully attacks the character, the player subtracts the amount of damage from the character's current hit point total. When the character's hit points are reduced to 0 or less, he or she is defeated and out of the fight.

You can save the big discussion on the specifics of character death and dying for later in the game.
- ✓ **AC:** The character's *Armor Class*. This class represents how tough it is to hit the character in combat and serves as the target number that opponents need to achieve to damage the character with an attack.
- ✓ **Speed:** This is the distance the character can move when performing a move-and-attack action. If the character just moves, he or she can move up to twice the listed number in the round.
- ✓ **Initiative:** To decide who goes first in a combat round, each player makes an Initiative check. The player rolls a d20 and adds his or her character's initiative modifier. That determines when the character can act in the round.
- ✓ **Attack:** This area of the character sheet lists the character's weapons and attack modifiers. Whenever the player makes an attack roll, he or she rolls a d20 and adds the attack bonus. If the result equals or exceeds the target's AC, the attack hits. If the attack roll succeeds, the player rolls damage, which is also listed in this section on the character sheet. For example, Regdar the fighter (one of the sample characters we provide in *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*) attacks with a greatsword (+4 bonus) that deals 2d6+3 damage when it hits.
- ✓ **Everything else:** Show the player where to look on the sheet when those sections become pertinent during the game.

## Chapter 7

# Sample Dungeon: The Rat Lord's Lair

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### *In This Chapter*

- Preparing for the sample adventure
  - Running the sample dungeon
- 

**W**e're taking all the advice we provide earlier in the book and using it to show you how to run your very first DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure. In addition to all the components that regularly go into a D&D adventure, for this one we provide plenty of advice and behind-the-scenes information to make your first experience as Dungeon Master run as smoothly as possible. This is the good stuff — go ahead and dig in!

## *Dungeon Master Preparation*

Whenever you prepare to run an adventure for a D&D game session, you should consider the items discussed in the following sections. You might come to develop other preparation habits as you become more comfortable in your role as Dungeon Master and as you become more comfortable with the game, but the following sections provide a solid approach to DM preparation.

### *Knowing the players*

As we discuss in Chapters 5 and 9, you need to have a sense of the kind of game the players want to play in. This includes getting a sense of the kind of characters they like to play, the way they approach the game, the kind of adventures they prefer, and the style of play they try to emulate.

## It's just a game

Remember to relax and have fun. We can't stress this enough — DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is a game. It's a fun game. You might not get everything right, but you can't get it wrong, either. Play to the best of your ability and the players'

abilities, and don't worry if you don't get all the game rules quite right the first time out. You have our permission to make mistakes. (As if you even need it!) So what are you waiting for? Get your game group together and start having fun!

Now, for your first adventure, you don't need to know the players' wants and needs for the game inside and out. In fact, you might not have much of an idea about their views on that at all when you start out. When you do figure that all out (through candid conversations, observation of play patterns, or both), it gives you a powerful tool for adventure planning and preparation.

For your first session, you basically just need to know how many players are coming to the game. The adventure presented in this chapter is designed to challenge a group of four 1st-level player characters. If you have fewer than four players, you will want to allow some players to control more than one player character (PC) so that you have a full party of four for the adventure. If you have more than four players, refer to the sections in the adventure that show you how to scale the encounters to match the number of player characters in the group. You probably don't want to try to run a game with more than six players, though. More players mean more complexity, more things for you to keep track of, and less time for each player to have a moment in the spotlight.

## *Knowing your adventure*

Never approach your game session cold. That's just trouble waiting to happen. It all comes back to being prepared. Whether you're preparing to run the adventure presented in this chapter, a published adventure, or one you've created, make sure you've prepared before the game session starts by following these steps:

1. Read through the adventure so you have a sense of the story and the pacing, as well as an understanding of the main villain and the encounters that the player characters will have to deal with. For your first session, preparation is easy — just review this chapter.
2. Review any game rules that you feel you need to brush up on before play, and look up any special rules mentioned in the adventure. If you think you might need to look up those rules during the game, bookmark those pages in the rulebook(s). That way, you won't need to delay the action for too long when those parts of the adventure come up.



3. Gather any other materials you'll need for the adventure, including your battle grid, miniatures (or other markers to represent the monsters), and dice. If you use a dry- or wet-erase battle grid, you might want to sketch out the first encounter area or two so that you can get right to the action when you start the game session.

## *The Rat Lord's Lair*

This adventure is designed to kick off your DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. It serves as an introduction to the game, as well as to the D&D world. It assumes that you're running a party of four 1st-level player characters. If you have more than four PCs or if the PCs are of a slightly higher level, see the "Making the Adventure Tougher" section at the end of this chapter for advice on adjustments you can make to compensate.



Throughout the adventure, material is divided into two distinct sections: material specifically for the Dungeon Master and material to share with the players. In general, DM material is behind-the-scenes advice and information that should be kept secret from the players until their characters do something to discover it. This could be opening a door, solving a puzzle, or otherwise doing something that brings the secret into the open. The adventure text will guide you through these secrets as you go along.



## Adventure premise



This section discusses the story-behind-the-story, the background of the adventure. This material is for the DM only. *Don't share this information with the players.* Their characters will learn about the story background as they play the game.

The adventure takes place in the tiny village of Castle Hill, a settlement with more wealth and activity than would otherwise be the case thanks to the presence of the busy trade road that passes through it. The inn, The Weary Wanderer, provides lodging, food, and entertainment for the merchants, traders, and other travelers that use the road to get to larger towns and cities to the north and south. The innkeeper, Malto Krass, makes a lucrative profit off a service he provides on the side: Krass uses a secure room in the inn's basement as a vault-for-rent. Traders carrying especially valuable goods or merchants looking to store items until a caravan arrives often take advantage of Krass's protected storage facility.

Unfortunately, the secure basement room isn't as safe as Innkeeper Krass once believed. The trade lord Silos Vant placed a small metal box in Krass's care. "I must complete some business up north in Griffonford," Vant explained, "and I don't want to carry this precious item with me. I shall leave it with you, innkeeper, safe in your secure room until I return. I should be back in about six days." So, Krass locked the small metal box in the basement room. When he went down to the basement room the next day to place another item into storage for a visiting metalworker, he unlocked the heavy door and entered the secure space. To the innkeeper's horror, the small metal box was gone! Not only that, but other items that he had locked away were missing as well. How had someone managed to get past the locked door? Malto Krass was baffled and extremely worried about his business and his reputation.

The adventure begins when Innkeeper Malto Krass approaches the player characters and asks them to undertake the mission to discover how the items were stolen, find the thief, and return the missing items before the whole village finds out what has happened.

**DM Secret:** Here's what's happening in the village of Castle Hill. A thief by the name of Shadowfang has set up shop in the secret tunnels beneath the hill upon which the village was constructed. Not just a simple thief, Shadowfang is a wererat who fancies himself to be the Lord of Rats. Using his ability to change into a rat and his affinity with the rats of the village, Shadowfang found a small crack in the basement room's floor. Moving from his tunnels up to the basement room when he was in rat form was easy, and he stole the small metal box and a few other items that were small enough to fit through the crack in the floor.

## *Starting the adventure*

You've gotten all the pre-game socialization out of the way, and now it's time to get to the main event — this game session's adventure. Start with the prologue: Have each player introduce his or her character by saying the character's name, race, and class, and giving a brief description of what the other characters see when they look at the character. Then, you should read this section out loud to the players:

**Read Aloud:** *You and your companions have been traveling along the trade road in search of adventure when you reach the small village of Castle Hill. The Weary Wanderer Inn looks comfortable and inviting, so you decide to stop for the night. The main room of the inn isn't too crowded this evening, and as you order drinks and food from the serving girl, you can't help but notice the innkeeper staring at you from his place behind the bar. He seems to hesitate for a second, but then he grabs a pitcher and walks toward your table.*

**DM Notes:** This first encounter is a roleplaying encounter. There is no map of the inn's common room or of the village because all the action takes place in the basement room and the secret tunnels beneath the village. The whole purpose of this encounter is to introduce the player characters and set the scene for the rest of the adventure to follow.

After letting the players introduce their characters and after you've read the preceding Read Aloud text, ask the players what they want their characters to do. Give them each a moment to decide on a course of action. Some players might decide that their characters will take a good look at the innkeeper. Others might watch the room for any strange activity. Still others might get on their guard and prepare for the worst. Let the player characters each make a single preparation, and then read the following out loud as the innkeeper reaches their table.

**Read Aloud:** *The innkeeper gives you a nervous smile. "May I join you?" he asks, setting a large pitcher of ale on the table.*

The innkeeper appears as a rotund, balding man of about 50 years. He wears an apron over clean and well-kept clothes. He carries no weapons or armor. Any player who asks to examine the innkeeper should make a Spot check. If the result is 10 or better, that character notices that the innkeeper seems nervous, perhaps even a bit fearful.

**Read Aloud:** *"My name is Malto Krass, and this is my place," the innkeeper says. "Am I right to assume that you are adventurers? If so, I'd like to hire you to solve a problem for me."*

Let the players answer for their characters. Encourage them, as you're playing the part of the innkeeper, to hear him out. The innkeeper will make it worth their while to help him and the entire village of Castle Hill. Any player character that makes a Sense Motive check of 10 or better realizes that the innkeeper is sincere in his appeal for help and truly means to reward anyone who provides that help. When the player characters ask what the problem is, read the following out loud.

**Read Aloud:** *The innkeeper says, "I have a secure room in the basement where I store items for a price. The room is always locked, but this morning I discovered that some very precious items were no longer inside the room. I have no idea how the thefts were accomplished, for the door was as secure as always. I need someone such as yourselves to investigate this matter — quietly — and retrieve the missing items before my reputation and the reputation of the whole village is ruined. Will you help me?"*

The innkeeper wants the whole business to be dealt with as quickly and as quietly as possible. He offers the player characters free room and board for the duration of the crisis, as well as 125 gold pieces each to investigate the mysterious robbery. If they actually catch the culprit responsible and return the missing items, he promises to double the reward (to 250 gold pieces each).

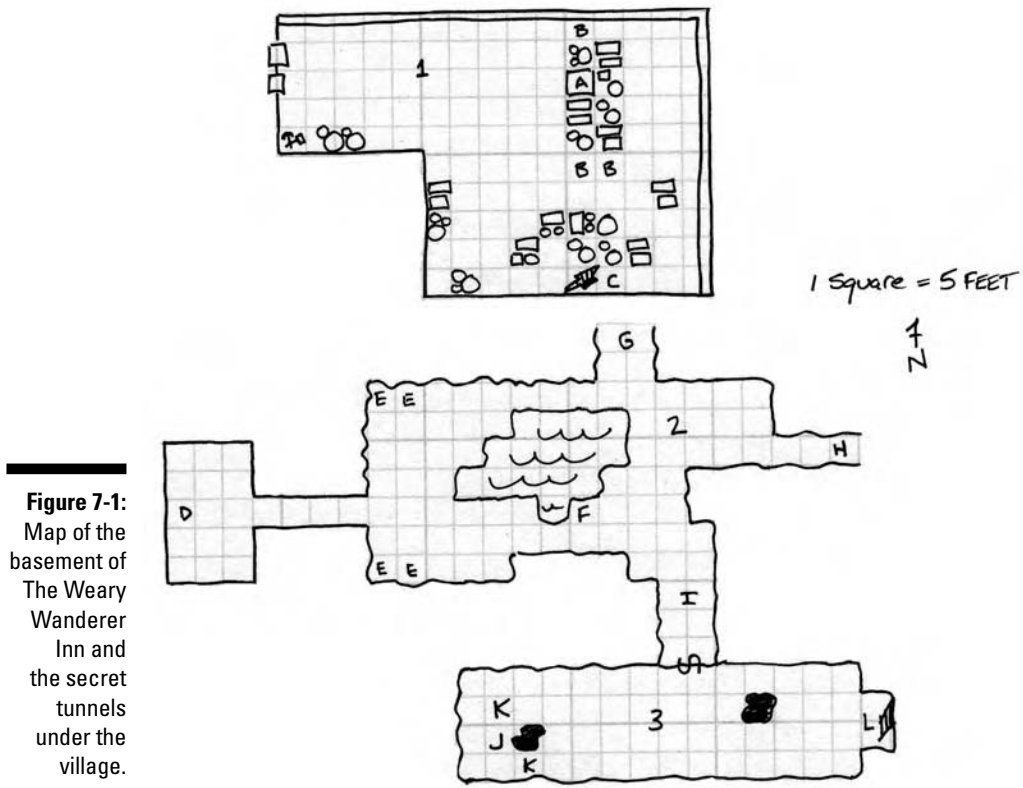
If the player characters want to ask questions, here are some possible answers that the innkeeper is willing to provide:

- ✔ **What items were taken?** A small metal box is missing; it bears the seal of Silos Vant and is about six inches long, three inches wide, and three inches deep. Also missing are a jeweled dagger with a ruby hilt, a gold pendant, and a silver ring encrusted with sapphires.
- ✔ **Who else has access to the room?** No one. The innkeeper has the only set of keys, and the key ring never leaves his side.
- ✔ **When did the thefts take place?** A small metal box was placed in the room yesterday. The innkeeper noticed that it and the other items were missing earlier today. The other missing items were placed within the room over a series of days, starting about a week ago.

When the player characters and the innkeeper reach an agreement, he takes them to the basement room.

## *Encounter Area 1: The Basement Room*

*This encounter area appears on the map shown in Figure 7-1. It is labeled as "1" on the map.*



**Encounter Level (EL) 1:** The player characters explore the basement room and discover a mystery that leads them deeper into the adventure.

The innkeeper leads the player characters downstairs to a pair of solid wooden doors. He hands a lantern to one of the player characters.

**Read Aloud:** *The double doors at the bottom of the stairs appear solid and strong. Three heavy padlocks, spaced evenly along the seam where the doors meet, are securely sealed. What do you want to do?*

Here are a few of the most obvious actions the player characters might make. Use the notes to help narrate the action. If a player wants his or her character to try something different, go for it! Listen to what the character wants to do, and then decide how best to adjudicate the action.

**Examine the Doors and Locks:** Any characters that want to examine the double doors or the locks should make a Search check.

*Failed Search Check (result is less than 15):* The doors and locks appear solid and secure. Nothing out of the ordinary suggests itself.

*Successful Search Check (result is 15 or better):* The doors and locks appear solid and secure. They have not been tampered with in any way. A character with this result does notice one odd thing about the doors. At the bottom of the right door, the wood has been gnawed away by some kind of animal, probably a rat, leaving a small hole about the size of a human fist at the base of the door. If the Search result is 20 or better, a character can tell that the hole is relatively new.

**Ask the Innkeeper to Open the Doors:** Innkeeper Krass says “Of course,” and produces a ring of keys from one of his many pockets. A different key unlocks each padlock. When he finishes, he steps back so that the player characters can open the doors. When the characters open the doors, skip ahead to the “Inside the Basement Room” description.

**Try to Break Open the Doors:** If the player characters want to bust open the doors, Innkeeper Krass objects strongly. (“See hear,” *the innkeeper says, “why would you want to smash my doors when I can simply unlock them for you?”*) If the PCs insist on destruction, the innkeeper throws up his hands and heads upstairs, mumbling about crazy adventurers and how he will deduct the cost of repairing the door out of their reward. (Reduce the reward by 25 gold pieces each if the player characters break open the doors.)

To break open the doors, one player character acts as the primary door breaker. That character makes a Strength check (roll a d20 and add the PC’s Strength modifier) and seeks to get a result of 18 or better. Up to two other characters can help the primary breaker. This is called *aiding* the character. The aiding characters also make Strength checks, but they need a result of only 10 or better. If an aiding character succeeds, the character provides a +2 bonus to the primary door breaker’s check. If both aiding characters succeed, the primary door breaker gets a +4 bonus.

If the Strength check fails, the characters bounce off the solid door. They can try again if they want, but they do notice that the attempt made a lot of noise, which the innkeeper didn’t want.

If the Strength check succeeds, the locks pull away from the wood and the double doors swing open. When the characters open the doors, go to the “Inside the Basement Room” description.

## Wererat (human form)

Wererats are quick and feral creatures that can transform between a human and an animal form. Evil and sneaky, a wererat hides among normal folk until it can take on its animal form to spread terror and bloodshed.

<b>Initiative</b>	+0	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	6 squares (30 feet)	<b>Hit Points</b>	12
<b>Rapier</b>	d20+2	<b>Rapier Damage</b>	1d6+1 (crit 18–20)
<b>Light Crossbow</b>	d20+1	<b>Light Crossbow Damage</b>	d8 (crit 19–20)
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+4	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+4
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +4	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	2		

**Try to Open the Locks:** If for some reason the rogue in the party wants to test the mettle of the locks that secure the basement room doors, Innkeeper Krass looks uncomfortable but says, *“Well, if that will tell you something about the robberies, I guess it’s okay.”* There are two Good locks (Open Lock DC 30) and one Average lock (Open Lock DC 25). It takes a full round action to try to open each lock. This is a tough challenge for a 1st-level rogue, so the character shouldn’t be surprised if he or she can’t open all the locks. Indeed, such a test should show the player characters that the thief probably didn’t get through these doors in any normal manner.

**Inside the Basement Room:** The large basement room is full of crates and barrels and other supplies for the inn. Shelves along two of the walls hold more precious items, including things given over to Innkeeper Krass for safe-keeping. When the player characters enter the basement room, read the following description out loud:

**Read Aloud:** *The large basement room reeks of stale air and dust. The lantern provided by the innkeeper casts shadows in each direction, revealing crates, barrels, and sacks stocked in the center of the space, and shelves line some of the walls. Sitting on a barrel, smiling at you as the lantern light washes over him, is a short, wiry human male with a thin mustache and oily brown hair, a loaded light crossbow across his knees. “You’ve caught me red-handed, it would seem,” the man says in a high, whiny voice. “But holding the Lord of Rats is an entirely different matter! Attack, my children!” Before you can react, you see three enormous rats emerge from the shadows behind the man to charge toward you. Everyone roll an Initiative check.*

## Dire rat

Dire rats are larger, tougher, meaner versions of normal rats. Bigger than large dogs, these vicious creatures have coarse, spiky fur, malevolent eyes, and long, naked tails.

<b>Initiative</b>	+3	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	8 squares (40 feet)	<b>Hit Points</b>	6
<b>Bite</b>	d20+4	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d4 plus disease
<b>Disease</b>	Bite fever (Fort DC 11 or –1 to all attacks and damage for 1d3 rounds)		
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+4	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+4
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1/3		

Have each player make an Initiative check for his or her character. You make one Initiative check for the Lord of Rats and one for the dire rats. Jot down the order of play for this encounter (high initiative result to low initiative result) and let each player tell you what his or her character is doing when you come to that point in the initiative order.

For the Lord of Rats, his only goal in this encounter is to see who has come to the basement, take their measure, taunt them a little, and escape. Use the wererat (human form) statistics for him in this encounter. The dire rats, on the other hand, want to protect their master by killing the player characters. That's the situation. Time to see how it plays out.

**Look at the Map:** Area 1 on the map shown in Figure 7-1 is the basement room. When you describe or sketch the map for the players, don't reveal any of the secrets. So, describe the shelves, the tools, the barrels, the crates, and the strange human claiming to be the Lord of Rats, but don't reveal anything about the hole in the floor until the player characters move close enough to see it.

Here are the key features of Encounter Area 1 on the map:

*Double Doors:* This is where the player characters enter the room. Stairs beyond these doors lead up to the inn.



*Shovels, Picks, Hammers, and Rope:* To the right of the double doors, beside some barrels, Innkeeper Krass stores some tools, including a couple shovels, two picks, three small hammers, and a coil of rope. None of these make good weapons, but they can be used to widen the hole in the floor (marked “C” on the map in Figure 7-1, earlier in this chapter).

*Crates and Barrels:* These are scattered throughout the room and marked on the map. Although none of the crates or barrels are large enough to block movement, they do slow movement. If a character or monster moves through a square containing crates or barrels, movement through that square costs double (count as 2 squares for movement instead of 1).

If the player characters decide to check, the crates contain various staples and trade goods that have little value for adventurers. The barrels contain ale, wine, water, or staples, and the crates contain trade goods.

The crate-filled square marked “A” on the map is where the Lord of Rats, in human form, starts this encounter.

*Shelves:* Floor-to-ceiling shelves line two walls of this large room. If the player characters spend time searching the shelves (a full-round Search check for every 10 feet of shelf), they have a chance to find something of value. If a character makes a Search check of 20 or better, roll a d% (two ten-sided dice used to roll between 01 and 100) and look up the result in Table 7-1 to see what is discovered. Of course, taking any of these items is stealing, but because the innkeeper doesn't know what is or isn't missing, you can leave the morality of it to the player characters.

Table 7-1		Shelf Valuables
Roll d%	Result (Worth)	Number Available to Find
01–15	Small pouch of gold (1d10+2 gp)	4
16–25	Small pouch of gems (1d4 gems, worth 10 gp each)	2
26–30	Silver dagger	2
31–40	Masterwork dagger	2
41–50	Masterwork longsword	1

(continued)

**Table 7-1 (continued)**

<i>Roll d%</i>	<i>Result (Worth)</i>	<i>Number Available to Find</i>
51–55	Masterwork mace	1
56–65	Large sack of silver (4d6 × 10 sp)	2
66–75	<i>Small metal shield +1</i>	1
76–80	<i>Dagger +1</i>	1
81–85	Quarrel of 6 silver arrows or 6 silver crossbow bolts	2
86–90	<i>Potion of cure light wounds</i>	4
91–95	<i>Potion of cure moderate wounds</i>	2
96–100	Quarrel of 6 +1 arrows or 6 +1 crossbow bolts	2

**Dire Rats:** These vile creatures start the encounter on the squares marked with “B” on the map.

**Hole in the Ground:** The hole that the wererat has been using to move between the basement room and the secret tunnels under the village is marked “C” on the map. The hole is hidden behind crates. It is 5 feet long but only 1½ feet wide, which is barely enough room for a dire rat to squeeze through.

**On the Dire Rats’ Turn:** When you reach the initiative order for the dire rats, here are the basic tactics that these creatures use. Two rats rush to attack the closest player character, teaming up to try to defeat the character as quickly as possible. The third rushes to attack a spellcasting character (a wizard or sorcerer as first choice, a cleric as second choice) that isn’t the same character the other two dire rats attack. The dire rats fight opponents to the death.

**On the Lord of Rats’ Turn:** When you reach the initiative order for Shadowfang, the Lord of Rats, he hops over the barrels and races to get over to the hole in the floor (“C”). It takes Shadowfang two move actions (a full round) to get over the crates and into the square beside the hole. The second time Shadowfang’s initiative comes up, he uses a standard action to transform into dire rat form and a move action to leap down into the hole. He does this in secret, hiding behind the crates near the hole, if at all possible.

Shadowfang has one goal in this encounter — to turn into a dire rat and escape down the hole and into the secret tunnels that run under the village.

**Troubleshooting:** If the PCs get lucky and stop Shadowfang's escape or kill him, the DM needs to do a little work to keep the adventure going. In this case, two wererats are at work — Shadowfang and his mate, Silentclaw. If Shadowfang is defeated, she continues to run the crime operations from the lair below (Encounter Area 3).

**After the Battle:** After the player characters have defeated the dire rats (which they should be able to do), they can search the basement room. The hole in the floor is easy to spot when the player characters move past the crates and barrels that hide it. A quick search of the area behind the crates shows the player characters that the only possible exit from the basement room is through the hole in the floor. It is also evident that the human they saw could not have fit through the hole — at least not as he was when he was sitting on the crates.

The player characters can use the shovels, picks, and hammers lying near the double doors to widen the hole in the floor. No rolls or checks are necessary; it just takes a little bit of muscle and time to make a space wide enough for the player characters to squeeze through. The coil of rope found near the double doors is 25 feet long, more than enough to reach to the tunnel floor below.

**Experience Points Award:** Give the party 300 XP for defeating the dire rats. Add another 100 XP for the group to split for figuring out how to widen the hole in the floor so they can follow the Lord of Rats to his lair. In a party of four, each character receives 100 XP for this encounter.

**Next:** When the player characters have widened the hole and are ready to enter the tunnels, go on to the following section.

## Kobold

Kobolds are small, scaly, reptilian humanoids about the size of a gnome or halfling, with doglike heads. Cowardly and sadistic, kobolds are nevertheless dangerous in large numbers.

<b>Initiative</b>	+1	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	6 squares (30 feet)	<b>Hit Points</b>	4
<b>Spear</b>	d20+1	<b>Spear Damage</b>	1d6–1 (crit x3)
<b>Sling</b>	d20+3	<b>Sling Damage</b>	1d3
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+6	<b>Skill: Move Silently</b>	d20+2
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +1, Will –1	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	¼		

## Kobold leader

A kobold leader is slightly stronger and more experienced than the average kobold warrior.

<b>Initiative</b>	+2	<b>Armor Class</b>	16
<b>Speed</b>	6 squares (30 feet)	<b>Hit Points</b>	8
<b>Short Sword</b>	d20+2	<b>Short Sword Damage</b>	1d6+1
<b>Light Crossbow</b>	d20+4	<b>Light Crossbow Damage</b>	1d6
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+6	<b>Skill: Move Silently</b>	d20+2
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +3, Ref +1, Will 0	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1		

## Encounter Area 2: Unfriendly Gang

*This encounter area appears on the map shown in Figure 7-1. It is labeled as “2” on the map.*

**Encounter Level (EL) 2:** The player characters enter the secret tunnels below the basement room in search of the missing items and the strange man who called himself the Lord of Rats.

The player character drop down from the hole in the basement room floor to the square marked “D” on the map. When the player characters gather in the area around “D,” read the following description out loud:

**Read Aloud:** *The tunnels feel cool and ancient, and all of the sounds and smells of the inn fade away far above you. A few unidentifiable sounds echo from the darkness ahead of you, as well as the constant drip of water that obscures the other sounds.*

A short corridor leads to a large, natural cavern that surrounds a deep, dark pool. Water drips from stalactites above, constantly raining large drops onto the otherwise still surface of the pool. This cavern is the home to a gang of kobold miners, led by a tough kobold named Nep. The kobold leader has made a deal with Shadowfang, agreeing to let the wererat move through the cavern unmolested for a share of whatever loot is acquired. Shadowfang just gave the kobold leader an extra share to keep the player characters from chasing him. To this end, Nep and his gang have set an ambush for the player characters. If the player characters try to hear more, have them make Listen checks.

**Failed Listen Check (result is less than 15):** The player characters hear only what is described in the read aloud section about the tunnels.

*Successful Listen Check (result is 15 or better):* A player character that makes a successful Listen check hears the whispers of the two kobolds on the right side of the cavern. No words are discernable, but the character can tell that someone is talking but trying not to be heard.

**The Ambush:** Here's what's going on in the large cavern (area 2 on the map). Four kobold warriors (shown as "E" on the map) are set up in pairs to each side of the entry corridor. The kobold leader, Nep, starts out in the square labeled "F" on the map. The pool of water in the center of the cavern is cold and deep. Characters must make Swim checks (DC 15) if they want to cross through each square of the pool. The corridor marked "G" leads to a dead end where the kobolds were mining. The corridor marked "H" leads deeper into the tunnels beneath the village and can be used as an entry point to future adventures of your own creation. The corridor marked "I" leads to the lair of the Rat Lord.

The kobolds attack in pairs, first with ranged weapons and then closing to melee and trying their best to set up flanks against the player characters. Nep moves to keep the pool between himself and the player characters, using ranged attacks for as long as possible before engaging in melee combat himself.

*First Round of the Ambush:* The first round of action in the cavern is a surprise round. That means that only the kobolds and any player characters that made successful Listen checks get to act in the round.

During the surprise round, the kobolds and the kobold leader, as well as the PCs that made successful Listen checks, act in initiative order. They can each make a single move or standard action. Roll an Initiative check for the kobold warriors and one for the kobold leader. (Have all of the players make Initiative checks for their characters, even though only the ones that succeeded at the Listen checks get to act in the surprise round. In subsequent rounds, everyone — monsters and PCs — act in their initiative order.)

The kobold warriors each make a ranged attack with their slings, targeting the nearest player character. Nep makes a ranged attack with his light crossbow, aiming for any obvious spellcaster in the group. He also yells, "*Die, die, die, invaders! You won't get past us! The Lord of Rats is safe in his lair to the south!*" in his yapping voice. (He's smarter than his gang, but not by much.)

*Subsequent Rounds of Combat:* The kobold warriors try to stay out of melee combat for as long as possible, moving and attacking with their slings each round. Nep moves around the edge of the pool each round, trying to stay out of melee range and making crossbow attacks when he can. Note that he needs to use a move action to reload the light crossbow after every attack. The kobold warriors fight until only one of them is still standing or until Nep falls, and then the remaining kobold(s) surrenders. If the warriors all go down, Nep apologizes for the misunderstanding and tries to make a deal. See the "After the Battle" description.

**After the Battle:** After the kobolds have been defeated or surrender, the player characters can move deeper into the tunnels.

If a kobold warrior surrendered, the player characters can easily intimidate it into telling them details. It explains that the Lord of Rats has been good to the kobolds. He lives in a chamber to the south. He has given some treasure to Nep, the kobold leader, but none of the kobold warriors have ever actually seen Nep's treasure.

If Nep surrenders, he offers the same information as the kobold warrior(s). In addition, he offers to return the treasure that the Lord of Rats gave him if the player characters agree to let him leave (he plans to flee into tunnel "H" at the first opportunity). If the PCs agree, Nep retrieves the following items from a hiding place behind a loose rock in the cavern wall: the gold pendant and the silver ring encrusted with sapphires. If the PCs don't agree, Nep resumes fighting and battles to the death. Without the cooperation of Nep, it requires an hour of searching (time they don't have if they want to catch up with the Lord of Rats) and a successful Search check (DC 20) to find the hidden items.

**Experience Points Award:** Give the party 600 XP for defeating or driving away the kobold warriors and the kobold leader. If they also recover the two missing items, increase the award by 100 XP.

## Fiendish dire rat

These monstrous versions of dire rats have been touched by the evil of the lower planes and appear more demonic and dangerous than their non-fiendish cousins.

<b>Initiative</b>	+3	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	8 squares (40 feet)	<b>Hit Points</b>	6
<b>Bite</b>	d20+4	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d4 plus disease
<b>Disease</b>	Bite fever (Fort DC 11 or –1 to all attacks and damage for 1d3 rounds)		
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+4	<b>Skill: Move Silently</b>	d20+4
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3	<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic Evil
<b>Special Qualities</b>	Resistance to cold 5 and fire 5, spell resistance (SR) 6		
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	½		

## Wererat (hybrid form)

Wererats are quick and feral creatures that can transform between a human and an animal form. In hybrid form, a wererat appears as a humanoid rat about the size of a man that fights with weapons and a diseased bite.

<b>Initiative</b>	+3	<b>Armor Class</b>	16
<b>Speed</b>	6 squares (30 feet)	<b>Hit Points</b>	12
<b>Rapier</b>	d20+4	<b>Rapier Damage</b>	1d6+1 (crit 18–20)
<b>Bite</b>	d20–1	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d6 plus disease
<b>Disease</b>	Bite fever (Fort DC 12 or –1 to all attacks and damage for 1d3 rounds)		
<b>Light Crossbow</b>	d20+4	<b>Light Crossbow Damage</b>	1d8 (crit 19–20)
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+5	<b>Skill: Move Silently</b>	d20+4
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +4	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	2		

**Next:** When the player characters decide to enter the tunnel marked “I” on the map, go on to the next section.

## Encounter Area 3: Lair of the Rat Lord

*This encounter area appears on the map shown in Figure 7-1. It is labeled as “3” on the map.*

**Encounter Level (EL) 3:** The player characters enter the lair of the Rat Lord to finish the mission that Innkeeper Krass sent them on.

**The Secret Door:** The first part of this encounter requires the player characters to discover the secret door that leads to the Rat Lord's lair. When the player characters enter the tunnel marked “I” on the map, read the following out loud:

**Read Aloud:** *The crudely carved tunnel ends in a solid wall. What do you want to do?*

The tunnel isn't actually a dead end. There's a secret door waiting to be discovered. When the player characters decide to search the area at the end of the tunnel, have them make Search checks (DC 20). When someone makes a successful Search check, read the following out loud:

**Read Aloud:** *You search the wall and you find an indentation in the rough stone. Pressing it causes the middle of the wall to swing inward, revealing a chamber beyond.*

The Rat Lord's lair is a large chamber lit by torches on wall sconces. Two pillars of stone hold up the ceiling and divide the chamber, and an alcove to the east contains a ladder (marked "L" on the map) that leads up into the village. When the player characters enter, Shadowfang starts out hidden in the shadows behind one of the pillars (in the square containing the "J"). Shadowfang's strongest guards, a pair of fiendish dire rats, wait in the shadows in the squares containing "K". When the player characters examine the chamber or step into it, read the following out loud:

**Read Aloud:** *The floor of the chamber seems to be covered in a thick carpet of gray fur, but then the carpet moves! Rats cover every inch of the chamber floor, moving back and forth with apparent purpose. From somewhere deeper in the chamber, you hear the high, whiny voice of the Rat Lord call out, "You invade my domain like thieves and murderers in the night? For this insult, you will die!" And the rats throughout the chamber screech in unison.*

The rat-covered floor makes moving through the chamber difficult. It costs double for every square of movement that the player characters make while in the chamber. (So if a character could normally move 6 squares in a round, he or she can move only 3 squares in this chamber.) In addition, making a melee attack while standing on rats can be problematic; player characters that make a melee attack while in the chamber must make a successful Balance check (DC 5) or slip and fall prone. Standing up requires a move action and provokes an attack of opportunity. The fiendish dire rats and Shadowfang don't have any trouble moving through the chamber normally. The normal rats don't attack in any meaningful way.

*Fiendish Dire Rat Tactics:* The fiendish dire rats move from the shadows and through the sea of normal rats in near-silent perfection. Allow the player characters to make Spot checks to oppose the Move Silently checks you make for the monsters. If a player character beats the dire rat's Move Silently check, he or she notices it sneaking around and combat occurs in normal initiative order. If the fiendish dire rat's Move Silently check is higher, it makes a surprise attack against a player character. The dire rats dart in and out of the sea of normal rats, attacking the player characters with fiendish delight. They fight to the death at the wererat's behest.



*Wererat Tactics:* Shadowfang the wererat remains in hiding until the fiendish dire rats engage the player characters. Then he fires his crossbow from the shadows and begins to move toward the ladder ("L" on the map). He hopes to kill a player character or two and escape, but will fight to the death if cornered. He switches to his rapier and bite attack when he has to engage in melee combat.

When the player characters catch a glimpse of the wererat's hybrid form, read the following out loud.

**Read Aloud:** *You see an enormous rat-man, standing on two legs and wielding a light crossbow, emerge from the shadows to attack you. "I am Shadowfang," the rat-man screeches, "I am the Lord of Rats. Attack them, my children! Destroy the intruders!" And the rats chatter and screech in response to their master's command.*

**After the Battle:** After the player characters have defeated Shadowfang and his fiendish dire rats, the remaining normal rats scurry out of the chamber through small cracks in the walls. Shadowfang reverts to human form, and the two remaining items (the small metal box and the jeweled dagger with the ruby hilt) can be found in the pouch slung over his shoulder. Upon returning the items to Innkeeper Krass, the player characters will receive their reward.

If Shadowfang and his fiendish dire rats defeat the player characters, the adventure ends. Hopefully, the defeat was dramatic and intense and resulted in a fun and exciting story. You can have the players create new characters to mount another attack on the evil Rat Lord while you add new details to make the adventure different from the first run-in with Shadowfang.

If Shadowfang reaches the ladder and escapes, the player characters don't retrieve the items they were sent to recover. They can go after Shadowfang in a new adventure of your own creation, or the wererat can return to trouble them later as a recurring villain.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat Shadowfang and the fiendish dire rats, give the party 900 XP. If they return the stolen items to Innkeeper Krass, don't forget to give them the monetary reward he promised them.

**Next:** What comes next is up to you! We present another adventure in Chapter 20.

## *Making the Adventure Tougher*

*The Rat Lord's Lair* should be reasonably challenging for a party of four 1st-level or 2nd-level characters. Some encounters will be easy, and others should be a little harder. However, if you have more than five player characters in the party or if the average level of the party is 3rd level or higher, you might want to increase the difficulty of the adventure by making the fights tougher. Here are a few suggestions:

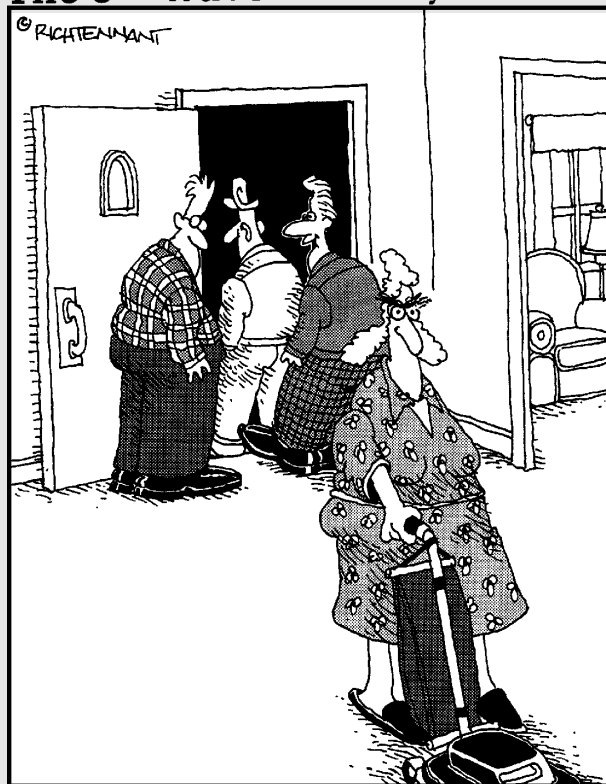
- ✓ **The Basement Room:** Add three more dire rats (increasing the EL to 2) or change the three dire rats into four fiendish dire rats (EL 2).
- ✓ **The Unfriendly Gang:** Add four more kobolds (EL 3), or add a second kobold leader (EL 3), or change the kobolds to orcs (EL 3).
- ✓ **Lair of the Rat Lord:** Add two more fiendish dire rats (EL 4), or change the mastermind behind the robberies from a wererat to a werewolf (EL 4), or both (EL 5). (If you go with the werewolf, keep the wererat around as a minion and as the actual thief, because he can change into a form small enough to pass through the crack in the basement floor.)

# Part II

# Advanced Dungeon Mastering

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant

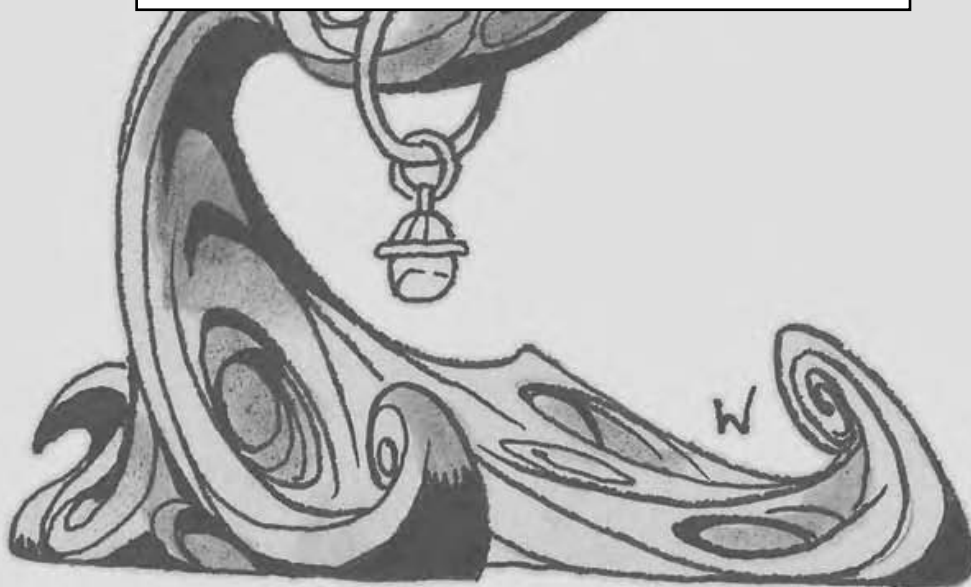


"Great job Dungeon Mastering! I love your character creations, especially the 'Hideous Vacuum Beast with the Eyebrows that Smite the Soul'."



## *In this part . . .*

**T**he best D&D games combine riveting action, dramatic tension, death-defying challenges, and unforgettable villains and monsters. To deliver on each of those counts, you need to find the sweet spot where your own talents and style meet the players' expectations for a great game. We don't want you to settle for being an *okay* Dungeon Master; we want to help you become a *great* Dungeon Master. Even if you're already an experienced DM, this part can help you to analyze how the players in your group approach the game as well as your own strengths and preferences. When you're running the game you want to run and delivering the adventure to the best of your ability, you can't miss.



## Chapter 8

# Running an Ongoing Game

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Choosing the format of an ongoing game
  - ▶ Keeping a journal of the game
  - ▶ Building the basics of your campaign
  - ▶ Using the sample town base of Griffonford
- 

Whether you've just run your first successful D&D game or you've been DMing for awhile, it's time to start thinking about doing this DMing thing on a regular basis. Just as millions of people enjoy a regular Friday night poker game, bowling league, or movie night, most D&D players participate in an ongoing D&D game. Maintaining a game group that meets on a regular basis (once a week, once every two weeks, once a month, or whatever works for you) is the next natural step for a Dungeon Master.

Setting up a regularly recurring game has a lot of advantages:

- ✓ **The game has a chance to grow.** Most importantly, a recurring game gives you the opportunity to evolve the D&D game into a more rewarding experience than you can achieve with a single game session. You can tackle extended adventures that require multiple game sessions to finish and add broad storylines to the game, and the players can keep their characters and grow them over time by gaining experience points, acquiring magic items, and building their characters' personalities and back-stories.
- ✓ **You've got players right where you want 'em.** You don't have to go searching for players every time you want to play D&D — you can stick with the players you've already got.
- ✓ **Everyone knows the niceties.** You can easily establish some basic game etiquette and table manners for the game because the players are all regulars and they know how things are supposed to go.

## Choosing the Right Format

There are a lot of different approaches to running a regular D&D game. Although most experienced D&D players will tell you that the “best” game is a long-running campaign where they’ve kept the same characters for years and the DM hand-builds a meticulously detailed world to explore, the truth is that sort of complicated commitment isn’t the right game for everybody. You might expect to play with the same group only for a couple months (over a summer break, for example), so what would be the point of trying to build a game world that would take years to explore? Sometimes the best game is one you run only for a session or two or three.

When you’re deciding how to build an ongoing D&D game, ask yourself these questions: Do you want the characters to continue from session to session? Do you want the adventure to continue from session to session? Do you want the game to continue from adventure to adventure? Take a look at Table 8-1. The answers to these questions can help you settle on a good model or format for your game: the standalone session, the dungeon-of-the-week, the one-shot campaign, or the continuing campaign.

<b>Table 8-1                      Defining Your Game Format</b>		
<b><i>Defining Question</i></b>	<b><i>Answer</i></b>	<b><i>Your Game Format Should Be . . .</i></b>
1. Do the characters continue?	No	Standalone session
	Yes	Go to the next question
2. Does the adventure continue?	No	Dungeon-of-the-week
	Yes	Go to the next question
3. Does the game continue?	No	One-shot campaign
	Yes	Continuing campaign

### *The standalone session*

At the most basic level, an ongoing D&D game consists of bringing back the same players for a game on some sort of regular basis. Nothing else *must* continue from session to session — and with the *standalone session*, each time the group plays, it’s a new adventure featuring new characters.

The standalone session has some important advantages:

- ✓ **It's simple.** Because nothing continues to the next session, you have no record-keeping to speak of.
- ✓ **It gives you the opportunity to try very different styles or scenarios each time you play.** One week the players can be barbarians and outcasts hunting monsters in the arctic wastes, and the next week they can be urbane swashbucklers and nobles solving a murder mystery in a great medieval city. You can explore a tremendous variety of D&D adventures this way.
- ✓ **It's a great format for giving players the chance to try their hands at being the Dungeon Master.** It's only one game session, after all.

The standalone session has three disadvantages. You have to make up or find new adventure material each time you play. You can't try out very long or involved adventures unless you have a lot of time available for the game session. The players don't have an opportunity to become familiar with their characters or develop them over time.



Making up a new character takes time, and you want to maximize the playing time you get out of every game session. It's a good idea to tell the players a day or two ahead of time what kind of characters they'll need to bring for the next game, and ask them to show up ready to play. At a minimum, the players need to know what level to give to their characters.

Run your D&D game as a series of standalone sessions if . . .

- ✓ Your D&D game sessions are infrequent or hard to schedule.
- ✓ The players don't invest in their characters and like making up new characters more than continuing to play old ones.
- ✓ The membership of your game group changes frequently.

## *The dungeon-of-the-week adventure*

The *dungeon-of-the-week* adventure format resembles the standalone session, except that the players keep the same characters from session to session. As with the standalone session, you save yourself the trouble of coming up with broad storylines or campaign details, and the record-keeping is minimal, so this is a fairly easy game format for the Dungeon Master to run. However, the players have the chance to become familiar with their characters and advance them over time. It's also easy to move from this model into a "real" campaign if the group wants to do so later on.

Run your D&D game as a dungeon-of-the-week adventure if . . .

- ✓ Your D&D game sessions are infrequent or hard to schedule.
- ✓ The players like advancing existing characters more than trying out new ones.
- ✓ The players view continuing story elements as a distraction and like to play a style of game that's fast and light.

## *The one-shot campaign*

The *one-shot campaign* is one long adventure that spans many game sessions, because exploring a deep dungeon isn't the work of just one evening. A D&D group can tackle about four or five encounters in the course of a three- or four-hour game session, so any adventure that features more than a half-dozen distinct encounters might require multiple sessions to complete. Most Dungeon Masters routinely run extended adventures that stretch across months of real time, tackling a few rooms in a big dungeon every week until the player characters have explored the whole thing.

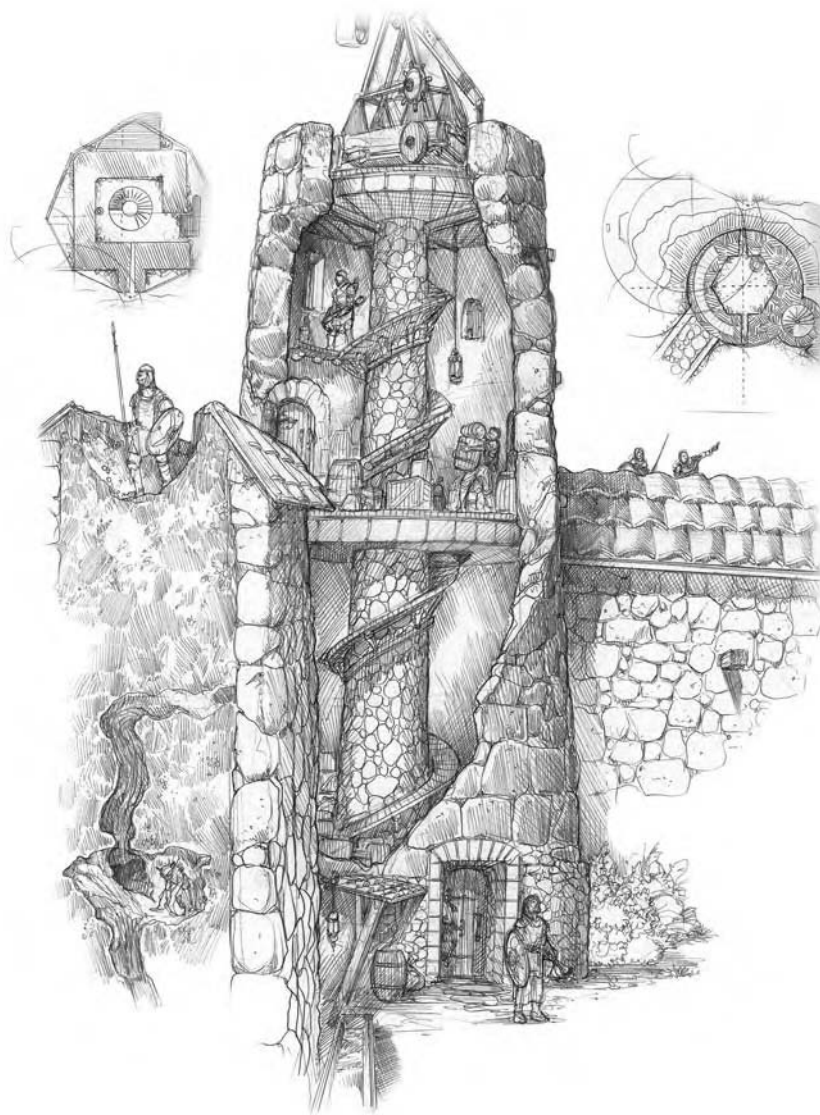
Your group might need to play once or twice a week for months to get through an epic adventure, but when the adventure is finished, it's done. You put away the dungeon, the players retire the characters, and the next time you begin a D&D game you can start with a party of brand-new characters tackling a brand-new dungeon.

The big advantage of the one-shot campaign is that you tailor the scope of your ongoing game to the adventure material and play time you have available. If you pick up *Dungeon Magazine* or buy a ready-to-play D&D adventure from your game store, you've got everything you need to run a game lasting weeks or months — you don't need to scramble each week to come up with something to throw in front of the players. The players have lots of time to become familiar with their characters and usually get to advance them at least a few levels over the course of the game.

Run your D&D game as a one-shot campaign if . . .

- ✓ You've got one good adventure to run, and you expect it will take at least a few game sessions to play it out.
- ✓ You've got a real-world time constraint to consider, such as a school year, a summer break, or a military deployment.
- ✓ You want to present some story elements and character advancement, but don't want to track an evolving storyline and campaign history over multiple adventures.





## *The continuing campaign*

Many D&D players feel that the game is at its very best when they get to keep their same characters week after week. Over time the players get to know their characters and watch them grow in power, experience, and heroic reputation.

The adventuring party moves from one dungeon or adventure to the next, which often presents an entirely new threat unrelated to the challenge of the previous adventure. When you string two (or more) adventures together for the same group of characters, it's a *continuing campaign*. The players keep their characters, and you slowly build up a history of dungeons plundered and monsters defeated by the heroes.

Campaigns invest the players in your D&D world and allow for the rewarding experience of growing a character over time. This format is the best for entertaining players who like to roleplay their characters, and it gives you your best opportunity to engage in the rewarding job of *world-building* — making up your own world to serve as the setting for your D&D games. However, it requires a modest amount of record-keeping and work on your part to keep a campaign running smoothly for adventure after adventure.

Run your D&D game as a continuing campaign if . . .

- ✓ You have several adventures you'd like to run for your gaming group.
- ✓ You enjoy the process of world-building and want to show off your creativity.
- ✓ The players enjoy roleplaying and exploring their characters in depth.
- ✓ The membership of your game group tends to remain stable over time.

## Keeping Records

Over the course of an extended adventure or campaign, the player characters most likely slay many monsters, discover a number of powerful and useful magic items, encounter memorable NPCs, and travel vast distances across your campaign world. Many Dungeon Masters like to actively keep track of how much experience the characters earn, how much wealth they accumulate, what they do, and who they meet. Recording the major events and finds of your campaign helps you to keep an eye on how fast the player characters are progressing through levels, whether they possess an appropriate amount of gear for their levels, and how much information you've actually put in front of the players.

You can get along just fine with virtually no record-keeping at all. But we're all human, and if the game runs for months and months, sooner or later a player is going to remember something you've since forgotten. If a player notices your lapse, he or she might not realize you'd simply forgotten a detail, and might come to a mistaken conclusion. For example, say a player catches you changing an NPC's description because you'd forgotten exactly how you

described that NPC earlier. The player might easily jump to the wrong conclusion, like this: “Hey, last time we met this Lord Thrinn guy, you said he was old, coughed a lot, and seemed like he was on his deathbed. Now you’re saying he’s in robust good health and seems vigorous and hearty. I bet he’s been turned into a vampire! Quick, let’s get him before he sets us up!” All of a sudden, you’ve thrown the players on the wrong track because you forgot a minor detail about an NPC that they remembered.

On the mechanical side of the game, record-keeping helps you to keep a close eye on what the characters are and aren’t capable of. If you’re thinking about creating a dungeon encounter that can’t be defeated unless at least one of the characters can fly, it’s very useful to check your copies of the character sheets or your treasure log and see whether anyone in the party has a potion of *fly* or *winged boots*.

## *The no-records game*

We won’t beat around the bush: Record-keeping can be a little tedious. A D&D game should be about fun and adventure, not documentation. If you’re running a D&D game built around standalone sessions or dungeon-of-the-week adventures, you don’t really need to keep any records at all. Other than awarding experience points for defeating monsters and telling the players what treasure their characters find, you can leave the rest of the record-keeping to the players. They’ll tell you when their characters amass enough XP to advance a level. Just point players to Table 3-2 on page 22 of the *Player’s Handbook* to figure out the XP target for their next character level, or check their progress at the end of each game session.

## *The DM binder*

If you decide you want to keep records of the game, get a good-sized binder with a couple pockets to serve as your *DM binder*. In addition to the game records, you can use it for collecting information about your campaign world in one spot, as well as the current adventure you’re running. Some of the things you’ll want in your DM binder include

- ✓ **Adventure log:** Keep a running journal of major events, encounters, and happenings in the game. Organize it by game session and start off by noting the date, which players show up, and which characters they run.
- ✓ **PCs’ character sheets:** Keep a current copy of the character sheet for each player’s character. This will help you to keep an eye on what spells, items, and capabilities the characters have, which is very useful when

you go about designing or modifying adventures. You can collect the players' character sheets at the end of the game session and hold them until the next game, or you might prefer to make copies.

- ✓ **NPC logs/character sheets:** Build a roster of NPCs you've introduced into the game, along with some notes about where and when the player characters met them. You don't have to record each word that every NPC speaks to the party, but you might want to note a couple salient points from an important conversation, such as a negotiation. Jot down NPC names, characteristics, and personality quirks so that you can stay consistent if and when the NPCs return in the future. Also keep character sheets for any NPCs you think the heroes might fight, or at least note any pertinent skills the NPCs might possess.
- ✓ **Treasure logs:** Keep track of how much treasure the player characters find, which player characters claim which magic items, and how the player characters divide out the coins, gems, and other things as cold hard cash. Don't forget to note which magic items the player characters sell or trade and which they buy. The magic items a player character carries are an important part of his or her overall power, so you need to know just how loaded each of the player characters is (or isn't).

## *Building a Basic Campaign*

Although you can run standalone sessions or present dungeon-of-the-week adventures indefinitely, most Dungeon Masters eventually graduate to presenting an ongoing campaign. A campaign is simply a string of adventures in which the same cast of player characters takes part. At the most basic level, the campaign is nothing more than the sequence in which you throw unrelated adventures at the same group of player characters. At the deep end, a campaign is a sprawling world populated with memorable NPCs, deadly villains, and riveting storylines that keep the players coming back for years. Don't let this intimidate you; we're starting at the shallow end.

### *Linking adventures together*

A vital step in creating an ongoing campaign is to provide a link from one adventure to the next. For example, the players defeat the hill giant warchief of Desolate Mountain and drive away the orc raiders lairing there. For your next adventure, you've got a vampire-hunting expedition in the crypts beneath the noble district of the city of Westgate. How do you tie these adventures together into a continuing story?

## Getting the players to help

Keeping track of all this stuff can get complicated. Ask the players to help you with the details, so that you can focus on presenting the adventure instead of note-keeping. Here are some jobs you can divvy out to the players:

- ✔ **Treasure recorder:** This player writes down every bit of loot the player characters recover, where they got it from, which character is carrying it, and what the party ultimately does with it.
- ✔ **Journal keeper:** This player records the significant events and encounters of the evening's game session, including which NPCs the player characters meet, which monsters they fight, and any potential clues they discover.
- ✔ **Initiative organizer:** This player maintains the initiative order in combat. (This isn't

really record-keeping, but having a player take over this job frees up the DM to concentrate on creating an exciting battle.)

Giving out these sorts of jobs to the players helps take some of the burden off your shoulders, and also gives the players something else to help them stay focused on the game and invested in what's going on. At the end of the game session, ask the players helping you to give you a copy of their notes or to write them up at greater length and send them to you in the next day or so. By reviewing the party's journal, you might spot mistakes you made in presenting the adventure or vital clues the player characters missed, or you might find opportunities to improve the adventure by throwing the players a twist they don't expect.

The short answer is that you don't have to. You can just start the next game by telling the players where their characters are now and what it is they think they're trying to do. In the preceding example, you could say something like this:

*After defeating the warchief of Desolate Mountain, you went back to the town of Griffonford. You received a summons from Lord Thrinn of the city of Westgate, who heard of your success and requested you to come to his palace on urgent business. You rode three days to the city of Westgate, and now you're waiting in the library of Lord Thrinn's palace. The door opens, and Lord Thrinn comes in . . .*

Do you see what happened there? You didn't ask the players what they wanted to do next — you picked up their characters and dropped them at the starting point of the next adventure. This technique might seem a little heavy handed, but most D&D players understand that you're just trying to get their characters to the adventure, and they'll forgive you for decreeing that their characters went to Westgate, went to Lord Thrinn's palace, and waited for the old fellow to show up to tell them what's going on with the vampires.



When you've gotten the hang of starting the next adventure after the current one ends, you can start working on some more elegant transitions. Sometimes you should allow the players to choose between adventures — in the preceding example, the player characters might receive a summons from Lord Thrinn at the same time that they're studying an old treasure map they found in the warchief's loot. Which adventure hook they follow is up to the players. Giving the players some choice over what their characters do next helps to build the illusion of a three-dimensional, living world that is waiting for the characters to make up their minds. Of course, you will need to have at least two adventures ready to run when you offer the players the choice of which to play next.

You'll find that it's useful to sow the seeds of future adventures by working foreshadowing elements into the current adventure. In the earlier example, you should make a point of telling the players about the treasure map among the warchief's possessions when they find it so that you don't have to go back later and say, "Oh, and you found a treasure map, and followed it, and here you are." If you want to try your hand at creating encounters or modifying an adventure, you could add an encounter in the hill giant warchief adventure that foreshadows the vampire adventure coming next. For example, you could create an encounter with a traveling bard who turns out to be a vampire during the course of the adventure against the warchief and his minions. When the player characters defeat the bard and examine her possessions, they find gold coins stamped with the seal of the city of Westgate. Later on, when the heroes receive the message from Lord Thrinn, the players already expect that the adventure in Westgate might involve vampires.

## Taking a cue from your TV

An ongoing D&D campaign has a lot in common with TV series such as *Star Trek* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. You've got a continuous cast of player characters who are like the stars of the show, and each adventure is like an episode of the series. You might have a recurring villain or threat who appears every now and then. And your D&D game should be *about* the player characters in the same way that a TV series is about the main characters.

In an episodic series like *Star Trek*, each week's show (or adventure) presents a problem or challenge, which the heroes then tackle. At the end of the show, the problem's been solved. For the next show, the *Enterprise* goes to a new

planet, encounters a new problem, and the characters have a new adventure. You don't have to spend a lot of time explaining how the *Enterprise* got to the new planet or why it was sent there; all that's really important is the fact that it's there now. Substitute *dungeon* for *planet* and swap a long ride or march for warp speed, and you've got the makings of a D&D campaign.

Sometimes events or characters from earlier adventures resurface in later adventures — which means that the players must be conscious of the fact that their characters' successes and failures might come back to haunt them at some future date.

## *Pacing character advancement*

Another important characteristic of a campaign is that the player characters advance and evolve over time. Players expect their characters to gradually advance, especially in a continuing campaign. The experience system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* assumes that it takes about 13 encounters for the characters in the party to gain a level — assuming that the party contains four characters and that the encounters have ELs (Encounter Levels) that are equal to the average party level. For example, if the party consists of three 3rd-level characters and a 4th-level character, the average party level is 3, so 13 EL 3 encounters should get most of the characters up a level. Most groups of D&D players can tackle about four encounters per game session, so if you play once a week, you can expect the characters to gain a level about once a month in real time.



You can find a discussion on awarding XP on page 38 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Encounter levels are discussed under “Encounters,” on page 48 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Basically, if the party fights a single monster, the monster's Challenge Rating is the encounter's Encounter Level. A displacer beast is a CR 4 monster, so fighting one displacer beast is an EL 4 encounter. Experience point awards vary from 200 to 40,000 or more, depending on the CR of the monster and the level of the party. High-CR creatures have higher rewards, and characters who fight monsters whose CR is higher than the average party level earn more XP than characters fighting monsters whose CR is lower than their level. It's all spelled out on Table 2-6 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Not all characters will advance to the next level at the same time. If one of the players misses a game session or two, his character misses out on the experience points and might fall behind the rest of the party. That's okay — the players who come to your game most often are rewarded for consistent attendance.

You might find that the players advance their characters faster or slower than this. If you play more than once a week, the player characters will advance faster. If fewer players are in your group, the characters will also advance faster because the XP (experience points) will be divided between fewer characters. And if you throw encounters that are above the party's level at the group (and the player characters survive), the characters will advance faster. Similarly, less frequent games or more players mean slower level advancement.

Finding the right balance between slow and rapid advancement is a bit of a challenge. If players don't level up often enough, they're missing out on one of the most rewarding parts of the game — seeing a character become more powerful. If they level up too quickly, they don't have time to learn all of their

characters' new capabilities before they're trying to master a new set of information. It also dulls the excitement of making a level. So, you need to pay attention to how much experience you're awarding to the player characters at the end of each game session.

## *Creating the home base*

The third component of a basic campaign is some sort of home base — a setting and collection of familiar characters to serve as the framing device for your D&D game. The home base gives the player characters roots in your game world. It's a place for the player characters to care about, a place they want to protect. When the PCs need to trade loot for useful gear, the home base is where they go. When the PCs need to get advice or guidance about how to solve a problem, some NPC at the home base is the person they'll ask. And when the PCs begin to explore the world outside the dungeon, the home base is where they start.

Over time, you can use the home base as a springboard for designing your own D&D world. But for starters, a good home base needs only NPCs, commerce, and story.

### *Home base NPCs*

Unless the players like to roleplay complete misfits, every character in the party implies a network of NPC patrons, advisers, friends, and rivals. For example, if one of the player characters is a cleric of St. Cuthbert, it's natural to ask where other clerics of St. Cuthbert might be found. If another player character is a rogue, it's good to know whether the home base has any kind of organized thieves' guild, and if so, how does it get along with the adventurer?

When you populate the home base, think about including NPCs who fill the following roles:

- ✓ An authority figure, such as a mayor or lord, who can ask the PCs to help out the town by solving problems (and thus providing adventure opportunities)
- ✓ A sage, a counselor, or an adviser who can answer questions for the PCs
- ✓ A merchant who can buy and sell things the PCs are interested in
- ✓ A cleric, druid, or other healer who can fix injuries or curses that the PCs can't handle with their own spells
- ✓ Innkeepers, barmaids, and other common folk as needed to make the home base feel like, well, home



### Commerce

The player characters need access to people who will give them gold in exchange for valuables they recover from monster lairs, including magic items the players don't want to keep. If everyone in the party already has a +2 magic weapon, the players will want to sell any +1 weapons they find, and the home base is the place to do that. The PCs also need a place to commission spellcasting they can't do themselves and buy useful magic items such as potions, scrolls, and wands.

The home base should have most (if not all) of the following services and goods available:

- ✓ A temple, druid's grove, or similar place where the PCs can obtain healing spells (especially important for low-level characters who don't yet have access to the spells needed to fix problems such as poison, paralysis, or disease)
- ✓ A wizard's tower, scribe's workshop, or library where the PCs can have magic items identified by means of an *identify* spell
- ✓ An armorer's and weaponmaker's shop, selling both normal and masterwork versions of most common weapons and armor
- ✓ A dealer in unusual mundane items (sunrods, lock picks, and other dungeoneering supplies) and minor magical items, such as potions or scrolls
- ✓ A place to meet potential NPC contacts, hirelings, or allies

### Story

The home base should be a distinct locale with its own memorable features, setting, and history. You don't need a lot of this at first; these elements can grow over time. Just add a detail or two each time the player characters return to their home base. As the players discover more about what's going on in and around the home base, you'll be surprised at how they begin to identify with the place their characters view as home. Important story questions to address include

- ✓ Where are the nearest dungeons, ruins, or monster lairs? How do the locals view these places?
- ✓ What does the place look like? Is it a mining town in the hills? A half-forgotten seaport on a fog-shrouded coast? A frontier outpost surrounded by vast forests?
- ✓ What do the people do to feed themselves? To make money?
- ✓ Who's in charge?

- ✓ Who keeps order in the town?
- ✓ Are there any potential villains or opponents for the PCs to deal with?

## A Sample Base: Griffonford

To help you get started, this section provides an example of a typical home base — a human settlement called Griffonford that's located near a couple of good dungeons for the PCs to explore. Griffonford is a small village that can serve as the home base for a group of beginning player characters.

You can introduce Griffonford before the player characters ever set out on their first adventure. Some characters might be natives of the area; others might be travelers who happen to find themselves in the town when adventure comes to call.



We think it's best to avoid starting the heroes in their home base before their first adventure. It's a stronger beginning for the game to start off with the heroes already at the door of the dungeon. Give the players a good taste of heroic deeds and dark dangers before you show them a place where their characters do ordinary things like bartering for goods or talking to people who don't want to kill them. Griffonford is the answer to the question, "So where do we go when we leave this dungeon?"

The first time the player characters walk or ride into town, you should give them a brief description of what the place is like. The following read aloud text is designed to do just that:

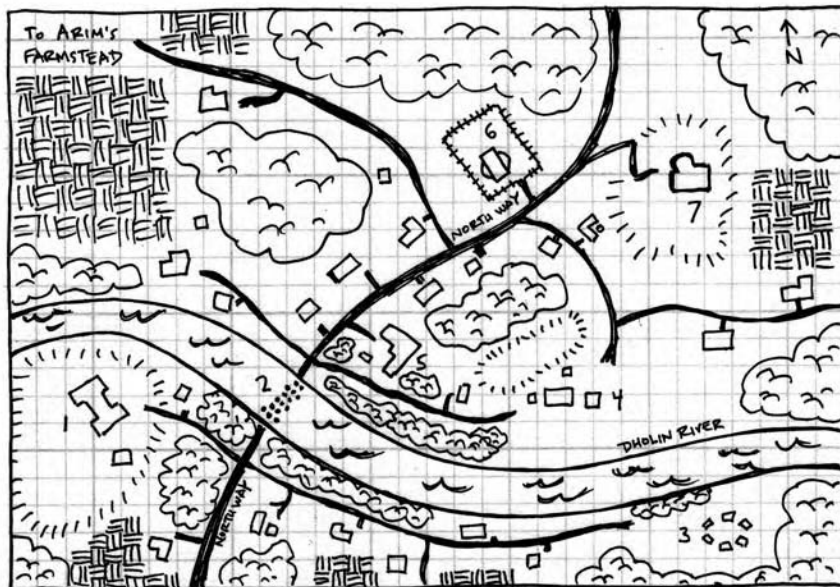
*The old dwarven trade road descends into a wooded valley and crosses a swift, cold river at a shallow ford. A village huddles close to the road, surrounded by apple orchards and small square fields of grain. A fortified manor-house crowns a low hill at one end of the town, and at the far end of the village a small, ramshackle tower sits atop a steep knoll. You can make out an inn a little ways ahead, with a green griffon painted on its signboard.*

## The story of Griffonford

Long ago, a dwarf kingdom in the mountains far to the north built a trade road leading to the human cities farther south. Caravans using this road needed a place to stop along the way, and the fords of the Dholin River were a natural campsite. However, the Dholin Vale and the rugged hills around the area were wild and unsettled, so monsters often troubled travelers and merchants in this vicinity. In particular, a pride of fierce griffons often carried off luckless travelers here.

Sixty years ago, a human knight named Kale Averoth obtained a writ from the lord of a nearby city to clear the Dholin Vale of monsters and establish a watchtower at the ford in order to protect travelers using the dwarven road. Averoth and his fellows slew several griffons and drove off the rest. Settlers soon came to the Dholin ford (now known as the Griffon Ford) to carve out homesteads under the protection of the watchtower Averoth raised. Soon a small town grew here and became known as Griffonford.

Griffonford and the wild lands of the Dholin Vale are now the demesne of the Averoth family, and the grandson of Kale Averoth governs the town. Most of the townsfolk and homesteaders are humans, but a family of dwarves known as the Durekkins runs a small ironworks on the banks of the Dholin, and a caravan of 50 halflings from the Thistlefoot clan has taken up residence in the meadows south of the town. The Thistlefoots have stayed in Griffonford for more than a year now, and it's only a matter of time before they decide to move on to settle in for a season or two somewhere else.



- KEY
- |                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. LORD AVEROTH'S MANOR     | 5. GREEN GRIFFON INN |
| 2. FORD OF THE DHOLIN RIVER | 6. SHRINE OF PELOR   |
| 3. THISTLEFOOT CARAVAN      | 7. REGIR'S TOWER     |
| 4. DUREKKIN IRONWORKS       |                      |

Although Griffonford is a reasonably safe spot, adventurers don't have to go far from the road to find trouble. Dangerous monsters roam in the rugged hills and thick woods that ring the Dholin Vale. Marauding orcs and ogres sometimes waylay travelers on the road or raid an outlying homestead, and lately there have been reports of sinister hooded strangers gathering near the old ruined monastery a couple miles from town. Lord Averoth could really use a brave band of troubleshooters (the party of player characters, in other words) to help keep the monsters at a safe distance, the roads clear, and the abandoned ruins empty as they ought to be.

## *Notable NPCs*

Griffonford is home to about 400 people, including those who live in the outlying farms. Most of the townspeople make their living as farmers, or cater to the caravans and travelers who pass through the town along the North Way. The townsfolk are a little suspicious of strangers, but won't take long to warm up to heroes who seem willing to take on monsters and bandits on their behalf.

We describe the town's notable citizens in the following subsections.

### *Lord Tardin Averoth*

The ruler of the Dholin Vale is Lord Tardin Averoth, an aging human nobleman who generally lets the town look after its own affairs. He is a friendly but dignified fellow who likes to discuss the weather and his apple orchards.

Tardin Averoth has a dark secret: His younger brother Vesgin is a vile necromancer who was driven out of Griffonford some years ago. Vesgin swore vengeance against his own family, and has wandered the rest of the kingdom for years, practicing his evil art and preparing for the day when he can make his triumphant return.

**Role:** Tardin is a potential patron. When the PCs need to hear about the next adventure opportunity, you can use him as a mouthpiece for getting the players to the adventure.

### *Piersera Thistlefoot*

A halfling merchant who has turned her family's wagons into a temporary trading post for as long as the Thistlefoots remain in town, Piersera is a canny businesswoman who relies on a vast network of kinfolk in other towns and realms to buy and sell almost anything. She is affable, but not very sincere — she thinks of humans (and other Big Folk) as more than a little thick-witted.

**Role:** Piersera is a merchant who can buy or sell almost any mundane commodity. When the PCs need to go shopping or sell off loot they would prefer to turn into cash, they can go see Piersera.

### ***Kelldan Hoffter***

Proprietor of the Green Griffon Inn, Kelldan is a tall, balding human of about 60. He is a loud, boisterous man who shouts a constant stream of orders at the army of nephews, nieces, children, and grandchildren who do most of the work at the inn. He has a broad streak of common sense and hears all kinds of stories from travelers passing through.

**Role:** When the heroes look for a place to rest while in town, they'll find that a room at the Green Griffon is the best way to go. If they cultivate Kelldan's friendship, they might even be rewarded with important rumors from time to time.

### ***Hammerfist Durekkin***

Head of the Durekkin clan, Hammerfist is a skilled armorer and weaponsmith. He is a dwarf who keeps his own counsel, and rarely speaks except to utter dwarven aphorisms such as, "The sharp axe takes off a goblin's head with one good stroke," or "Five goblins and a fire spell trouble, mark my words."

**Role:** Hammerfist can buy or sell weapons and armor, and sometimes even has magical weapons or armor to sell.

### ***Regir Runecloak***

Griffonford's resident wizard is the half-elf Regir Runecloak, who lives in the small tower overlooking the town. A semi-retired adventurer, Regir spends much of his time puttering around with alchemical experiments in his basement. He dislikes interruptions and can't abide a fool, but he has a keen mind and can't resist an arcane mystery.

**Role:** Regir can buy or sell arcane potions, scrolls, or wands. He can also be paid for spellcasting services if needed. He is a 6th-level wizard.

### ***Initiate Morsennil Druth***

A human cleric of Pelor (a good-aligned deity of the sun), Initiate Morsennil is a thoughtful woman of about 40 who has tended the shrine of the sun god in Griffonford for five years now. She is very worried about the rumors of evil gatherings in the ruined monastery, and wants the place cleared of an evil influence.

**Role:** Morsennil can buy or sell divine potions and scrolls, or be paid to cast spells on the heroes' behalf. She is a 7th-level cleric. She has two scrolls of

*raise dead* that she can sell or use on the PCs behalf, but each costs over 6,000 gp. Morsennil won't use one of these precious scrolls unless the PCs can afford to pay her for it.

## *Adventures near Griffonford*

Only two miles from Griffonford lie the ruins of an ancient evil monastery, crouching atop a small hill overlooking the river. Farther to the west, the Dholin Vale becomes very wild and rugged; Griffonford's shepherds and goatherds keep their flocks well away from the western woods. On the south side of the valley, in the middle of the rugged hills, adventurers have discovered an old dwarf-made mine. From the evil monastery to the wild woods to the dwarven mine, adventurers will find plenty of things to do in Griffonford's immediate vicinity.



You could easily use any of these three ideas — the ruined monastery, dwarven mine, or the monster-filled woods — as a springboard for designing your own dungeon or outdoors adventure set near Griffonford. See Part III for more information on designing your own adventures.

## Chapter 9

# Knowing the Players

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Identifying the types of players at the table
  - ▶ Catering to player styles
  - ▶ Handling difficult players
- 

**I**f a D&D adventure is a movie or an episode of a TV series, the Dungeon Master is the scriptwriter, director, and supporting cast all rolled into one. Like any good moviemaker, you need to think about the audience you're trying to reach with your game — the players. If the players are interested in a fast-paced shoot-'em-up sort of game, they aren't going to be entertained by exploring their emotional range with hours of free-form roleplaying. Similarly, if the players like to invest their characters with personalities and mannerisms that no one ever notices because they do nothing but fight, fight, fight, they aren't going to be as satisfied with the game you're running as they could be. To present a game that the players will want to come back to week after week, you need to figure out what it is they're looking for in a game and give it to them on a regular basis.

This chapter discusses the various player styles and gives advice on how to run a game that involves and interests the different types of gamers.

## *Figuring Out Player Styles*

The first step in delivering the type of game the players will enjoy is figuring out what they want. Different people look for different experiences in their D&D games. Some players want to see how many monsters their characters can beat, some players like the challenge of trying to act out their characters' parts, and some players show up just because they like to socialize and don't really care much about the game at all. If your D&D group includes players from opposing extremes, you'll need to present a variety of different play experiences in your games to keep everyone happy and entertained.

Note that the players might never identify themselves as one type of player or another. You might have to figure that out after observing them at play for a while, and then adjust the adventures accordingly.

The basic divide in player preferences is between people who play the game to roleplay and people who play to beat up monsters and gain power. Most people in the hobby think of themselves as either *roleplayers* or *power gamers*, although it's a little more complicated than that because the vast majority of players like at least some mix of both approaches in their games.

## Roleplayers

*Roleplayers* are the players who like to pretend to be someone else and immerse themselves in the imaginary setting. They're interested in their characters' likes and dislikes, quirks and mannerisms, and history and relationships with other characters in the game setting. Roleplayers don't like to see the rules get in the way of the story. For them, the mechanics of the D&D game exist to serve as a vehicle for roleplaying and storytelling.

Roleplayers often . . .

- ✓ Choose a distinctive voice for their character.
- ✓ Prefer encounters where they can talk and roleplay instead of just fight.
- ✓ Create detailed histories about their characters.
- ✓ Choose interesting or flavorful options instead of pure combat options when they advance their characters.

## Power gamers

*Power gamers* are the players who like to gain levels and crush monsters every week. They're interested in their characters' powers and abilities — personality or mannerisms are an afterthought. Power gamers don't like it when story elements interfere with the action. For them, story serves as window-dressing for the challenge of beating the next monster and growing more powerful.

Power gamers often . . .

- ✓ Carefully optimize their character's race, class, feat, and spell choices.
- ✓ Prefer fights to roleplaying encounters.
- ✓ Create minimal personalities or histories for their characters.
- ✓ Study various game sourcebooks, looking for powerful new abilities when advancing their characters.





## *Introducing the Player Types*

Within the two basic gaming styles of roleplayer and power gamer are several different subgroups. For example, some players are natural rebels — regardless of whether they favor roleplaying or power gaming, they like to test limits and indulge themselves by using D&D to do and say things they never would in real life. Other players are students of the game. They like to increase their mastery over the game by learning more about how it works, whether that's by figuring out the best way to run their characters in a fight or by learning as much as possible about the game world their characters adventure in.

## Which is better?

If you spend any amount of time around long-time D&D players, sooner or later you'll run across the contention that one style of play is better than the other.

One school says that roleplayers are better than power gamers. Because the power gamers don't immerse themselves in their characters or their settings, the roleplaying advocates believe that the power gamers are playing a diminished game. The *best* players know that skillfully portraying an imaginary character is the whole point of a roleplaying game — or so the roleplayers say.

The other side says that power gamers are better than roleplayers because power gamers

know the rules of the game inside and out and use that knowledge to their best advantage. Power gamers believe that all that “talky stuff” is boring and misses the point of the game, which is to gain power and defeat monsters.

To our way of thinking, any game is a good game if the players are having fun. Don't let gaming snobs from either side of the aisle tell you that your game isn't as good as theirs or that you aren't playing the game right. The right way to play, the *best* way to play, is to use the style and method that leads to the most fun for you and your game group.

Taken together, these tendencies and traits provide seven basic player types: the hack'n'slasher, the wargamer, the thinker, the impulsive adventurer, the explorer, the character actor, and the watcher. Most players don't fall into any one camp, but instead have traits that fall across a couple of categories.

## *Hack'n'slasher*

A hack'n'slasher player is a power gamer. He or she just likes to beat the stuffing out of monsters, and resists efforts to complicate the game beyond this basic exercise. The point of D&D is to kill monsters, get their cool stuff, get stronger, and kill more powerful monsters and get their cool stuff, too. Combat is what the hack'n'slasher wants, and the more combat, the better.

A hack'n'slasher often . . .

- ✓ Plays a barbarian, fighter, or other class that's good at melee combat.
- ✓ Gets bored with anything that isn't a fight.
- ✓ Plays very impulsively and doesn't follow plans.
- ✓ Keeps the game moving with his or her demand for action.

## *Wargamer*

The wargamer is a competitive power gamer. These players live to amass power and defeat the game, and they aren't really picky about how that's done. Unlike hack'n'slashers, wargamers are perfectly willing to consider solutions that don't involve fighting the bad guys; they are the ultimate pragmatists. Wargamers enjoy high-level play because it gives them the opportunity to exercise an ever-greater impact on the game world, and they live for the opportunity to level up.

A wargamer often . . .

- ✓ Plays a cleric, wizard, or other class with access to high-powered magic.
- ✓ Chooses character options (such as skills, feats, and spells) strictly based on power.
- ✓ Knows the game rules very well.
- ✓ Enjoys pondering the tactics of every situation.
- ✓ Discerns the most efficient way to complete an adventure and drives the rest of the players toward that goal.

## *Thinker*

The thinker player views the game as a puzzle to be solved. Tricky tactical situations such as dealing with flying monsters or enemy archers on the other side of a lava moat are puzzles, too, so the thinker is often an excellent tactician. Unlike the wargamer, the thinker doesn't mind playing a weak character because the challenge is there to see just how well he or she can do with limited options.

A thinker often . . .

- ✓ Plays a variety of character classes over time.
- ✓ Enjoys logic puzzles, defeating traps, and other challenges that don't necessarily involve combat or interaction.
- ✓ Knows the game rules better than anyone else at the table.
- ✓ Takes a long time to figure out the exact right action in each round of combat.

## *Impulsive adventurer*

Think of an impulsive adventurer player as the rebellious roleplayer. This player doesn't like letting his or her character sit still, and when the adventure begins to lag for whatever reason, this player finds a way to get it moving again. A D&D game is set in an imaginary world populated with imaginary characters, so why not have fun by trying out the most outrageous things you can think of? The impulsive adventurer is the player who can't resist testing the implicit and explicit rules of the game world. Usually, this isn't a deliberate effort to annoy you or the other players — it's just another form of escapism, and D&D is all about letting your imagination run free for a couple hours.

An impulsive adventurer often . . .

- ✓ Plays a signature class (often a barbarian, bard, or rogue) in game after game.
- ✓ Has his or her PC pick fights with NPCs, even if they aren't people the PCs are really supposed to fight in the adventure.
- ✓ Acts impulsively and pushes the borders of what the game allows.
- ✓ Can't resist making the PC open doors, pull levers, push buttons, or peek around the corner to see what's waiting there.
- ✓ Makes things happen when the adventure stalls by doing something completely unexpected.

## *Explorer*

The explorer is a roleplayer too, but more introverted than the character actor and much less rebellious than the impulsive adventurer. This player is fascinated with the imaginary world revealed in the game, and wants to know everything about it. If you're playing in a published campaign setting such as the FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON, the explorer has copies of all the source-books for the setting and reads the novels set in the world.

An explorer often . . .

- ✓ Carefully builds characters to fit the world and chooses roleplaying mannerisms and character abilities appropriately.
- ✓ Asks lots of questions about the back story of the adventure and the history of the setting.
- ✓ Makes maps of each dungeon or other adventure setting.
- ✓ Approaches adventures with the intent to fit his or her character into the story, instead of making the story fit his or her character.

## *Character actor*

The character actor plays D&D because it gives this player the chance to pretend to be someone else — to think, talk, and act like the character he or she has created. The character actor is happiest when given plenty of chances to *be* the character. This player is also happy to do nothing all game session long except talk to other players in character, using the character's voice, so hashing out democratic decisions within the party (for example, "What do we do next?" or "Can we really trust this drow wizard?") are just as fun as encounters the DM puts in front of the party.

A character actor often . . .

- ✓ Plays a signature class (often a bard, rogue, or swashbuckler) who relies on personality more than brute power.
- ✓ Adopts distinctive voice or mannerisms for his or her character and tries to talk to almost anybody or anything the party encounters.
- ✓ Gets bored with too many fights.
- ✓ Serves as the party spokesperson.
- ✓ Engages in the story more than any other player.

## *Watcher*

Finally, there's the player type that's no type at all — the watcher. The watcher is just not inclined to jump into the game with both feet. He or she might be unusually shy or reserved, or might be truly apathetic. A player who is easily distracted because your game isn't holding his or her attention is a watcher, but so is the new player who could turn out to be an enthusiastic D&D fan after getting over his or her initial hesitation about trying a game he or she doesn't know how to play yet.

A watcher often . . .

- ✓ Plays a class that's easy to run, such as a barbarian or fighter (although many groups often make watchers run clerics, because every party needs a cleric and the watcher doesn't have a character preference).
- ✓ Says little or nothing at all during the course of the game.
- ✓ Doesn't follow the game closely and needs prompting.

## *Analyzing the Players*

When you know something about what makes the typical D&D player tick (which we explain in the earlier sections of this chapter), you can put that knowledge to good use. Get a piece of paper and jot down the names of the players, and then think of things each player seemed to especially like or dislike about your game. What sort of character does each player play? Does the player try to speak in character, or is he or she more hands-off when it comes to roleplaying? What bores the player?

You don't have to do this in secret, by the way. Don't worry about skewing the results of the experiment by letting the subjects know that they're being observed. In fact, you'll probably get better and more accurate information if you simply *ask* the players what they like best about D&D and what they hope to get out of the game. Here's a sample player survey you can use to figure out what the players like:

1. What was your favorite part of the game tonight?

Players who liked "talky" roleplaying encounters best might be explorers or character actors; players who preferred a combat encounter are more likely hack'n'slashers or wargamers; and players who enjoyed a puzzle or tricky challenge might be thinkers.

2. What was the part you liked the least?

Players who liked the combat encounters least are probably character actors. Players who didn't like encounters with lots of talking or diplomacy are probably hack'n'slashers or thinkers.

3. What do you think is coming next? How do you expect the story to continue next week?

A player who is closely following the story of the adventure and thinking hard about what comes next is probably an explorer or character actor. A player focused on the next big obstacle to defeat may be a wargamer or thinker, but a player who doesn't care what comes next might be an impulsive adventurer or hack'n'slasher.

4. How would you improve the game?

Pay attention to what your players are asking for — that's the easiest way to figure out what sort of game style they prefer. You don't always have to give the players exactly what they want (in fact, it's better DMin'g to always keep your audience wanting a little more), but you might want to rethink your current adventure if it looks like it isn't going to be the adventure that any of your players are most interested in playing.

## *Balancing Play Styles*

Players naturally like D&D games that cater to their personal style. Players who are method actors at heart naturally think that the best game is one that lets them spend the whole evening speaking in voice and demonstrating their skills at roleplaying. To entertain those players, you can't present a whole session full of nothing but combat.

In general terms, you should adjust your own game style to reflect the tastes of the players. For example, say you have five players at the table. Two are dyed-in-the-wool character actors, one's an explorer, one is a hack'n'slasher, and one is a thinker. For this group, most of the adventures should include an even split between combat encounters and opportunities for interaction and exploration away from the dungeon. On the other hand, if the party is composed exclusively of power gamers (wargamers, thinkers, and hack'n'slashers), the vast majority of your game should be spent in dungeons and battle scenes. The only reason to throw a noncombat encounter at this sort of group is for the sake of pacing and variety.

We discuss game style in greater depth in Chapter 10.

## *Getting Along with Difficult Players*

It's sad but true — players sometimes develop habits that make it hard for everyone else at the table to have fun playing the game. In the following sections, we take a look at some of the more common types of problem players and offer some pointers on how to get along with them.



Ultimately, D&D is a social activity. Who you spend your leisure time with and how much grief you put up with in order to enjoy your hobby are completely up to you.

### *Handling a problem character*

One of the cool things about the D&D game is that you can try to create almost any kind of character. Fortunately, the game can handle all kinds of strange characters, from half-dragon ogre paladins to medusa sorcerers. However, sometimes a character becomes a problem in the game.

When a character is *broken* or *disruptive*, you might have to take steps to keep your game fair and fun for all the other players in the game group.

- ✔ **A broken character is one who is simply too good.** Enough character options are floating around out there in various game sourcebooks or magazine articles that any competitively-minded player can usually build a character who is exceedingly good at something. It's great when a player becomes interested enough in the game to seek out really good combinations of race, class, feat choices, and magic items, but when his or her character is way better than anyone else at the table, it can lead to trouble. For example, a character whose Armor Class is 10 points higher than any other character in the party poses a nasty challenge for the DM. If you throw a monster at the party who can actually score hits on the high-AC character, the monster won't ever miss if it attacks anybody else. And if you use a monster that's appropriate for everybody else, the high-AC character is never going to be threatened. Neither is good for your game.
- ✔ **A disruptive character is one that causes trouble within the adventuring party.** The classic example is an evil character in an otherwise good party. It isn't impossible for a player to pull this off, but if the player decides that his character ignores, bullies, steals from, or betrays the other characters in the party, it won't be long before the game grinds to a halt.



To counter these sorts of problems with characters, you might want to lay down ground rules for character creation in the game. It's better to spell out these things ahead of time than to allow a player to advance a problem character and then ban that character later on. Character guidelines such as "No evil characters," or "No feats or spells that aren't from an official D&D sourcebook," are fairly commonplace. Most players will go along with broad guidelines such as these.



Some DMs approach this sort of problem by instituting a sort of "deific vengeance" against the offending character. All of a sudden, exceptionally dangerous monsters begin to appear in the game, and they attack only the single obnoxious character. An evil character finds that his record of misdeeds means that powerful good characters and monsters are hunting for him. This sort of tactic is heavy-handed and "old school," so we don't really recommend it. It's far too easy to make a player feel like you're picking on him or her, and that can lead to bad feelings in a hurry. On the other hand, many experienced players will quickly realize that you're applying not-so-subtle pressure to get the player to give up on the troublesome character and create a new character who fits the game a little better.



## *Dealing with a rules lawyer*

In the parlance of D&D, a *rules lawyer* is a player who argues against a DM's verdict or adjudication by making reference to the rules. Helping a Dungeon Master to get the rules right from time to time is okay, but constant argument stops the game in its tracks and prevents all the other players at the table from having fun until the question gets resolved.

Rules lawyers come in two stripes: *over-helpful* and *over-competitive*. Over-helpful rules lawyers aren't really all that bad; they want to make sure the game runs right, so they are inclined to jump in and "help you get it right" when they think you've made a mistake. If your over-helpful rules lawyer is usually right, well, that isn't so bad — Dungeon Masters are human, after all, and there's no reason to let a mistake stand because you're too stubborn to go back and correct it. On the other hand, if helpful rules lawyers correct you continuously in the game session, or if they're wrong more often than not, it can get old. At least their hearts are in the right place.

The over-competitive rules lawyers are a little harder to deal with. They just can't stand negative results. If something bad happens to their characters, or something good happens for an opponent, the over-competitive rules lawyers are inclined to look for a loophole or interpretation that favors their characters and sets the universe back to right (in their eyes, at least). In the worst cases, this amounts to verbal blackmail or bullying. It isn't fun for anybody, except maybe the rules lawyers.

When rules lawyering becomes a problem in the game, consider some or all of the following steps:

- ✓ **Hold the questions until the end of the game.** Explain to the players that you'll be happy to entertain rules debates after the game session, but during the game you don't want to break the flow of the action or your narration by looking up obscure rules.
- ✓ **Specify conditions for debate.** It isn't unreasonable to ask players to save rules debates for absolute life-or-death matters. If your ruling doesn't spell a character's actual death, it isn't worth arguing about.
- ✓ **Make the rules lawyer your ally.** When you argue *against* a player, you're helping him or her to make it into a power struggle where someone winds up winning and someone winds up losing. Take the wind out of an argumentative player's sails by asking the player to help determine the correct answer. Get him or her to help you look up the answer.
- ✓ **Reward the other players for staying in the game.** Tell the rules lawyer to take as long as he or she wants to look something up, and that you'll

just skip him or her for a while. The monsters will leave the rules lawyer's character alone while you continue the adventure with everyone else. The other players get to play more D&D, and aren't held ransom to the rules lawyer's demands on your time.

- ✓ **Reason with the player.** If nothing else is getting through, draw the problem player aside, state the problem, and ask how the two of you can fix it. For example: "Bob, I know I'm not the best DM, but I don't feel like I can get anything going for the other players if you're arguing every call I make. How can we keep the rules debates from stopping the game for everybody?"

## *Speeding up a slow player*

Many players can take a long time to decide what they want their characters to do. Some players simply don't have a good handle on their characters' capabilities and honestly don't know what to do. Other players feel that they need to figure out the very best course of action every time their turn comes up, and they get frozen in a sort of analysis-paralysis as they carefully weigh every choice that's available. And a few players will want to look up multiple rules such as spell or feat descriptions before they really start making up their minds.

Every player deserves the courtesy of a moment or two to make a good decision, but watch out for players who bring the game to a screeching halt while they try to work out what it is their characters will do next. It isn't fair to everyone else at the table to stop the game for one slow player, especially if you're in the middle of a fast-paced, high-action scene such as a battle against a dangerous monster. The combat round is supposed to be only 6 seconds of in-game time, after all — just how long can a wizard ponder the question of which spell to cast before those seconds are used up?

The easiest way to keep the game moving is to skip a player who's just taking too long. Give the player a warning before you skip his character's turn — it's a pretty big penalty to miss out on a round of action. The generous way to skip the character is to tell the player that you've decided his or her character is delaying his or her initiative (see page 160 of the *Player's Handbook*). Whenever the player finally figures out what it is he or she wants to do, he or she can tell you that he or she wants to jump back into the initiative order. The harsher way to skip a slow player is to rule that the character does nothing and leave the initiative order. The player will have to wait until next round to act.

The decision to pressure a player to play faster and threaten him or her with delayed or skipped turns is up to you. Many players won't like being prodded,

so use this tactic with care. If you have a player who usually plays pretty quickly or a new player who honestly doesn't know any better, you might want to cut him or her some slack. Don't skip that player unless he or she has really managed to drag the action to a halt. On the other hand, you might need to set some ground rules for the game table (how long you'll let players think, whether they get delayed or get skipped, and so on) if you have a habitual show-stopper playing in the game.

## *Involving the apathetic player*

Sometimes, people join D&D games and just aren't all that interested in playing. Maybe the apathetic player is there only because his or her significant other is playing. Maybe the apathetic player is part of your circle of friends but just doesn't want to learn the game or finds the game boring. Whatever the reason, the player just doesn't really want to play D&D — hence the term *apathetic*.

Sometimes, an apathetic player is someone who could become an enthusiastic and involved contributor at the game. In other cases, the apathetic player is the guy who tries to convince everyone else to go catch a movie or play video games instead of playing D&D. You'd really like to cultivate and encourage the former while preventing the latter from wrecking the game on a regular basis. It simply comes down to this: *Does the player want to play D&D?*



If the player really isn't at the game table to play, we frankly advise you to avoid trying to make him or her play. Do you know what they say about trying to teach a pig to sing? It makes you look foolish, and it annoys the pig. It's pretty much the same thing here. As long as the player isn't actively disruptive, let him or her come and go as he or she likes. If the player *is* a real distraction, well, don't go out of your way to invite the player to your gaming nights. If the apathetic player's presence is important to keeping a good player in the game (for example, he or she is somebody else's ride or a significant other), you might not be able to do this. It would be a shame to exclude a player who likes your game and has fun because an apathetic player is part of the package, so we advise erring on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion.

If the player wants to play D&D but isn't tuning in, either your game is boring (we certainly hope not, but later chapters can help you work on that) or the player might be intimidated by the game. D&D can be pretty complex for a newcomer (which is why we wrote *Dungeons & Dragons For Dummies*), and some people are honestly self-conscious about messing up by speaking out of turn, saying something that reveals a depth of ignorance, or making a dumb move.

The best cure for this player is time, patience, and encouragement. You might ask one of the better players to take the new player under his or her wing and to help the new player stay involved and make good decisions. You could try to arrange training sessions where you give the shy player an opportunity to get more familiar with his or her character when other players aren't around. (For example, you could arrange a couple one-on-one game sessions in which the player gets to run a character through very simple adventure or even try his or her luck in a non-lethal "sparring ground" or arena combat.) Finally, you can (and should) make a special effort to call on the player frequently during the course of a game session. If you ask the player questions such as, "Bob, what does Jozan think about this plan?" or "Say, Bob, what is Jozan doing while everyone else is searching the room?" you can keep all but the most timid or remote players involved in the game to some degree.

## Chapter 10

# Choosing Your Game Style

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Figuring out your style as DM
- ▶ Establishing your own style and setting the tone
- ▶ Using DM tips and tricks to keep the game moving
- ▶ Deciding whether to let a player character die

**J**ust like players, Dungeon Masters have their own preferred styles of game play. Some DMs are most comfortable running combat-heavy games that shy away from involved storylines or extended roleplaying. Other DMs view combat as a means to an end and don't go out of their way to make sure that every game session includes a fight of some kind. You might decide that you want to run your game strictly by the book, or you might prefer to run the game with snap answers and off-the-cuff rulings so that you don't have to slow down and check the rules in the middle of the action.

If you're wondering which DM style is best, the answer is simply whichever style makes *your* game work best. If you're a natural storyteller, it would be a shame to ignore your strengths by running a game where you never get to use that skill. At the same time, you should also consider the sort of game the other players are hungry for. If they love beating monsters in fights, you'll have a hard time keeping them interested and involved if you run a game where they never get to do what they like best. So, the best game is the game that lets you do what you do best and gives the players what they want at the same time.

## *DM Styles: Running the Game You Run Best*

When you're thinking about DMing a game session or adventure, the first thing you should ask yourself is what sort of game you want to run. Do you want a game with plenty of fighting? A roleplaying-heavy game with lots of NPC interactions? A low-level game or a high-level game? Before you give any real thought to what the players might like best in the game, you need to

decide what *you* would like best. If you try to run a game that you aren't really interested in running, it's going to show.

Are you more comfortable handling action-oriented games that emphasize getting to the fight or challenge fast, or games that are more about roleplaying and storytelling? Do you like to stay narrowly on task, or do you prefer a more spontaneous approach to the game?

How you answer these questions can help you determine what type of DM you are. Most Dungeon Masters fall into one of five basic types: the action movie director, the storyteller, the puzzlemaker, the worldbuilder, and the connector. Just as many players like a mix of power gaming and roleplaying, you'll find that most DMs like to run games that include some elements from several of these styles.

Take a look at the descriptions that follow and see whether you can recognize yourself. The player descriptions we use in the following sections refer to the player types (hack'n'slasher, character actor, impulsive adventurer, explorer, wargamer, thinker, and watcher) that we discuss in Chapter 9.

## *Action movie director*

If you're an *action movie director*, you enjoy the game most when the player characters are locked in mortal combat against some horrible monster. Everything else in your game exists for the purpose of describing how and why the heroes move from one fight to the next. Some of the fight scenes might be important to the overall story of the adventure or the campaign (for example, a climactic battle against the boss monster of the adventure), while other fight scenes don't have any real purpose in advancing the story of your game, but instead exist solely for the purpose of testing the player characters' abilities to survive them (for example, a fight against a wandering monster).

You might be an action movie director at heart if . . .

- ✔ The game gets easier to handle when you tell the players to roll initiative.
- ✔ You like to create straightforward adventures with plenty of fighting, such as the typical dungeon crawl.
- ✔ You find it difficult to create unique mannerisms or voices for the NPCs, and often don't bother to try.
- ✔ You're most comfortable dealing with players who are hack'n'slashers or wargamers, and you don't know how to react to the things character actors say or do in the game.

## Storyteller

If you're a *storyteller* DM, you're out to tell a riveting tale, stocked with great villains, memorable allies, and supporting characters. It has a great twist at the end that leaves the players emotionally drained. Fights in your game serve the story, not the other way around — you're inclined to view a fight with a monster that the player characters don't strictly have to fight (such as a wandering monster) as a distraction from the real business of the game session.

You might be a storyteller if . . .

- ✔ The game is easiest for you when you're roleplaying an NPC with a specific part to play (ally or villain) in the adventure.
- ✔ You like to create sophisticated adventures that include significant events and encounters that don't take place in a dungeon.
- ✔ You take pride in crafting memorable mannerisms and voices for the NPCs the player characters to deal with.
- ✔ You're most comfortable dealing with players who are character actors or explorers, and you find it hard to keep hack'n'slashers or wargamers immersed in the story.

## Worldbuilder

You're a *worldbuilder* DM and you've built a fascinating and deeply textured game world, and you want to share it with your friends. The best way for them to explore this imaginary world is through the eyes and experiences of their player characters in your D&D game. Adventures you run reveal specific features of your campaign world. Sometimes this might be a battle against some evil faction or monstrous race that poses a grave threat to your world, but in other cases your adventure might be designed to reveal something about the ancient history, politics, or magical secrets of your world.

You might be a worldbuilder if . . .

- ✔ Your favorite part of the game is the creative exercise of inventing towns, kingdoms, and nonplayer characters before the game session even starts.
- ✔ You rarely use adventures you don't create yourself.
- ✔ You provide the players with extra information or options for character creation that help them to ground their characters in your world.
- ✔ You're most comfortable dealing with players who are explorers or thinkers, and you find your game easily derailed by impulsive adventurers or over-enthusiastic character actors.

## Puzzlemaker

Your goal as *puzzlemaker* is to test the players' wits, not their characters' capabilities. You like to present puzzles, riddles, mysteries, and exotic obstacles that don't have an answer in the game — instead, the players have to figure out what's going on based on the clues you've given them. A tricky combat encounter (for example, fighting against invisible, flying archers) can be a puzzle of sorts, but your favorite challenges and obstacles don't require any sort of attack rolls or skill checks. If the players figure out what's going on, they beat the encounter. If not, they don't, and it doesn't matter how much magic or power their characters wield.

You might be a puzzlemaker if . . .

- ✓ Your favorite part of the game is when the players try to figure out how to beat a tricky problem.
- ✓ You design encounters that can't be defeated by the use of any skill, feat, spell, or magic item.
- ✓ You like to use a lot of props and handouts in your game.
- ✓ You're comfortable with thinkers and explorers, but wargamers are unhappy because your adventures don't let them use their character abilities.

## Connector

If you're a *connector* DM, you see your game as a set of evolving relationships between the player characters, their NPC allies, and the signature villains or monsters in your game. Like the storyteller, you're mostly interested in telling a great story — but you see the story as something that spans multiple adventures. The Big Story in your game is the story of the *characters* the players create, and that story spans adventure after adventure. If the storyteller's dream is to build an adventure that is as riveting and moving as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, you want to build something as character-driven and engaging as George R.R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. Discovering the destiny of each character in your group is the ultimate goal.

You might be a connector if . . .

- ✓ Your favorite part of the game is when the players talk to each other in character.
- ✓ You design factions and foes that the player characters must deal with, and then you create adventures that serve to present them to the players.



- ✓ You allow the players to determine what adventure comes next by choosing for themselves the things their characters are interested in.
- ✓ Character actors and explorers immerse themselves in your games, but wargamers and hack'n'slashers wish you'd give them more combat.

## Establishing Your Own Style

If you're like most Dungeon Masters, you probably recognize characteristics of your D&D game in several of the DM styles we discuss in the preceding sections. The best games involve a little bit of everything, so your own personal style should revolve around the parts of the game you enjoy the best.



Although you should naturally try to play to your strengths, you also need to keep your audience in mind. Each encounter, challenge, NPC interaction, or bit of narration you present to the players in the course of an adventure serves a purpose. Whether you intend it or not, these adventure elements make some types of players happy while boring other types. If the table is full of bloodthirsty hack'n'slashers, don't try to run a game that emphasizes connectivity. If the players are character actors, don't feed them a game of fight, after fight, after fight. Most players have the courtesy and patience to wait through the game elements they don't like very much in order to get to the game elements they like the best, but you need to be aware of your audience.

Even if the players are hardcore power gamers or roleplayers, it isn't a bad idea to include an occasional "wrong" sort of encounter simply to change the pacing of your game. The players will appreciate the opportunity to use some different brain cells and try new things, as long as they get to come back to the parts of the game they like best. Unless you're pretty sure that all the players are one specific type of player and your game style caters directly to them, you'll find it best to mix elements of several DM styles into your own unique style.

## Setting the Tone

If your DM style describes the elements you like in your D&D game, *tone* describes how you like to run your game. Do you try to keep the game moving fast, or do you let the players roam along at their own pace? Do you run by the book, or do you prefer a more spontaneous style? Are you striving to be the affable narrator of the player characters' tale, or do you gleefully seek to destroy any player characters that fall into your clutches?

The tone of your game is a pretty subjective standard. It combines your own particular mannerisms, philosophy, and game goals into a distinct flavor that

is different for every DM. The best we can do here is present a handful of sliding scales for you to consider; set each pointer where you're comfortable.

## *Arbiter or narrator?*

Ask yourself whether you prefer to simply adjudicate the actions the players take or actively narrate the adventure at hand.

An *arbiter* is content to let the players succeed or fail on their own, offering few (if any) hints to help them overcome difficult challenges or solve tricky puzzles. Running a game based on strict adjudication is easier in some ways because you don't have to figure out how you're going to help the players through the tough spots. DMing as an arbiter is good for concentrating on the basics of the game (controlling monsters and evaluating player actions) instead of trying to juggle storyline elements at the same time you're trying to adjudicate the game. On the down side, it's hard to run a high-energy game if you maintain such a passive role.

A *narrator* actively narrates the game and is interested in telling the player characters' stories. You want to see conflict and resolution, the development of characters, and the advance of your campaign's various plots and storylines. If the players stall out on a tough puzzle, you look for ways to move the story along rather than allow the players to dump the adventure and go do something else — you're invested in their success. Active narration requires you to be more interactive and creative in your DMing. You might have to construct "patches" for your adventure on the fly so that the story continues. (For instance, if the villain manages to escape when the heroes assault his lair, a narrator might spontaneously add a chase scene to the adventure or have the villain "leave behind" clues about his plans so that the players can still acquire the key plot point information they were expected to get by defeating their foe.) Active narration is good for keeping the players engaged and interested, but requires more spontaneity and ability to make things up on the fly.

## *On-task or player-paced?*

Some Dungeon Masters try to keep their games moving and keep the players engaged in advancing the adventure, but other DMs allow the players to pace themselves.

If you're an *on-task* DM, you can definitely tackle more encounters and resolve more of the adventure, and you have a tighter control over the dramatic pacing of the game. The down side is you, as the DM, are always "on." You don't get many chances to organize your thoughts or re-energize yourself because you're trying to get as much of the game into the available time as you can.



The *player-paced* DM allows the players to set the pace for the adventure. Allowing the players to pace themselves is easier on you in many ways, but you'll find that you don't get as much of the D&D game under your belt in a game session. The players might feel like they're at loose ends if you don't provide at least some pressure to make decisions, take actions, and actively advance the plot. On the other hand, this style of game works very well for players who enjoy roleplaying and exploration out of combat. As long as the players are having fun, why worry about getting to the next fight or finishing the adventure in a timely manner?

## *By the book or fast and loose?*

You should decide whether it's more important to you to keep the game moving without interruption or to make sure you get every implementation of the rules just right.

Running *by the book* means that you'll often have to stop to look up the answer to a tricky game interaction, which throws everyone at the table out of character and shifts the focus of the game session from your adventure to the rules of the game. That can be tedious, but when you look something up and learn it, you might not need to look it up the next time the situation arises. And many players place a high value on getting the rules right because that means they know what to count on in your game.

Playing *fast and loose* with the game might mean missing some subtle rules interactions, but on the other hand, you don't drop out of the adventure to hit the books and study like it's finals week. The drawback to this style of DMing is that the players might find that things they expect to be true in your game (how a spell works, whether a particular action provokes an attack of opportunity) might *not* be true because you aren't going to stop and double-check. If you decide to play fast and loose with the rules, make an effort to run the same thing the same way each time it comes up. (There's that consistency thing again.) Even if a rule isn't book-legal, at least the players will have an opportunity to observe how your game works and adjust their own play styles and expectations to match.

## *Building Your DM Toolbox*

Every good Dungeon Master has a set of techniques, tricks, and mannerisms that help keep the game in motion and help to keep it interesting. Your *DM toolbox* is a part of your DMing style. When you don't know what exactly to do next, a quick trip to your DM toolbox might provide the answer.

## *Letting the dice decide*

The player characters are in the middle of a fierce battle against a bone devil, and the bone devil's turn comes up. Does it attack with one of its spell-like abilities? Does it try a melee attack against a character? Which character does it attack? You've got to make a decision, and while you're pondering the question, the game is frozen for the players.

A bone devil is a pretty intelligent monster, so you would be within your rights to try to analyze the combat from the monster's point of view and make the best decision for it. Or, you could instead roll a die and decide things that way.

For example, you could pick up a d6 and say to yourself, “On a 1-3, the devil uses a spell-like ability. On a 4-6, he makes a melee attack.” Then you could roll again to pick a target: “Okay, 1-3 he attacks Jozan, 4-6 he goes after Mialee.” A couple quick die rolls help you pick the monster’s action for the round.

One of the virtues of letting the dice decide is that it gets you off the hook for making a tough decision. If you know that Jozan is down to 4 hit points and the bone devil’s next attack will probably kill him outright, you don’t have to put yourself in the position of deliberately avoiding Jozan just to be a nice guy. If the dice say that the bone devil goes after Jozan, well, adventuring is a dangerous business. It also adds an element of unpredictability to the fights because the players can’t be sure that the monsters they’re fighting will always take the obvious best actions.



You can also let the dice decide the answers to questions you just haven’t prepared for. If the players surprise you by offering a pair of orc guards a bribe to let them pass deeper into the dungeon, and you honestly have no idea whether the orcs might be amenable to such an arrangement, you could toss a die to see how likely they are to let greed overcome bloodthirstiness. For example, you could say to yourself, “On a scale of 1 to 10, just how bribable are these orcs?” and throw a d10 to see what you get. If you roll a 1 or a 2, take it as an indication that the orcs are offended that the heroes think they can just buy their way through the dungeon. If you roll something like a 9 or 10, well, clearly those orcs aren’t happy with the pittance the dark overlord pays them and are more than willing to line their pockets any way they can. If you *know* the orcs are hostile, ask the players to make a Diplomacy check instead of making a random roll.

There are two important caveats for letting the dice decide:

- ✓ **If an intelligent monster clearly has a best choice for its action, the monster should probably take it.** A mind flayer confronting several player characters at the same time will almost certainly use its *mind blast* attack. That’s the smartest thing it could do, and mind flayers are cunning, intelligent monsters.
- ✓ **If there is an option or decision that clearly makes for a more interesting or exciting adventure, don’t let the dice screw it up.** You might have had no plans at all for allowing the heroes to bribe the orc guards, but it would be a shame to stomp on the players’ creativity by refusing to allow the ploy a chance to work.

## *Ruling by common sense*

Sometimes, you simply need to take a look at what’s going on at the table and make a decision based on your own common sense. You are allowed (and expected) to resort to ruling through *DM fiat* (just making a decision and telling the players that’s how it is) to keep the game running on an even keel.

For example, say that the heroes are being chased by a pack of wolf-riding goblins and decide to hide by climbing a big tree. One of the heroes' cohorts (allies) is a unicorn. According to the strict mechanics of the game, a unicorn ought to be a good climber because Climb is a Strength-based skill. But it's patently silly for any creature that's got a body like a horse to scramble up into a tree. By applying the rule of common sense, you can just tell the players, "Hey, climbing the tree is only a DC 10, but there's no way your unicorn friend can do it. Unicorns just aren't built to climb trees."

No rule in the game explicitly states that unicorns can't climb trees, but you just made one, and it makes plenty of sense. On the same score, NPCs won't go jump off a cliff just because a charismatic hero asks them to do it and rolls a good Diplomacy check. A rogue can't blow out a candle that's on the other side of a closed window. A fighter can't use the Improved Trip feat to knock a snake prone, because snakes are pretty much always prone. You get the idea.



Keep in mind that the world of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is magical, and some things that just aren't possible in the real world can happen in a fantasy world. A human might be able to jump a 50-foot chasm . . . if he's a high-level monk with a useful magic item and the dice fall just right. Don't use DM fiat to shoot down an action that's clearly within the spirit of the rules.

## *Winging it*

If common sense can override nonsensical rules, creativity and excitement should win out over boring or pointless play. You are completely within your rights to discard elements of an adventure that just aren't working for you and follow any inspiration that strikes. You're also free to introduce any complication, obstacle, or monster that seems appropriate in order to keep the adventure buzzing along at the height of dramatic tension.

Some Dungeon Masters prefer to run a game with minimal preparation, and they count on inspiration to strike at the appropriate moment. If the player characters decide to explore a ruined keep that you figured they would pass by, why not give them a dungeon one room at a time? It's not like the players can call you on it — they don't know what might or might not have been in the basement of a keep you just imagined a few minutes ago. All you have to do is figure out what makes for a satisfying and exciting game session.



The key to successfully winging it is to give yourself a head start by building up a reserve of Interesting Things — monsters you'd like to try out, map sketches of rooms with interesting features or dangerous traps, villains that can make a sudden appearance to liven up a boring game, or quirky NPCs for the player characters to meet and interact with. You don't have to arrange

these things in any particular order, but the technique of winging it works best when you don't have to stop and scrape together character stats or try to draw dungeons on the fly. You might find it useful to check out D&D Web sites, magazines such as *Dragon* or *Dungeon*, or even unused bits of source-books you have on your shelf to build up your reserve of bits you might improvise with later. If you stock up a folder in your DM binder with emergency adventure material, you'll never have to worry about the player characters taking a wrong turn again.



Just as you can improvise on the course of an adventure, you can also improvise within the context of an encounter or challenge. For example, your adventure might note that the chuul in room 5 has 92 hit points (hp), but if the chuul is clobbering the heck out of the player characters and you really don't want the chuul to wind up killing everybody, maybe it's okay to have the chuul suddenly keel over if one of the PCs gets it down to its last few hit points. The players don't know if the chuul had 92, or 91, or 83 hp. Just don't make it obvious when you have a monster take a dive to keep the adventure moving.

## DM cheating

Dice are fun, but terrible things can happen to the game if the dice fall badly too many times in a row. Should you change the hit points or Armor Class of a monster? Should you fudge a die roll now and again? In short, should you cheat?

Well, the DM really can't cheat. In one sense, you're in charge and what you say goes. It's certainly in your rights to sway the results one way or another to keep the game moving or to keep players happy. Still, many DMs like to follow the same rules that the players must abide by. That's perfectly acceptable, but it takes away some of the control you otherwise can exercise to make a fun and exciting game.

You might be tempted to cheat to spare a player character from a grisly and untimely death. We go into more detail about character death in the nearby sidebar, "Should you let a character die?"



Whatever way you decide to come down on this issue, never let the players know when you're bending the rules. The players need to be able to trust your die rolls so they know you're not playing favorites. It's important for them to believe their characters are always in danger, and they'll change their behavior if they suspect that you always fudge the action in their favor. With no element of risk, the reward will be less sweet. So, our advice is to play it straight, fudge when appropriate, and keep the players guessing.

## Should you let a character die?

Sooner or later, it's going to happen: One of your monsters scores a critical hit, or a player fails a crucial saving throw, and before you know it, a player character meets an untimely end. Should you really go ahead and tell the player that the character is no more?

Killing off a character is a big deal. You're knocking one of the players out of the game for a time, likely for the rest of the session. Either he's waiting around for the other PCs to take his character back to someplace where a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell can bring the hapless hero back, or he's sitting at the table busily making up a new character. Worse yet, a lot of players just hate to get a character killed. Nobody likes to lose, after all, and getting killed is definitely a form of losing.

On the other hand, not killing a character also poses problems. The risk of losing (getting a character killed) makes the game exciting. If the players come to realize that their characters aren't in any real danger because you won't allow a game result that results in character death, what's the point of playing out the adventure? Success is assured, after all. There's no dramatic tension.

Our considered opinion is that the best games include the risk of character death but that characters should rarely if ever be killed in arbitrary, malicious, or meaningless ways. Although a ferocious orc warpriest might be inclined to murder a helpless character with a coup

de grace in "real life," in your game you can choose for the orc warpriest to stay focused on the characters who are still fighting back. Instead of wasting a round to finish off a downed character, the monster keeps flailing away at the other characters. If a character fails a Balance check while crossing a chasm on a narrow log, you might think about having the character hit a ledge 20 or 30 feet down and taking some damage instead of falling 1,000 feet to certain death. You might even fudge a combat result by announcing a missed attack, a failed critical confirmation roll, or deliberately understating damage dealt to a character, as long as the players can't see what your dice happen to say. Just try not to make it obvious.

So when should you go ahead and let a character die in the game? We think there are only three good answers:

- ✓ When the party is facing a dramatically important battle
- ✓ When a character tries something that is obviously highly risky and exceedingly stupid
- ✓ When the players have developed a sense that their characters have nothing to fear in your game

Even then, don't be malicious about it. When the characters are in one of those situations, you can simply decide that you aren't going to work very hard to avoid killing a character if that's what the players' actions and the dice decide.



## Chapter 11

# Creating Excitement at the Game Table

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Putting the players' imaginations to work
  - ▶ Using miniatures, maps, and other game aids
  - ▶ Pacing your narration and directing the action
  - ▶ Getting to the fun fast
- 

**T**he best DUNGEONS & DRAGONS games engage the players on several levels. A great game involves the players in a story that's dramatic, compelling, and masterfully paced. It creates a backdrop that includes fantastic landscapes, magical vistas, shadowy perils, and terrible monsters. A great game presents challenges that encourage players to use their characters' resources wisely, make good decisions, and work together so that everybody wins.

The point of including a compelling story, inspiring setting, and challenging gameplay in your D&D game is to make the game exciting. Exciting games entertain the players, and it's a lot easier to Dungeon Master for players who are having fun than players who are bored or disinterested.

## *Maximizing Imagination*

One of the unique characteristics of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is that a lot of the game — most of it, really — takes place within the imagination of the participants. Much like reading a good book, someone playing the D&D game (or any roleplaying game, really) creates a continuous mental picture or visualization of the action. You can literally play a D&D game with your eyes closed, just opening them long enough every so often to roll some dice or jot down a note or two.

## *Narrating for all five senses*

In most D&D games, you hit stretches where the Dungeon Master is narrating events, creating scenery, or describing creatures or obstacles for the players. Some people think of this sort of description as *boxed text*. That's because many published adventures set aside descriptive passages in boxes, italics, or some other typographic method. The idea is that the DM can read these passages to the players when the adventuring party reaches that point of the adventure.

When you're telling the players what's going on around their characters, don't limit yourself to just what they see. Tell them what their characters are perceiving with all their senses. Consider these two examples:

**Example 1:** *You hiked up into the mountains to the abandoned dwarven citadel. You stand in front of the old gates, which lie in ruin. Yellowed skulls stuck on poles stand on either side of the path leading to the gate. They're marked with Orc runes of some kind.*

**Example 2:** *You hiked up into the mountains to the abandoned dwarven citadel. You're standing in front of the old gates, which lie in ruin. The air is cold and damp, and you're chilled to the bone. Yellowed skulls stuck on poles stand on either side of the path leading to the gate, each marked with a rune in Orc. A thin haze of acrid smoke drifts out of the dark doorway, and from deep in the mountain comes the distant ringing of hammers on steel.*

The first example isn't bad, but the second provides a lot more sensory information. The characters hear hammers striking anvils. They smell smoke. They feel cold and wet. Although the players may or may not be able to readily imagine what the scene looks like, everybody knows what hammer strokes sound like, everybody knows what a whiff of smoke smells like, and everybody knows what it feels like to have cold water soaking their clothes. The listeners naturally supply these details for themselves, making your description of the scene far more real and engaging than one that appeals only to the players' ability to visualize the scene.



More evocative descriptions are great, but as a general rule of thumb, a DM monologue of any sort — adventure background, boxed text, villainous speeches, anything — shouldn't be more than about a minute long. That means keeping things you read to the players to 100 words or fewer. Give a good description, and then get on to the action before the players get bored.

## *Mixing the mundane and fantastic*

One of the reasons that the imaginary world portrayed in the D&D game is compelling is because players actively try to imagine what things look like,

sound like, and feel like around their characters. It's part of the escapism of the game, and it allows everyone to have fun roleplaying. Forming a clear mental picture of what's going on also helps players to figure out ways to overcome challenges and defeat monsters. The easier you make it for the players to immerse their imaginations in the game, the more compelling and interesting the game becomes.

Imagination is fabrication, and like any good fabrication, it should be grounded in truth. The more that things from the normal, mundane, everyday world are true in your game world, the easier it is for the players to imagine themselves in the middle of the action. Consider this example:

**Example 1:** *Your trail leads into the Gresgil Forest. Anda, the great blue sun, is high in the sky. Ryth, the lesser red sun, hovers over the horizon, while Gel, the yellow sun, will not rise for some hours yet. The giant purple tree-ferns tower over your heads, weaving and sighing in the wind. The mewling cries of flerrbits drift hauntingly through the air. Suddenly, goblin warriors leap out of the shadows at you. It's an ambush!*

Chances are pretty good that the players are straining mental muscles just trying to picture what the heck this place really looks like to their characters. Is this *normal* to people presumably born in this world? Or are the characters supposed to feel as weirded out as the players likely do? Are the giant purple ferns dangerous? What in the world is a flerrbit, and does it eat people? When the goblins jump out, the actual encounter is anticlimactic. "At last!" the players cry, "Something normal!"

Compare that with this example:

**Example 2:** *Your trail leads into the Gresgil Forest. It's early afternoon, but underneath the trees the day seems gloomy, warm, and still. There isn't much undergrowth, but green curtains of moss hang from the branches of the knurled oak trees. Distant birdsong drifts down from the canopy far above. Suddenly, goblin warriors leap out of the shadows at you, filling the air with war-cries! It's an ambush!*

Now you've given the players a setting that is accessible and believable. The players might not envision exactly what you had in mind when you prepared this encounter, but you can guess they're going to get pretty close.

In general, if you assume that a lot of things in the game are the way they are in the real world (or at least, the real world of an imagined Middle Ages), you can spend more of your "imagination capital" on the exceptions. Save your most fantastic touches for things you want the players to pay the most attention to. Add interesting details if you like (rain, sunshine, cold weather, hot weather, and so on), and then get on to the part of the game you really want the players to pay attention to — the goblin ambush.

## *Suspending disbelief*

The whole point of a roleplaying game is to pretend for a bit. Everybody knows that people can't just mumble a few words and whisk themselves a hundred miles away in the blink of an eye, but for the purposes of the game, we're all willing to pretend that some people are powerful wizards. Wizards can employ magic, and magic includes spells, such as *teleport*, which lets them do exactly that. In other words, players choose not to apply their natural skepticism or disbelief to the game.

The key to maintaining the players' suspension of disbelief is to meet their expectations about their characters, the world, and the game. Anything that doesn't fit expectations and forces the players to reevaluate what they know about the game — or the setting where the game takes place — drags the players out of active visualization and lets their natural disbelief come rushing back in. It's like a giant Pause button on the game.

Failed expectations come in three basic flavors, as we describe in the following subsections.

### *This world is a joke!*

If you show the players that they're supposed to treat your game like a joke, that's what they're going to do. Sometimes that can be fun, but most D&D games work better if you play the world seriously, and let the players find the humor for themselves. One of the most common tip-offs that your game isn't serious is a bad name. Names like Lord Binky, Tim the Wizard, or Castle Stupenderous tell the players "don't take this world seriously, and don't try to get invested in the game — it won't be worth your effort."

### *Capricious rules*

The rules of the D&D game set a lot of boundaries on what exactly characters can and can't do. Arbitrarily changing the rules on the players is a sure way to jar them out of their suspension of disbelief, especially if doing so creates a negative result in the game.

For example, the *fly* spell lets a character fly — and a strong character can carry anything aloft he normally could carry while walking, so he can pick up a buddy and fly him across a chasm. If you suddenly inform the players, "Sorry, but the *fly* spell just doesn't work if you try to carry somebody else," you're asking for trouble. Despite the fact that you'd like to preserve that chasm as an obstacle in your game, nothing in the spell description implies that you can't carry your buddies if you're strong enough. In fact, you're inviting the players to go look at the description of the spell and the rules for carrying loads. Whatever you were trying to accomplish in the game grinds to a halt as the players try to figure out what works and what doesn't work in your particular version of D&D.

### *Illogical consequences*

Players expect that their actions in the world result in logical consequences. If the characters defend an elven village against a dragon's attack, the players expect gratitude from the elves. If a villain gets pushed off a cliff, the players expect that the bad guy falls and gets hurt or killed. If the characters purchase a scroll with the *passwall* spell to break into a vault where they know treasure is hidden, they expect to find the treasure when they finally get in — or at least find a reason as to why the treasure isn't there anymore.



DMs sometimes fall into the illogical consequences trap by sticking too closely to the script. If the person who designed the adventure had no idea that the characters might figure out a way to get into the vault right at the beginning, it's tempting to just say "you can't get in," or "the treasure isn't here." But a better answer is reward the players' ingenuity and resourcefulness with the success they earned, even if that "breaks" the adventure and causes you to do some fast thinking.

## *Setting the mood*

What do you do if you're going to watch a scary movie? You turn down the lights. Similarly, you might find that you can help the players get in the right frame of mind for the game by using lighting, backdrops, and background music to create the right atmosphere.

### *Lighting*

If you want to convey an atmosphere of mystery, fear, and suspense, consider keeping the lights low around the gaming table. Don't make it so dark that the players can't see what's written on their character sheets or read the results of their die rolls, but other than that, darker is usually better.

### *Music*

Music is a pretty powerful tool for imagination, especially if it's appropriate for the current tempo of your game. Music is naturally a matter of taste, but whatever you and your friends prefer, you want to make sure it isn't too loud — you don't need to spend the whole game session trying to shout over your own background music.

The following genres of music make good background or mood music for D&D games:

- ✓ **Movie soundtracks:** Most soundtracks don't have much singing that might distract your listeners with lyrics, and they're created specifically for the purpose of evoking emotion from the listener at dramatically

appropriate moments. Horror, fantasy, and science fiction movie soundtracks usually fit the mood and work best for D&D adventures.

- ✓ **Game soundtracks:** A small number of game soundtracks are available. They have the virtue of being created specifically for the purpose of providing background music for D&D games or other roleplaying games, but your mileage may vary.
- ✓ **Classical music, classic rock, or heavy metal:** These types of music can work for the game if you find the right piece or the right artist and album. But watch out for music that contains lyrics.



Don't be afraid to save background music for specific game events, especially combat encounters. If you've got a pounding, heroic battle-theme playing when you'd really rather have an atmosphere of lurking dread, your music is getting in the way of imagination. Above all, don't get so caught up in fiddling with the music that your attention is on the stereo instead of the players. If you're going to use background music, cue it up on the stereo before the players arrive so that all you have to do is push a button to get the selection you're after.

## *Showing, not telling*

One of the most powerful tools in the Dungeon Master's arsenal is the ability to show the players what's going on, instead of just telling them how the action unfolds. You could take 10 minutes to describe a dungeon chamber in exacting detail . . . or you could simply draw a map that shows the players exactly how the room is laid out and where the monsters are standing. Gimmicks such as maps, miniatures, illustrations, and handouts give you the ability to show the players exactly what you're talking about. They make the task of visualizing what's going on a snap for even the most unimaginative players.

### *Maps*

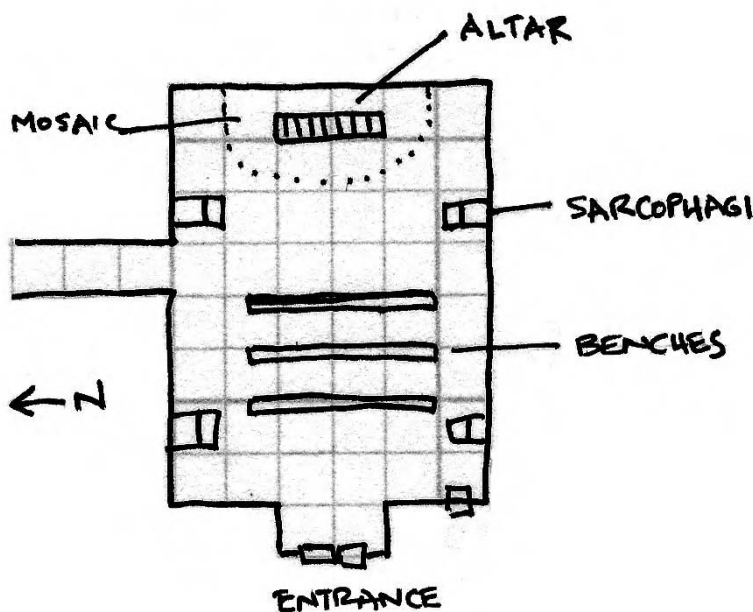
Say that one of the rooms in a dungeon you've created is an evil shrine. If the player characters approach the altar in the center of the shrine, mummies lurking in sarcophagi along the walls will burst out and attack. To describe the room in careful detail, you might have to say something like this:

*The room beyond the door seems to be a shrine of some sort. A big altar of black stone stands at the far end of the room, about 40 feet from the door. You can see two other exits: a passage that leads off into darkness in the middle of the wall on your left, and an iron-plated door just to the right of the doorway you're standing in. The shrine is about 30 feet wide, and the ceiling is quite high, almost 20 feet tall. Four big stone sarcophagi line the walls; two to the north, two to the south. They're carved in the image of ancient warriors in armor. Above the altar hangs a twisted skeleton of bronzed bones — the bones of a dragon, it seems. Purple tiles cover the*

*floor in a semicircle extending about 10 feet from the altar, and three rows of low stone benches run the width of the room, with narrow walkways on the outer edges.*

Hopefully not every room in your dungeon gets this kind of over-precise boxed text. However, there is not much here that the players won't need to know sooner or later. They need to know what features in the room might pose a threat (the skeleton, sarcophagi, and odd purple-tiled floor), and they need to know what in the room might invite a closer look (the altar). But how many people could sort out a good mental image of the room and its contents based solely on that verbal description? Which details would some listeners just miss entirely? Which details would they visualize incorrectly?

Now, imagine that instead of reading that boxed text to the players, you draw a map for them. Figure 11-1 shows what the room looks like.



**Figure 11-1:**  
A map of the  
shrine room.

If you show the players the map while describing the room, you might say something like this instead:

*The room beyond the door seems to be a shrine of some sort. A big altar of black stone stands at the far end of the room. You can see two other exits: a passage that leads off into darkness here (point to your map), and an iron-plated door here (point again). The ceiling is quite high, almost 20 feet above you. Four big stone sarcophagi line the walls, each carved in the*

*image of an ancient warrior in armor. Above the altar hangs a twisted skeleton of bronzed bones — the bones of a dragon, it seems. Purple tiles cover the floor in a semicircle in front of the altar, and three rows of low stone benches run the width of the room.*

As you can see, the second description is much like the first — but with a visual diagram of the room's layout in front of the players, most of the room's details are crystal clear. You have to explain this room only one time, instead of answering question after question about what's where.

Maps you create for the players fall into two categories: map sketches and tactical maps.

### **Map sketches**

When all you want to do is clarify the description of a room by providing a diagram of what you're describing, a map sketch is all you need. A map sketch is simply a way to convey information to the players in an efficient format. Figure 11-1 at the beginning of this section is an example of a map sketch. You can't set it on the table and use it as a board for your miniatures, because your miniatures are too big. But the map sketch shows players exactly where each feature in the room is located, and the map can certainly serve as a template or guide you can follow for drawing a tactical map of the same room.

Graph paper is the easiest way to present a map sketch to the players. However, it is a sketch — you don't need to be perfect. Any information you provide will be an improvement over verbal description alone.

### **Tactical maps**

A tactical map is a very large map you create that serves as a board for everyone to play out a combat encounter on. A tactical map uses a scale of 1 inch = 5 feet. Each square on the map is therefore a 5-foot square. Miniatures (if you use them in the game) are in the same scale as your map, so you can actually set your miniatures on the tactical map to show exactly where each character or monster is during each round of the fight.





























































Several handy game products are available for use in creating tactical maps. Many people use a *battle map* — a vinyl mat covered in a 1-inch square grid. You can draw rooms on the battle map by using wet-erase markers, like those you would use with an overhead projector. A grease pencil and a thin sheet of Plexiglas over a paper map with 1-inch squares works just as well. An interesting medium for tactical maps that's out there right now is the puzzle-piece *Tactile* — a hard plastic map section of 1-inch squares. You can use dry-erase markers on these, and you can arrange them in different configurations if you need to *scroll* the battlefield (that is, shift the map to cover more area) during a running fight. Ready-to-use battle maps complete with fully rendered locations are available in D&D *Fantastic Locations* products, as well as in some D&D *Miniatures Game* products. You can find these items at your local game store or online.



## Mapping Tips





























































Maps drawn for the D&D game often make use of common scales, symbols, and conventions. The following figures show a set of symbols you

are likely to see on maps in published adventures. You might as well use symbols like these when you draw your own maps for the players.

1		Door	21		Illusionary Wall	41		Barrel
2		Double Door	22		Dais	42		Stool
3		Secret Door	23		Altar	43		Chair
4		One Way Door	24		Pool	44		Box
5		False Door	25		Well	45		Chimney
6		Revolving Door	26		Pillar	46		Brazier
7		Archway	27		Ladder	47		Statue
8		Concealed Door	28		Covered Pit	48		Railing
9		Open Doorway	29		Open Pit	49		Curtain
10		Portcullis or Bars	30		Trap Door In Ceiling	50		Bed
11		One Way Secret Door	31		Trap Door In Floor	51		Dais
12		Window	32		Secret Trap Door	52		Dais
13		Arrow Slit	33		Trap	53		Natural Stairs
14		Fire Place	34		Spiral Stairs	54		Submerged Path
15		Locked Door	35		Spiral Stairs	55		Pool or Lake
16		Locked and Bolted Door	36		Stairs, Up or Down	56		Stream or River
17		Barred Door	37		Stairs, Slide Trap	57		Depression
18		Slit Window	38		Table	58		Elevated Ledge
19		Rock or Stone Wall	39		Chest	59		Ledge
20		Bars	40		Fountain	60		Natural Chimney

(continued)

(continued)

61		Torch	81		Forested Hills	101		Underwater Battle
62		Levers	82		Cave	102		Whirlpool
63		Rubble	83		Broken Land	103		Snow
64		Sinkhole	84		Village	104		Glacier
65		Crevasse	85		Town	105		Reef
66		Stalagmite	86		City	106		Desert
67		Stalactite	87		Capital	107		Rocky Desert
68		Rock Column	88		Ruins	108		Badlands
69		Subterranean Passage	89		Tower	109		Waterfall
70		Fire	90		Palace	110		(Rapids) Greater Cataract
71		Light Forest	91		Castle	111		Medium Cataract
72		Medium Forest	92		Fort	112		Lesser Cataract
73		Heavy Forest	93		Road	113		Mud Pit, Hot Springs
74		Jungle	94		Trail	114		Crenelated Wall
75		Grass	95		Lighthouse	115		Docks
76		Swamp	96		Camp	116		Building or Roof
77		Moor or Bog	97		Battlefield	117		Wooden Stockade
78		Mountain	98		Naval Battle	118		Underground
79		Volcano	99		Mining	119		Tar Pots
80		Hills	100		Bad Magic Points	120		Clear

Most game maps drawn on graph paper use a scale of 1 square = 5 feet or 1 square = 10 feet. You can quickly create tactical maps (each 1-inch square is 5 feet across) based on these dungeon map sketches if you use one of these

standard scales. Maps of bigger areas, such as towns or kingdoms, use much larger scales, as you might expect, such as 1 square or 1 inch = 5 miles or more.

In addition to using symbols that the players can easily understand and a convenient scale, you should also try to create maps that are logical and aesthetically pleasing. When you're drawing a map for the players, ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ **Is this the right size?** If your dungeon is inhabited by big creatures such as ogres or giants, you should make most of your hallways 10 feet or 15 feet wide, and rooms should be big. If you're setting up an encounter with a highly mobile monster (something that flies, for example), give it a room big enough to move around in. Don't forget high ceilings, if appropriate.
- ✓ **Does the room have interesting contents?** A room with four walls, a door, and nothing else is boring. Every room should have

accoutrements and furnishings appropriate to its function. Libraries should have bookshelves. Alchemists' laboratories should have worktables and kilns. Prisons have shackles attached to the walls, and barracks have bunks, weapon racks, and footlockers. Shrines should have altars and statues.

- ✓ **Is the room too symmetrical?** A dungeon full of nothing but square rooms is boring. Include corners, alcoves, or L-shapes. Include columns or pillars. Add details to the flooring, such as raised or sunken areas with steps.

Feel free to pillage maps from any published adventures you can find. A number of gaming-related Web sites also include maps that you can download and print out for use in your own game.

## *Miniatures*

If you find it useful to create tactical maps for the players, you should strongly consider using miniatures in the game. Although you can mark the locations of monsters and characters by drawing on the map or using stand-in tokens (glass beads, unused dice, or candies), a good selection of miniatures makes your combat representation into something concrete and tangible instead of an abstraction.

Miniatures used to be a rather expensive and time-consuming adjunct to the roleplaying hobby, but in recent years, several companies have started to produce pre-painted, plastic miniatures that really aren't that expensive and eliminate the work of building and painting them. Official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS miniatures are the best of these for a D&D game because they feature all the official D&D monsters and character classes, but you might find that pieces from your favorite board game or other miniatures work just as well in the game.

## *Illustrations*

A picture is worth a thousand words, or so they say. Instead of trying to describe a big, complicated room with lots of important details through several paragraphs of boxed text, seek out a picture that might do the job.

A few published adventures are designed with illustration booklets that are keyed to the adventure. Even if the adventure doesn't have any illustrations

that are specifically designed to be shown to the players, most published adventures include a small number of illustrations. These pictures can often show what's going on far better than you could ever explain it through verbal description alone. Don't be afraid to show the players any illustration in a published adventure. (You might want to cover up the rest of the page with a blank piece of paper if you don't want the players to read whatever else is on the same page.)

If you prefer to create your own adventures, keep an eye out for interesting illustrations or artwork that you can show the players during the game. Good places to look for D&D-themed artwork include the following:

- ✓ Check the Wizards of the Coast Web site ([www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com)). Art from current D&D products is frequently posted in preview galleries.
- ✓ If you're handy with a sketchbook, try creating your own illustrations. It doesn't have to be that good. Even a very rough and simple sketch of what the characters see when they look into a room can be a tremendous help for visualizing what's where.
- ✓ Calendars or book covers from fantasy artists are often appropriate, even if they aren't from D&D game products.
- ✓ Capture screen shots from your favorite computer game and print them out to show to the players.
- ✓ The real world includes plenty of striking scenery; photographs snipped or copied from encyclopedias, travel magazines, or old issues of *National Geographic* can stand in for many fantasy landscapes. Mountains, forests, jungles, deserts, waterfalls, weird rock formations, old castles, or quaint European towns are all fair game.

### ***Handouts***

Any time the player characters find something written down — a secret message from an evil spy, an old wizard's riddle, a treasure map, or a mysterious code — think about presenting that information as a handout. Instead of telling the players what the secret message says, you can write the letter exactly as your villain would have done and simply give it to the players to read for themselves. Let the players determine for themselves what's important or unimportant in the message.

Like a good illustration, a handout is an excellent DM tool because it gives you the chance to show the players *exactly* what their characters are seeing. There's no possibility for misunderstanding.



If you want to give your handouts the appearance of authenticity, try this: Lightly blot some paper with tea or coffee, and then let it dry. The coffee or tea will stain the paper yellowish and make it a little crinkly, so it will look a little like old parchment. Or you can get some parchment paper and use that for even more of an authentic feel.

Here's an example of a handout. The setup for this handout is that the characters have defeated a party of hobgoblin slavers that was hired by the leader of an evil cult to abduct the local lord's son. The goal of this handout (shown in Figure 11-2) is to give the players information they can use to find the secret temple of the evil cultists after they save the young noble from his hobgoblin captors.

**Figure 11-2:**  
A sample  
handout  
to give  
players — a  
letter they  
find in the  
course of  
adventuring.

**Xardagas:**

As we discussed in our previous correspondence, I agree to pay you 500 pieces of gold for the capture of Reddan Oreskil, son of Lord Tereth Oreskil of Griffonford. I want him alive and unharmed, but do as you will with any others you find in his house. When you succeed in capturing him, bring him to the ruined watchtower in Wyvernfang Pass. My agents will meet you there. You will know them by the sign of the Black Gauntlet. Here is the first 100 gold pieces for your services; my agents will pay you the rest when you bring Reddan Oreskil to Wyvernfang Pass.

Kurdell

By giving this handout to the players after their characters defeat the hobgoblins of Xardagas's band, you provide the players with an obvious next step in their adventure — the watchtower in Wyvernfang Pass. Instead of telling the players what they ought to do, you've shown them.

## Pacing the Game

Whether you're engaged in a scene that the players are visualizing entirely in their minds or one that they're experiencing in a more tactile, concrete presentation, we recommend actively managing the game's dramatic tension. In short, you don't want things to get boring.



The rules of dramatic tension are simple:

- ✓ Start small and work up to a climax.
- ✓ Don't waste time on challenges or scenes that don't threaten the characters or advance the plot in some way.
- ✓ Always leave 'em wanting more.

## Cliffhangers

The oldest technique for dramatic tension in the book is the cliffhanger. Instead of playing out each game session to its absolute conclusion, look for an opportunity to stop a little short. If you do it right, the players will be positively chomping at the bit to find out what happens next. Instead of reaching a convenient stopping place and staying there, take the player characters right up into the beginning of the next big danger — and then call it a night. Let the players spend the rest of the week wondering how in the heck their characters are going to get out of whatever fix you dropped them in when you ended the last D&D session.

## The cut-away scene

Imagine that your D&D game is a movie, and you're the director. You're shooting a scene where Lidda the Rogue is exploring a secret passage in an evil shrine, while her friends are waiting behind her. Suddenly, fiendish dire rats set on Lidda in the dark passageway, while fanatical temple guards find her friends and attack. How would you shoot the scene? You could just run the combat one round at a time, letting the characters take their turns in order regardless of whether they're in the same fight. Alternatively, you might use the *cut-away scene* technique: You could play through several rounds of one fight scene, and then cut away to the other scene and catch up by playing several rounds of that one. Your "camera" follows Lidda for a time as she explores the passage and encounters the dire rats, and then it jumps back to the rest of the characters when the temple guards burst into the room, and then jumps back to Lidda after the first round or two of the temple guard fight, just in time to see how she's doing against the dire rats.

The cut-away scene works best when the player characters are divided. They might be only a few feet away in another room, or they might be engaged in completely different adventures that are only loosely linked to each other. Spend 5 to 10 minutes dealing with one discrete storyline in your adventure, then put that action on hold (usually at a dramatically appropriate moment, using the cliffhanger technique) while you switch over to DM one of the other players through whatever his or her character is doing, and then switch away again when you're ready.



Cut-away scenes are incredibly effective in both books and movies — just as soon as something reaches a breaking point, the action jumps away to another character and follows him or her for a time. At the gaming table, keep your cut-away scenes short. Remember, while you're giving attention to one character or group of characters, other players at the table are sitting around doing nothing except watching and listening. Try to give each player at the table about the same amount of your time and energy.

## *Varying your delivery*

Just as you control when game sessions and encounters start and stop, you also control the pace and style of the narration, because you're the narrator. It's useful to create contrast between scenes that are intended to provide action and scenes that are intended to provide anticipation leading to the action.

### *Action scenes*

Action scenes include any fight in the game, as well as encounters with deadly traps, formidable obstacles, or verbal confrontations with NPCs who are trying to obstruct the player characters in some way.

Pick up the pace and allow yourself to show more animation and excitement when you're presenting a combat scene or deadly challenge. After all, this should be an exciting moment in the game. What do people do when they're trying to say something they're excited about? They talk faster. They talk louder. They gesture more, they might even get up and move around or literally bounce in agitation. They pour physical and emotional energy into what they're saying. If you inject this excitement into your narration of the game, the players will pick up on it, and they'll be riveted to everything you say or do. Don't be afraid to jump to your feet, gesture expansively, and talk loudly and fast when you want to ramp up the energy level at the table.

### *Anticipation scenes*

If the player characters aren't in an action scene, they should be in a scene that is building anticipation toward the next action scene to come. Exploring a fearsome dungeon, piecing together a riddle or puzzle with troubling implications, or planning the defeat of a dangerous foe are all encounters or scenes designed to build anticipation. To create an atmosphere of brooding menace, use a lower tone of voice and avoid excitable movement such as pacing or pronounced gestures. Take your time with your narration, indulge in a little extra description, and see whether you can't get the players leaning forward in their chairs to see what happens next. That makes it all the more startling when you jump up and announce the sudden attack of some horrible monster.

## *Getting to the fun fast*

Many D&D adventures contain a serious flaw: In one way or another, they make the players search for the fun. If the players can't figure out what their characters are supposed to be doing or just hit what seems to be a dead end, they get frustrated.

Obstacles that sometimes get in the way of finding the fun include:

- ✓ **They didn't find the secret room:** If the characters have to find a well-hidden secret door in your dungeon in order to keep playing, you might be just hiding the fun. Make sure that plenty of clues exist elsewhere in the dungeon to suggest how secret places might be found.
- ✓ **They didn't talk to the right guy:** If the characters have a whole town full of people to interview in order to locate the one NPC who can tell them what they need to do next, you're hiding the fun for everybody except the character actors. When you design your adventure, make sure that multiple NPCs possess clues that can point the characters in the right direction. Some clues might be better than others, but at least the odds of figuring out some place to go next are pretty good.
- ✓ **They didn't solve the puzzle:** Sometimes you might stump the characters with a riddle or physical puzzle. If they need to solve the puzzle of aligning the levers in the room the right way to open the otherwise impassable door and just can't do it, you stop the adventure dead. Make sure that clues are available if the players need the help.
- ✓ **They didn't bring the right magic:** Maybe the characters needed to have access to a specific spell, scroll, or potion (say, *water breathing* or *fly*) to get past an obstacle. Provide clues ahead of time that suggest to the players what preparations they'll need to succeed, or make sure that a detour route is available. The detour can be difficult and dangerous, but that will just reward those characters who prepared for the challenge.



Making the players use their brains is perfectly okay. Every now and then, the players should hit challenges or obstacles that make them think hard about what to do next. You just want to make sure that they will be able to come up with an answer when they have to stop and figure things out.



# Chapter 12

## Growing Your Game

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Building a world for your D&D game
- ▶ Increasing character creation options in your game
- ▶ Creating your own rules
- ▶ Involving the players in the campaign

**M**ore than any other hobby you can name, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game inspires creativity. Power gamers seek out innovative ways to develop their characters through the clever use of new magic items, spells, and tactics. Roleplayers gradually accumulate a library of stories about their characters' backgrounds, personalities, and accomplishments. Dungeon Masters constantly search for new adventure material to throw in front of the players, and many also take the time to create highly detailed settings for their games, complete with iconic villains, political maneuvering, living history, and ever-growing storylines for the players to interact with. There's really nothing else like it.

In this chapter, we take a look at ways to expand the scope and creativity of your regular D&D game. Growing your game keeps it fresh, interesting, and vital for the players.

### *Setting Your Game in a World*

The first big questions to ask when you're thinking about trying to expand the scope of your game are, "Is there a world outside the adventure my players are currently involved in? Can they explore it? What will I tell them if they do?" In other words, does anything important happen to the player characters when they aren't in a dungeon?

Setting your D&D game in a living, changing game world is an excellent way to grow your game. All of a sudden, you've got room for virtually endless creativity. If you're creative, energetic, and willing to pour a lot of time into your

hobby, there is virtually no limit to the amount of world-building you can do. We've seen Dungeon Masters who have built worlds of astounding scope and detail, with dozens of pages of maps, hundreds of NPCs, and thousands of words of history, culture, and arcane lore.



If you don't feel you have the time, energy, or native creativity to build your own game world, consider using a world somebody else has built for you. You can adapt the setting of almost any fantasy fiction to your D&D game with a little work. Or you can pick up an official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game setting such as FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON. If the players are already fans of the fantasy story or setting you select to build the campaign around, you've got a great head start in getting them involved and interested in your game.

You can always settle on an approach that combines both of these elements. For example, you might use an established setting like the FORGOTTEN REALMS, but drop in any dungeons, towns, characters, or monsters you create into the game setting whenever it's convenient for you. It's your game, after all.



If you find it a little daunting to wrestle with a whole planet when you begin your D&D game, think about starting with a microcosm instead of a macrocosm. Begin your campaign with the dungeon and a simple base town, and grow your game outward only when the player characters need to venture into some new domain or locate some new resource. Why bother to fill pages and pages with notes about the interesting folk of the Isles Beneath the Dawn when the player characters haven't ever gone more than 10 miles from the town they started in? Draw maps of far places and write descriptions of exotic towns and people whenever you like, but you don't *have* to do either until the player characters are ready to venture into that particular corner of your game world.

We take a longer look at building your own campaign in Part IV of this book.

## *Adding New Rules Elements*

Most DUNGEONS & DRAGONS games begin with about 1,000 pages of rules: the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. Although you can create a bewildering variety of characters and adventures with the material in these three core rulebooks, you will find that an immense amount of additional game material is available if you want more choices. For example, there are 11 base character classes in the *Player's Handbook* — but other D&D sourcebooks provide dozens more, including classes such as the favored soul, hexblade, marshal, ninja, psion, psychic warrior, samurai, scout, soulknife, swashbuckler, warlock, and warmage, just to name a few. Some veteran players feel like they've "been there and done that" with the 11 character classes from the *Player's Handbook*, but trying out one of these new base classes gives jaded players a chance to do something in the game they haven't done before.

## Where can I find all this stuff?

If you like a game with a broader selection of character options, monsters, magic treasure, and everything else, you're in luck — so do a lot of other DMs. You can find all sorts of additional D&D material in a number of places. Wizards of the Coast, Inc., publishes a variety of official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS sourcebooks and supplements, many of which include all sorts of new material you might want to incorporate in your game. A number of other game publishers publish D&D material through an open source agreement with Wizards of the

Coast. *Dragon Magazine*, from Paizo Publishing, is an excellent source of new material. You can find a tremendous amount of material on various Web sites, from the Wizards of the Coast site ([www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com)) to any number of fan-created Web sites. Finally, you can create brand new monsters, classes, or spells for yourself.

We take a longer look at sources for D&D material in Chapter 13.

Other players find that additional character-building options allow them to get far more specific with a particular character concept. For example, a player who's a big Alexandre Dumas fan might want to build a Musketeer-like character — dashing, debonair, quick and deadly with a blade. You can build a character like this from the rogue and fighter classes in the *Player's Handbook*, but the swashbuckler class (from the *Complete Warrior* sourcebook) is an even better starting point for the would-be Musketeer. The more options you allow into your game, the more likely it is that the players can find the exact rules implementation necessary to create the characters they've got in mind.

Adding rules options to please the players is fine, but you will find that most DMs introduce new rules elements for their own benefits on a very regular basis. Naturally, you might want to create unique and memorable villains who make use of the same sort of extra options that are available to player characters. You will also find that the game benefits from a regular infusion of new monsters and new magic items.

## Making new options available

When you decide to make new character options and choices available, you immediately face the choice of whether to allow the players to make use of these options retroactively, or instead require the players to wait until their characters have the opportunity to acquire these abilities in the normal course of advancement.

For example, say you buy a sourcebook that has a number of new feats in it. The player characters in your game are all 7th level. If you require the players to wait until their characters can normally choose new feats, most of the

characters in your game must wait two levels before they can explore the new options you've introduced, because most character classes gain feats at 6th level and 9th level.

If you choose to allow your characters to *respec* (redo their character statistics, changing selections they made at lower levels) to take advantage of the new options, the feats become available immediately. By allowing the player characters to revisit the feat choices they made at 6th level, 3rd level, or even earlier in their careers, you let them make better decisions in light of the new options that are available — but, of course, you're *retconning* your game. Retcon stands for *retroactive continuity*, which is a fancy way of saying that you're telling the players to pretend that something about their characters or your game was always the way it is now, instead of sweating the details of how and why things changed.

## *Examining new rules elements*

Not all rules elements are born equal. Some are very easy to implement in your game and have a relatively limited effect. Others might require you to really bone up on a complex new aspect of the game and will change everything you do at the game table. The following subsections provide a quick look at the types of rules elements you might choose to include in your game, in ascending order of difficulty.

### *Monsters and magic items*

Veteran D&D players have a pretty good idea of what's in the *Monster Manual*. They might not remember off the top of their heads how many Hit Dice a troll has, but they do know that they have to deal out fire or acid damage to finish off the regenerating monster. Using a monster that no player in the party has ever fought before makes jaded players sit up and take note because they realize that they don't know how much danger their characters are in. All of a sudden, it's like they're neophytes again, and they have to figure out the best way to beat the monster with no out-of-character game mastery to help them along.



Adding a new monster to the game is about the easiest new thing you could possibly add. It's entirely in your control whether the players ever encounter the creature. If the monster proves troublesome (it isn't clear how its special abilities work, it seems too weak, or it seems too deadly), you never have to include it again — just make a point of not using it in any more encounters.

An easy way to add a new monster to an adventure is to pick up a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Miniatures Game* booster pack. Chances are that you'll find a new monster (or a monster that you've rarely used before), along with its game statistics, that you can use on the spot in your adventure. This way, it's a surprise for you and the players.

New magic items are similar to monsters in that most players expect the DM to control when or whether they appear in the game. Players don't have a sense of entitlement toward a magic item their characters haven't found yet. However, a magic item is harder to take out of your game if it proves to be a problem. Magic items that have charges eventually run out, of course, but permanent magic items hang around forever — particularly if players have discovered that they're useful.

### ***Feats and prestige classes***

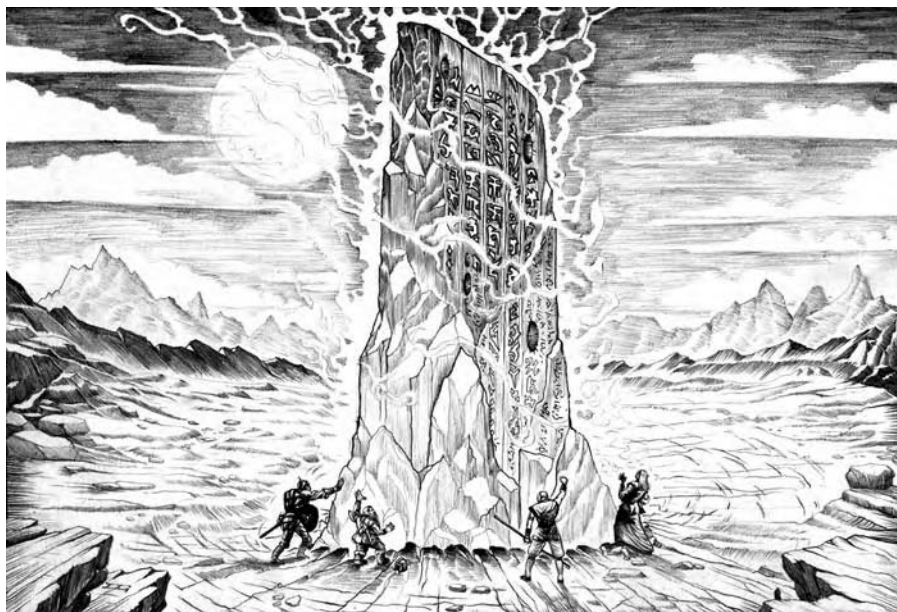
Making new feats or prestige classes available in your game doesn't provide you with many new DMing possibilities, but it does provide players with the ability to explore new character abilities and archetypes. In general, these options help players to specialize their characters and develop signature combat tactics, combos, spells, or strategies for besting the monsters. There are a lot of dwarf fighters out there in the D&D world, but how many of them have levels in the dwarven defender prestige class and can use the Whirlwind Attack feat with the two-bladed sword?

When you introduce these new options into your game, the players can't instantly take advantage of them. They have to wait until their characters reach a new experience level to consider adding a prestige class, and they might actually require a couple levels to meet the requirements for getting into the prestige class. Similarly, players can't take advantage of any new feats you add to the game until their characters have the opportunity to select new feats, which might require a wait of a level or two.

Unlike monsters or magic items, you don't control these rules elements after you introduce them into your game — it's up to the players to decide whether they want to take advantage of them when they advance their characters over time. Conversely, there is no elegant way to remove these elements from your game after you make them available. If you find that a certain prestige class or feat is causing trouble in your game, you can't just stop including it, because it's now in the players' hands. You have to retcon their characters to get rid of the problem, and that usually isn't very much fun.

### ***Spells***

When you make a new spell available in your game, spellcasting characters gain access to that spell almost instantly. A new cleric or druid spell is available the very next time the character prepares spells. A new wizard spell can probably be bought and added to the character's spellbook the next time the adventurers happen to pass through a big town. In other words, the players can put new spells into play more quickly than almost any other rules element you add to your game.



The biggest challenge of introducing a new spell is that each new spell you add to your game adds to the number of options that must be considered when a player running a spellcasting character chooses spells. This isn't so bad for the sorcerer, who makes decisions about which spells to learn only when he or she gains a level, but for the cleric or wizard it's adding to a significant preparation burden. Choosing from a list of 50 1st-level spells requires more player commitment and discernment than choosing from a list half that size.

That said, new spells are definitely cool. Players who have become familiar with the *Player's Handbook* will almost always find a spell slot or two for interesting new spells. And, should a new spell prove to be detrimental to your game, it's easier to remove something from a character's spell list than it is to take back a prestige class level or rework a set of feat choices.

### ***Character classes and races***

Just like feats, prestige classes, and spells, new character classes and races are primarily player options. These options tend to sit at the slow end of the "speed of introduction" scale. You aren't likely to see much use of new character races unless a new player joins your group or an old player gets his or her character killed and decides to try something else. By far the best opportunity to introduce a new character race is when the players are first making up their characters for a brand-new game.

New classes are theoretically easier to introduce during a continuing campaign because any character might choose to add a new class the next time he or she gains a level (called *multiclassing*), but in practice few classes are instantly attractive to characters who are already well along the road of their original class. This is especially true of spellcasters — a wizard is not likely to give up the next level of spellcasting progression in order to become a 1st-level anything.

Additional character classes and races do provide a staggering wealth of new options for adventuresome players to try out. Consider this example: Say you decide to add the scout character class from *Complete Adventurer* to your game. You haven't added just one new character type — you've added dozens, because the existence of the scout invites an experienced player to try building a human scout, a half-orc scout, an elf scout, a dwarf scout, a scout who maximizes stealth skills, a scout who uses the Spring Attack feat tree, and so on.

### Cap systems

The term *cap system* refers to a whole rules set that adds a new dimension to the game, such as a new system of magic or style of play. Most cap systems include new character-building options, such as races, classes, or feats; new spells or powers; and monsters and adventure material that make use of the new rules. Official cap systems for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game include

- ✓ Psionics (mental powers), as described in *Expanded Psionics Handbook* and *Complete Psionics*
- ✓ Incarnum (soul energy), as described in *Magic of Incarnum*
- ✓ New magic systems, such as shadow magic and pact magic, as described in *Tome of Magic*
- ✓ Super-high-level play, as described in *Epic Level Handbook*

Introducing a cap system to your game gives the players a ton of new options to explore. However, not every player at the table needs to make use of each subsystem of the new rules. For example, if you're using the psionic rules from *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, one player at your table might want to choose the maenad character race, another player might decide to create a character with the psion character class, and another player might be happy to choose one or two of the psionic feats, but otherwise stick with the dwarf fighter he always likes to play.



A cap system can be challenging to incorporate in your game because it imposes a significant learning curve on you as the DM. When you add a discrete component such as a character race or class that operates by the normal rules of the D&D game, you have to evaluate only the specific component you're adding. Adding a cap system means that you need to do some homework and familiarize yourself with the way the system works.

The challenge increases significantly with each cap system you allow into your game. Each new system increases character options exponentially, because players can build characters by using core rules and other cap systems and then cherry-pick specific abilities from the new book.



If you're just beginning as a DM, it's probably best to limit yourself to learning one cap system at a time.

## Creating House Rules

The rules set for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is very large. It's almost inevitable that sooner or later you will find something in the game that you don't like. Some DMs grit their teeth but stick to the book anyway, but other DMs decide to take matters into their own hands and create a *house rule* — a modification to the core rules for their own games. Do you think rangers and bards aren't very tough characters? Create a house rule to rework their spell progression charts and give them more spells at earlier levels. Don't like the fact that clerics can prepare only one domain spell per spell level? Create a house rule that says clerics can prepare as many castings of their domain spells as they like.

When you find yourself wishing the rules worked a different way and thinking about how you'd fix them if it were up to you, keep these general guidelines in mind:

- ✓ Don't create a house rule that applies to only one character at the table. If you find yourself legislating general game rules to solve problems that one character causes, you might be dealing with a broken character, not a game state in need of correction. (We discuss broken characters in Chapter 9.)
- ✓ Before creating a house rule, take some time to review what's in the rulebook pertaining to the situation you want to fix. It's always possible that you haven't been playing the rules right.
- ✓ Solicit player feedback about your proposed house rule. Find out whether the players can drive oxcarts through the gaping holes in the rule before you actually try to enforce it in play.
- ✓ Keep a good record of your house rules and make sure the players know what they are and why you have them in play. Remember to be consistent!



One of the outstanding features of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is that you're free to make it into the game you want to play. Don't be afraid to discard elements that cut into your fun and add elements that make you happier, as long as you're confident that the players feel the same way about the rules you want to change.



## Common house rules

If you're wondering what sort of rules other Dungeon Masters choose to adjust for their games, here are a couple of the more common ones:

- ✓ **Reduced experience:** Some DMs feel that the XP table advances characters faster than they'd like. To slow down character advancement, a DM might institute a house rule that states that all encounters are now worth 50 percent of the experience points the rules say to award.
- ✓ **No level loss for the *raise dead* spell:** Losing a level when a character comes back from the dead really hurts. Some DMs choose not to apply this penalty.
- ✓ **Action points:** The *EBERRON* world introduces the idea of action points, a special resource that players can use to help out die rolls when things look bad. Some DMs who aren't running *EBERRON* games like the idea enough to incorporate it in their own D&D games.
- ✓ **Gestalt characters:** This optional rule was introduced in the sourcebook *Unearthed Arcana*. It essentially allows a single character to combine the class abilities of two character classes at every level. DMs who have only a couple players for their games find it useful for making sure the adventuring party can still do everything they need to do, even though only two or three characters are present.

## Getting Players Involved in the Game

New places to explore and new character options are all very good, but the single best way to grow your D&D game is to increase the players' investment in the continuing success of the game. If you can succeed in getting the players to *care* about your game, they'll drive your campaign's storyline, seek out new rules options, and build better, more interesting characters for the game — and that in turn will push you to present adventures and challenges that they're interested in tackling. You motivate the players; the players motivate you. Everybody wins!

Players are most likely to become deeply invested in games where their characters continue from week to week, so if you want to get them involved and keep them involved, you need to create a campaign (see Chapter 8). The following sections share tricks and techniques for getting players wrapped up in a campaign — and keeping them that way.

### *Crafting good backgrounds*

The first step in encouraging players to care about your game is to encourage them to care about their characters. Challenge the players to create interesting

and appropriate backgrounds for their characters. Even a few scribbled notes to record a player's creative thinking about who his or her character is and where he or she comes from is better than nothing.

When the players create new characters, ask them to think up answers to some or all of the following questions:

- ✓ Where was your character born? Where was he or she raised?
- ✓ Does he or she have a family? Why did your character leave them to take up a life of adventuring?
- ✓ How did your character learn to do whatever it is his or her character class does? How did your fighter learn to fight? How did your wizard learn to use magic?
- ✓ Who are your character's enemies? Are there any monsters that he or she particularly hates or fears?
- ✓ Does your character have any interesting mannerisms or characteristics? How did he or she come by them?



You might need to offer a concrete reward to the players for taking the time and trouble to craft a good back story for their characters. For example, you might award newly created characters bonus experience for a good background — say, 50 percent of what they need to hit their next level goal (or about 500 XP for 1st-level characters). Sure, the power gamers in your group will create character backgrounds solely for the purpose of speeding their progress to their next level, but at least you got them to think about who their characters are and how they fit into the world.

## *Using character goals*

Just like real people, well-crafted characters change over time. They learn new things, they develop history with allies who aid them and with villains who oppose them, and they strive to make progress toward goals they deem desirable. Players naturally want to see their characters grow and change. Power gamers want to see their characters gain impressive new abilities and garner respect in the game world, and roleplayers want to see their characters make progress toward personal story goals — quite possibly goals they imagined when they first created their characters, however many levels ago that might be now.



So how do you figure out what the characters in your game want? You ask the players. It's that simple. You don't even need to spend time at the gaming table doing it — an e-mail, a hallway conversation, or a phone call between game sessions will do just fine.



Keep in mind that character goals can change over time. Things that seem important to a player starting a 1st-level character might become passé when that same character hits 9th or 10th level. You should periodically check back with the players to find out whether their goals have evolved since the last time you asked.

### ***Character build goals***

Gaining levels is a lot of fun, and each time a character gains a level, the player gets a chance to select new and exciting rules options — new spells, new feats, even new character classes. Many players begin low-level characters with their eyes already set on a signature move, tactics, or capability they can't wait to get their hands on. For example, a player with a fighter character might look forward to the day he masters the Whirlwind Attack feat; a rogue might anticipate the level at which he can enter a prestige class that gives him the ability to hide in plain sight; or a paladin might dream of the day he finds a *holy avenger* sword.



When you find out what the players' character-building goals are, make a list of things you'll need to plan for future adventures. Some prestige classes have special requirements that can be met only through specific adventures or quests; some magic items won't be suitable for a character until he gains a number of levels.

Character build goals are easy on the DM because usually you don't have to do much more than provide the normal amount of character advancement in the game for the player to make progress toward the goal. Some build goals might require a little work — for example, if a player wants to see his or her character gain a particular magic item (that *holy avenger* sword, say), you will eventually need to place that item as treasure in an adventure or even design an adventure in which the prize is the desired item.

### ***Story goals***

Character goals that don't involve gaining specific abilities or options are story goals. Story goals might be seeded all the way back in a character's background ("my father was murdered; I want to find his killer someday and avenge his death") or be acquired during the course of a character's adventuring career ("the vampire Erissyl killed our brave comrade Jozan during our assault on the Ebon Tower; someday we will hunt her down and avenge Jozan's death").

Story goals are significantly more work for you because each story goal demands an adventure to resolve it. To help players achieve their story goals, you have to provide adventure content that refers to these hopes and aspirations. In the examples from the preceding paragraph, you'll eventually need to figure out how the player character can learn the identity of his or her father's killer, where that person or creature is now, and what he, she, or it will do when confronted by a vengeful hero. On the bright side, the story goals that the players share with you ought to provide a wealth of ideas for creating adventures the players will care about.

## *Using 21st century technology to enhance your game*

Lots of Web-savvy Dungeon Masters use 21st century technology to record details of their regular D&D games. For example:

- ✓ **Web site:** You can create a Web site devoted to your game that your players can access anytime they want to read up on what's going on in the game world. Nobody has to carry around a big, disorganized notebook or misplace handouts you provided if an ongoing journal of your game is a persistent, ever-growing section of your Web page.

A Web site is also a great place to keep information that's generally useful for your game. For example, if you have a set of rules or notes about which game sourcebooks you allow in your game and which ones you don't, you can build a Character Creation tab or page for your site. If you have extensive notes about the people or places in your game world that you think the player characters ought to be familiar with, write them up and post them on a World Atlas or Campaign Gazetteer page.

- ✓ **Blog:** *Blogs* (short for Web logs, which are online journals for those of you who haven't joined the 21st century yet) are excellent formats for maintaining a lasting journal of your game. Like with a Web site, you can use a blog to keep an online journal of your game that the players can access anytime they please.

Most blog hosts allow users to leave comments on blog entries, so your players can easily add their own comments to an entry journaling the latest adventure.

You might also want to collect and maintain electronic versions of the players' character sheets and keep the updated files on your Web site. That way, if a player doesn't show up, you can always hop on any Internet-connected computer and download the latest version of a character should you need it. Similarly, you can ask the players to contribute interesting content about their characters to your site.

One of the more interesting techniques DMs use to keep player interest in their campaigns bubbling is to use a Web site or blog to publish an in-world newsletter — articles, missives, correspondence, or similar documents written “in character” that show what's going on in the game world. Imagine what sort of flier or pamphlet a town crier might read from in a town where the player characters are involved in dangerous dealings, heroic rescues, and deadly monster hunts, and post that on your Web site or blog. Are the writers of the pamphlet friends of the heroes, who celebrate their successes? Or are they suspicious, narrow-minded gossips who delight in passing along every petty rumor they can find? Creating the Web page or blog entries for the game world's newsletter takes a little work, but it's a great payoff for the players.

## Chapter 13

# Using Every Available Resource

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Deciding which game accessories are right for you
- ▶ Borrowing ideas from books, movies, and TV
- ▶ Using the collision of ideas to generate new adventure concepts
- ▶ Joining the RPGA or local game club

One of the biggest challenges you face as a Dungeon Master is simply coming up with new material for each game session. Although there's no limit to the amount of adventures and encounters you can create with nothing more than a bit of graph paper and some scribbled notes to yourself, many DMs feel they can't afford the time to generate everything in their games from scratch. Learning how to acquire a steady stream of adventures, encounters, maps, storylines, and villains for use in your game without spending an inordinate amount of time doing so is just part of the fine art of DMing a regular game. So, if you're interested in presenting the best game you can with the least preparation possible, read on!

## *Buying Published Game Material*

The most obvious way to get good gaming material without doing all the work yourself is to pay someone else for it. For this hobby, that means going down to the bookstore or game store and buying professionally published material for your game. If you've poked around the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS shelf at your bookstore or visited your Friendly Local Gaming Store, you've probably noticed that literally hundreds of game accessories, sourcebooks, adventures, and resources are all sitting on the shelves alongside the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*.



Most of these game books are designed, illustrated, and edited by professionals, so you might find that they're as good as or better than adventure material you can create yourself. However, this is not always true — quality can vary widely from publisher to publisher and sourcebook to sourcebook. Before you drop money on a new game sourcebook, take a few minutes to thumb through the book and see whether you like what's in there.

## Understanding what's out there

Three principal sources of published material exist for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game:

- ✓ Wizards of the Coast, Inc., the company that publishes D&D
- ✓ Paizo Publishing, the company that produces *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines under license from Wizards of the Coast
- ✓ A number of other publishers that produce d20 material. d20 sourcebooks make use of Wizards of the Coast's open source license agreement to publish game material that is compatible with the D&D game

### Adventures

One type of game product you can find are published adventures (sometimes referred to as *modules*) for the D&D game. A well-designed adventure includes an interesting storyline, challenging encounters and puzzles, cool maps, and a memorable collection of monsters and villains. More importantly, it saves you a lot of time and work. All you need to do is spend a couple hours reading through the adventure so you know what's going on and how to get the player characters involved in it. In a pinch, you can probably do without even that much preparation and just drop the PCs right in.

Official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventures include the original 3rd Edition "Adventure Path," beginning with *Sunless Citadel* and *Forge of Fury*. They're a few years old now, so you might not be able to find them easily. Recently, Wizards of the Coast has started a new series of miniature-friendly adventure products within the *Fantastic Locations* series. These include *Fane of the Drow* and *Hellspike Prison*. Wizards of the Coast also publishes longer adventures, such as *Red Hand of Doom* and *The Shattered Gates of Slaughtergarde* as well as adventures for the FORGOTTEN REALMS and EBERRON settings. Finally, several other d20 companies publish some excellent D&D-compatible adventures under the d20 license agreement.



The best deal on published adventures is *Dungeon Magazine*, by Paizo Publishing. *Dungeon* is licensed by Wizards of the Coast, Inc., the folks who publish the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. A typical issue of *Dungeon* includes two to four big adventures, plus a couple encounters, villains, or side treks.

Most adventures typically include

- ✓ A fully detailed dungeon, castle, temple, or similar site to explore
- ✓ Custom-built monsters or villains to fight
- ✓ A background and storyline that makes the adventure more three-dimensional than a simple dungeon crawl
- ✓ A couple new spells, monsters, or magic items, as necessary

Using a published adventure requires less creativity and preparation than creating your own adventure. Whether that's worth paying for depends on your own personal preferences and circumstances. Even if you don't use the whole adventure, however, you can usually use parts of it, such as maps, NPCs, or monsters, for your own campaign.

### ***Player resource books***

Sourcebooks that are devoted to exploring specific types of characters and introducing new character options fall into the player resource book category. Usually, sourcebooks with names such as *Player's Guide to . . .* or *Complete . . .* are player resource books. Official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS player resource books include race books such as *Races of Stone*, *Races of the Wild*, and *Races of the Dragon*, and class books such as *Complete Warrior* and *Complete Arcane*.

Player resource books might include some or all of the following:

- ✓ New character races
- ✓ New character classes
- ✓ New feats
- ✓ New prestige classes
- ✓ New spells
- ✓ Organizations or sites relevant to the new material

In general, player resource books don't have much material you can use for generating adventures and encounters for the players. However, the players will find a lot of interesting new options for their characters.

### ***DM resource books***

Sourcebooks aimed at the Dungeon Master usually provide new threats, rewards, or storylines for use in the game. Official D&D sourcebooks of this sort include monster collections such as *Monster Manual III* or *Fiend Folio*; terrain books such as *Frostburn* or *Stormwrack*; and in-depth monster studies such as *Draconomicon*, *Lords of Madness*, or *Fiendish Codex*.

DM resource books typically include

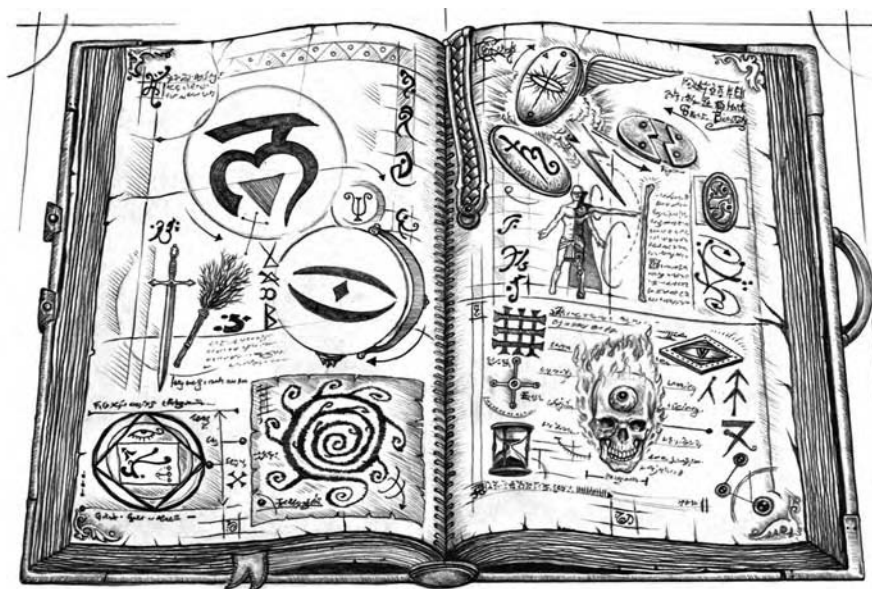
- ✓ New monsters
- ✓ New prestige classes
- ✓ New spells and magic items
- ✓ Storylines, themes, or adventure suggestions
- ✓ Ready-to-play encounter sites, monster lairs, or short adventures, including maps and monster or villain statistics
- ✓ Organizations, villains, and sites relevant to the new material

DM resource books naturally have more pages devoted to material you can use for creating adventures and encounters for the players, and fewer pages for new character options. Many also include chapters that have ready-to-play adventures, encounters you can drop into your game with no additional preparation, or keyed locales or sites you can easily borrow for use in your own game.

Don't overlook sourcebooks that are tied to particular game worlds. For example, Wizards of the Coast publishes two sub-lines of D&D products, each set in its own game world: the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, and the *Eberron Campaign Setting*. Official D&D game products specific to a particular world include sourcebooks such as *City of Splendors: Waterdeep, Underdark*, and *Mysteries of the Moonsea* in the FORGOTTEN REALMS; and *Sharn: City of Towers* and *Secrets of Xen'drik* in EBERRON. A number of other companies produce their own game settings that are compatible with D&D. Even if you don't play in one of these game worlds, you might find that you can drop products such as these (or great portions of them) into your own game setting with a minimum of work. Of course, your mileage may vary.

### ***Miniatures and game play accessories***

Not every D&D accessory involves something you read. Most DMs discover that they need physical tools for their games as much as they need new adventures and additional source material. If you use miniatures at the gaming table, you'll find that you really can't ever have too many.





## *Figuring out what you need*

It isn't unusual to find that you can't make use of everything in a particular sourcebook in your game. Maybe the players don't have the "right" mix of character races or classes, or maybe you find that some of the material just isn't appropriate for the setting of your campaign. Fortunately, most well-designed sourcebooks have plenty of material that you can pillage for almost any game.

The single most important guiding principle in evaluating published sourcebooks and adventures is simply this: Does it strike you as cool? If the subject matter is interesting to you, you'll find a way to make it fit into your game, and your game will be the better for it. Conversely, if you think it just isn't that interesting, it doesn't matter how appropriate the sourcebook is for your game or the players — you won't have fun trying to build your game around your new purchase. Save your gaming dollars for things that really inspire you, and you'll be happier in the long run.

Assuming that you're going to stick to the cardinal rule and focus on things that strike you as interesting, what else should you look for in a sourcebook or adventure? The following subsections pose questions that you should ask yourself when you're deciding whether to buy a particular new sourcebook.

### *Does it require a restart?*

You might find that you really can't use a new sourcebook or adventure unless you're willing to restart your game with brand-new characters appropriate for the material you've just purchased. For example, if you buy the *Expanded Psionics Handbook* and decide to fully incorporate psionics into your game, the players really should have the opportunity to create psionic characters if they want. If more than one or two players do so, you are effectively restarting the game with a new assemblage of player characters, facing new varieties of monsters and employing new powers.

### *Is it applicable to the player characters in this game?*

Say you're running a game in which most of the player characters are 3rd or 4th level, and you're trying to decide whether to buy a copy of *Epic Level Handbook*. Well, *Epic Level Handbook* is designed for characters of 20th level or higher, so very little in the book is relevant to your current campaign. Similarly, a book all about elves is great, but if none of the players in the game has an elf character, it's hard to see why you would really need it.



Remember, if the topic of the adventure or sourcebook really catches your eye, you can always choose to make it a central theme in your game.

### *What can I pillage?*

Even if you encounter difficulties when trying to incorporate all the new ideas or material from a sourcebook into your game, you can usually find *something* that you can use with little work. Most sourcebooks include a couple of maps, some interesting NPCs, a few good adventure suggestions, or even just a monster or two you can drop into your game with no preparation.

You can usually pillage some or all of the following from almost any sourcebook:

- ✔ **Monsters:** Most D&D sourcebooks or adventures include at least one or two new monsters. Even if there aren't any new monsters, chances are good that they offer new combinations of monsters, templates, and classes you might find useful. Check to see whether the sourcebook includes unique monsters you can use somewhere else in your game.
- ✔ **Characters:** Most prestige classes presented in a sourcebook include a sample character. You can use these ready-to-play NPCs as villains, allies, or just people the characters meet. See whether the sourcebook you're looking at includes characters that are fully described, including game statistics.
- ✔ **Adventure hooks:** Many sourcebooks offer a number of adventure suggestions. For example, a prestige class entry often includes several different scenarios in which the player characters might encounter a member of that class. Good ideas for adventures are invaluable.
- ✔ **Maps:** If you're cartographically challenged, you'll often find that the best way to map out your next dungeon is to simply use a map from one of your sourcebooks and create your own keyed encounters and challenges based on that map. Check out the sourcebook's maps and see whether they're interesting, well-rendered, and easily adaptable to multiple purposes.

## Which edition?

Most of the time, you're better off spending your gaming dollars on material designed for the current edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game: 3rd Edition Revised, or v.3.5 as it's known. However, your hobby store might stock older 2nd Edition ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS supplements. Although they aren't compatible with

the current edition, you might find these out-of-date sourcebooks to have enough maps, adventure hooks, or story ideas to make them worth a second look, though you'll need to do some work to make them current with your game. As always, your mileage may vary.

## *Finding Story Inspiration*

Many Dungeon Masters choose to create their own adventures and campaigns out of nothing more than their imaginations. If you're one of those DMs, good for you! Devising exciting adventures and crafting a fantastic world for your D&D game are some of the most rewarding parts of being a Dungeon Master.

However, even the most creative DM can use a helping hand every now and then. For some people, it's a matter of time; depending on the amount of detail and contingency planning you deem necessary in preparing adventures for the players, designing a big dungeon might take up your hobby time for weeks and weeks. Other DMs have the time but find it hard to come up with original ideas on demand. When your creation well runs dry, try some of the options in the following sections.

### *The real world*

The first place you can look for ideas is right in front of you. Between the Earth's astonishing variety of terrain and climate and the similarly broad canvas of human societies in different places and times, you can find zillions of ideas for interesting adventures. If you need a floor plan for a castle, why not base your map sketch on the plan of a real castle? You can find plenty of books about castles at your local library or bookstore, or you might do well to hop online and use your favorite search engine to see whether anybody's ever posted that sort of information to the Web.

Naturally, books on medieval life, history, or castles in general are useful to many D&D games. Encyclopedias often have interesting articles on a variety of these topics. In addition to references on medieval Europe, keep your eyes open for books or articles pertaining to other times — the Dark Ages or the Renaissance, for instance — and other cultures, such as the medieval Arabic, Byzantine, Malinese, or even Chinese or Japanese Empires. Even modern-day examples of exotic places and cultures might prove inspirational. *National Geographic* is a treasure trove of ideas for a D&D game. By checking out the interesting locales, maps, and portraits of societies and customs from all over the world, you'll find something in every issue.

### *Fantasy fiction*

Over the years, thousands of authors have created tens of thousands of fantasy stories. There's no reason you can't quietly borrow elements of a couple from your own favorites for use in your D&D game. As long as you don't create

an adventure that's all about taking the Sole Ring of Ultimate Might to Mount Woe in order to destroy it in the volcanic fires where it was forged, the players might not even notice that your adventure was inspired by a book you read.



If you want to use your favorite fantasy story as inspiration for your game, here are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

- ✓ Short stories are better than novels; a short story can easily inspire a single adventure.
- ✓ Stories with lots of action make for better games than stories that are driven by the relationships of the characters.
- ✓ The more obscure, the better; try to avoid stories the players are intimately familiar with.
- ✓ Fantastic it up — most fantasy fiction is less fantastic than D&D, so consider changing human kingdoms or characters into creatures of a more fantastic nature.
- ✓ File off the serial numbers. Make sure you change names of places and characters enough so that the players won't recognize them.



Robert E. Howard's Conan stories or Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser tales are good examples of the sort of fiction that lends itself to conversion into D&D adventures. You could do worse than to model an adventure after Howard's *The Devil in Iron* or Leiber's *Swords of Lankmar*.

## Movies and TV

Imagine this scenario: An honest lawman is hired to clean up a rough-and-tumble mining town, but when he does his job too well, the corrupt mayor calls in the hired guns to kill the lawman and stop him from setting things right. It's a plot from a Western, right? Not exactly — this is from the Sean Connery movie *Outland*, which was really just a Western story with a science fiction setting. If the formula works for Hollywood, it can work for you, too. There's no reason you can't borrow the basic plot structure of almost any action movie, replace some of the thugs and villains with monsters, and present it as a D&D adventure for the players.

TV shows also have some lessons for a DM in search of creativity. Unlike a movie, which usually ends with the biggest and most satisfying resolution possible for the hero, a TV show is a serial. A single episode *can't* resolve every problem the hero faces, because if it does, the viewers have no reason to tune in next week. Your D&D game is more like a TV show than a movie; at the end of the adventure, you need plenty of reasons for the players to come back and see what happens next.

A well-written TV show commonly introduces an immediate problem that can be resolved with reasonable satisfaction in the single episode you're watching, but also throws in elements of long-term plots and developments that might never be resolved. Think of *The X-Files*: In every episode, Mulder and

Scully discover, investigate, and then deal with (or just survive) some immediate threat, but in the background several important storylines and recurring figures keep the series-spanning meta-plot moving forward with appearances by characters such as Cancer Man and Deep Throat.



It's hard to imagine a better example of a serial adventure format for a D&D game. Replace Mulder and Scully with the player characters, the immediate problem of the episode with the dungeon they're currently exploring, and the meta-plot characters with long-term patrons or master villains appropriate to your campaign, and you've got the ingredients of a great campaign.

## *The collision of ideas*

Want to know one of the big secrets of the creative process? Here it is: Anybody can think up something new by taking two different things and mashing them together. When you're really stuck, try pairing up a couple ideas or notions that don't seem to have anything to do with each other, and see where it takes you.

For example, take pirates and a wizard's tower. How could you build an adventure around those components? Maybe the player characters want to explore the wizard's tower, but first they have to find the pirates who know where it is and infiltrate their operation. Maybe the player characters can find and explore the tower easily enough, but just when they think the adventure's over and they're about to leave with the loot, a band of pirates shows up to take the treasure away from them. Or maybe the wizard who dwells in the tower has hired a pirate band to comb the seas in search of a magic gem he needs for some special rite, and the player characters have to beat the pirates to the prize — and then survive the wizard's wrath. There are a dozen more where those came from, all based on the collision of two simple ideas.

## *Talking with Other Gamers*

One final resource deserves mention in this chapter: the community of gamers that exists across the world. You aren't the only Dungeon Master out there looking for an adventure for your Friday night game. Kicking around the idea for an adventure with just one other DM can help you spot plot holes, work out refinements to your basic premise, and come up with a hundred other things you might not have thought of before. Other DMs might have advice on how to handle characters that seem to be causing trouble in your game, suggestions for challenges and traps the players would never expect from you, or even old adventures and encounters they'd be willing to swap in exchange for some of your own old game material.

## *Joining a game club*

Depending on where you live and what you do, you might be closer to a network of other D&D fans than you think. Many high schools and colleges have gaming clubs for their students, which provide you with a supply of potential players as well as a chance to network with other DMs. Local gaming clubs often have arrangements with schools, libraries, or hobby stores for regular game nights, providing a safe and convenient place to play D&D.

If you don't have a gaming club close at hand (or if your school days are, alas, behind you), some of the better hobby stores around often sponsor their own game nights. Check with your Friendly Local Game Store to see whether it sponsors any D&D nights.

Finally, there's a worldwide network of D&D fans known as the RPGA (ROLEPLAYING GAMERS ASSOCIATION). You can find RPGA chapters all over the country. The RPGA sponsors several special programs that reward you for joining and DMing for other members. You can find out more at [www.rpga.com](http://www.rpga.com).

## *Corresponding on the Web*

If you don't happen to have a local gaming club available, the Internet offers the opportunity to communicate with countless other gamers. Message boards at several popular gaming-related sites offer you an excellent forum for seeking help with particular plot problems, difficult characters, purchasing decisions, or adventure design.

### *Wizards of the Coast Web site*

[www.wizards.com](http://www.wizards.com)

The official Web site of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. provides support for all the games the company publishes, including the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. You can find previews of new and upcoming products, various articles and game content, message boards, and pointers to mailing lists.

### *EN World*

[www.enworld.org](http://www.enworld.org)

The EN World Web site is about the busiest D&D and RPG site out there other than Wizards of the Coast itself. It's a great place to find out about d20 products not published by Wizards of the Coast, so if you want to hear what people are saying about other d20 companies this is probably the place to start looking.

***Paizo Publishing***

[www.paizo.com](http://www.paizo.com)

The Paizo Publishing Web site is the official site for *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. It also has plenty of chatter on all things D&D. You can also order back issues of these magazines through the Web site, which might be handy if you find that there's a particular article or adventure you would really like to get your hands on.

***Candlekeep***

[www.candlekeep.com](http://www.candlekeep.com)

The Candlekeep Web site is devoted to the FORGOTTEN REALMS world. The discussion here tends to run more toward the details of the world (some might even say minutiae). A number of FORGOTTEN REALMS authors and designers keep half an eye on this site, as do many fellow fans who are real masters of Realmslore.



We're sure you've heard it before, but be careful about who you talk to online. If you're a minor, you should ask your parent or guardian before you visit any online forum, chat room, or bulletin board. And never, ever provide any personal information to anyone you don't know.



# Part III

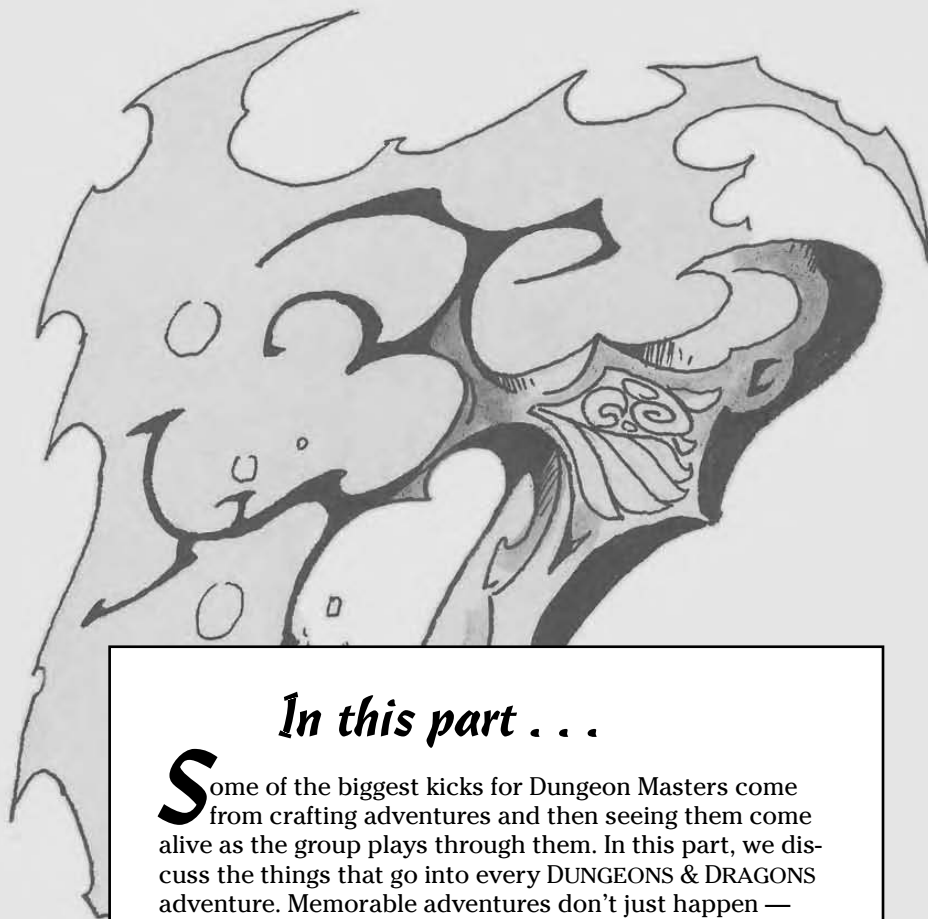
# Creating Adventures

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant

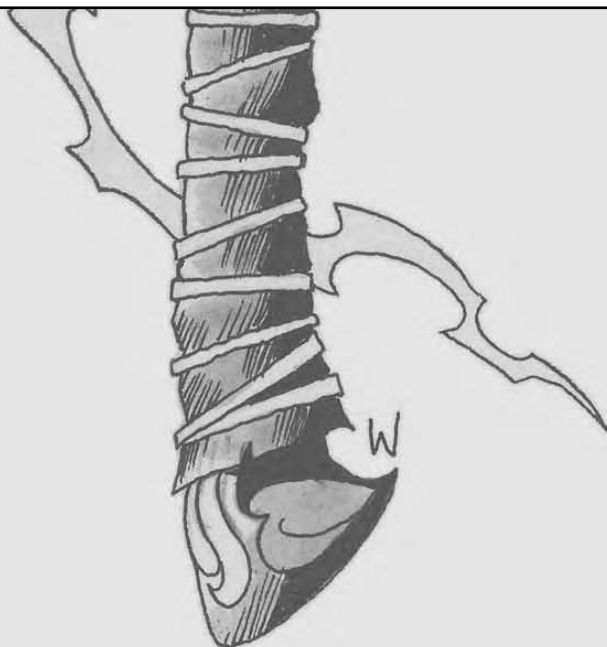


"As your therapist I'd advise past life regression therapy and a series of medications. As your Dungeon Master I'd tell you to go bash a bunch of orcs until you feel better."



## *In this part . . .*

**S**ome of the biggest kicks for Dungeon Masters come from crafting adventures and then seeing them come alive as the group plays through them. In this part, we discuss the things that go into every DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure. Memorable adventures don't just happen — they're made with care and imagination. We show you how.



# Chapter 14

## Tools of the Trade

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Examining the parts of an adventure
  - ▶ Understanding the types of encounters in the game
  - ▶ Creating maps of dungeons
  - ▶ Populating encounters
  - ▶ Using Challenge Ratings and Encounter Levels
  - ▶ Reviewing the basics of adventure structure
  - ▶ Rewarding player characters with experience and treasure
- 

**A**dventures. You can't play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game without them. Eventually, you're going to want to (or need to) create your own adventure. You'll need something for the next game session, and nothing you've found will quite fit the needs of your campaign. Or, the gaming group is getting together in a few hours, and you haven't had time to get over to your favorite game store to find an adventure. Or, you just want to expand your creative muscles and create your own adventure.

That's where this chapter comes in. We show you how to craft a solid adventure, even if you don't think you're up to the challenge. In this chapter, we examine the tools of adventure design and set the foundation for the rest of the chapters in Part III.

### *Breaking Down the Parts of a D&D Adventure*

For the Dungeon Master, creating adventures can be a wonderful outlet for creative expression and imagination. Although not everyone can be a Tolkien or a Salvatore, every DM can craft solid, fun D&D adventures.



Adventure design doesn't strive to craft a complete story. The DM provides only part of the story — the rest comes out through the game and the actions of the player characters. The DM sets up the basic plot and a rough structure for an adventure, leaving the conclusions to come when the game is played. This means that how things turn out will be a surprise to everyone, including the DM. That's part of the fun of the D&D game.

Like everything in life, adventure design becomes a lot easier when you break it down into parts. Deal with each part, and soon you have a complete and vibrant adventure. An *adventure* (also called a quest, a mission, or a module) is a collection of related encounters that create a cogent storyline. An adventure promises a story, offers obstacles, provides opportunities for each player character to shine, and delivers a threat.



As you build your adventure, think in terms of setting scenes. You provide the beginning for each scene in the story, providing a place for the player characters to make a decision or select a course of action. Don't think about endings, because you want the adventure to play out through the actions and ideas of the players and their characters.



Always ask the players “What do you want to do?” or “What do you do now?” End each part of your setup with one of these or a similar question, showing that it's always up to the players to decide the next course of action for their characters.

Adventures consist of the following parts:

- ✓ **The premise:** The hook you use to catch the players' interests and provide motivation for their characters.
- ✓ **Encounters:** The space for action and drama. This is where the game is played. Encounters come in three basic forms:
  - Challenge encounters
  - Roleplaying (or interaction) encounters
  - Combat encounters
- ✓ **The end:** The adventure usually winds up with a climactic encounter and provides a variety of options for moving on to the next adventure.

The rest of this chapter examines these parts, as well as the other tools you use to craft D&D adventures.

## *The premise*

A *premise* sets up the promise of your adventure. It's an initial situation that gets the player characters involved. Some of the premise is background, the things that happened before the adventure begins. Some of the premise is the opening hook, the scene you use to start the adventure and get the player characters interested.



## Where to start?

Sometimes you'll want to start an adventure right at the beginning. However, this means that a lot of the game is spent dealing with setup and motivations. Every once in awhile, for variety, try starting an adventure in the middle of the action. Come up with an opening scene that is reminiscent of action movies, something exciting and intriguing, with plenty of flair and style so that the players get caught up in the game. Start out with a call for action, and let the players decide how and why their characters get involved. There's always a risk that the players will decide to turn the other way, but in the end, everyone is here to play D&D. Most of the time, if you dangle the action in front of them, the players will jump to get their characters involved. After all, that's where the fun is.

Using the example premises given in "The premise" section, here's how to start in the middle of the action:

- ✓ The player characters are on the road to the village of Welton when they come around a bend and spot an ancient and partially collapsed tower. The place looks abandoned and very gloomy in the twilight darkness of the forest. Suddenly, an eerie light flares in
- one of the tower windows, and the player characters notice something move in the shadows around them. Unearthly growls fill the woods, and the things in the shadows leap toward them. What do the player characters do?
- ✓ On the road to the City of Far Spires, the player characters come upon a richly appointed elven caravan. The caravan is being attacked by marauding bugbears, and already many of the elf guards have fallen. What do the player characters want to do?
- ✓ The player characters have been hired to guard the vaults of the dwarf lords. There are seven connected vaults, each containing something more valuable than the last. Over the past three weeks, the first three vaults have been robbed. Now the fourth vault is under the protection of the player characters. Suddenly, the vault falls into complete darkness, and the PCs hear a strange, twisted laugh. "So you think you can stop me?" the laughing voice calls from the darkness. "Then let the contest begin!" What do the player characters want to do?

The background is what has gone before, the lead up to the start of the adventure. It could be long and complex — the war between the dwarves and the giants has been going on for decades when one dwarf and one giant approach the player characters with a plan for ending the conflict. It could be brief and to the point — something has been killing town folk every night for the past month and now the town elders need help.

Examples of adventure premises include

- ✓ Lights have been seen in the abandoned Tower of the Mad Wizard, and strange creatures have been spotted roaming just outside the village of Welton.

- ✓ An elf cleric needs someone to guard her and the ancient Elrooven Cask that she seeks to transport to the City of Far Spires.
- ✓ A thief has been robbing the vaults of the dwarf lords, getting around every trap and ward the dwarves have put in place. The thief must be stopped before the next vault is plundered.

## Encounters

Every DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure consists of encounters. *Encounters* are where the action takes place. Three types of encounters exist: challenge, roleplaying, and combat. With these basic building blocks, you can construct adventures.

Every encounter is kind of like a miniature, concentrated version of the entire adventure. An encounter has a premise and a setup. It has a location. It has a goal. And it has a connection to the next step in the adventure.

Encounter goals can be summed up by the verb that best describes the action required to complete the encounter — *capture*, *defeat*, *discover*, *destroy*, *escape*, *find*, *negotiate*, *obtain*, *protect*, *rescue*, and *survive* are a few examples. In an encounter, the player characters might have to *defeat* the gargoyle guarding the magic fountain, *destroy* the evil ring in the pool of molten lava, *find* the hidden tomb of Baranka the Vile, or *survive* the dangers of the Chamber of One Hundred Deaths.

The following subsections take a closer look at the types of encounters you can use to build your adventure.

### Challenge encounters

*Challenge encounters* feature a hazard, a trap, or an obstacle that the player characters must overcome to attain the goal of the encounter. Skills, spells, and ability checks, as well as ingenuity and quick thinking, provide the player characters with the things they need to complete challenge encounters. These are the encounters where the less combat-oriented characters can shine. Rogues and bards have a variety of skills that can be useful in challenge encounters, and spellcasting types often have options available to them to help navigate a path through the most deadly of obstacles.

### Roleplaying (or interaction) encounters

Because the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is a roleplaying game, it could be said that all encounters are roleplaying encounters. But when we talk about *roleplaying encounters*, we mean encounters in which player characters (PCs)

must interact with each other or with DM-controlled nonplayer characters (NPCs) to attain the goal of the encounter. These are the scenes where PCs must talk to, convince, bluff, bribe, insult, seduce, negotiate, interrogate, beg, or otherwise interact with an NPC to advance the adventure. Roleplaying encounters often lead to challenges or combats, depending on how the scene plays out. These encounters rely on roleplaying and conversation, using skill checks sparingly to augment roleplaying and to determine the reactions of NPCs.

When a roleplaying encounter calls for skill checks, the skills that usually come into play include Bluff, Diplomacy, Gather Information, Intimidate, and Sense Motive.

### ***Combat encounters***

In most D&D adventures, the majority of encounters are *combat encounters*. When you think of the D&D game, combat encounters are the scenes you usually imagine.

In combat encounters, the player characters must face and defeat monsters or other DM-controlled opponents. Combat skills and spells see the most use in these encounters.



In addition to the monsters or opponents the player characters must face, a combat encounter works best when set in an interesting location where movement and tactics can come into play. Try to imagine what each of the player characters can do, and plan challenges accordingly. Try to include something for everyone to do in most combat encounters.

## ***The end***

Every adventure has an ending. Create a climactic encounter to end your adventure. It should involve elements that have been hinted at throughout earlier scenes, and it should provide the pay off that the player characters have been waiting for — they get to deal with the main villain or at least disrupt the main villain's plans and save the day, for the time being.

The climax is where all the answers wait to be discovered — the true plan, the true villain, the true evil behind it all. The climax is also where the main battle usually occurs — where the player characters face the boss monster and everything is on the line.

Not every adventure needs to be earth-shattering or deal with huge stakes, but the end should still entail a payoff.





## What makes an adventure exciting?

Remember that the players (or their characters) can't see the behind-the-scenes machinations of your villains or the clever plot twists that you have liberally sprinkled throughout the adventure. You want your adventures to have the feel of a great fantasy novel or movie, but you can't rely on the same tricks that those mediums use.

Don't just imagine your adventure as a series of fights occasionally interrupted by periods of talking. When you do, you shortchange one of the most compelling parts of the game — playing a role. Give some thought to the personalities, motivations, and goals of your nonplayer characters, especially the key villains and anyone you expect the player characters to deal with in roleplaying encounters. In this way, even scenes where combat never breaks out can be memorable and exciting.

In addition to the ranks of goblins and orcs you use to provide the player characters with rows of bad guys to take down, you want to be sure to include competent adversaries for them to encounter. From common enemies to arch villains, make sure that these spotlight opponents can stack up against the player characters. This doesn't mean that all your villains must be super-powerful, but they shouldn't be too weak, either. Set up and play an intelligent villain, and that NPC can seem more powerful in the game than it does on paper. And when you create that villain NPC for the climactic encounter, make sure the NPC can stand against

the player characters for a few rounds, or that the NPC is supported by minions who can add weight to the scene.

Consider that the best fights take place in amazing places. Any combat encounter can be exciting, but a combat that involves deadly monsters *and* a dangerous or challenging location can be memorable. Imagine a fight in a huge chamber full of pits, chasms, and ledges, where the terrain becomes both an ally and an enemy as the battle rages on. What if a fight takes place in dense fog that gives concealment to creatures 1 square away (adding a 20 percent miss chance) and makes it impossible to see anything beyond that? What about a chamber comprised of raising and lowering platforms that move at random and keep the opponents apart?

**Remember:** The players take their cues from you. Your descriptions of each action that occurs, the location of each important object and participant, and the general environment are crucial to letting players imagine the scene and make intelligent decisions for their characters. How you pass on information can help set the tone of a scene, as well. Speak quickly and intently to add intensity to the action. Be slow and deliberate when you want to build atmosphere or suspense. In this way, the players will (perhaps even unconsciously) pick up on your verbal cues and will become better at visualizing the scene and will make better decisions for their characters' actions with each game you play.

Sometimes your adventure is just one in a series that will take the player characters up in level and unveil greater and greater threats along the way. In these cases, you don't want to have your villain defeated at the end of the first adventure in the series. Instead, you should provide assistants and minions — some that are powerful in their own right — to give the player characters someone to defeat and some insidious plan to foil with each adventure, even if another plan is revealed right at the end.

## Creating Dungeon Maps

Site-based adventures, which are usually dungeon crawls, are the easiest adventures to design and run. Site-based adventures use encounters keyed to a map, and the map provides a natural flow for the adventure.

Use graph paper when drawing your dungeon map. Each square equals 5 feet. Mark encounter areas with some kind of key (numbers or letters work best), and note any special features, such as doors, curtains, furniture, and traps. Later, when the player characters have moved through an area, make notes right on your map to remind you which doors they unlocked, which traps they set off, and which monsters they defeated.

Keep the key to your map on a separate sheet of paper from the map itself. If you marked an encounter area as 1 or A, use that same notation on your key page. On the key, make notes about each area on the map, including monsters, traps, and treasure. These notes should be as long or as short as you're comfortable with so that you can easily run your adventure from them.

You can stay as simple or get as complex as you want with the details of your dungeon. A simple dungeon is often *static*, meaning that you set the monsters in place and that's where they stay until the player characters encounter them. A *dynamic* (and therefore more complex) dungeon features notes on contingency plans the monsters have in place and often sets conditional statements such as "if the PCs do this, then that occurs."



Use the various examples of maps shown throughout this book, such as the dungeon maps in Chapters 7 and 20, as guidelines when creating your own maps.

## Populating a Dungeon

In general, you populate a dungeon (or any kind of adventure) with opponents to challenge the player characters. Some of these opponents take the form of traps or natural hazards (challenge encounters), but the majority of opponents appear in the form of monsters or villains.

You can take monsters right out of any one of a number of ready-to-use sources, including the D&D *Monster Manual*, *Monster Manual II*, *Monster Manual III*, *Monster Manual IV*, and *Fiend Folio*.

Villains are a little tougher, requiring a little bit of work on your part. Villains usually have character classes (such as an evil human cleric or a half-dragon sorcerer). A master villain is usually an NPC 2 to 4 levels higher than the average level of the player characters, whatever that may be. A persistent nemesis who gives the heroes trouble when they are low-level characters might be

quickly surpassed as the player characters rise in level . . . or you might decide to advance the heroes' nemesis too, so that the master villain remains a signature foe throughout the player characters' career.

What kind of monsters and villains are right for your dungeon adventure? That depends on the story you want to tell and the level and party size of the player characters. The game uses Challenge Ratings (CRs) and Encounter Levels (ELs) to help you determine whether a particular opponent or group of opponents will be easy, tough, or darn near impossible for the player characters to deal with.

## Challenge Ratings

A Challenge Rating is assigned to every monster in the game. A monster's CR tells you the level of a party of player characters for which the monster will provide a good challenge, meaning that the monster isn't likely to kill any of the PCs, but it will take about a quarter of the PCs' resources (including hit points) to defeat. For example, a party of four 2nd-level adventurers should see a good challenge from a CR 2 monster.

The CR of a monster also helps you determine the experience point (XP) award for that monster. Taking on a monster with a lower CR than the party results in less XP, but taking on a higher-CR monster results in higher XP. You divide the XP by the number of player characters in the party, so a party with more than four PCs earns less XP per character, and a party with fewer than four PCs earns more XP per character.

## Encounter Level

A single monster's CR is the same as its Encounter Level (EL).

Because it is more interesting to throw multiple monsters into a fight than to have a party of player characters beat up on a single monster, we use the EL system to determine the appropriate challenge for a party.

When you craft each encounter in your adventure, assign monsters to hit the Encounter Level you want associated with the encounter.



You're going to want to review the information on pages 48–50 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. It tells you how to use CRs and ELs to build encounters.

You want the level of the party to match the level of the encounter. Some encounters should be easier than average; some should be harder. Table 14-1 describes the optimal mix of encounters to throw at the PCs over the course of an adventure. (This table is adapted from Table 3-4 on page 49 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.)

<b>Table 14-1 Encounter Difficulty</b>		
<b>% of Total Encounters</b>	<b>Encounter Difficulty</b>	<b>Encounter Level Description</b>
10%	Easy; PCs will lose little or no resources or hps	EL lower than party level
20%	Easy if handled properly; a specific item, action, or spell will significantly help the party	EL lower or equal to party level
50%	Challenging; PCs will lose a significant amount of resources or hps	EL equals that of party
15%	Very difficult; PCs will lose a significant amount of resources and hps, death of a PC is likely	EL 1–4 higher than party level
5%	Overpowering; PCs will lose most of their resources and hps, and death of one or more PCs is almost guaranteed	EL 5 higher than party level

Some types of encounters will be easier if the player characters have found the appropriate item or done the appropriate thing, as noted in the second row of Table 14-1. If the PCs don't have the item or haven't done the appropriate action, the encounter becomes challenging or very difficult. For example, not finding the right weapon that can bypass a monster's Damage Reduction turns an easy encounter into a challenging one.

The percentages relate to the overall dungeon you design. For example, if you design a dungeon with ten combat or challenge encounters, one should be easy, two should be easy if handled properly, five should be challenging, one or two should be very difficult, and one or none should be overpowering.

## Rewards

The last piece of the adventure design puzzle revolves around rewards. *Rewards* include experience points and treasure, as well as the pure player satisfaction of solving a mystery or completing a goal. Rewards are the benchmark a DM uses to show the players how well they've played and how good their characters are, based on the challenges they overcome.

## Structure your adventure for the players

You want to make sure that you create an adventure of the right length and complexity for your game group. A group that meets sporadically probably wants to play shorter, less complex adventures, and it would be difficult to build a continuous storyline from adventure to adventure. On the other hand, a group that meets frequently can handle the complexity of longer plots that continue on from adventure to adventure. Keep in mind that good adventures are adventures that include things the players like to do — things they find fun.

Whether the adventure you're creating is a simple dungeon crawl or it's a part of a larger campaign, always include situations where

players can make choices. Try to avoid leading the player characters or railroading them just to get to what you've designed; players need to feel like they have a say in the direction of the adventure. Always vary the types of encounters you build into the adventure so at least one encounter will interest each player; avoid creating encounters where the player characters are simply spectators — the PCs need to be in the thick of the action. Always think of encounters where each player character has a moment to shine; avoid creating encounters that continually nullify player character powers and abilities.

## Experience points

Most players are as eager to find out how many experience points their characters earned for the adventure as they are to see what kind of treasure their characters found. After all, the experience point total a character has earned determines his or her level. Updating characters who have gone up a level is great fun for most players, and many will pore over the *Player's Handbook*, carefully reading the descriptions of feats, skills, and spells before choosing which ones are the coolest or most optimized for their characters.



Calculating how many experience points the PCs earned for the adventure is easy. Monsters and other challenges have CRs and ELs that correspond to XP awards. Page 38 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* has a comprehensive table for determining XP awards by CR. You can also assign a CR to challenges or roleplaying encounters so that you can award XP for the successful completion of those kinds of encounters. In general, you never want to assign a CR higher than the party level for challenge and roleplaying encounters. Save the big rewards for the combat encounters.

## Treasure

Treasure comes in a number of forms. Monetary treasure includes gold, as well as gems, jewels, and other things that the party can easily convert to



## Chapter 15

# The Dungeon Adventure

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Designing dungeons
  - ▶ Reviewing dungeon adventure structure
  - ▶ Adding a dynamic element to dungeon crawls
- 

**T**he original adventure structure for roleplaying games is the dungeon crawl. When you want to get started creating your own adventures, we recommend using the basic form. Dungeons, after all, are half of what the D&D game is all about!

There are places of legend in the D&D game, such as Castle Ravenloft, the Tomb of Horrors, and the Temple of Elemental Evil. For anyone who has played the game in the past, one or more of these legendary names will conjure images of danger, excitement, and thrilling fun. By using the advice and tips we provide in this chapter, your dungeons can accomplish the same thing for your fellow players.



Check out Chapter 18 for suggestions on how to build a dungeon adventure by using random elements. It's a fun and fast method for creating an adventure quickly or on the fly. At the very least, Chapter 18 should give you some ideas on what to put into the dungeon crawl that you design with the methods we describe in this chapter.

## *Designing Your First Dungeon*

When you're creating a dungeon crawl (also called a *site-based adventure*), you need to prepare several elements to make a complete adventure:

- ✓ A story idea
- ✓ A map of the dungeon
- ✓ A key to the locations on the map

The key to the locations on the map describes encounter areas that are triggered when the player characters arrive there. You want to use all the tools and building blocks presented in Chapter 14, applying them to the map of the site that you create.

## *Plotting the dungeon's story*

Dungeon crawls tend to be linear adventures where the encounter locations provide the impetus to move the plot forward. In other words, the dungeon map provides the structure and flow of the story. Depending on the complexity of the dungeon map that you create, the player characters can have a single path to follow or multiple ways to get to the goal of the adventure.

Here's that dragon and the egg conundrum: Which comes first, the dungeon map or the story idea? Our answer is that it doesn't matter because the creative process is different for everyone, so we don't stifle and muck with your creativity by telling you The One True Way to design a dungeon crawl adventure.

If you start out with a story idea, you draw a map to fit that story and fill it with encounters that help you develop the storyline. On the other hand, you might prefer to start out by drawing a cool map, and then crafting a story to take advantage of its pattern. There's no right way to approach this, and over the years we've used both approaches in our personal games as well as in professional projects.



However you approach the creation of your dungeon crawl adventure, remember that the main action and most of the story takes place in the dungeon itself. This doesn't mean that a dungeon crawl will limit your creativity, however, because dungeons can take a wide variety of forms. They can be carved corridors of stone or natural passages through caverns. Really, any confined place can be used as a dungeon, whether it's a cave complex, a wizard's stronghold, or a king's castle.

## *Drawing the map*

You need graph paper to draw your map. You don't need to be an artist to make a useful map. Just make it as clear as you can, and make notes about the encounter areas. If you can't draw a sarcophagus, for example, don't sweat it. Make a rectangle and write *sarcophagus* next to it (or just "S") so that you can remember what that rectangle represents.

Why use graph paper? There are a number of reasons. Everything in the game is expressed either in feet or in 5-foot squares. Those nice little squares on graph paper simplify your job of translating encounter areas into either feet or 5-foot squares. Plus, the grid pattern makes it easier to draw straight (or nearly straight) lines as you draw your map.



Here are some suggestions to make your dungeon map drawings better:

- ✓ **Larger areas are better than smaller areas when it comes to creating encounter zones.** Why? Because you want to have room for the player characters and monsters to move around. A dynamic battle that involves tactical movement is better than a static battle where everyone lines up and stands still until the fight ends.

On the other hand, don't make encounter areas so big that they won't work on the gaming table. Especially if you use miniatures and miniature-scale maps at the table, you want your encounter areas to fit within the space you can depict for play. A room more than 100 feet (or 20 squares) across is difficult to transfer to a tabletop battle grid.

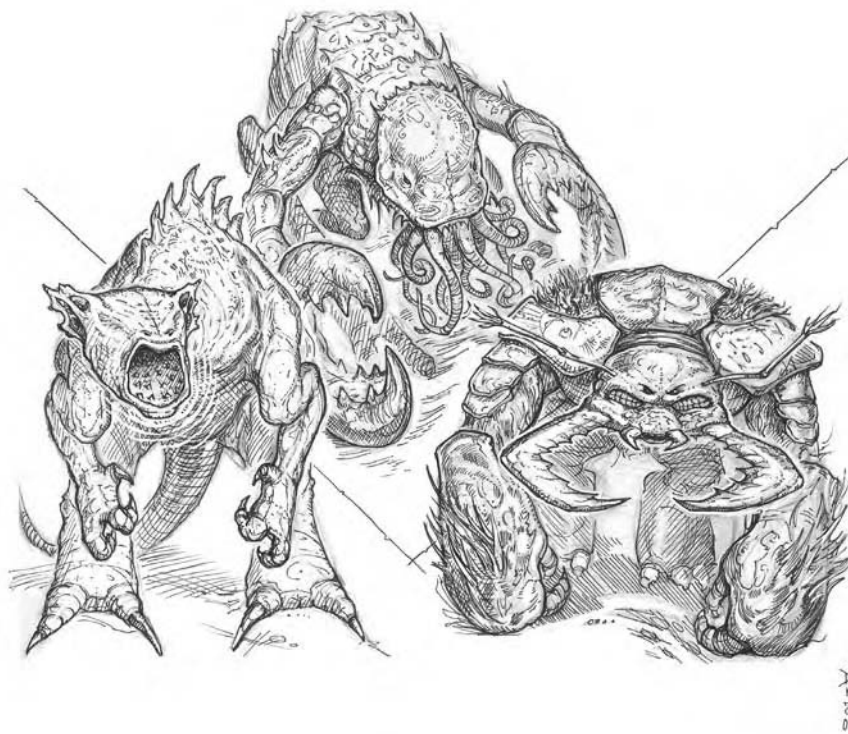
- ✓ **Wider corridors are better than narrow corridors.** In general, you should make the corridors in your dungeon two squares (10 feet) wide. This allows player characters to walk side-by-side as they explore the dungeon, and it provides room for Large-sized creatures to move around freely. If you plan an encounter with multiple Large-sized creatures, you want to give them room to move and position themselves easily. If they have to line up, one behind the other, the PCs aren't dealing with multiple monsters — they're fighting them one at a time. Neither the monsters nor the PCs can move around much, and that makes for a boring fight.

If you plan to use Huge-sized creatures for encounters, you want to consider making your corridors at least three squares (15 feet) wide to accommodate these monsters. Encounter areas should be sized accordingly, as well.

## *Marking the encounter areas*

Corridors connect to rooms and chambers in your dungeon, but you can craft encounter areas so that encounters take place either in the corridors or in the rooms. You don't want the players to come to expect that combat or challenges will occur only in rooms, and to expect that nothing much will happen in the hallways of the dungeon. The best dungeons mix it up so that some encounters occur in corridors and some rooms are empty. If you mix it up, the players will always be guessing about when the next encounter is going to spring out at them.

Mark your encounter areas on your dungeon map with numbers or letters. You'll use these same numbers or letters when you fill in your map key (see the "Making a key" section, later in this chapter). Feel free to make short notes on the map itself, next to encounter areas, if you want to jot down details such as what the symbols you've created are or other notes to aid your memory. For example, you might want to note such things as fountains, statues, pillars, pits, gates, steps, and other dungeon contents.



Consider which encounter areas will work best for the different encounter types we describe in Chapter 14. You want to make sure to include a mix of encounter types as you design your dungeon. Note that dungeons don't have to be huge, with dozens of encounters, to be satisfying and fun. For your first couple dungeon designs especially, keep it short and to the point, with about ten or so encounters of various types.

Also consider the placement of encounter areas and how that might affect the flow of the adventure. Encounter areas that are few and far between make for lulls in the action. Encounter areas that are close to each other might escalate into large running battles due to proximity and monster mix. And you want to decide whether to include alternative routes through the dungeon, or whether to create a single path for the adventure.

## ***Making a key***

You've marked the encounter areas on your map with a number or a letter code. Maybe you even used both to better represent the expected flow of the

adventure. You might have made some notes on the map, but you need to make a full-fledged key to best run your dungeon crawl as an adventure. What goes on the key?

Set up your key in sequential order so that you can find things quickly. If your map is labeled 1, 2, 3, and so on, then make the key in the same fashion: Describe encounter area 1, then 2, then 3, and so on.

Each keyed encounter should get some attention. You can make these encounter notes as detailed or as brief as you want, as long as you can work with them in the heat of the game session. Nothing is more embarrassing than finding yourself trying to interpret your own obscure notes in the middle of a dramatic encounter. So, our advice is to be as clear and as complete as you need to be for your own use.

Each entry in your key should include the setup for the encounter, a description of the encounter area, the scene, monsters, tactics, and rewards.

### ***Setup***

The setup portion of each encounter entry in your key includes what's in the encounter area, what's going on before the player characters arrive, and what the goal of the encounter is. The setup is also where you can note what kind of encounter you expect this to be, whether a challenge, roleplaying, or combat encounter.

### ***Description***

The description part of a key entry takes three forms:

- ✓ What the player characters can see and otherwise notice as they arrive
- ✓ What player characters can see and otherwise notice with skill checks (such as Listen and Spot)
- ✓ What's behind the scenes that only the DM knows

## **Look to the book!**

We include good examples of maps and dungeon adventures in various places in this book. Refer to them for inspiration and to see how to design them as you read through this chapter. Chapters 7 and 20, for example, feature full-length dungeon crawls (though Chapter 20

provides a more complex adventure format than Chapter 7). Chapter 28 features encounters and maps that you can use to round out your dungeon design. Use the examples we've provided to make your own dungeon designs better. That's why we included them in this book!

In a published adventure, the first part is covered by a “read aloud” section. You don’t need to write read aloud text, but you do have to improvise a description when the PCs enter the area. Whether you improvise or write out a read aloud paragraph or two ahead of time, make sure that your description of the encounter area provides enough information and clues so the players can visualize the scene and determine whether they need to have their characters perform some action (such as making a Search check to find a secret door).

### ***Scene***

The scene portion of a key entry describes the action you expect to happen in the encounter. Now, player characters have a way of doing the unexpected and making the scene play out completely different from what you had imagined, but that’s okay. You still want to have a general idea of what you think is going to happen in the encounter.

### ***Monsters or NPCs***

You need to make a list of the monsters or NPCs involved in the encounter. (This mostly applies to combat encounters, but it could apply to roleplaying encounters, as well.) This can be as simple as recording a name and noting a page number in the *Monster Manual* for you to refer to during the game session, or as complex as creating an NPC or unique monster with levels in a character class. You can jot down any stats on your key that you think you’ll need to reference quickly (such as AC, hp, attack bonus, damage), but it’s usually okay to go to the *Monster Manual* or other source when the encounter starts. (Try to have the correct page flagged for easy access if you can.)

### ***Tactics***

Tactics can apply to either combat or roleplaying encounters, and they detail the behavior of the monsters or NPCs. If the PCs do *this*, the monsters or NPCs do *that*. You don’t have to come up with every contingency; just plan out a primary action for the monster and a backup response if the PCs do something unexpected.

In general, monsters of low intelligence don’t have any tactics more sophisticated than “leap at the nearest character and try to kill or eat him or her.” On the other hand, a clever villain with a number of options at his disposal (for example, a high-level evil wizard) should begin a battle with a plan — a short list of spells he’s likely to cast, an idea of which characters he wants to take out of the fight first, and a plan for getting away or summoning reinforcements if a fight goes poorly.

### ***Rewards***

When the encounter ends, what rewards do you have waiting for the player characters? In addition to experience for defeating the monsters or accomplishing the goal of the encounter, you might include some kind of treasure. Not every encounter needs to provide a ton of treasure, though. Such indiscriminant gifting of loot has been referred to as Monty Hauls in the past, and often

leads to problems that make the game less fun. Follow the guidelines presented in Chapter 14 (or page 51 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) for creating appropriate rewards, and if anything err a little on the side of being a bit stingy when it comes to handing out gold and magic items.

## Adding Depth to Dungeon Crawls

Most dungeon crawls, especially those created by first-time designers, are designed with *static* encounters — encounters that don't affect each other. This means that Encounter 2 begins when the player characters reach that spot on the map, with no regard as to what happened in Encounter 1 or what might happen in Encounter 3. The player characters can arrive at any encounter location whenever they want, stay for as long as they want, and come back later to find the site just as they left it.

Static adventure design is easy and straightforward. You don't have to put too much thought into how the occupants of the encounter areas relate to each other or interact. All you need to figure out is what's in the encounter area and what happens when the player characters arrive there.

You can add more depth and realism to your dungeon crawl by designing *dynamic encounters*. In a dynamic environment, there is evidence of intelligent organization and cooperation between monsters in different encounter areas. As the player characters move through the dungeon, the occupants take actions to respond to the invaders. Perhaps patrols become more frequent if the player characters leave evidence of their arrival behind them or if they allow a monster to escape from an encounter area. Traps are reset, areas are restocked with defenders, treasures are moved, and paths are blocked off as the monsters work to defend the dungeon.

You can start small, just making a few encounters dynamic. Or you can go all out and develop the whole dungeon as a dynamic environment. Dynamic encounters are more challenging to create than static encounters, but the reward in game play is worth it. In addition to a map and a key, you need to work out a plan for the dynamic portions of the dungeon. In general, consider these factors in your design for a dynamic dungeon:

- ✔ **Defensive plans:** Whether it's the plans formulated by monsters in two adjoining encounter areas, in a section of the dungeon, or across the entire dungeon, you need to think about how the monsters react to the threat posed by the player characters after that threat becomes obvious. Do they increase patrols and create more opportunities for wandering monsters to encounter the PCs? Do they increase defenses by setting (or resetting) traps, locking doors, and taking other protective measures? Do they increase the number of guards at particular encounter sites, leaving less important or valuable areas less defended?

- ✔ **Conditional requirements:** Encounter areas need *conditional requirements*, which are events or situations that trigger escalated responses from the monsters. A monster escaping to warn the rest of the complex, for example, can be a conditional requirement. Examples of subtler conditions include the PCs moving a statue, taking an item, springing a trap, or opening a specific door. What do you want the player characters to have to do to put the dungeon inhabitants on higher alert status? That's what goes into this section of your dungeon notes.
- ✔ **Time frame:** Make time a factor for your dynamic dungeon. Time pressure can add tension and suspense to an adventure. And if the dungeon changes depending on the time, it comes more alive. Are more or fewer guards on duty at night? Do patrols move around according to a strict schedule? Is something terrible going to happen at the stroke of midnight unless the player characters accomplish something? Use time to make your dungeon dynamic.
- ✔ **Long-term plans:** To better understand how the inhabitants of the dungeon react in a dynamic situation, you need to have a grasp of their long-term plans. What does your boss monster hope to accomplish? Does the boss monster or villain NPC plan to send minions to raid the nearby town three nights from now? Are the monsters cooperating to build a powerful golem to unleash on the village? Is the villain NPC using the orcs to collect the components he or she needs to cast a spell to release a demon from captivity? Whatever the long-term plans, if you know what they are you can use them to determine dynamic actions in your dungeon adventure.



## Chapter 16

# The Wilderness Adventure

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Designing outdoor adventures and encounters
  - ▶ Taking a look at the wilderness adventure structure
  - ▶ Understanding how wilderness adventures differ from dungeon crawls
- 

**P**layer characters do not live in dungeons alone! Every once in a while, you have to let them get out of the deep darkness and into the sunshine.

That's where wilderness adventures come in. However, the entire adventure doesn't have to take place in the great outdoors. You can develop specific encounters that take advantage of the wilderness and what it has to offer, making them portions of a larger adventure. The sample adventure presented in Chapter 20 handles wilderness areas in this manner, for example.

As with the dungeon, you can get as complex or keep it as simple as you like with wilderness adventures. It all depends on your tastes and the need of the story you want the adventure to tell. In this chapter, we examine the wilderness as a full adventure and as specific encounters. We discuss how this type of adventure is and isn't like a dungeon crawl, and we give you some suggestions as to how to get the most out of the wilderness in your D&D campaign.

## *Designing a Wilderness Adventure*

You can make a very satisfying D&D game experience by starting and ending every adventure you run in the dungeon. But there's so much more to the world than the dark and secret places that never see the light of the sun. Player characters need to get out more. That's where the wilderness adventure (or encounter) comes in.



Do you want to know what the big secret to designing a wilderness adventure is? Treat it like a dungeon! Outside areas can be handled just like any other site-based adventure. Sites for the wilderness include the road (or path, or trail), clearing, hill, forest, lake, garden, graveyard, and swamp. Map the site, add monsters, and you have an encounter. String encounters together, and you have an adventure.

## *What is the wilderness?*

For the purposes of creating a D&D adventure, the wilderness is any outdoor environment beyond the confines of the dungeon. When player characters leave the safety and relative comfort of the town, village, or city, they enter the wilderness. In the wilderness, the wild things roam. The maps are incomplete, and they say things like “Here Be Dragons” in the large open spaces to signify — quite literally — that dragons and other monsters are present.

The trick to designing wilderness site-based encounters and adventures is to treat them like dungeons. Never try to block out an entire trek through the wilderness, as you want to map out and play only the exciting parts of the trip. For long periods of travel, it’s okay to fade from one action scene to the next with just a little narration to help progress the story and give a sense of the passage of time.



To make an ordinary wilderness into a D&D wilderness, you want to add some elements of fantasy. Obviously, adding D&D monsters provides a fantastic element, but you can go farther. Trees whose leaves sparkle in the night, waterfalls that are miles high and drop between colossal sculptures of ancient kings, and forests of ambulant plants are all examples of natural environments that have had an infusion of the magical and fantastic.



The specific challenges, conditions, and terrain features of different types of wilderness are discussed on pages 86–98 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*.

In the following subsections, we discuss some of the basic types of outdoor environments that you can use in your wilderness adventures.

### ***Deserts***

Deserts are dry wastes. They can be hot and sandy or cold and ice-covered. They are desolate regions where food and water are hard to find and survival requires supplies, equipment, magic, skill, and more than a little luck.

Deserts often feature sporadic oases, extreme climates that might require Survival checks or Fortitude saves, harsh weather, sand (or snow) storms, sink holes, and other hazards.



### ***Forests***

Forests make up much of the wilderness we imagine when we think of the typical D&D world. Forests usually feature paths or roads, rivers, lakes, thick clusters of trees and other vegetation, and the occasional clearing. A temperate forest is one example of this type of environment. Others include arctic conifer forests, rainforests, and jungles.

Finding food and water usually isn't a problem in a forest, and except for the occasional storm, the weather and climate generally don't present a danger to the player characters. What makes the forest dangerous are the animals and creatures that roam the dark, dense places covered by the canopy of leaves.

### ***Hills***

Hills tend to provide topography more than environment, as forests and deserts can both be hilly. From gently rolling mounds to craggy piles of rock, hills provide an interesting environment to travel through or engage in a deadly ambush. Hills are also good places to put entrances to dungeons and monster lairs.

### ***Mountains***

When you think mountains, think about areas of jagged, barren rock that rise above the tree line. Travel is difficult, requiring characters to climb or find irregular paths up and down the rocky surfaces. Water is usually plentiful (unless the mountains are in a desert), but food might be hard to come by, especially in winter. Hazards include avalanches (which might be falling rocks or sliding snow and ice), crumbling surfaces, and various monsters (which might be dragons and other flying creatures that tend to like to lair high in the mountains). Mountains are good places to put entrances to dungeons and monster lairs.

### ***Plains***

Plains can be any of a number of flat terrain types, including savannas, prairies, grasslands, tundra, and farmlands of all descriptions. Rolling hills and bluffs sometimes break the monotony of these regions. Food and water, although not as abundant as in the forest, are relatively easy to come by. Although player characters can see a long way across the flat expanses in the plains, they can, in turn, be seen from a far distance.

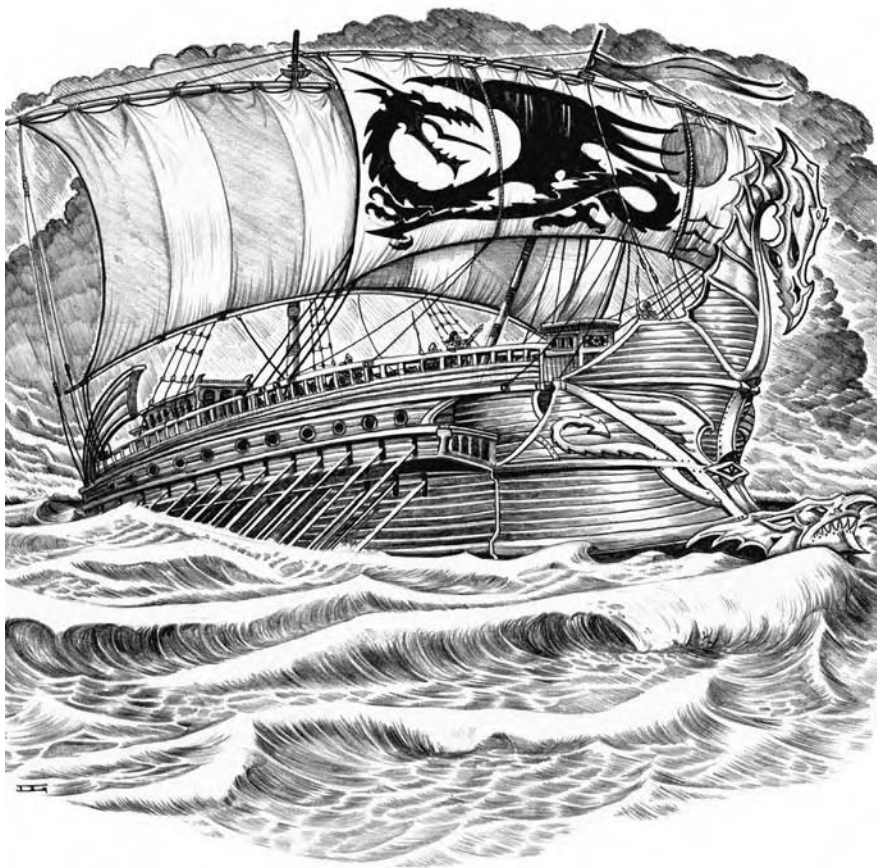
### ***Swamps***

Swamps, wetlands, and marshes are wet and teeming with life. Set at low elevations and usually along the edge of a lake or river, there's almost no way to cross a swamp and remain dry. The ground might be spongy in places, muddy in others, and completely under murky water everywhere else. Although water

is everywhere, it might not be safe to drink (see “Diseases,” on page 292 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*). Food in the form of fish and game is reasonably plentiful. Deep in the swamp, player characters might encounter the lair of a witch or a shaman, the hiding place of a dark shrine, or the ruins of some ancient tower.

### ***Oceans***

The first requirement of an ocean adventure is a means of transportation. A number of spells and abilities allow the player characters to venture into or onto the water for a short time (for example, a *water breathing* spell or a *carpet of flying*), but if they expect to travel more than a couple miles from shore or remain at sea for more than an hour or two, they need to purchase, hire, or confiscate a ship for their use (see “Transport,” on page 132 of the *Player’s Handbook*). Assuming their vessel is well-provisioned, food and water aren’t really a problem. Adventurers sometimes find themselves undertaking epic voyages to visit haunted islands, search out pirate lairs, hunt sea monsters, or descend below the waves to explore the ruins of sunken cities.



### ***Underdark***

The vastest and most perilous wilderness in many D&D settings is the Underdark — a boundless realm of interconnecting caverns, rifts, vaults, and dungeons far below the surface. Many dungeons at their lowest levels lead into the Underdark. The Underdark is the domain of terrible monsters such as aboleths and mind flayers and home to the sinister and cruel *drow*, or dark elves. Most of the Underdark consists of natural caverns, some so large that whole cities lie within, so the landscape is similar to a conventional dungeon environment in many ways. Water and food can be hard to find, but a more pressing concern to the traveler is the presence of all sorts of malevolent and hungry monsters. In the depths of the Underdark, the heroes might visit a cavern-castle of the drow, venture into the twisted maze of a fell lich, or blunder into a watery shrine of the insane kuo-toa.

### ***How to use the wilderness***

Often, you will use wilderness encounters as framing sequences for your adventures. Do the player characters need to get to the Pyramid of Bala-Tuum? First, they need to cross the Desert of One Thousand Dangers! Do they need to find the Cave of the Lost Clan? Then they have to explore the terrible Storm Mountain to find it. These present *travel* encounters for you to use. Sure, you could say, “*You travel for 30 days and 30 nights across the burning desert until you see the ancient pyramid rising out of the sand ahead of you.*” But a better, more exciting option is to have a few encounters in the wilderness as the player characters make the journey.

You can even set an entire adventure in the great outdoors. For example, you might send the player characters into the Whispering Swamp to discover what has turned the murky water into blood. Or you might have them hired on as guards for a caravan intent on crossing the Zarven Plains.

In all cases, treat each encounter as a site or location, even if the area continues beyond the scope of your graph paper. Use clusters of trees, rocky formations, water, and other natural boundaries as the “walls” of your outdoor dungeon. Then populate each encounter, as we discuss in Chapters 14 and 15.

## ***Wilderness Adventure Outline***

The following list provides an example outline for a wilderness adventure. Use it as a guide when you create your own wilderness encounters and adventures. In this example, the player characters begin a trip to reach the city of Paragon on the Jagged Coast.



## Putting the wilderness in your dungeon

Another option for using wilderness encounters is to just put them in your dungeon. For example, create an ice cavern, a chamber filled with a subterranean swamp, or an underground forest of mushrooms as tall as trees. The world of D&D is permeated with magic, after all, and you have every right to put a blazing hot desert

in one dungeon room and a lake as deep as the ocean in another. That way, even if you and the other players never want to leave the comfortable confines of the dungeon, you can present different climates and environmental hazards for the player characters to overcome.

- ✓ **Encounter 1: The Silver Hills.** On the third day into the trip, the PCs are ambushed by ogres where the road cuts through the Silver Hills. Map: ambush site, road, hills, and hidden ogre bands.
- ✓ **Encounter 2: The Forest Shrine.** On the fifth day of the trip, the road enters the Dark Woods, a dangerous forest often avoided by most travelers. Within the forest, in a clearing, the Shrine of the Unicorn has been corrupted by an annis hag. The hag decides to lure the PCs to the shrine so that she can sacrifice them to her dark god. Map: forest trail, clearing, corrupted shrine, and the annis hag's lair.
- ✓ **Encounter 3: The Lonely Swamp.** On the eighth day of the trip, the road winds around the Lonely Swamp. The PCs come across the remains of a merchant caravan that appears to have been attacked on its way from Paragon to Griffonford. A badly wounded caravan guard tells the PCs what happened and asks them to enter the swamp to recover the parcel they were carrying and the sorcerer who was protecting it. *"She is the daughter of the lord of Paragon," he gasps, "and the item must be recovered at all costs."* Map: swamp, shambling mound encounter areas, and the mad wizard's lair.



This is just an example of how to structure a wilderness adventure. Don't try to play out every second of travel. Get to the action and run those encounters, but don't try to narrate every step along the way.

## Chapter 17

# The Event-Based Adventure

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### *In This Chapter*

- Designing event-based adventures
  - Using timelines and flowcharts
- 

All adventures have a story. Some stories are implied by the encounters; others are central to the adventure. In this chapter, we examine the event-based adventure and talk about how you can set up adventures that are more complex than simple dungeon crawls. By using events and the actions of the player characters to drive the plot forward, you can create surprisingly rich stories that play out through your adventures.

## *Designing Event-Based Adventures*

What do we mean by an event-based adventure? Instead of letting encounter areas on a map drive the adventure (and thus build the story), specific events drive the progress of these types of adventures. Events can be *off stage* (the player characters might have no way to influence them) or *on stage* (the events are specifically triggered by the actions of the player characters). And in all cases, later parts of the story are “unlocked” or “opened” by the actions the player characters perform.

Examples of events that can serve as the catalysts for adventures include a spreading plague, the arrival of a merchant caravan, the coronation of a new king, a series of murders, a string of robberies, and even the phases of the moon.

The reactions of the player characters change the events that can occur, or the order in which things happen, or both. This type of adventure focuses on trying to accomplish a specific quest or mission, and the encounters build upon that effort. There’s usually more to an event-based adventure than “explore the dungeon” or “kill all the monsters.” Event-based adventures are sometimes called story-based adventures, because the structure is more like a book or movie than an exploration of a site.



The basic difference between a dungeon crawl and an event-based adventure is that you build an event-based adventure with encounters keyed to *events* instead of to *locations*. The two best methods for plotting and organizing an event-based adventure are the *flowchart* and the *timeline*. We discuss both of these methods in the following sections.

## The flowchart

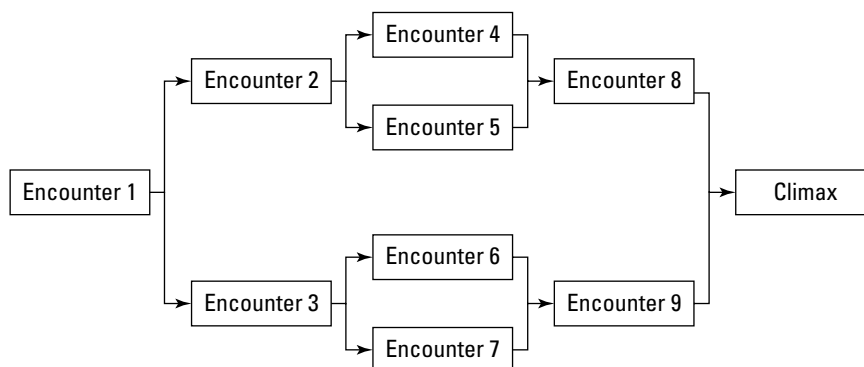
When you create an event-based adventure, one way to organize your encounters is by using a flowchart. You want to create at least a few paths through the adventure so that the players don't feel that their characters are being railroaded through events to the conclusion you want to happen. You can accomplish this in many ways, but we show you one method that doesn't take a lot of work and sets up an adventure that feels wide open from the players' point of view.

Imagine the flowchart as if/then statements that lead from one encounter or event to the next. The branches that flow from each encounter can be as few as one or two, or as many as you're comfortable handling. Certainly, you don't want to design such a complex flowchart that many portions of the adventure you've prepared will never get used. But you do want to present at least the illusion of choice for the player characters.

Think of a flowchart as a dungeon. The player characters explore each encounter in the flowchart, just as they explore each chamber in the dungeon. They might take the left-hand path, or they might decide to forge straight ahead.

A simple flowchart presents an encounter with two choices that each lead to another encounter with two choices. Then paths lead to one of two encounters that lead to the climactic encounter. Figure 17-1 shows this basic encounter flowchart.

**Figure 17-1:** You can plot out the different possibilities for an event-based adventure with a flowchart.



So, using an example of “murder as event” to build this adventure, here’s how the key to the first encounter in this flowchart might look.

**Encounter 1:** The player characters, while walking through the town of Blue Oaks late at night, hear some kind of commotion coming from a nearby alley. It sounds like a struggle of some sort is taking place. A terrible scream marks the end of the struggle, and the PCs and the night watch arrive in the alley from different directions at almost the same moment. A body is sprawled across the alley floor, and blood is splattered everywhere. An examination of the area shows no sign of the murderer, but the body — that of a barkeep who was well known in town — has been slashed with what appears to have been vicious claws. The man’s left arm was ripped off and is nowhere to be seen.

The watch officer says that this is the fifth such murder in as many nights. Each victim was missing different body parts: the right leg was taken from the first victim, the right arm from the second victim, the torso from the third victim, and the left leg from the fourth victim. Each victim seemed to have been attacked after leaving the Open Door Inn, the same establishment where the latest victim worked. He also explains that the watch is at a loss as to what to do. If the player characters can help, the town would appreciate it. The town scholar, a wizard named Avolid, examined all the bodies and may know more. The hour is late, but perhaps some sense of this violence can be made in the morning.

*If the PCs want to investigate the Open Door Inn, then go to Encounter 2.*

*If the PCs want to talk to the town scholar, then go to Encounter 3.*

Fill in each encounter area with a challenge, roleplaying, or combat encounter, leaving clues that provide paths to the next encounters shown on the flowchart. One way this adventure might turn out is that the player characters keep being led back to Avolid, the town scholar. This unassuming wizard has turned to necromancy and the dark arts and is using a troll to murder town folk and collect body parts for his dark project — he’s building a flesh golem! The climax encounter occurs after the flesh golem is animated — the player characters must defeat it and its dark master before it rampages through the town.

## *The timeline*

Another method for setting up an event-based adventure is the timeline. When you build an adventure around a timeline, things happen despite the actions of the player characters, and there is often a sense of tension and pressure created by the advancing clock. The adventure kicks off with an event that clearly appears to be the first step in an unfolding plot. Time (or at

least, the illusion of time) becomes as much an opponent and obstacle as the villains and monsters you use to populate the adventure.



What do we mean? Well, there really isn't a ticking clock counting down to some terrible explosion, but you certainly want the player characters to feel that way. The truth is that although you have outlined a timeline for events in the adventure, you as the Dungeon Master get to decide when to advance the adventure along the timeline. As long as the players are having fun and accomplishing things, hold off unveiling the next event in the line. When the players get bogged down, lose their way, or become bored, that's the time to advance to the next event.

The timeline lays out how and when events in the story take place. Sometimes the player characters can do things to delay or speed up the occurrence of these events, and sometimes they can alter events or unlock new paths through the timeline, depending on the adventure you've created.

A typical timeline can be simple and straightforward, describing events that will happen at specific moments in the adventure. One way to do this is with simple descriptions:

1. **The first night, 2 a.m.:** A man is attacked and murdered about two blocks from the Open Door Inn. His right leg is removed by the murderer and taken away.
2. **The second night, 1 a.m.:** The next murder takes place, near the stables. The victim is found with the right arm missing.
3. **The third, fourth, and fifth nights:** Another murder happens on each subsequent night, and each time, another part of the victim's body is removed. The murderer has now collected a right leg, right arm, torso, left leg, and left arm.
4. **The sixth night, 3 a.m.:** The last murder will take place in the town square. This time the murderer needs the victim's head and the brain housed inside it.

Another way to set up a timeline adventure is by setting the events for specific times, but building an *open-exploration area* where the player characters can investigate as they see fit until the next event takes place. You might set up a timeline with open-exploration areas between events as follows:

1. **Event 1, 2 a.m.:** The PCs hear the struggle and screams as the fifth murder occurs. The PCs may investigate any or all of the following before Event 2 occurs:
  - The murder site (roleplaying or challenge encounter)
  - Avalid's magic shop (roleplaying encounter)



- The victim's residence (roleplaying encounter)
- The sewer network (challenge or combat encounter)
- The old warehouse (challenge or combat encounter)

**2. Event 2, 2 a.m.:** The sixth and last murder takes place.

In this model, you set up the parts of the town that the player characters can explore and the people they can meet to ask questions of. The player characters can visit these sites in any order, providing the illusion of a wide-open story and player control. You need to prepare roleplaying, challenge, and combat encounters (for explanations of the different kinds of encounters, see Chapter 3). When they have almost run out of things to do, the next event occurs. This opens up new parts of the town to explore, new suspects and witnesses to talk to, and new dangers as the PCs get that much closer to solving the mystery.

You can even combine a flowchart and a timeline to make a more integrated and complex adventure. It all depends on the story you want to set up.

## *Using Flowcharts and Timelines in Dungeons*

There's no reason not to try to design a dungeon crawl adventure that also uses a flowchart or a timeline. These can add greater depth to the story and a touch of drama and realism not necessarily available in a typical dungeon crawl.

When you're designing a dungeon, you can use a flowchart to determine how the dungeon denizens react to the actions of the player characters. For example, *if* the player characters defeat Palehorn the Minotaur, *then* Tusenmaug the Dragon puts the guards in rooms 7, 8, 9, and 10 on high alert. A flowchart can also be useful for tracking the main villain. *If* the player characters disarm the trap in room 13, *then* Vlanis the Vile moves to room 16 to unleash the hell hounds.

A timeline provides the same tension and time pressure in a dungeon environment as it does in any adventure setting. Perhaps the dungeon is slowly filling with water, flooding rooms and corridors at a predefined pace. Or an earthquake threatens to destroy the entire dungeon complex, with parts collapsing as time passes. The time pressure can also be more subtle, as in these examples:

- ✓ The number of guards and patrols increase as time passes.
- ✓ More monsters arrive in response to a summons by the dungeon's arch villain.
- ✓ The arch villain is getting closer and closer to completing the evil ceremony with each passing hour the player characters spend lost or exploring the complex.



Try any or all of these options as you create adventures for your game group. If something doesn't work, improvise your way through the current adventure and try again the next time. Remember that the players don't know what you've planned, so if you need to make adjustments behind the screen, go ahead and do it. Nothing in your adventure notes really happens until it takes place in the game.



If the PCs get stuck and aren't sure what to do next, you can keep the adventure from coming to a halt by having a monster or NPC show up, kick in the proverbial door, and attack the PCs on the spot. The sudden appearance of a new threat injects some tension into the adventure and gives the players a chance to refocus. The seemingly random encounter also allows you to plant a clue on the assailant that will help the PCs get on the right track about what to do next.

## Chapter 18

# The Randomly Generated Adventure

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Running a D&D game with no preparation
  - ▶ Creating a dungeon with random rolls
  - ▶ Generating a random monster
  - ▶ Determining random treasure
- 

**S**ometimes, you just don't have enough time beforehand to prepare an adventure for a D&D game. Maybe you and your friends spontaneously decided to play some D&D, and you need to come up with something fast. Maybe you found yourself with time to kill, but you need a little help to start your creative juices flowing. Whatever the reason, you might find that generating a dungeon full of monsters with random die rolls is the best way to start playing fast.

In this chapter, we take a brief look at how you can use random-generation tables to create a random dungeon and stock it with monsters for the player characters to fight. We also provide you with a random-dungeon-generation system — all you need is a couple d10s and the tables in this chapter to quickly and easily create and populate a fun dungeon with no prep time at all. In fact, you can actually use this chapter to make up the dungeon on the fly, while you're playing!

## *Using the Random-Generation Tables*

The tables in this chapter provide you with all you need to randomly generate a complete dungeon.



Note that random generation can have some strange results. Feel free to modify, ignore, or roll again if you wind up with results that don't make sense to you.

To use the tables, follow these steps:

1. Choose the base Encounter Level (EL) and roll a surface setting for the dungeon on Table 18-1.
2. Choose a first room configuration from the options shown in Figure 18-1. Copy the room layout to a pad of graph paper.
3. When the players choose to explore a corridor originating in the first room, roll on Table 18-2. Make a new roll on this table every 30 feet the corridor travels. Some results on this table will send you to other tables in this chapter; just follow the directions.
4. When the players choose to open a door in the first room or a door they find in a corridor, roll on Table 18-5, and then on Table 18-6. Some results on Table 18-6 will send you to other tables in this chapter; just follow the directions.
5. If the tables indicate an encounter with a wandering monster or the contents of a chamber turn out to include a monster, use Tables 18-12, 18-13, or 18-14 (1st-, 2nd-, or 3rd-level Dungeon Encounters, as appropriate for the base EL) to determine what sort of creature the player characters meet. You can find monster statistics in the *Monster Manual*.
6. If the tables indicate that a room contains treasure, use Tables 18-15, 18-16, or 18-17 to generate a random 1st-, 2nd-, or 3rd-level treasure, as appropriate. You can find gem, art object, and magic item descriptions in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



Most of the die rolls you need to make to use the tables in this chapter require you to roll percentile dice. In D&D shorthand, percentile dice are called d%. Use two ten-sided dice; read one die as the tens place, and the other die as the ones place. Treat a 00 roll as a roll of 100, not 0.

## Keeping Track of a Random Dungeon

Although creating a random dungeon by using the method we describe in the preceding section doesn't require much (if any) upfront work, you still need to create a map and a key to keep track of what's in the dungeon and what the player characters have encountered or discovered:

- ✓ **Map:** The map shows where the chambers, corridors, doors, and other features of the dungeon are; you use a pad of graph paper to draw your dungeon map as the dice dictate.

Alternatively, you can create a random dungeon by simply sketching out whatever arrangement of corridors, chambers, and caverns you like, but leaving the contents of the dungeon's rooms undetermined. You don't

even have to draw the map yourself — any map in a published adventure or sourcebook can be stripped of its key and repopulated by the random monsters and treasure described in this chapter. All you need to do is record the details of what the player characters find in each room on your key.

- ✓ **Key:** The key consists of whatever notes you make to describe the exact contents of each room as the player characters encounter them. Usually, it works best to keep the key on a pad of simple notebook paper and use identifying numbers or letters (room A, room 2, whatever) to tie the map and the key together.

## Starting Your Random Dungeon

Creating a random dungeon begins with two DM decisions — the *base Encounter Level* and the *first room configuration*. After these two decisions, you can sit back and allow the rolls to take over. The random-map-generation system we describe in the “Generating the Dungeon Map” section, later in this chapter, helps you to create the physical layout of passages and rooms that make up the dungeon, and the random-encounter system we describe in the “Rolling a Random Encounter” section helps you stock those rooms with monsters and villains for the player characters to fight.

### Base Encounter Level

The *base Encounter Level* is simply the level of most encounters you expect to generate in the adventure. This should be close to the average level of the player characters in the party. For example, if the player characters average 6th level, your base Encounter Level (EL) should be 6. When you generate random encounters to fill the rooms in your dungeon, begin on the 6th-level Dungeon Encounters table on page 79 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The dungeon encounters tables are built so that a chance exists that any particular 6th-level encounter might shift down to the 5th-level table or bounce up to the 7th-level table, but 80 percent of the encounters will be EL 6 — a single CR 6 monster, two CR 4 monsters, or any combination that results in an encounter suitable for 6th-level characters.



You can find random dungeon encounter tables for levels 1 through 20 on pages 79–81 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

For your convenience, we've duplicated the 1st-level through 3rd-level encounter tables in this book. If you're creating a random adventure for 1st- or 2nd-level characters, the tables in this chapter should suffice.

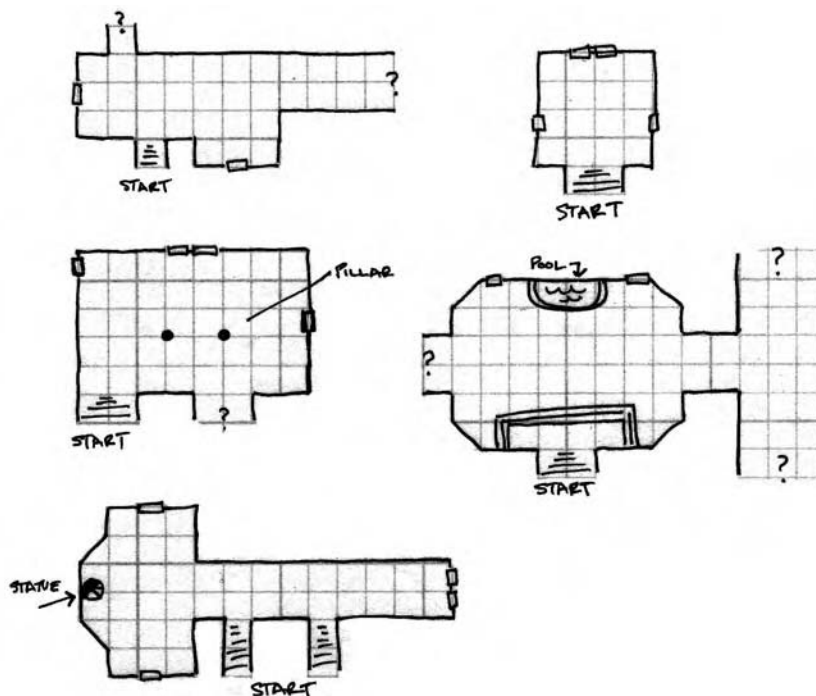
## *First room configuration*

If you don't create the whole map ahead of time, you need to pick a starting point for your randomly generated map. All our random dungeons begin with a stairway descending from some feature on the surface down into a first room — the place where the player characters enter the dungeon for the first time. To determine what lies above the dungeon, roll a d% and look up the resulting number in Table 18-1 or choose a result that strikes you as interesting.

<b>Table 18-1</b>	<b>Surface Setting</b>
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Dungeon Lies Beneath . . .</i>
01–10	Ruined watchtower in a wild forest
11–25	Old castle, long abandoned
26–30	Ruins of a once-prosperous city
31–45	Destroyed temple, shrine, or monastery devoted to an evil deity
46–60	Cellar of a ruined noble's manor, villa, or palace
61–65	Desolate cemetery or forgotten mausoleum
66–95	Road, trail, or path with no other noteworthy structures
96–100	None; the dungeon was built as a concealed stronghold underground

When you know what's above the dungeon, you can choose an appropriate length for the stairs leading from the surface feature down into the labyrinth below. In general, the stairs descend from 10 to 40 feet; longer stairways usually consist of several shorter flights.

Now choose one of the room designs shown in Figure 18-1 and draw it in the center of the graph paper you're going to use for your dungeon map. Each of these configurations offers several exits leading in different directions, so you can't be sure where the randomly generated map might lead. The stairway marked "start" leads back up to the surface and is the place where the player characters begin their adventure.



**Figure 18-1:**  
The first  
room . . .  
enter at  
your own  
risk.

## Generating the Dungeon Map

From the first room, the player characters can begin to explore the dungeon by opening a door or proceeding down one of the open corridors.

Tables 18-2 through 18-4 describe corridors. Make a check on Table 18-2 when the player characters reach any point marked “?” in the first room configuration. This check tells you what lies in that direction. Every 6 squares (30 feet) that the player characters advance along the corridor after that, roll another check on Table 18-2. Corridors often feature branching passages, turns, side-passages or side-doors, or just lead into a chamber with no door at all.

If you begin by checking a door in your first room or when Table 18-2 indicates a door in a corridor the player characters are exploring, go to Table 18-5 to determine whether the door is locked, stuck, or trapped. Table 18-6 describes what lies on the other side of the door. This may be another corridor (in which case you’ll go back to Table 18-2 to see how far it goes and in what direction) or a chamber of some kind.

Make all corridors 10 feet wide (2 squares) unless otherwise noted.

<b>Table 18-2</b>	<b>Corridor Direction and Features</b>
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Corridor Feature</i>
01–10	Continues straight. Check again in 6 squares (30 ft.).
11–13	Corridor dead-ends at a door. Go to Table 18-5.
14–19	Door on right side; corridor continues. Go to Table 18-5.
20–25	Door on left side; corridor continues. Go to Table 18-5.
26–35	Side passage on right-hand side; corridor continues. Go to Table 18-3.
36–45	Side passage on left-hand side; corridor continues. Go to Table 18-3.
46–48	Corridor comes to a T. Go to Table 18-3 for each branch.
49–50	Corridor splits at a Y. Go to Table 18-3 for each branch.
51–52	Four-way intersection with perpendicular corridor. Go to Table 18-3.
53–57	Corridor turns left 90 degrees.
58–62	Corridor turns right 90 degrees.
63–64	Corridor turns right 45 degrees.
65–66	Corridor turns left 45 degrees.
67–80	Corridor emerges into chamber, no door. Go to Table 18-7.
81	Stairs (go to Table 18-11). Corridor ends.
82	Stairs on left side (go to Table 18-11). Corridor continues.
83	Stairs on right side (go to Table 18-11). Corridor continues.
84–95	Dead end.
96–100	Corridor event (go to Table 18-4). Corridor continues.





As your randomly generated dungeon map expands, corridors or rooms might hit the edge of your piece of graph paper. You can address this in one of two ways:

- ✓ Exercise some discretion and alter the random results to produce a dungeon that fits on the piece of graph paper.
- ✓ Simply continue your dungeon onto another piece of paper.

Table 18-3	New Corridor Size and Characteristics
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Corridor Size and Characteristic</i>
01–10	Difficult floor*. Roll again and ignore this result if it occurs again.
11–25	1 square (5 ft.) wide.
26–70	2 squares (10 ft.) wide.
71–80	3 squares (15 ft.) wide.
81–88	4 squares (20 ft.) wide.
89–92	4 squares (20 ft.) wide. Row of columns down center.
93–96	4 squares (20 ft.) wide. Stream, canal, sewer, or channel 1d3 squares wide runs along length of corridor. For depth, roll d%: 01–30, 2 ft.; 31–80, 5 ft.; 81–100, 10 ft.
97–99	4 squares (20 ft.) wide. Chasm, rift, or crevasse 1d3 squares wide runs along length of corridor. Depth is 1d8 × 10 ft.
100	Less than 1 square (5 ft.) wide. Tight Space for Medium-sized characters (see <i>Escape Artist</i> , page 73 <i>Player's Handbook</i> ).

\* **Difficult floor:** Roll d% to determine floor type: 01–40, uneven flagstone; 41–80, hewn stone; 81–95, light rubble; 96–100, dense rubble. See *Floors* on page 60 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



Depending on the twists and turns your dice generate, a corridor might double back and run into a part of the dungeon that's already been mapped. You can choose to make your current corridor into a dead end so that it won't disrupt what you've already mapped. Or you can have your corridor meet the already-mapped corridor or chamber in a secret door — clearly, the player characters missed it when they were exploring the area on the other side.

Table 18-4 Corridor Events		
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Go To . . .</i>
01–20	Corridor changes size and then continues.	Roll on Table 18-3.
21–25	Stream <sup>1</sup> (5 ft. wide, 5 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
26–35	Stream <sup>1</sup> (10 ft. wide, 5 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
36–40	Stream <sup>1</sup> (15 ft. wide, 5 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
41–45	Stream <sup>1</sup> (15 ft. wide, 10 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
46–65	Chasm <sup>2</sup> (5 ft. wide, 20 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
66–75	Chasm <sup>2</sup> (10 ft. wide, 2d4 × 10 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
76–80	Chasm <sup>2</sup> (15 ft. wide, 3d4 × 10 ft. deep). Corridor continues.	None
81–82	Camouflaged pit trap, CR 1.	See page 70, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
83–84	Deeper pit trap, CR 1.	See page 70, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
85–87	Portcullis trap, CR 1.	See page 71, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
88–89	Fusillade of darts trap, CR 1.	See page 70, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
90–100	Wandering monster.	Roll an encounter on Table 18-12, 18-13, or 18-14 (depending on the level of the party).

<sup>1</sup> **Stream:** Streams flow out of a niche, crevice, or down one wall in a cascade and disappear into an opening on the opposite wall. Speed 1d10 × 10 ft. per round; see *Flowing Water*, page 92 *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Roll d%: 01–70, no bridge; 71–90, log or plank bridge (Balance DC 10); 91–100, wooden footbridge.

<sup>2</sup> **Chasm:** Roll d%: 01–70, no bridge; 71–90, log or plank bridge (Balance DC 10); 91–100, wooden footbridge.



The pit trap, portcullis trap, and fusillade of darts trap mentioned in Table 18-4 are described at length in Chapter 27.

At your discretion, streams or chasms may lead to other levels of the dungeon. You can treat a stream as a “corridor” of the appropriate dimensions that eventually emerges in a new starting area for a dungeon. Whether the stream corridor has any air or is completely filled with water (and thus is potentially lethal to unprepared characters) is up to you.

<b>Table 18-5</b>	<b>Door Characteristics</b>
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Door Characteristic</i>
01–20	No door; it’s an open archway.
21–40	Wooden door, opens freely.
41–50	Wooden door, stuck. DC 16 Strength check to force.
51–65	Wooden door, locked. Open Lock DC 20, or DC 18 Strength check.
66–80	Iron door, opens freely.
81–85	Iron door, stuck. DC 23 Strength check.
86–95	Iron door, locked. Open Lock DC 25, or DC 28 Strength check.
96–98	Wooden portcullis. DC 25 Strength check to raise.
99–100	Iron portcullis. DC 25 Strength check to raise.

After you determine what the door is (or isn’t), continue to Table 18-6 to determine what lies on the other side.

Table 18-6			Space Beyond a Door		
<i>d% Roll</i>		<i>Beyond the Door . . .</i>		<i>Go To . . .</i>	
01–10		Parallel corridor, extending 6 squares (30 ft.) in each direction. If door was at end of the corridor, this is a chamber instead.		Go to Table 18-7.	

(continued)

**Table 18-6 (continued)**

<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Beyond the Door . . .</i>	<i>Go To . . .</i>
11–35	Corridor straight ahead.	Go to Table 18-2.
36–40	Corridor at a 45 degree angle (ahead or back, your choice).	Go to Table 18-2.
41–95	Chamber.	Go to Table 18-7.
96–97	False door with CR 1 arrow trap, triggered by opening.	See page 70, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
98	False door with CR 1 wall blade trap, triggered by opening.	See page 71, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
99–100	Stairs.	Go to Table 18-11.

**Table 18-7 Chamber Size and Shape**

<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Chamber Shape</i>	<i>Chamber Size</i>	<i>Go To . . .</i>
01–15	Square	4 squares by 4 squares (20 ft. × 20 ft.)	Go to Table 18-8.
16–30	Square	5 squares by 5 squares (25 ft. × 25 ft.)	Go to Table 18-8.
31–35	Square	6 squares by 6 squares (30 ft. × 30 ft.)	Go to Table 18-8.
36–45	Rectangle	4 squares by 6 squares (20 ft. × 30 ft.)	Go to Table 18-8.
46–50	Rectangle	5 squares by 8 squares (25 ft. × 40 ft.)	Roll twice on Table 18-8.
51–55	Rectangle	6 squares by 10 squares (30 ft. × 50 ft.)	Roll twice on Table 18-8.
56–60	Circular or octagon	6 squares in diameter (30 ft. diameter)	Go to Table 18-8.
61–63	Circular or octagon	8 squares in diameter (40 ft. diameter)	Roll twice on Table 18-8.
64–65	Circular or octagon	10 squares in diameter (50 ft. diameter)	Roll twice on Table 18-8.

<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Chamber Shape</i>	<i>Chamber Size</i>	<i>Go To . . .</i>
66–73	Odd* shape, small	Roughly 4 to 5 squares across (20 ft. to 25 ft. across)	Go to Table 18-8.
74–76	Odd* shape, medium	Roughly 6 to 8 squares across (30 ft. to 40 ft. across)	Go to Table 18-8.
77–78	Odd* shape, large	Roughly 9 to 12 squares across (45 ft. to 60 ft. across)	Roll twice on Table 18-8.
79–92	Cavern, medium	Roughly 6 to 8 squares across (30 ft. to 40 ft. across)	Go to Table 18-8.
93–98	Cavern, large	Roughly 9 to 12 squares across (45 ft. to 60 ft. across)	Roll twice on Table 18-8.
99–100	Cavern, extra large	Roughly 13 to 16 squares across (65 ft. to 80 ft. across)	Roll three times on Table 18-8.

*\* Odd: The room may be triangular, trapezoidal, hexagonal, or L-shaped. Alternatively, the room may have numerous alcoves or niches.*

You can align a chamber with the door or corridor entering it in any way you like.



Most dungeon chambers should have walls at least 5 feet thick separating them from neighboring rooms or corridors. When you draw a chamber on your map, you can add a 5-foot foyer to act as a spacer between the door and the room specified in Table 18-7.

All chambers begin with one exit — the door, archway, or stair by which the player characters enter the room. Chambers may have additional exits, as shown on Table 18-8.

<b>Table 18-8</b>	<b>Additional Chamber Exits</b>
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Exits from Chamber?</i>
01–50	No additional exits.
51–80	One additional exit.
81–92	Two additional exits.
93–96	Three additional exits.
97–100	Stairs. Go to Table 18-11.

**Exit:** For each indicated exit, roll d% to determine type: 01–50, corridor; 51–100, door. Then roll d% again to determine the approximate location of each exit: 01–25, north wall; 26–50, east wall; 51–75, south wall; 76–100, west wall.

After you determine the size and shape of the chamber and identify any additional exits, roll on Table 18-9 to determine what is in the room.

Table 18-9		Chamber Contents
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Inside Chamber</i>	<i>Go To . . .</i>
01–20	Empty; no monsters or special features.	None
21–35	Monster only.	Go to Table 18-12.
36–40	Special feature only.	Go to Table 18-10.
41–60	Monster and treasure.	Roll once on Table 18-12 and once on Table 18-15.
61–65	Special feature and treasure.	Roll once on Table 18-10 and once on Table 18-15.
66–80	Monster and special feature.	Roll once on Table 18-12 and once on Table 18-10.
81–85	Monster and two special features.	Roll once on Table 18-12 and twice on Table 18-10.
86–98	Monster, special feature, and treasure.	Roll once each on Tables 18-10, 18-12, and 18-15.
99–100	Monster, two special features, and treasure.	Roll once on Tables 18-12 and 18-15 and twice on Table 18-10.

In addition to the contents we describe in Tables 18-8 and 18-9, most chambers have one or more unusual features. You can find an extended list of dungeon dressings, features, and furnishings on pages 65–66 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Table 18-10	Chamber Features
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Chamber Features</i>
01–10	Difficult floor (see notes).
11–20	Chasm or crevice (see notes).
21–30	Pool or lake (see notes).
31–35	High ceiling (20 ft. above floor).
36–38	High ceiling (30 ft. above floor).
39–40	Single pillar or column.
41–45	One row of pillars or columns.
46–48	Two rows of pillars or columns.
49–64	Major furnishings (1d3 items). See page 65, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
65–88	Minor furnishings (1d4 items). See page 66, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
89–91	Swinging block trap, CR 1. See page 71, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
92–94	Rolling rock trap, CR 1. See page 71, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .
95–100	Camouflaged pit trap, CR 1. See page 70, <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> .

If you get any of the following results when rolling for Table 18-10, a few extra notes apply:

- ✓ **Chasm or crevice:** The room is divided by a chasm  $2d4 \times 10$  feet deep. To determine width, roll d%: 01–40, 5 feet; 41–85, 10 feet; 86–95, 15 feet; 96–100, 20 feet. To determine whether the chasm is bridged, roll d%: 01–50, no bridge; 51–70, log or plank bridge (Balance DC 10); 71–100, wood or stone footbridge.

- ✓ **Floor:** The chamber has a difficult floor. Roll d% to determine floor type: 01–40, uneven flagstone; 41–80, hewn stone; 81–95, light rubble; 96–100, dense rubble. See Floors, page 60 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.
- ✓ **Pool or lake:** The room features a body of water. Roll d%: 01–50, pool; 51–100, lake. A pool takes up about 1 to 4 squares, and is 5 feet deep. A lake takes up about half of the squares in the room, and is 1d4 × 5 feet deep. In a small room, there isn't much difference between a lake and a pool.
- ✓ **Trap:** The traps mentioned in the table are located in or around features, furnishings, or exits. If you don't know where else to place a trap, roll 1d4: if 1, set the trap in the northwest quadrant of room; 2, northeast quadrant of room; 3, southeast quadrant of room; 4, southwest quadrant of room. Any monsters in the chamber know about the trap and avoid it.

Table 18-11	Stairs
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Stairs</i>
01–05	Stairs ascend to a dead end.
06–10	Stairs descend to a dead end.
11–45	Stairs descend one level.
46–70	Stairs ascend one level.
71–85	Trap door and ladder ascend one level.
86–95	Trap door and ladder descend one level.
96–100	Vertical shaft provides access to a level below and a level above. No stair or ladder (DC 20 Climb check, 30 feet ascent or descent to change level).

When you use a stairway to descend to a new level of the dungeon, you must begin a new map. Choose another room configuration from Figure 18-1. If the player characters descend by means of a ladder or vertical shaft, replace the stairs marked on Figure 18-1 with the appropriate feature.

## Rolling a Random Encounter

Player characters exploring a dungeon might encounter wandering monsters as they explore the various corridors and passages, as well as monsters guarding treasure in various chambers. To determine what monster(s) the player characters face when they kick in the door in a random dungeon, consult Tables 18-12 through 18-14, as appropriate for your dungeon's base Encounter Level.



For a random dungeon, you can assume that deeper is more dangerous. When the player characters descend to a new, unexplored dungeon level, increase the base Encounter Level by 1. For example, instead of rolling encounters on the 1st-level monster table (see Table 18-12), roll encounters on the 2nd-level monster table (see Table 18-13).



When these tables list a die range before a monster's name, that means you roll the appropriate die to determine how many monsters are actually present. For example, if the PCs encounter 1d3+1 goblin warriors, roll 1d3 (generating a 1, 2, or 3), then add 1 — so the PCs might encounter 2, 3, or 4 goblins. We include the page number where the monster can be found in the *Monster Manual* (abbreviated as MM) in the tables.

Table 18-12 1st-Level Dungeon Encounters	
d% Roll	Monster
01–03	1d3 Medium monstrous centipedes (vermin); see MM p. 287
04–08	1d4 dire rats; see MM p. 64
09–10	1d4 giant fire beetles (vermin); see MM p. 285
11–13	1d3 small monstrous scorpions (vermin); see MM p. 287
14–16	1d3 small monstrous spiders (vermin); see MM p. 288
17–20	1d3 dwarf warriors; see MM p. 91
21–22	1d3 elf warriors; see MM p. 101
23–25	1 darkmantle; see MM p. 38
26–28	1 krenshar; see MM p. 163
29–30	1 lemure (devil); see MM p. 57
31–40	1d3+1 goblin warriors; see MM p. 133
41–50	1d4+2 kobold warriors; see MM p. 161
51–56	1d4 human warrior skeletons; see MM p. 225
57–62	1d3 human commoner zombies; see MM p. 265
63–71	1d4+1 tiny viper snakes (animal); see MM p. 279
72–80	1d3 orc warriors; see MM p. 203
81–85	1d3 stirges; see MM p. 236
86–90	1 spider swarm; see MM p. 237
91–100	Roll on 2nd-level table



Not all encounters on Table 18-12 are automatically hostile to the player characters. You can assume that dwarf or elf warriors regard a party of adventurers with an Indifferent starting attitude (see “Diplomacy” on page 72 of the *Player’s Handbook*). Perhaps they’re fellow adventurers, engaged in exploring the same dungeon, or they might be guards whose task it is to make sure that dangerous monsters do not escape from the dungeon.

**Table 18-13 2nd-Level Dungeon Encounters**

<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Monster</i>
01–10	Roll on 1st-level table
11–12	1 lantern archon (archon); see MM p. 16
13–19	1 hobgoblin warrior and 1d4 goblin warriors; see MM p. 153, 133
20–23	1 bugbear; see MM p. 29
24–26	1 choker; see MM p. 34
27–28	1 dretch (demon); see MM p. 42
29–30	1 quasit (demon); see MM p. 46
31–32	1 imp (devil); see MM p. 56
33–35	1 dire bat; see MM p. 62
36–38	1d4+1 fiendish dire rats; see MM p. 107
39–40	1d3+1 formian workers; see MM p. 108
41–43	1d3+1 halfling warriors; see MM p. 149
44–50	2d4+1 kobold warriors; see MM p. 161
51–55	1 wererat (lycanthrope); see MM p. 171
56–62	1d3+1 orc warriors; see MM p. 203
63–65	1 shocker lizard; see MM p. 224
66–68	1 owlbear skeleton; see MM p. 225
69–70	1 bat swarm; see MM p. 237
71–72	1 rat swarm; see MM p. 237
73–74	1 thoqqua; see MM p. 242
75–79	1 worg; see MM p. 256

<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Monster</i>
80–83	1 constrictor snake (animal); see MM p. 279
84–87	1d4+2 Small vipers (animal, snake); see MM p. 279
88–90	1 Huge monstrous centipede (vermin); see MM p. 287
91–100	Roll on 3rd-level table

In Table 18-13, the lantern archon is not necessarily the player characters' enemy and might be willing to aid them in their exploration of the dungeon — especially if a paladin or other charismatic lawful good character is in the party.

<b>Table 18-14                      3rd-Level Dungeon Encounters</b>	
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Monster</i>
01–10	Roll on 2nd-level table
11–13	1 allip; see MM p. 10
14–16	1 cockatrice; see MM p. 37
17–19	2d4+1 dire rats; see MM p. 64
20–21	1 doppelganger; see MM p. 67
22–23	1 wyrmling brass dragon; see MM p. 79
24–27	1d3 drow warriors (elf, drow); see MM p. 103
28–29	1 ethereal filcher; see MM p. 104
30–31	1 ethereal marauder; see MM p. 105
32–33	1 ettercap; see MM p. 106
34–35	1 violet fungus (fungus); see MM p. 112
36–38	1 ghost (ghoul); see MM p. 119
39–43	1d3 gnolls; see MM p. 130
44–45	1 grick; see MM p. 139
46–48	1 hell hound; see MM p. 151
49–50	1 howler; see MM p. 154

(continued)

**Table 18-14 (continued)**

<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Monster</i>
51–52	1d3 krenshars; see MM p. 163
53–55	1d3 lizardfolk; see MM p. 169
56–57	1 werewolf (lycanthrope); see MM p. 173
58–62	1 ogre; see MM p. 198
63–65	1 gelatinous cube (ooze); see MM p. 201
66–67	1 phantom fungus; see MM p. 207
68–69	1 rust monster; see MM p. 216
70–72	1 shadow; see MM p. 221
73–75	2d4 stirges; see MM p. 236
76–77	1 locust swarm (swarm); see MM p. 237
78–80	1 wight; see MM p. 255
81–82	1 yuan-ti pureblood; see MM p. 262
83–84	1d3 troglodyte zombies; see MM p. 265
85–86	1d3 Medium vipers (animal, snake); see MM p. 279
87–88	1 giant praying mantis (vermin); see MM p. 285
89–90	1d3 Medium monstrous scorpions (vermin); see MM p. 287
91–100	Roll on 4th-level table (see page 79 of <i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i> )

The brass dragon in Table 18-14 is unlikely to attack good-aligned adventurers without warning, but if the player characters blunder into its lair, it might choose to defend its treasure first and ask questions later.



All these random encounter tables appear on page 79–81 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. You can use them to create random dungeon encounters for a base Encounter Level as high as 20, if you like.

## Generating Random Treasure

What's the point of risking life and limb in some dismal, monster-infested dungeon if the player characters don't come home with a king's ransom in gold, gems, and wondrous magic items?

To generate a random treasure, roll three times on Table 18-15—once for coins, once for goods, and once for items. (If the player characters find the treasure on levels 2 or 3 of the dungeon, use Tables 18-16 or 18-17, as appropriate.) It's possible that a treasure might have no coins but still have goods and items or any combination of the three types of valuables. To determine the exact gems, art objects, and items found, refer to Tables 18-18 through 18-20.



Tables 18-15 through 18-17 repeat the first three entries found on the treasure table on page 52 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. We've taken a couple shortcuts with the gems, art objects, and other valuables. You can create higher-level treasures by using the table on pages 52–53 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Table 18-15 Random 1st-Level Treasure					
d%	Coins	d%	Goods	d%	Items
01–14	None	01–90	None	01–71	None
15–29	1d6 × 1,000 cp	91–95	1 gem	72–95	1 mundane
30–52	1d6 × 100 sp	96–100	1 art object	96–100	1 minor magic item
53–95	2d8 × 10 gp				
96–100	1d4 × 10 pp				

Table 18-16 Random 2nd-Level Treasure					
d%	Coins	d%	Goods	d%	Items
01–13	None	01–81	None	01–49	None
14–23	1d10 × 1,000 cp	82–95	1d3 gems	50–85	1 mundane item
24–43	2d10 × 100 sp	96–100	1d3 art object	86–100	1 minor magic item
44–95	4d10 × 10 gp				
96–100	2d8 × 10 pp				

Table 18-17 Random 3rd-Level Treasure					
d%	Coins	d%	Goods	d%	Items
01–11	None	01–77	None	01–49	None
12–21	2d10 × 1,000 cp	78–95	1d3 gems	50–79	1d3 mundane item
22–41	4d8 × 100 sp	96–100	1d3 art object	80–100	1 minor magic item
42–95	1d4 × 100 gp				
96–100	4d6 × 10 pp				



To determine the exact type and value of gems, art objects, or mundane items discovered in a treasure hoard, use Table 18-18. (If you prefer a more detailed version, see Tables 3-6, 3-7, and 3-8 on pages 55–56 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.)

Table 18-18 Gems, Art Objects, and Mundane Items					
d%	Gem	d%	Art Object	d%	Mundane Item
01–25	10 gp (agate)	01–25	55 gp (gold bracelet)	01–20	Alchemical item
26–50	50 gp (onyx)	26–45	105 gp (silver chalice)	21–50	Armor
51–70	100 gp (amber)	46–60	350 gp (tapestry)	51–80	Weapon
71–90	200 gp (garnet)	61–75	550 gp (gold comb)	81–100	Gear
91–100	500 gp (topaz)	76–90	700 gp (ivory harp)		
		91–100	1,000 gp (ceremonial dagger)		

A few of the items from Table 18-18 require you to make another roll or two:

- ✓ **Alchemical item:** Roll d%: 01–30, alchemist's fire (1d4 flasks); 31–50, acid (2d4 vials); 51–75, holy water (1d4 flasks); 76–95, everburning torch; 96–100, thunderstones (1d4).
- ✓ **Armor:** Roll d%: 01–25, chain shirt; 26–50, breastplate; 51–70, half-plate armor; 71–80, full plate armor; 81–90, masterwork buckler; 91–100, mithral chain shirt.

- ✓ **Weapon:** Roll d%: 01–25, masterwork dagger; 26–50, masterwork short sword; 51–75, masterwork longsword; 76–90, masterwork greatsword; 91–100, masterwork longbow.
- ✓ **Gear:** Roll d%: 01–10, bullseye lantern; 11–20, 50 ft. silk rope; 21–50, healer's kit; 51–80, silver holy symbol; 81–90, magnifying glass; 91–100, masterwork thieves' tools.

To generate a random minor magic item, refer to Table 18-19. Roll percentile dice to determine the category or type of the magic item, and then roll a d10 to find out the exact type of the item.

Table 18-19		Minor Magic Items	
<i>d%</i>	<i>Item Type</i>	<i>d10</i>	<i>Item</i>
01–03	<i>+1 armor</i>	1	Leather armor
		2–3	Studded leather armor
		4	Chain shirt
		5	Hide armor
		6–7	Chain mail
		8	Breastplate
04	<i>+1 shield</i>	9	Banded mail
		10	Full plate
		1–3	Buckler
		4–5	Light steel shield
		6	Light wooden shield
05–09	<i>+1 weapon</i>	7–10	Heavy steel shield
		1	Dagger
		2	Heavy mace
		3	Light crossbow
		4	Short sword
		5	Longsword
		6	Greatsword

(continued)

**Table 18-19 (continued)**

<i>d%</i>	<i>Item Type</i>	<i>d10</i>	<i>Item</i>
10–44	Potion	7	Dwarven waraxe
		8	Longbow
		9	Scimitar
		10	Warhammer
		1–4	<i>Potion of cure light wounds</i>
		5–6	<i>Potion of bull's strength</i>
		7–8	<i>Potion of invisibility</i>
		9	<i>Potion of cure moderate wounds</i>
		10	<i>Potion of fly</i>
		1–6	<i>Ring of protection +1</i>
45–46	Ring	7	<i>Ring of feather fall</i>
		8	<i>Ring of climbing</i>
		9	<i>Ring of jumping</i>
		10	<i>Ring of the ram</i>
47–81	Scroll	1–2	1st-level arcane spell ( <i>sleep</i> )
		3–4	2nd-level arcane spell ( <i>web</i> )
		5	3rd-level arcane spell ( <i>lightning bolt</i> )
		6–7	1st-level divine spell ( <i>protection from evil</i> )
		8–9	2nd-level divine spell ( <i>hold person</i> )
		10	3rd-level divine spell ( <i>remove disease</i> )



<i>d%</i>	<i>Item Type</i>	<i>d10</i>	<i>Item</i>
82–91	Wand	1–2	<i>Wand of magic missile</i> (caster level 1)
		3–4	<i>Wand of color spray</i>
		5	<i>Wand of knock</i>
		6–7	<i>Wand of cure light wounds</i>
		8	<i>Wand of bull's strength</i>
		9	<i>Wand of daylight</i>
		10	<i>Wand of hold person</i>
92–100	Wondrous Item	1	<i>Bracers of armor +2</i>
		2–3	<i>Cloak of resistance +1</i>
		4	<i>Cloak of elvenkind</i>
		5	<i>Amulet of natural armor +1</i>
		6	<i>Gauntlets of ogre power</i>
		7	<i>Gloves of Dexterity +2</i>
		8	<i>Headband of intellect +2</i>
		9	<i>Periapt of Wisdom +2</i>
		10	<i>Boots of striding and springing</i>



You can find descriptions of all these magic items in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Many more items appear on the random magic item charts in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*; Table 18-19 offers just a sample of the items you might find in a randomly determined treasure.

Treasure isn't always found lying in tidy piles on the dungeon floor. When you create a random dungeon treasure, you might want to add a little detail by finding an appropriate container or containers for the treasure, as determined by Table 18-20.

Table 18-20 Treasure Container	
<i>d% Roll</i>	<i>Treasure Contained In . . .</i>
01–40	No container (heaped or piled on floor)
41–50	Bags or sacks
51–55	Wooden cases or caskets
56–60	Wooden chests or trunks, locked (Open Lock DC 25)
61–70	Iron coffers or strongboxes, locked (Open Lock DC 30)
71–80	Clay urns
81–100	In a secret room (5 × 5 ft.) nearby (Search DC 20 to locate)



Even if a monster doesn't have a chest for its treasure, intelligent monsters usually look for some way to conceal their hoards, stashing them out of sight. Player characters who defeat the monsters and traps guarding a room would be well advised to look around and search in likely places, just in case the monster has a hoard hidden somewhere nearby.

## Finishing a Random Dungeon

The last bit of advice we have for running a random dungeon is simple: At any time you choose, you can dispense with the dice and simply select the option from the table that you like best.

Also, rather than continue to expand your dungeon at random indefinitely, you may choose to limit the size and expansion of a randomly built dungeon any time you like — all you need do is decide that passageways come to dead ends, chambers have no other exits, and stairs no longer lead to lower levels.



You can even use a dungeon you generate through random rolls as a springboard for a purposefully designed adventure.

## Chapter 19

# The High-Level Adventure

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### *In This Chapter*

- Understanding the challenges of DMing a high-level game
  - Dealing with new player character abilities
  - Presenting different types of high-level adventures
- 

**G**aining levels is one of the best parts of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Players are rewarded for their time, effort, and cleverness with new, interesting character abilities; mighty magic items; great honor and responsibility within the game world; and more sheer power to overcome the challenges they face. Adversaries such as orcs, ogres, and ghouls no longer pose a significant threat to the player characters — instead, they face more awesome and deadly foes such as dragons, demons, or giants.

Over the course of time, the steady acquisition of new, powerful spells and feats transforms the player characters. Not only do they hit things harder and stand up to more damage, they gain capabilities that simply have no parallel at lower levels. With a little preparation, every character in the party can fly, turn invisible, or become immune to particular types of damage. The player characters gain the ability to spy on distant enemies with scrying magic, leave a dungeon instantly by means of spells such as *teleport*, or even bring dead characters back to life.

Creating adventures that challenge characters that can fly, teleport, and bring back the dead is a little hard, but it's still possible. Some tricks and traps you counted on in lower-level adventures just won't work anymore; this chapter helps you design adventures that take the player characters' fantastic high-level capabilities into account.

## Understanding Why the Game Changes

The first step in building good high-level adventures is to understand how and why the D&D game transforms at higher levels. The game begins to shift from heroic to superheroic somewhere between 9th and 13th level because characters gain access to game-changing spells:

- ✓ At 9th level, clerics and wizards acquire access to 5th-level spells, which include spells such as *dominate person*, *raise dead*, and *teleport*.
- ✓ At 11th level, clerics and wizards gain 6th-level spells, which include such choices as *antimagic field*, *heal*, and *overland flight*.
- ✓ At 13th level, these same characters gain the ability to cast 7th-level spells such as *mass invisibility*, *resurrection*, and *vision*.



Over the same level range, the expected value of the player characters' wealth (or magic items) increases from about 36,000 gp to 110,000 gp — for each character! (See Table 5-1 on page 135 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.) Although you don't have to adhere to the character wealth guidelines, the game generally assumes that you are doing so. That means even the fighters and rogues in the party are likely to gain powerful and useful magic items such as *boots of speed*, *wings of flying*, or a *ring of invisibility*.

Generally, the changes that take place over this level range begin to affect adventure design in five principal ways (mobility magic, the attack gap, save-or-die spells, divination magic, and character specialization), as we discuss in the following sections.

### Mobility magic

The first characteristic of a high-level adventuring party is its access to highly useful mobility magic — spells such as *fly*, *dimension door*, *water breathing*, *teleport*, and to a lesser extent, *polymorph*. Magic items that grant similar abilities, such as *winged boots*, certainly belong in this category, too. Mobility magic has two major effects on the game: It means that the player characters become adept at ignoring obstacles and using tactical mobility to arrange unfair combat against monsters.

#### *Ignoring obstacles*

When all the characters in the party can fly, vertical obstacles such as chasms, cliffs, or pits no longer matter. Instead of channeling the player characters into exploring in a different direction, a chasm now becomes a road, offering the player characters the ability to travel throughout its length and depth. For that matter, many horizontal obstacles — cavern lakes, gardens

full of carnivorous plants, lava rivers, and so on — can be crossed with impunity. All it takes is a sorcerer who's willing to use up some of his 3rd-level spell slots to bestow a *fly* spell on everyone in the party.

Just as flying means the end of vertical obstacles in your game, teleportation takes away time and distance as impediments to the player characters. An arduous desert crossing you planned as part of your adventure is now completely mitigated by a single spell — the player characters simply teleport to the other side and carry on with what they were doing. Adventures that hinge on tight timelines are equally likely to be busted by teleportation magic; instantaneous travel makes it hard for the player characters to miss catching up to the bad guys.

The upshot of all this is that mobility magic makes most physical obstacles in your game useless. Go ahead and include them if you like, but dizzying chasms or foreboding mountain ranges are only interesting scenery for high-level parties.

### ***Tactical mobility***

Not only is mobility magic good for bypassing physical obstacles, it's also good for making monsters look bad. Any ground-bound creature without a ranged attack is simply dead meat for a party of flying characters. Why mix it up with the iron golem or fiendish tyrannosaurus when these melee bashers can be cut to pieces with archery and magical attacks from the safety of the air?



To challenge the players, make sure that most creatures the PCs encounter have ranged attacks, cooperate with flying monsters, can fly themselves, or guard a room or chamber with a ceiling low enough that airborne PCs can't stay completely out of reach.

## ***The widening attack gap***

At 1st level, the difference between a fighter's melee ability and a wizard's melee ability is probably about 4 points or so — the fighter has a base attack bonus of +1 to the wizard's +0, a Strength score about 4 to 6 points higher than the wizard, and might or might not have the Weapon Focus feat. A monster that the fighter hits 50 percent of the time, the wizard hits 30 percent of the time. A monster that the wizard hits 50 percent of the time, the fighter hits 70 percent of the time. This is a significant difference, but it isn't broken.

By the time characters hit 12th level, this gap is much more significant. The difference in base attack bonus is now 6 points, the difference in Strength scores has grown to 10 or 12 points, and the fighter definitely has Weapon Focus and Greater Weapon Focus. The fighter probably has a much better magic weapon than the wizard, too. Now the fighter's attack bonus is about

12 or 13 points higher than the wizard's attack bonus, and probably as much as 6 or 7 points better than the cleric's attack bonus. A monster that the fighter hits 50 percent of the time, the cleric only hits 20 percent of the time, and the wizard only hits on a roll of 20. A monster that the wizard hits 50 percent of the time, the fighter never misses. Rogues do almost as well as fighters because they usually rely on Dexterity-based attacks.

Now, it's true that the wizard shouldn't be attempting many melee attacks by the time he or she reaches 12th level (heck, by the time he or she reaches 2nd level, really). But what the widening attack gap means is that you have to decide whether a monster you include in the adventure is there to threaten (and be threatened by) the fighter, the cleric, or the wizard. If the circumstances of combat develop in such a way that the wrong character is in melee with the monster, you have a bad mismatch. The encounter suddenly becomes too easy or too deadly for the player characters.



The best answer to the widening attack gap is to avoid monolithic encounters where all the monsters are the same. It's better to have two or three different types of monsters in an encounter, some better at dueling with the fighter, some equipped with other ways (such as spells or supernatural abilities) to attack the cleric or wizard.

## *Save-or-die spells*

As spellcasters rise in level, the spells they gain access to become more and more destructive. In particular, spells that kill or completely incapacitate an opponent with a single failed saving throw begin to appear around the time characters reach 9th level, and they become more prevalent and more dangerous from that point forward. Because these spells can take a monster out of a fight in a single round, they're often referred to as *save-or-die* spells. Good examples include *disintegrate*, *dominate person*, *finger of death*, and *hold monster*.

The difficulty these spells create in high-level games is that the consequences of a monster failing a saving throw go from significant (taking 6d6 damage instead of 3d6 for failing a save against a sorcerer's *fireball*, say) to decisive (instant death for failing a save against *destruction*). They're very *swingly*, which means that a powerful all-or-nothing spell might wipe out the encounter you've planned for the PCs, or it might not help them at all. Do you balance the encounter under the expectation that the party's spellcasters will take out some of the bad guys right at the start with save-or-die spells? What happens if the monsters get lucky and succeed on their saving throws? Now you've got an encounter that suddenly looks way too tough for the player characters. To reduce the impact of save-or-die spells cast by the PCs, include the occasional monster with an immunity to such spells — some examples are constructs, dragons, outsiders, and undead.

Many of the monsters the player characters encounter at higher levels employ save-or-die spells and effects of their own. Again, these can be very swingly encounters. Even if the player characters all have Fortitude saves of +12 or higher, a Difficulty Class (or DC) 19 death effect — for example, a lich's *circle of death* spell — probably kills at least one character in the party. We guarantee you that the unlucky player isn't having much fun for the rest of that battle. The PCs can guard themselves against such attacks if they expect them. Encourage the players to use divination magic, information gathering, and to listen to your clues in order to be prepared for such a dangerous opponent's save-or-die spells.

## Divination magic

Just as mobility magic takes all sorts of physical obstacles out of the DM's toolbox, divination magic defeats *information obstacles* — situations where a lack of some necessary piece of information prevents the player characters from advancing through the adventure. For example, if the PCs don't know where the evil high priest's hidden shrine is located, they can't go confront him. Before they can defeat their enemy and conclude the adventure, they have to find out where his stronghold is by piecing together clues, interrogating minions, searching likely spots, or generally going to some effort to figure it out. But high-level characters have access to spells that can defeat impediments of this sort just as easily as a *fly* spell defeats a chasm.

The divination spells most often used to bust through information obstacles include *scrying*, *greater scrying*, *commune*, and *vision*. Player characters can also overcome information shortfalls by capturing one of the monsters or villains and using magical compulsion to discover what their captive knows (which is usually more than the PCs do). Spells such as *suggestion* or *dominate person* can make the most loyal minion of the Big Bad Evil Guy spill everything he, she, or it knows.



Fortunately, the game includes several defenses against hostile divination magic. You should give at least some of the villains of a high-level adventure defenses against easy scrying. Spells such as *detect scrying*, *mind blank*, *Mordenkainen's private sanctum*, and *nondetection* — or magic items replicating these effects — are an extremely useful part of any evil mastermind's arsenal.



Even villains who don't have access to magic that can prevent divination spells can limit their exposure with some everyday information discipline. For example, an evil mastermind doesn't need to tell every thug, minion, or monster in his hidden fortress what his ultimate plan is or where he goes when he isn't there. Exceedingly clever and subtle villains might actually sow disinformation in the player characters' path by telling a minion the *wrong* plan, and then sending him out to battle the PCs with the expectation that the minion will be captured and compelled to tell the PCs everything he knows — thereby setting a diabolic trap!

## *Specialization*

As characters rise in level, players gain more opportunities to make choices about what their characters are good at. By far, the best strategies for character-building emphasize offense and maximize strengths. Emphasizing offense is important because players control when their characters get to use offensive abilities, whereas defensive abilities can be triggered only by enemy attack. Maximizing strengths is good for the same reason — players can expect that their characters will spend most of their time doing what they're good at.

All player characters are specialized to some degree or another, but by the time characters reach the game-changing levels (9th through 13th), the cumulative effect of choices the players have made can result in very significant differences between characters in the party. Just as the gap between a fighter's and a wizard's base attack bonus widens as they increase in level (as discussed in the section, "The widening attack gap"), you see similar differences in character functions such as spell ability, skill checks, Armor Class, hit points, and so on. The net effect of this natural tendency is that characters lose the ability to make meaningful rolls in things they're not good at. A Balance or Hide check that would be interesting for the rogue is pointless for anybody else — no other character has a chance of succeeding. If you set the DC low enough for the cleric or wizard to succeed with a decent roll, the rogue passes the check automatically.

Spellcasters become especially dangerous through specialization because the appearance of save-or-die spells coincides with the availability of options that increase a character's spell save DCs (the Difficulty Class of saving throws that a character's foes must make against his or her spells). The combination of feat choice, prestige class, and magic items means that a high-level spellcaster can easily generate a spell save DC that is nearly impossible for most adversaries to save against. Challenging a maximized spellcaster without just negating the player's character build choices requires a lot of DM ingenuity.

## *Refining the Challenges*

One answer to a high-level adventuring party is simply more of the same — bigger monsters with more Hit Dice, more special abilities, and more treasure. If the game simply changed in a quantitative manner, that would be fine; there's no end to the number of hit points you can assign a monster, after all. But as we point out in the preceding sections of this chapter, the game changes in a qualitative manner too. Players approach encounters in a whole



new way. The challenge becomes a matter of finding the exact right spell that will nuke the encounter in the most efficient way possible. It might be *wind walk*; it might be *teleport*; it might be *mass invisibility*. Too much of the game falls on the shoulders of the players with the spellcaster characters and their abilities to transfer magical power to the rest of the characters in the party.



In general, half of your encounters ought to feature monsters, situations, or villains that reduce the effectiveness of some characters in the party, but not all. The question of which PC excels and which one gets thrust into a supporting role should have a different answer in each fight you throw at them. You have the ability to control which characters are the stars in any given encounter, and you should design your adventure to shine a spotlight on each player at the table at some point or another.



The first step in designing adventures that remain interesting and challenging for high-level characters is to look for ways to counterbalance the spells and capabilities most commonly used for busting adventures.

## Flight

Flying characters no longer have to worry about crossing any dangerous ground or difficult terrain you might use in a dungeon. Nor will they be deterred by vertical obstacles, such as walls, cliffs, or chasms. Flying also makes it possible to kill opponents on the ground with impunity.

To limit the effectiveness of flight without taking it away entirely, try these techniques:

- ✓ **Wide obstacles:** A *fly* spell cast by a 12th-level character lasts 12 minutes, or 120 rounds. A flying character can take two 60-foot moves per round (40 feet if wearing medium or heavy armor). In other words, this spell lets a character fly 2 to 3 miles, or half that distance if climbing. Make the obstacle *big*, and at least the PCs have to commit higher-level spells (such as *overland flight* instead of *fly*) to bypass it.
- ✓ **Low ceilings:** Dungeon chambers or hallways only 10 feet tall don't give a flying character enough space to get out of a Medium-sized enemy's reach. Bigger monsters and monsters with reach can threaten characters in rooms with higher ceilings.
- ✓ **Monsters with ranged attacks:** If the monsters or villains have the ability to attack effectively at range, flying becomes much less of an advantage for the player characters.
- ✓ **Flying monsters:** If the monsters can take to the air too, flying is less of a tactical advantage for the player characters.

## Invisibility

Invisibility comes in two flavors: the *invisibility* spell and the *greater invisibility* spell. The plain old *invisibility* spell is pretty good because invisible

characters can often sneak past encounters, penetrate the defenses of dungeons or strongholds without being challenged, or set up viciously effective ambushes. Even though characters using this spell become visible after making an attack, it's still a good deal. *Greater invisibility* is far more devastating in combat because the recipient of the spell doesn't become visible after attacking. Now it becomes almost impossible for many types of foes to even guess which square the invisible attacker is standing in, let alone make a successful counterattack. This spell is especially effective when the player characters turn the party's rogue invisible, because now every attack the rogue makes is a sneak attack.

To stop invisibility from overrunning the game, try some of these techniques:

- ✓ **Monsters that see invisible creatures:** If some of your encounters include creatures with blindsight, tremorsense, or the *see invisibility* spell, invisible characters will be less effective. A much less heavy-handed approach is to include weak “spotting” monsters as pets or allies to the real thumpers in the encounter. For example, fire giants often have hell hounds as pets. Hell hounds have the scent ability, which helps to locate invisible creatures.
- ✓ **Telltale floors:** A little sand, snow, mud, or water on the floor should make it much easier for an intelligent monster to guess the location of an invisible foe. Even though the monster still has a big miss chance due to the concealment provided by the spell, at least it's likely to attack the right square.
- ✓ **Monsters immune to sneak attack:** Monsters that are resistant or immune to critical hits and sneak attacks (constructs or undead, for example) aren't very worried about a high-level rogue with a *greater invisibility* spell.
- ✓ **Area attacks:** If a monster possesses an area attack — a damaging aura or a big breath weapon, for example — it doesn't need to know exactly where the invisible character is standing in order to threaten him or her.

## Invulnerability

Various spells and effects might make a character virtually immune to the attacks of a particular monster in a particular encounter. For example, a character under a *stoneskin* spell has little to fear from a mantichore. The spell confers 10 points of damage reduction, and a mantichore's best attack deals 2d4+5 damage — not enough to do more than scratch the magically protected character. Similarly, characters of high level can easily make themselves immune to energy damage of various types or otherwise “unhittable.”

Try the following techniques when you're dealing with (virtually) invulnerable player characters:

- ✔ **Make it a wrestling match.** Monsters that can't hit a character might do much better to attempt a grapple instead, especially if the monsters are bigger than the player characters. This is especially dangerous around water — even a character with *stoneskin* needs to breathe.
- ✔ **Use cooperative tactics.** Intelligent monsters can cooperate against a tough PC by using flanking tactics and the Aid Another action to overcome very high Armor Class.
- ✔ **Ignore what you can't hurt.** Intelligent monsters quickly figure out if an opponent just can't be hurt by their attacks. If the party's fighter appears to be protected by powerful defensive magic, they'll see whether they can do better against another character.
- ✔ **Create combination encounters.** Create encounters featuring monsters that deal damage in very different ways. If you pair up mummies with evil clerics, the mummies can use their physical attacks while the clerics attack with spells. It's hard for player characters to be invulnerable to more than one sort of attack at a time, no matter what kind of spells or magic items they employ.

## Don't just say no

When the players are wrecking your dungeon through the egregious overuse of spells such as *invisibility* or *fly*, you might be tempted to simply negate these abilities through DM fiat. For example, you could design a dungeon with a special magic effect that says "any creature that flies gets hit by a 10d6 lightning bolt each round." In order to counter invisibility, you might fill your dungeon with monsters that all have blindsight. If nothing else, your whole dungeon might be surrounded in an *antimagic field*. Whatever it is the players are doing, you can negate it through monster selection or special conditions.

Although this is certainly one way to counter the growing capabilities of the player characters, it isn't particularly fun. Instead of feeling like they've been rewarded for growing more powerful and playing smart, they feel like you're just trying to take away their toys.

A better approach is to design high-level encounters *assuming* that the PCs will make the best use of the capabilities at their disposal. For example, instead of designing an encounter that negates flying, design an encounter that rewards it. If the monsters have ranged attacks that are somewhat weaker than their melee attacks, they'll still be able to do something about flying characters, but they won't be as effective as they would be against ground-bound parties. You've rewarded flying as a tactic for the encounter, but the monsters at least get to put up some fight.

You can still create the occasional encounter that "turns off" one of the party's capabilities; just don't make that the encounter the player characters have every time they play in one of your high-level adventures.

## *Making the Experience Match the Level*

By the time the player characters reach 13th or 14th level, they've saved plenty of villages. They've beaten plenty of marauding monsters. They've rooted out plenty of sinister cults and broken up plenty of slaver gangs. Moving into high-level play means that the characters should begin to take on quests and tasks that *feel* like they're worthy of a high-level party's time and attention.

### *Raising the stakes*

The first thing you can do to make high-level characters feel like they're becoming more important in the game world is raise the stakes of whatever adventure they take on. Instead of adventuring to save a village, the heroes now deal with threats to great cities or whole kingdoms. A low-level party dealing with a bloodthirsty cult of Erythnul, god of slaughter, might face a single cult leader in one isolated shrine. At higher levels, the cult of Erythnul might be a society of assassins who hold an entire realm in terror. High nobles and great merchants are secret members of the cult, and they work to shield the cult from any organized efforts to stamp it out. When the heroes take on the adventure, they're facing a secret society with hundreds of members. The basic idea of the adventure is the same, but the stakes are a dozen times higher.

### *Wowing the players with the setting*

Early in their player characters' careers, players expect to fight in modest, mundane locales such as caves, crypts, ruined castles, and lonely wilderness clearings. As the characters transition into high level, make the scenery around the adventure more and more spectacular. Instead of grubbing around in a dirty little cave only a few hundred feet from daylight, send the PCs 20 miles down into the awesome black vault of the Underdark. Locate your secret strongholds of evil atop awesome mountain peaks, in the fuming calderas of volcanoes, or in the icebound ruins of a city of giants ringed by colossal statues hundreds of feet high. The more remote, the better — if the PCs have to make use of their prodigious magical gifts just to get to the adventure, the players will understand why this was an adventure no ordinary dungeon-delvers dared take on.

## Going past 20th level

We feel that D&D transitions fully into high-level play when characters reach 13th to 14th level. If you find that you enjoy high-level play and want more of it, you might want to take the campaign past the 20th level barrier. Characters of 21st level or higher are referred to as *epic* characters, and the whole expanse of game play beyond 20th level is known as *epic level* D&D. If you want to play at this super-high level, check out *Epic Level Handbook* and see whether it's for you.

Be warned — the game continues to grow more complex and unwieldy the farther you go, just because even the simplest characters continue to master new feats, new attacks, and new magic items. Each level the player characters gain is one more thing the players and the DM have to study in order to play the best game. With that said, if your game group wants to slay great wyrms, demon princes, and evil demigods, epic level is the place you ought to be playing.

## *Providing benchmark encounters*

Once every adventure or two, it's a good idea to remind the players of how much tougher their characters are now compared to where they were a few levels ago. Look for opportunities to throw the occasional weak encounter into a high-level adventure. If you can find a benchmark monster or former enemy who once seemed tough to the players, so much the better. For example, if the player characters almost got wiped out by a troll when they were 4th level, an encounter with four or five trolls when they're 11th or 12th level will show off just how far they've come since that one hard fight.

## Chapter 20

# Sample Dungeon: The Necromancer's Apprentice

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Preparing for this adventure
  - ▶ Running *The Necromancer's Apprentice*, an adventure for four 2nd-level characters
  - ▶ Adjusting the adventure for more characters or higher-level characters
- 

**T**he earlier chapters in this book bury you under an avalanche of helpful advice and suggestions. In this chapter, we give you something concrete and immediately useful — a second sample dungeon that you can use in your D&D game. This one is a little longer and more involved than the sample dungeon presented in Chapter 7, and it might take you two or three game sessions to complete.

## *Dungeon Master Preparation*

To run your best game, make sure that you know the adventure, the monsters, and the key rules for obstacles, challenges, or special attacks the player characters are likely to run into during the adventure. You certainly don't need to commit everything to memory, but the game will run smoother if you're familiar with the adventure and its features before you begin your game session.

Before you intend to play, read or review the following:

- ✓ The adventure contained in this chapter (naturally).
- ✓ The following monster descriptions from the *Monster Manual* (if you own it): choker, skeleton, gnoll, monstrous centipede, wight, and worg. You don't need the *Monster Manual* to run the adventure, because we include

all the relevant statistics, but the *Monster Manual* includes more thorough descriptions of these creatures.

- ✓ The following special attack forms: grapple, poison, trip, and energy drain. See the *Player's Handbook*, pages 155 and 158, for more about grapple and trip attacks, respectively. See the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, pages 296 and 293, for details on poison and energy drain, respectively.
- ✓ The following spell descriptions from the *Player's Handbook*: *blindness/deafness*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *summon swarm*, *burning hands*, and *ghoul touch*. They're likely to come up during the last encounter of the adventure.
- ✓ The description of Griffonford and its surroundings in Chapter 8. This adventure is set in Griffonford, but you can easily change the name or key personalities of the town to suit your own campaign if you would prefer to use a different setting.



You might want to use sticky notes, paper clips, or some other handy method to mark the pages in your rulebooks that you intend to refer to later. It will save you time and page-flipping during your game session.

## The Necromancer's Apprentice

When the folk of Griffonford's outlying farmsteads report livestock killed, sinister creatures prowling around their homes by night, and evil whispers in the wild woods, the player characters are called in to investigate and set matters right. Their investigation leads them into a monster-haunted forest and the long-abandoned home of a notorious necromancer . . . now occupied by a new master.

This adventure is designed for four player characters of 2nd level. If your group includes more than four players or the characters are higher than 2nd level, you can adjust the adventure to compensate; see the section, "Making the Adventure Tougher," at the end of this chapter.

As with the adventure in Chapter 7, the material in this chapter is divided into two sections: Dungeon Master information, and information to be shared with the players. The material you can read aloud to the players is marked "Read Aloud" and set in italics.

### Adventure premise

In the Thirsting Wood a few miles west of the small town of Griffonford stands the lonely house of the infamous necromancer Roburn. Years ago, Roburn



attracted the attention of the young Vesgin Averoth, younger brother of Tardin Averoth, lord of the town. Vesgin aspired to the magical arts, and Roburn taught the ambitious young nobleman many secrets of dark magic. Vesgin grew proud and cruel under Roburn's tutelage, and began to plot the murder of his older brother so that he could take his "rightful" place as lord of Griffonford.

Vesgin's attempt to assassinate Tardin failed. When the depth of his brother's evil came to light, Tardin threw Vesgin out. Then he set out after Roburn, intending to drive off the necromancer who had poisoned his younger brother with cruelty and ambition. But Roburn was gone. He apparently left his lonely house to the birds and the beasts, and has not been seen or heard from since.

It has been a number of years since Roburn and Vesgin studied together in the sinister house in the woods. Vesgin grew in his knowledge of the necromantic arts and took an apprentice of his own, Nathar. Finally, Vesgin decided to return to Griffonford and exact vengeance for all the injustices he suffered — and the first step was to send Nathar to prepare his way.

At his master's order, the young necromancer Nathar crept into the Dholin Vale and took up residence in Roburn's old house. Nathar intends to thoroughly spy out Griffonford and the lands nearby, gather a warband of evil creatures suitable for Vesgin's work, and sow what chaos and fear he can in preparation for Vesgin's return. Vesgin told Nathar several of the secrets of Roburn's old abode, and the younger apprentice is eagerly searching out every scrap of arcane lore remaining in the various tomes and books Roburn left behind when he abandoned his home.

Nathar's servants include a gang of gnoll warriors, a particularly vicious "Sneak," and a number of skeletons created by Roburn that now answer to the new wizard of the house. Roaming the Vale by night, Nathar's minions have started killing livestock, terrorizing the outlying farms, and waylaying travelers in the wild and at lonely spots outside of town. The folk of Griffonford suspect that some sinister new denizen might now inhabit Roburn's house, but the last guardsmen who went to investigate were attacked by a vicious black wolf in the woods and never made it to the old necromancer's home.

## *Starting the adventure*

When you're ready to start playing, begin by having each player introduce his or her character — name and race, character class, and a quick description of what the character looks like. Then read the following text to the players:

**Read Aloud:** *Your travels have brought you to the small town of Griffonford. You've spent several days looking around some old ruins nearby, but you haven't found much at all. As you are getting ready to set out on a new day of explorations, a dour-looking old swordsman approaches you on the street. He wears the silver cloak clasp of the town watch. "I'm Tervith, captain of the watch," he rasps. "You've been looking around the old ruins out in the Vale. Well, I think I know of one you ought to visit. Are you interested?"*

Give the players a moment to think up appropriate responses. Tervith is here to point the characters toward the adventure, so the captain takes anything short of outright hostility as an indication to explain more.

### ***Captain Tervith's request***

This is a roleplaying encounter. Tervith wants the player characters to go out to Roburn's old home and see what exactly is going on out there. He's a little suspicious of wandering adventurers, but he thinks the player characters are probably better able to handle any trouble they might run into than his own guards or any kind of town militia.

**Read Aloud:** *Tervith glances up and down the street — none of the other townsfolk are nearby. He lowers his voice. "The farmsteaders who live on the outskirts of town are worried. Strange things have been happening lately — livestock missing, sinister faces peering into windows, even sightings of beast-men in the Thirsting Wood. Early this morning, old Arim sent one of his boys into town to tell me that someone or something killed half a dozen of his sheep west of town. There's an old wizard's cottage, known as Roburn's house, not far from Arim's place, and I'm worried that some new evil is hiding out there. Do you think you could look into this?"*

Naturally, the players might have some questions. Captain Tervith answers the PCs questions to the best of his ability:

- ✓ **Who's Arim?** *"A shepherd who lives with his sons a mile or so west of town, just on this side of the Thirsting Wood. He's a steady man, and I've never known him to scare easily. Follow the track north from the middle of town; you can't miss his place."*
- ✓ **Who lives in the wizard's cottage?** *"No one now, but it used to be Roburn's house. He was a brooding, unfriendly sort who lived up in the Thirsting Wood for many years, keeping to himself. He abandoned the place about ten years ago, and hasn't been seen or heard from since. Good riddance to him."*
- ✓ **How do we find Roburn's house?** *"There's a trail leading into the forest near Arim's pasture. It's about three miles from the pasture to Roburn's house."*

- ✓ **Why don't you look into it for yourself?** *"We did, but the Thirsting Wood is a dangerous place. A couple of my men were attacked by a vicious black wolf near Roburn's house a few days ago. I'm afraid that this might be more than the town watch can handle."*
- ✓ **What's in it for us?** *"If you can drive off whoever or whatever is skulking around up there and put an end to these troubles, we'll pay you 200 gold pieces."*

Tervith is willing to pay as much as 500 gp, but in order to talk up the fee, a player character must succeed on a Diplomacy check (DC 15). When the players are done negotiating and have no more questions for Tervith, the watch captain points out the track that leads up toward Arim's house, and wishes them luck.

Ask the players whether they'd like their characters to do anything else while they're in town. For example, the players might want their characters to stock up on arrows, buy a potion, or pick up special gear such as sunrods or thunderstones if they have any money to spend. This is also a good time to ask players with spellcasting characters to choose which spells their characters prepare for the day, if they haven't done so already. When the PCs are ready to continue, go on to "Arim's pasture."

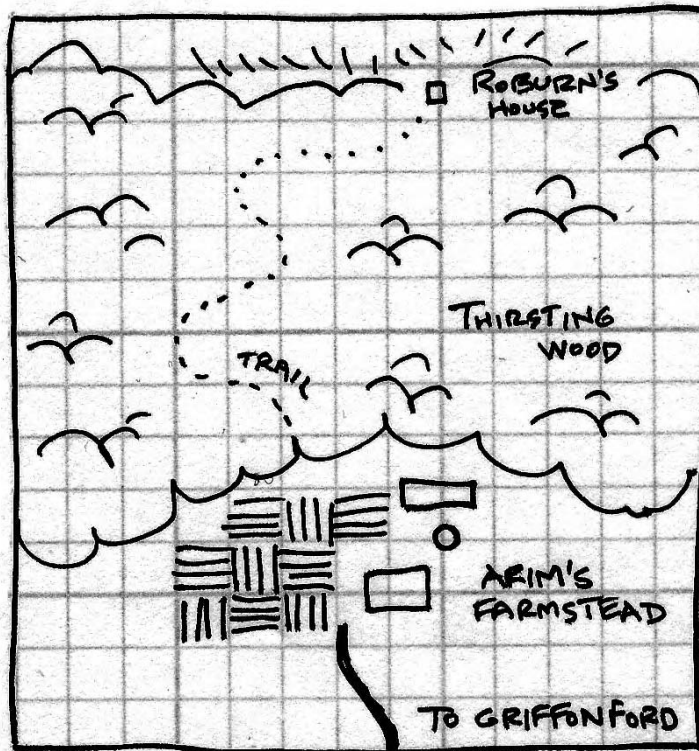
## *Arim's pasture*

This is the scene of the most recent attack and the setting-out point for the adventure. Figure 20-1 shows a map of the area. When the players tell you that their characters are ready to begin, read the following text:

**Read Aloud:** *You follow the track from Griffonford past several outlying farmsteads and herdsmen's cottages. The cart track ends near a large cottage of fieldstone and turf, surrounded by broad green pastures. You can see that one of the farther pastures is a scene of slaughter. The carcasses of half a dozen sheep lie strewn about, and the smell of blood hangs heavily in the air. None of the dead animals appear to have been eaten. Just beyond the low stone wall broods the Thirsting Wood, shadows thick and dark under the gnarled branches. An overgrown footpath leads into the woods.*

**DM Secret:** The livestock were killed during the night by the gnolls who serve Nathar, who were scrounging around Arim's farm looking for something worth stealing. They carried off two of the smaller animals and killed the rest out of spite.

**Figure 20-1:**  
A map  
of Arim's  
farmstead  
and the path  
through  
the wood.



### *Arim and his sons*

If the player characters stop at the cottage, they make the acquaintance of the old shepherd Arim and his two strapping young sons. Arim is a lean, gray-bearded fellow with a sturdy wooden quarterstaff and a leather sling at his belt. He walks with a bad limp, the result of an old injury, and he never uses two words when one will do. If the player characters question him about the night's events, he can't add much more to the story.

- ✓ **Did you see or hear anything last night?** *"No. The wind was up all night, and I didn't hear much else. I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary until sunrise, when I got up to check on the flock."*
- ✓ **Are the woods dangerous?** *"Never used to be this bad. I've taught the wolves and eagles to stay away from my flock. But there's some new beast out in the woods that has no fear of man. I won't let my lads go in there by themselves these days."*
- ✓ **Where does the path lead?** *"To Roburn's house. It's about three miles farther on. I don't go near the place; it's got an evil look to it."*

### *Examining the scene*

The players may have their characters take a closer look at the dead livestock. It's gruesome work, but the player characters might learn something for their effort. Ask the players which skills their characters are using when they study the scene. Skills that might be relevant include Knowledge (nature), Search, or Survival.

- ✓ **Knowledge (nature):** A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Knowledge (nature) skill check can determine that the dead livestock were killed by edged weapons, likely axes.
- ✓ **Search:** A character who studies the ground around the dead animals can attempt a Search check. If the character succeeds on a DC 14 check, he or she finds tracks around the slaughtered animals. (A ranger whose favored enemy is humanoid [gnoll] may add his favored enemy bonus to this check.) To get more information, a character must have the Track feat. If a character with the Track feat succeeds with a result of 18 or better, he or she determines that two creatures with wolf-like prints likely killed the sheep. On a result of 22 or better, the character also determines that the killers walked on two legs, not four, despite their wolf-like prints.
- ✓ **Survival:** To follow the tracks, a character with the Track feat must succeed on a DC 14 Survival check. The tracks lead to the footpath and follow the path north into the woods.

**DM Secret:** The strange tracks of the wolf-like creatures were left by the gnolls; their feet and legs are more canine than human in appearance.

### *What next?*

When the players tell you that they're ready to strike off in search of Roburn's house or choose to follow the tracks leading into the woods, move on to "The Thirsting Wood."

## *The Thirsting Wood*

The footpath winds through the woods toward the necromancer's old home (refer to the map shown in Figure 20-1). It's a few miles from the pasture, so it takes the characters about an hour of marching to get there. Along the way, they encounter some trouble. To set the mood for the players, use the following to describe the march:

**Read Aloud:** *The forest is dense and dark. Twisted trees with black trunks and heavy overhanging branches make the footpath seem more like a tunnel than trail. The air is warm, still, and gloomy, and there doesn't seem to be a breath of wind in here. You don't even hear any birdsong.*

### *Worg attack*

**Encounter Level (EL) 2:** About halfway to Roburn's house, the player characters run into the creature that attacked the town watch — a vicious, blood-thirsty worg. The creature has noticed Nathar's servants making use of the footpath leading through its territory, and it's waiting to ambush the next person who comes up or down the path.

**Setting up the Ambush:** To set up this encounter, draw a winding path about 1 square wide along your battle grid or play surface, if you have one. All squares off the path are considered difficult terrain — a creature must pay 2 squares of movement to enter each square of forest. Ask the players to arrange their miniatures on the battle grid in the order in which their characters are marching. You can assume that the player characters are on the path.

**Spotting the Ambush:** Next, roll a Hide check for the worg. (It's d20+4 normally, but the woods offer excellent cover, so the worg gets an extra +4 bonus, for a total of d20+8.) Beginning with the character in the lead, allow each player to roll a Spot check. Each Spot check takes a -2 penalty because the worg is 20 feet off the path.

If a character equals or beats the worg's Hide check result, he or she sees the monster. Place the worg about 20 feet from the first character who spots it, off in the woods. Allow the rest of the characters to make Spot checks too. Roll initiative, but only the worg and the character or characters who successfully spotted it may act in the first round of the fight — everybody else is surprised.

If no characters spot the worg, place it 20 feet from the last character in line. (It picks off whoever's bringing up the rear.) The worg rolls initiative and acts on the first round, but in this case all characters are surprised and no one else gets to act. When you place the worg on the battle grid, read the following:

**Read Aloud:** *Lurking in the shadows of the forest is a big wolf with a black pelt and wide, slavering jaws. It hurls itself at you with a terrible growl, its eyes ablaze with bloodlust!*

**The Worg's Tactics:** The worg is somewhat overconfident and figures that after it downs a victim, the rest of the party is likely to run off. (That's how the fighting went with the town watch, after all.) It bounds straight at the first character that saw it (or the last character in line, if no one spotted it) and attacks.

A worg that makes a successful attack can try to trip its victim; see the rules on Trip, on page 158 of the *Player's Handbook*. Given the chance, the worg attacks any prone characters when its turn comes up; attacks against prone characters receive a +4 attack bonus. Standing up after getting tripped is a move action that provokes an attack of opportunity (see page 137 of the *Player's Handbook*).

## Worg

A worg is a cruel, clever wolf almost as intelligent as a human. It has black fur and yellow eyes that seem to glow with malice. It's bigger than any natural wolf, standing 3 feet tall at the shoulder and weighing almost 300 pounds.

<b>Initiative</b>	+2	<b>Armor Class</b>	14
<b>Speed</b>	50 ft. (10 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	30
<b>Bite</b>	d20+7	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d6+4
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+4	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+6
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +3	<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	2		

**Trip:** If the worg hits with its bite attack, it can attempt to trip its opponent (d20+3 Strength check) as a free action. It must beat its opponent's Strength or Dexterity check (opponent's choice) in order to trip its foe. If the attempt fails, the opponent can't react to trip the worg.

**Scent:** The worg notices invisible creatures within 30 feet. It can take a move action to note the direction of the invisible creature. If it approaches within 5 feet, it knows which square the invisible creature is in.

**After the Battle:** If the worg is reduced to 10 hit points or less and two characters or more are still on their feet and fighting, it tries to run away — it's overconfident, but that doesn't mean it doesn't know when to call it a day. This counts as defeating the monster for purposes of awarding experience points. From the site of the worg's ambush, it's about another half-mile or so to the necromancer's cottage. Continue the adventure with "House of Roburn."

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat the worg, the party earns 600 XP.

## House of Roburn

At the end of the footpath lies the house built by the necromancer Roburn. A map of the house and the surrounding area is shown in Figure 20-2. The player characters reach the place about an hour after setting out from Arim's farmstead. When you're ready to move on to this part of the adventure, begin with the following description:

**Read Aloud:** *The footpath ends in a sizable clearing at the base of a bramble-covered hillside. A large, rambling house of fieldstone squats under the hill. Moss grows over the wooden shakes of its roof, and its small round windows are dark*

and dusty. A thin stream runs out from a crevice in the hillside near the house; the crevice is loosely covered by an iron gate. Smoke drifts skyward from the ramshackle chimney atop the house, and old oxcart leans against one wall. The house seems to have only one door, which is fashioned in a curious oval shape.

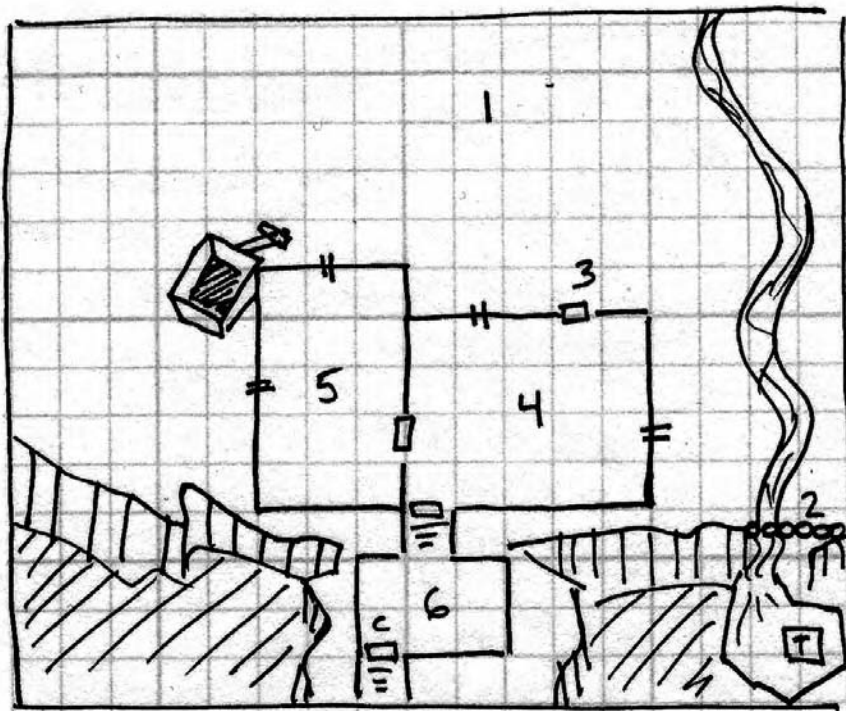
We describe the areas numbered on the map in the following sections.

### ***Encounter Area 1: The Clearing***

None of the house's denizens spend much time outside by daylight, so the clearing is almost always empty.

**Read Aloud:** *The clearing around the house is covered with tall, dry grass and bramble-bushes. There is a dusty yard immediately before the front door. The oxcart leaning against the house is old but sturdy.*

The players might fear that their characters will be seen from the house if they enter the clearing, but in truth the house's windows are so dark and dusty that no one inside can really see out at all. As long as the player characters stay reasonably quiet, the gnolls in the front hall (area 4) won't know they're out here. However, if the player characters make any loud noises — shouting or smashing things — the gnolls hear them and get ready for a fight.



**Figure 20-2:**  
The clearing  
and the  
cottage.



If the player characters wait and observe the cottage, no one comes out until nightfall, when the gnolls in area 4 emerge to begin another evening of marauding and troublemaking. If the player characters fight them here, use the statistics provided in “Encounter Area 4: The Front Hall” (and remember that gnolls defeated here won’t be waiting for the player characters in area 4).

### ***Encounter Area 2: The Spring and Gate***

A spring rises deep in the crevice and serves as the house’s well.

**Read Aloud:** *The cleft in the hillside goes back a good ways into the gloom. A small trickle of a stream not more than a foot across spills out and passes under the thickets nearby. The iron grate across the mouth of the cleft is hinged, and is secured by a rusty old padlock.*



The padlock isn’t a very good one, but it is rusty and difficult to operate (DC 25 Open Locks check). It can also be smashed off the grate by a couple solid hammer blows, but that makes enough noise to alert the gnolls in area 4. A character could also force his or her way in by wrenching the grate loose, which requires a DC 23 Strength check. Remember, characters can Take 20 on these checks if they want (see page 65 of the *Player’s Handbook*).

Inside, the cleft goes back about 20 feet, narrowing until it becomes a tight squeeze for almost anyone. Hidden around a bend in the crevice is an old wooden trap door that leads down to area 8 in the dungeon level.

### ***Encounter Area 3: The Front Door***

The house has only one entrance.

**Read Aloud:** *The cottage door is made of fitted wooden planks, still streaked by peeling yellow paint. In the center of the door is a keyhole that sits in a plate worked in the shape of a grinning devil’s face.*

The lock looks formidable, but the door is unlocked because the key is long gone. Nathar’s servants simply use an iron latch on the inside, and they secure it with a stout wooden peg if they remember to do so. The PCs can lift the latch with a thin blade or a thief’s pick (Open Lock DC 15) or force the whole door with a good enough kick (Strength check DC 23). They can use the oxcart in the clearing as an improvised battering ram (+4 bonus on Strength checks to open the door) if any player thinks to try it.

If someone tries to open the latch and fails, the gnolls in area 4 don’t notice anything. However, if someone tries to break down the door and fails the Strength check, the gnolls definitely take note. They get ready for a fight.



If the player characters don't seem to be able to get through the door, remember that they can make multiple tries to break down the door with Strength checks or even Take 20. Also, characters can use the Aid Another action to add a +2 bonus to another character's Strength check, so multiple characters cooperating and Taking 20 should open the door, especially if they think of using the oxcart to batter it down — but that will certainly give the gnolls in area 4 plenty of warning that trouble's about to show up.

**Listening at the Door:** If any character decides to listen by the door, allow a Listen check (DC 7). On a successful check, a character can make out a low, growling conversation between two or three creatures (the gnolls in area 4). Unless the character knows the language Gnoll, he or she can't make out what they're saying. A character who speaks Gnoll can quickly make out that a couple gnolls are arguing about which farmstead to loot tonight. One wants to go back to the same place they went last night, and the other wants to try someplace new.

**Looking in the Windows:** Peering in a window doesn't do much good — they're small, dark, and so dirty inside and out that nothing can be seen in either direction. A character could easily break a window in order to see into area 4, but the gnolls inside notice (and likely stab or shoot at any character's face they see peering in at them).

**Getting on the Roof:** Characters inclined to scramble on or around the house can scale the walls with a DC 20 Climb check. However, the noise of someone walking around on the roof certainly alerts the gnolls in area 4 to expect trouble.

### *Encounter Area 4: The Front Hall*

**Encounter Level (EL) 3:** Two of Nathar's gnolls use the main room of the old cottage as their guardpost. When the player characters get the door open, here's what they see:

**Read Aloud:** *The front of the house is a dark, cluttered room filled with a thick, musty odor like wet fur. There are two doors on the other side of the room. Old furnishings lie heaped up against the walls, and there are two crude bedrolls by the large hearth, where a small cookfire smolders. A pair of tall hyena-men wearing ragged leather jerkins lurk here, growling defiantly at you. "Kill the humans," one snarls.*

The gnolls have no interest in talking with the player characters and do their best to kill the PCs. One of the doors leads to area 5, the Sneak's Den, and the other leads down to the cellar (area 6), shown on the map in Figure 20-2. Neither door is locked.

**Surprise:** If the player characters opened the door without making too much noise (they used Open Lock, or got it open on the first Strength check), the gnolls are surprised and don't get to act in the surprise round. If the player characters don't know that the gnolls were in here when they opened the

door (no one attempted a Listen check at the door, or the Listen check failed), the player characters are surprised. It's possible that both the gnolls and the player characters are surprised or that neither side is surprised, in which case you can skip the surprise round and start the battle with a normal initiative roll.

**Gnoll Tactics:** If the gnolls had a chance to get ready for the fight, they're both at the far side of the room with their javelins ready. They throw their javelins at the first character they see when the door opens, and then rush up to attack with their battleaxes.

**Defeating the Gnolls:** The gnolls fight until one drops. Then the other tries to make a fighting retreat out of the room, heading for the door that leads down to area 6. Remember, it takes a move action to open a door. If the surviving gnoll makes it out, the creature joins Nathar in area 11, and fights the player characters again when they reach that room.

**Treasure:** Most of the clutter in the room isn't very valuable — mildewed old chairs, well-worn tables, and several barrels and crates of goods such as flour, molasses, sour ale, and other such staples (which Nathar and his gnolls brought with them when they moved in). Hidden under a loose stone by the hearth (Search DC 15) is a leather pouch containing 35 gold pieces and two agates worth 15 gp each.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat the gnolls, the party earns 900 XP.

## Gnolls (2)

A gnoll is a savage, hyena-headed creature that often serves a more powerful master as a marauder or guard. It stands about 7½ feet tall and wears dirty leather armor. These gnolls carry a shield, battleaxe, and a javelin.

<b>Initiative</b>	+0	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	11 each
<b>Battleaxe</b>	d20+3	<b>Battleaxe Damage</b>	1d8+2/×3
<b>Javelin</b>	d20+1	<b>Javelin Damage</b>	1d6+2
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+2	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+3
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0	<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1		

***Encounter Area 5: The Sneak's Den***

**Encounter Level (EL) 2:** This room used to be Roburn's bedchamber. It has become the lair of a choker that Nathar and his gnolls call "the Sneak." The monster hates its new neighbors, but it fears them too much to strike directly at them, so it spends a lot of time skulking about spying on Nathar and his gnolls. Nathar allows it to stay, hoping that he can use the small monster as a spy and assassin in Griffonford.

**Read Aloud:** *This room looks like it was once a comfortable bedchamber, but it is dark and dank now — it seems that a badly leaking roof overhead has allowed years of rain and wind to ruin the furnishings and the plaster. The floor is littered with the bones of small animals, and the room smells of mildew and old, rotten meat.*

The choker is hiding up in the rotting rafters overhead. Make a Hide check for the monster (d20+10). The result is the DC for Spot checks made by any characters looking around the room to see the choker before it strikes. If somebody sees the choker, continue with the following:

**Read Aloud:** *Clinging to the rafters above the door is a hideous little creature with mottled gray skin and long, spindly limbs. It hisses at you and lashes out with its spiny hands!*

If nobody sees the choker, it does not attack unless a character actually enters the old bedchamber and starts poking around. In that case, read this text instead:

**Read Aloud:** *Something hisses overhead, and then a long, snakelike arm or tentacle reaches down and tries to grab you!*

**Choker Ambush:** If nobody spots the choker before it strikes, it surprises the player characters. The monster attempts to grab one character and strangle him or her. Because it's above the player characters, it gains a +1 bonus on its attack rolls due to higher ground. It's still within sword's reach for characters below, but the mess of rotting rafters gives it some cover (+2 bonus to AC as long as it stays up in its nest). The choker has an exceptionally long reach and can easily attack characters in the room below.

If the choker is reduced to 5 hit points or less, it flees. It worms its way out of a small hole in the roof (this takes the creature one full round) and then runs off into the forest, never to be seen again.

If nobody spots the choker but nobody goes into the room and provokes it, the monster decides to stealthily follow the player characters. It attacks a character at the rear of the party when it thinks no one else is looking.

## Choker

The choker is a small, rubbery creature about 3 feet tall. Its flesh is a mottled gray-green, and it has long, spindly, boneless arms and legs. It is a vicious, clever ambusher that hides in the shadows, reaching out to seize unwary characters in its deadly grip.

<b>Initiative</b>	+6	<b>Armor Class</b>	17 (19 with cover)
<b>Speed</b>	20 ft. (4 squares), climb 10 ft.	<b>Hit Points</b>	16
<b>Tentacle*</b>	d20+6	<b>Tentacle Damage</b>	1d3+3
<b>Skill: Climb</b>	d20+13	<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+10
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +4	<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	2		

\*If the choker can make a full attack, it can make 2 tentacle attacks per round. With its quickness ability, it can move and make a full attack, or make a full attack and then make an additional tentacle attack.

*Improved Grab:* If the choker hits with a tentacle attack, it can attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. Its grapple check is d20+5. If it wins the grapple check, it establishes a hold and can constrict.

*Constrict:* The choker deals 1d3+3 damage if it wins a grapple check against its victim.

*Quickness:* The choker can take an extra move action or standard action (including an extra tentacle attack) on its turn each round.

**Treasure:** A few months ago, the choker killed a bandit who had thought he would use Roburn's house as his hideout. The unfortunate outlaw's goods and belongings still lie in the mildewed mess on the floor, including two sun-rods, a *potion of cure light wounds*, and a masterwork short sword.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat the choker, the party earns 600 XP.

### Encounter Area 6: The Cellar

The cellar seems to be a typical cellar — dank, dusty, and lined with wooden shelves on the brick walls for the storage of food.

**Read Aloud:** *A flight of narrow wooden stairs descends from the front room of the cottage to a small cellar below the house. The cellar is floored and walled with brick, and it's filled with the usual clutter of dusty wooden shelves and old*

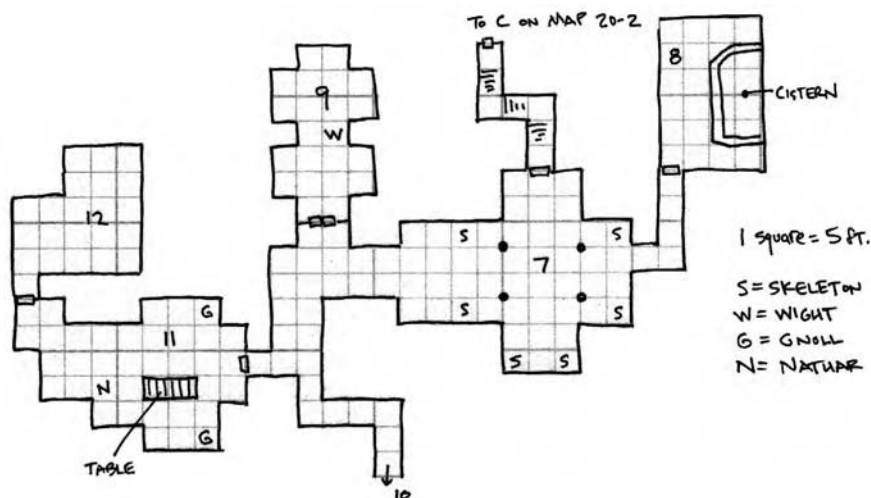
stores. You can see that part of the wall opposite the foot of the stairs is actually a concealed door, its surface plastered and painted to match the surrounding brick. It's standing ajar, and flickering green light leaks out from around the edges. Beyond is another set of stairs continuing down.

The gnolls are supposed to shut the concealed door when they come or go, but they're lazy and don't often do so. If the door is actually closed, it requires a DC 20 Search check for someone who doesn't know it's there to locate it. The stairs lead down to the dungeon level (see "The dungeon below").

## The dungeon below

The biggest secret of Roburn's house is that the cottage in the clearing was only a small part of the necromancer's lair. In the hill behind the house, Roburn excavated a small dungeon where he kept his valuables and performed his sinister rites and experiments. A map of the dungeon under Roburn's house is shown in Figure 20-3.

The floors in the dungeon level are made of smooth, well-worn flagstones, and the walls are dressed masonry. Torches enchanted with *continual flame* illuminate most of the rooms.



**Figure 20-3:**  
The  
dungeon  
below.

***Encounter Area 7: Roburn's Sleepless Warriors***

**Encounter Level (EL) 2:** The door leading to this room from the stairs is made of iron, but it isn't locked. The chamber beyond holds six human warrior skeletons under Nathar's command.

**Read Aloud:** *Two torches burning with eerie green flames illuminate this large chamber. The room consists of two intersecting vaults, with four pillars of stone in its center. Glimmers of light show two passageways leading into the gloom. Standing in two silent files on each side of the room are six skeletons, each carrying a round shield and a curved scimitar. With the clicking and rasping of old bones, the skeletons turn toward you and advance with scimitars raised!*

The undead monsters have been directed to attack any living creature that enters the room without giving a special pass-sign (a clenched fist, held across the chest). Nathar has taught the gnolls in his service the pass-sign, so gnolls coming and going through this room aren't attacked by the skeletons. Roll initiative for the player characters and the skeletons when the player characters enter the room.

If the player characters forced one of the gnolls in area 4 to retreat and pursue the monster closely, the gnoll gives the pass-sign as it runs through this room. Characters who are within 30 feet of the gnoll when it does so can make out the sign with a DC 10 Spot check. Realizing that the fist-to-chest motion instructs the skeletons not to attack requires a DC 25 Sense Motive check (or a very good guess on the part of an observant player).

**Skeleton Attack:** Skeletons are mindless automatons that attack with relentless determination if ordered to do so. The skeletons simply move toward the nearest character and attack. They continue until destroyed, turned by a cleric, or until the player characters are all dead or retreat from the room.

**DM Secret:** Nathar did not animate these skeletons, and he can command the undead warriors only because long ago Roburn, their original creator, ordered them to follow the commands of anyone displaying a brooch in the shape of a silver skull. Vesgin gave this brooch to Nathar when he sent him back to Griffonford.

**Treasure:** No treasure is hidden in this room, but Nathar and his minions use two of the wings of the room to store more supplies, including a couple of water casks, several sacks of flour, small barrels of dried apples and smoked meat, and other useful stores.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat the skeletons, the party earns 600 XP.

## Skeletons (6)

The magically animated bones of a human warrior, the skeleton carries a large steel shield and a scimitar. It is mindless and strictly follows the orders given to it by its creator.

<b>Initiative</b>	+5	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	6
<b>Scimitar</b>	d20+1	<b>Scimitar Damage</b>	1d6+1/18–20
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	⅓		

*Damage Reduction:* The skeleton has damage reduction 5/bludgeoning, so piercing and slashing weapons deal –5 damage against a skeleton.

*Immunity to Cold:* The skeleton is immune to cold damage.

*Undead:* The skeleton is immune to critical hits, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, sleep effects, sneak attacks, and stunning. It is not subject to fatigue or exhaustion.

### Encounter Area 8: The Cistern Room

**Encounter Level (EL) 3:** The door to this room is made of wood. It's damp and sticks a little (DC 8 Strength check to open), but it isn't locked. Nathar and his gnolls don't come in here, because the room is infested with giant centipedes.

**Read Aloud:** *A big stone cistern brimming with dark water fills most of this room. On the far side, an old wooden ladder leads up into a shaft about 3 feet wide and disappears into the shadows overhead. The whole room is dank and smells faintly rotten, and the masonry is in bad repair — tree roots pierce the ceiling and walls, and earth spills through the holes. You can hear a faint rustling sound somewhere above.*

The spring in the hillside beside the cottage lies almost directly over this chamber and feeds the cistern here through a hidden pipe. With this supply of water, Roburn could have hidden out beneath his own cottage for weeks had he needed to. The wooden ladder leads about 15 feet up to the trapdoor hidden in the back of the spring's cleft (area 2). Roburn had the shaft built to provide a secret escape route from the dungeon.

The centipedes lurk in the tree roots and crevices in the walls. When suitable prey (such as the player characters) enters the room, the crawling monsters scuttle out and attack. Roll initiative.



## Monstrous centipedes (5)

The monstrous centipede is a hungry scavenger 6 feet long. It attacks anything that might turn out to be food.

<b>Initiative</b>	+2	<b>Armor Class</b>	14
<b>Speed</b>	40 ft. (8 squares), climb 40 ft.	<b>Hit Points</b>	4
<b>Bite</b>	d20+2	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d6–1
<b>Skill: Climb</b>	d20+10	<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+10
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	½		

**Poison:** If the centipede hits with its bite attack, the victim must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 10) or take 1d3 points of Dexterity damage. Check again 1 minute later.

**Vermin:** The centipede is immune to mind-affecting effects.

The centipedes are quite hungry, and don't give up until they're dead or they've managed to down a character — at which point all the remaining centipedes swarm the character on the floor and begin feeding. Characters who choose to retreat can shut the door on the centipedes, trapping them in the cistern room; the centipedes can't get through the door when it's closed.

When Nathar or his servants need water, the necromancer's apprentice orders skeletons from area 7 to fetch water. The centipedes ignore the skeletons because animated bones don't have enough meat on them to be food.

**Treasure:** Hidden in the bottom of the cistern is a large jar of thick green glass, well sealed with wax (Search DC 10, if any character actually looks in the water). It contains a small leather pouch with 30 platinum pieces and a *potion of invisibility*. Roburn placed it here long ago in case he ever needed to flee through the trap door.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat the monstrous centipedes, the party earns 900 XP.

### *Encounter Area 9: The Crypt*

**Encounter Level (EL) 3:** The door leading to this room is a locked door of iron plate (Open Lock DC 25, or Strength DC 28 to force open). Nathar found the key during his explorations of the dungeon and carries it on his belt.

**Read Aloud:** *A large crypt lies on the far side of the iron door. A half-dozen alcoves cut into the walls hold moldering bones, some still dressed in the rotting remains of their funereal finery. Hunched by the floor, a gaunt, pale figure clad in the shredded remains of black robes crouches. It looks up when the door opens, and an evil light flickers in its eyes. “At last,” it rasps in a cold voice. “At last!” Then it scrambles to its feet and leaps at you!*

Vesgin warned Nathar to never open the crypt, and so far the necromancer’s apprentice has avoided the temptation — even though he strongly suspects that some desirable treasure must be hidden within. It’s lucky for Nathar that he hasn’t looked in here yet, because the stout iron door of the crypt imprisons a very dangerous monster — a hateful, murderous type of undead known as a wight. The wight has been trapped in the crypt for many years, and it furiously attacks any living creature that enters the crypt.



The wight is a dangerous monster. If it successfully attacks a player character, it deals one negative level to that character. When a character acquires negative levels equal to his or her own experience level, the character dies — so it only takes two hits for the wight to kill a 2nd-level character no matter how many hit points the character has. See “Energy Drain,” on page 293 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*. Try to encourage a player whose character has been hit once by the wight to back out of the fight.

**The Wight’s Tactics:** The wight has no real tactics other than launching itself at the closest character and battering him or her to death with its life-draining slam attacks. It tries to kill off one character rather than injure several because it knows that if it kills a character, that fallen character will rise as a new wight under its control. (The rest of the player characters should seriously consider fleeing for their lives if the wight turns one of their comrades into a second wight. Running now allows them to live to fight another day, when they can come back at full power and possibly with help to take on the wights.)

**DM Secret:** The wight is none other than Roburn himself. His apprentice Vesgin betrayed the old necromancer before fleeing Griffonford. Vesgin imprisoned his former master alive in the crypt. Roburn died a few days later, so consumed with hate for his former apprentice that he awoke into undeath as a wight — still imprisoned in his own dungeon. Vesgin has no idea that Roburn “survived” his experience, but he warned Nathar to stay out of the crypt anyway, simply because Vesgin does not want his own apprentice to figure out how he repaid his former master.

**Treasure:** None of the bodies entombed here have any funerary wealth worth stealing, but Roburn himself carries several valuables that he has long since forgotten about. Around his neck is a fine silver chain set with moonstones (worth 400 gp), and on his hands he still wears two rings — one a gold ring with an emerald and the signet of Roburn’s house (worth 350 gp and identifying him as the ancient master of the place), and the other a +1 ring of protection.

## Wight

This undead creature possesses a semblance of life through the sheer force of its own hate and violence. It resembles a desiccated human corpse, with tight leathery skin, needle-like teeth, and eyes aglow with evil.

<b>Initiative</b>	+1	<b>Armor Class</b>	15 (16 with ring)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	26
<b>Slam</b>	d20+3	<b>Slam Damage</b>	1d4+1
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +5	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Possessions</b>	+1 ring of protection (worn), jewelry (see "Treasure")		
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	3		

**Energy Drain:** If the wight successfully hits a living creature with its slam attack, it inflicts 1 negative level on its victim and gains 5 temporary hit points. (A character suffers a –1 penalty to all attack rolls, saves, and checks for each negative level he or she currently has, and dies if the number of negative levels equals or exceeds his or her own character level or Hit Dice.) The save DC to remove the negative level is 14.

**Create Spawn:** Any humanoid slain by a wight becomes a wight in 1d4 rounds. Spawn are under the command of the wight that created them.

**Undead:** The wight is immune to critical hits, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, sleep spells, sneak attacks, and stunning. It is not subject to fatigue or exhaustion.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat the wight, the party earns 900 XP.

### ***Encounter Area 10: The Back Door***

This passageway continues on for more than 200 feet, eventually ending in a thick wooden door on the other side of the hill. Roburn built this as yet another secret escape route.

**Read Aloud:** *The ceiling of this narrow passage is only about 5 feet high. The passage runs straight for a couple hundred feet with very little change, although you pass several spots where roots have grown through the ceiling. It ends at a stoutly built wooden door, secured on your side by a thick iron bar. A small glimmer of daylight peeks around the edges.*

If the player characters open the door (it takes a DC 15 Strength check), they find that it opens into a dense thicket on the far side of the hill from where

Roburn's cottage stands. The surrounding foliage is so thick that the door can't be seen by anyone more than 10 or 15 feet away, and there are no trails or sites of interest beyond — only more of the rugged hills and tangled trees of the Thirsting Wood.

***Encounter Area 11: Nathar's Workroom***

**Encounter Level (EL) 5:** Nathar spends most of his time puttering around in this spacious workroom, engaged in various experiments and studies. Two gnolls wait here (three if a gnoll from area 4 escaped), ready to answer any commands Nathar issues. Begin with this description:

**Read Aloud:** *A piece of parchment is stuck on this door by a nail. It reads "Stay Out!" in Common.*



The door leading to this room is closed, but not locked. If any character tries to listen at the door, have the player make a Listen check. On a result of 7 or better, he or she can discern the low rumbling of a furnace at work, sounds of bubbling, and low growling voices conversing with each other. (The gnolls are muttering to each other in Gnoll, arguing about what's for dinner.)

When the characters open the door, read the following aloud:

**Read Aloud:** *This chamber is clearly an alchemist's workshop. Against one wall, a small furnace crackles and roars, and a big table in the middle of the room is cluttered with burners, retorts, alembics, and coils of copper tubing. A large bookshelf stands against the other wall. A dark-bearded human in black robes stands by the bookshelf, consulting a thick tome of some kind, while close by the door a pair of tall, hyena-like creatures watch him at his work. All three look up as the door opens, and the man in the robes scowls fiercely. "Impudent fools!" he snarls. "Graad, Thor-Kul — slay them!"*



This is a tough fight for a party of four 2nd-level characters. If the player characters surprise Nathar and his servants, they have a much better chance, but if the player characters are already beaten up by the time they get to this room, this encounter might finish them off. If the player characters have any healing magic available, they might want to use it before they open the door — which is why there's a warning sign posted. (Note that they have no chance of surprising Nathar if one of the gnolls from area 4 escaped.)

**Starting the Fight:** If the player characters listened at the door and heard the gnolls talking, the PCs are ready for a fight. They surprise Nathar and his gnolls and may act in the surprise round. If the player characters just opened the door or didn't hear the gnolls, roll initiative normally.

The gnolls are standing in the squares marked "G" when the fight begins, and Nathar is in the square marked "N." You might want to sketch the room out on your battle grid, if you have one, and place miniatures to represent Nathar and the two (or three) gnolls on the grid.

**Tactics:** The gnolls stay close to the door and try to keep the player characters hemmed in this side of the room. They fight with their axes, and unlike the gnolls up in area 4, both fight to the death — Nathar is watching them, after all.

Nathar himself hangs back away from the melee and hurls spells at the player characters. He casts a spell each round if he can, beginning with *blindness/deafness* (to blind a PC archer or spellcaster) or *ray of enfeeblement* (to weaken a strong-looking character mixing it up with the gnolls). He then uses *summon swarm* or *summon monster I* to conjure a bat swarm or a Small fiendish monstrous scorpion behind the player characters. After that, he

attacks with *scorching ray*, *magic missile*, or his *wand of burning hands*. The necromancer saves his *chill touch* and *ghoul touch* spells for dealing with any player characters who get past his gnolls and try to close with him. He attacks with his dagger only as a last resort.

Nathar is currently protected by his *mage armor* spell, which increases his AC from 12 to 16. He casts the spell every day just for occasions such as this.



Remember, a spellcaster can avoid an attack of opportunity from a threatening opponent by taking a 5-foot step away from him before casting, or by making a successful Concentration skill check (DC 16 for 1st-level spells, or DC 17 for 2nd-level spells).

**Defeating Nathar:** If Nathar is reduced to 5 hit points or less, he tries to escape. The workroom is something of a trap because there's only one way in. If the player characters are between him and the door leading back to area 7, Nathar flees back through the door leading to area 12, and then closes and locks the door. He drinks his *potion of cure light wounds* and gets ready to blast the player characters with whatever spells or wand charges he has left if they try to come in after him.

**Treasure:** This gear in Nathar's workroom constitutes a fully equipped alchemical laboratory, worth 500 gp. In addition, several of the books on the bookshelf are rare and valuable; one is worth 250 gp, another 100 gp, and three more are worth 50 gp each. Most of the books deal with magical theory and necromantic studies, but they don't actually hold any spells. Nathar keeps his spellbook in area 12.

## Gnolls (2)

A gnoll is a savage, hyena-headed creature that often serves a more powerful master as a marauder or guard. It stands about 7½ feet tall and wears dirty leather armor. These gnolls carry a shield, battleaxe, and a javelin.

<b>Initiative</b>	+0	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	11 each
<b>Battleaxe</b>	d20+3	<b>Battleaxe Damage</b>	1d8+2/×3
<b>Javelin</b>	d20+1	<b>Javelin Damage</b>	1d6+2
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+2	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+3
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0	<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1		

## Nathar, apprentice to Vesgin

Nathar is a short, saturnine fellow with a swarthy complexion, a short stiff beard, and a perpetually sour look to his face. He wears robes of black and carries a large, wavy-bladed dagger at his belt. He is impatient, domineering, and short-tempered.

<b>Initiative</b>	+2	<b>Armor Class</b>	16
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	20
<b>Dagger</b>	d20+3	<b>Dagger Damage</b>	1d4+1/19–20
<b>Skill: Concentration</b>	d20+9	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+2
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral evil
<b>Possessions</b>	+1 dagger, +1 cloak of resistance, wand of burning hands (caster level 2), potion of cure light wounds		
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	4		

Spells Prepared:

- ✓ 0-level — *acid splash*, *detect magic*, *read magic*, *touch of fatigue*
- ✓ 1st-level — *chill touch* (touch attack d20+2, save DC 13, 4 touches), *mage armor* (already cast), *magic missile* (2 missiles), *ray of enfeeblement* (touch attack d20+4, 1d6+2 Str penalty), *summon monster I*
- ✓ 2nd-level — *blindness/deafness* (save DC 14), *ghoul touch* (save DC 14), *scorching ray* (touch attack d20+4), *summon swarm*

Wand: Nathar has a *wand of burning hands* (caster level 2) with 20 charges (save DC 11).

Nathar's ability scores are Strength 10, Dexterity 14, Constitution 14, Intelligence 15, Wisdom 8, Charisma 12.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat Nathar and the two gnolls, the party earns 1,800 XP. (Consider it a victory for the PCs if Nathar flees to area 12.) Add another 300 XP if one of the gnolls from area 4 is present for the battle.

### Encounter Area 12: Nathar's Chambers

When Nathar tires of puttering around the laboratory, he withdraws to this room. It formerly served as Roburn's own quarters in the dungeon, and many of the old furnishings are still useful.

If Nathar managed to retreat to this room from area 11, the door is locked (Open Lock DC 25), and partially barricaded (Strength DC 24 to open). Otherwise, it opens easily. When the player characters enter, read the following.

**Read Aloud:** *A large bed covered in sleeping furs sits in this room, alongside a small writing desk covered with parchment, a brazier full of warm coals, and a large trunk. Two tapestries hang from the walls; one depicts a sage in his tower, and the other shows a starry night.*

**Nathar's Last Stand:** If Nathar is here, he fights like a cornered rat. Refer to the sidebar "Nathar, apprentice to Vesgin" for his statistics. If he runs short on spells, he uses his *wand of burning hands* to keep his attackers at bay. Nathar is quite proud and arrogant and won't consider surrender — he fears the revenge that his master Vesgin might exact if he gives up too easily.

**Treasure:** The trunk contains an assortment of traveling clothes and other elements of a well-to-do wizard's wardrobe. None are particularly valuable. However, the trunk has a secret compartment (Search DC 15) that conceals a pouch with 60 platinum pieces, 4 tourmalines worth 30 gp apiece, and a *scroll of vampiric touch*. (Nathar is saving the scroll to scribe into his spellbook, anticipating that he will soon master more advanced magic.)

Nathar's spellbook sits in the drawer of the writing desk. It contains all the spells noted in his statistics, plus the following spells:

- ✓ 0-level: *disrupt undead, mage hand, mending, resistance*
- ✓ 1st-level: *comprehend languages, detect secret doors, feather fall, grease*
- ✓ 2nd-level: *resist energy, see invisibility, summon monster II*

Naturally, these spells will be of interest to a player character wizard.

Also on the writing desk is a letter from Nathar to Vesgin, which reads:

*Master Vesgin:*

*As you have instructed, I have established myself in the house of your one-time mentor, Roburn. I discovered several interesting texts in the secret workshop below the house, and have found them quite elucidating. In the meantime, I have made a small beginning toward gathering about me such servants as you may find useful when you make your return to Griffonford. The gnolls are filthy savages, but they are hungry for the chance to fall on the town. I think they will do nicely.*

*I trust you received Roburn's map to the Shrine of Emerald Skulls? I made a copy for myself in case some misfortune befell your messenger. I shall forward it at once if you did not receive the original.*



*Eagerly awaiting your next instructions,*

*Your obedient servant,*

*Nathar*

Below the letter is a hand-drawn map, which shows the location of a place marked “Shrine of Emerald Skulls.” The map, and the evil shrine whose location it reveals, are not described in this sample adventure. Feel free to use this as a stepping-stone to an adventure you design yourself, which may or may not involve more of Vesgin’s minions, or perhaps even the original necromancer’s apprentice himself.

**Experience Points Award:** If the player characters defeat Nathar a second and final time in this chamber, the party earns 1,350 XP.

## *Concluding the adventure*

After the player characters defeat Nathar and his gnolls, the mischief around Griffonford’s western farmsteads comes to an end — for now. Captain Tervith of the town watch makes good on his promised payment. Moreover, he assembles a large company of townsfolk and militia to march up to Roburn’s house, block up the entrance to the cellar dungeon with rubble, and then burn the house down over the place, just to make sure that no other evil creature finds a lair there.

If the player characters show Tervith the letter from Nathar to Vesgin, the watch captain immediately recognizes the name of Lord Averoth’s sinister younger brother. He arranges an interview for the player characters with Lord Tardin, who questions them closely about everything they found in and around Roburn’s house. (This is a great opportunity for the players to have some fun relating the tales of their own cleverness, bravery, and luck, if they’re so inclined.) In return, Lord Tardin fills in the players on the story of Roburn, Vesgin’s fall into evil, and his brother’s flight from justice — so feel free to sum up the back story outlined in the “Adventure premise” section for the players.

As for what comes next, that’s up to you. You can use the map that the player characters find in area 12 to point the players toward a new adventure of your own devising; feel free to change the Shrine of Emerald Skulls into anything else you need to describe the dungeon you’d like the player characters to explore.

## Making the Adventure Tougher

The *Necromancer's Apprentice* adventure should be reasonably challenging for a party of four 2nd-level or 3rd-level characters. Some encounters will be easy, and others should be a little harder. However, if you have more than five player characters in the party or if the average level of the party is 4th level or higher, you might want to increase the difficulty of the adventure by making the fights tougher. Here are a few suggestions:

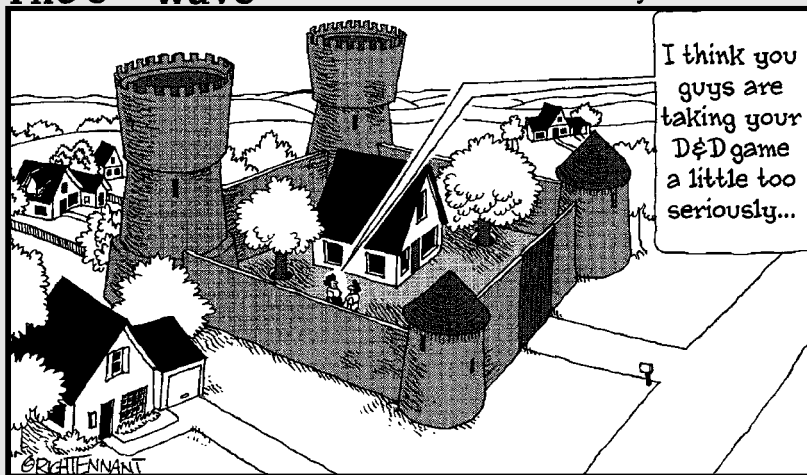
- ✓ **Worg Attack:** Add a second worg or change the worg into a fiendish dire wolf (both EL 4).
- ✓ **Encounter Area 4: The Front Hall:** Add a third gnoll (EL 4) or fourth gnoll (EL 5), or change the gnolls to bugbears (EL 4).
- ✓ **Encounter Area 7: Roburn's Sleepless Warriors:** Change the six human warrior skeletons to a single chimera skeleton (EL 4) or three owlbear skeletons (EL 5).
- ✓ **Encounter Area 8: Cistern Room:** Change the monstrous centipedes to a single centipede swarm (EL 4).
- ✓ **Encounter Area 9: The Crypt:** Replace the wight with a mummy (EL 5). Roburn's story remains the same, except that Vesgin killed and embalmed him before leaving.
- ✓ **Encounter Area 11: Nathar's Workroom:** Replace the gnolls with bugbears (EL 6), or make Nathar a 5th-level necromancer (EL 6). This gives him 4 more hit points and two more spells: *vampiric touch* and *lightning bolt*.

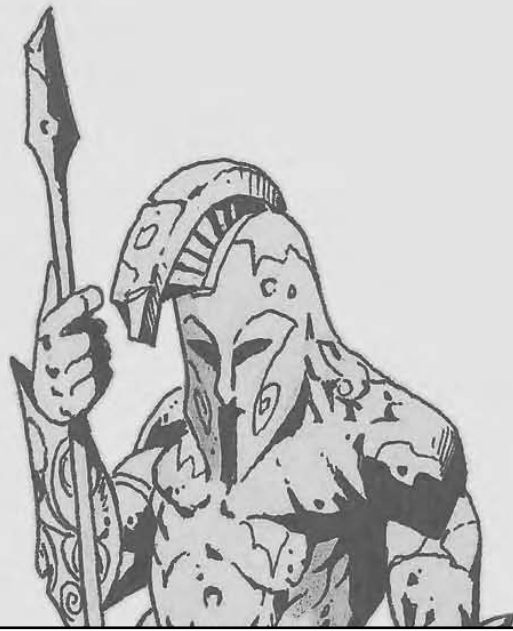
# Part IV

# Building a Campaign

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant





### *In this part . . .*

**O**kay, you've made your own adventure. The next step for the renaissance Dungeon Master is to turn his or her game into a campaign. In this section, we discuss how to build a campaign, how to move from unrelated adventures into a campaign format with ease and elegance, and how to slowly grow the scope of your campaign. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither should your campaign be built in one session!



## Chapter 21

# Building a Continuous Story

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Borrowing inspiration from your favorite sources
  - ▶ Examining story themes
  - ▶ Creating a dungeon-of-the-week campaign
  - ▶ Using what the players give you
- 

Maybe you've run a few games of D&D for your game group. Now you want to start shaping those early sessions into the beginning of an ongoing campaign. Sure, you could start over and plan the campaign from the beginning, but why go to that trouble if you've been having fun and the players have grown fond of their characters? Those early adventures could have been unrelated to the Big Story you want to start building, or you can find dangling plot threads (such as an escaped villain) that you can weave into the Big Story. Suppose a goblin warrior escaped in one of your first adventures. The player characters probably were bummed by the fact that one of the monsters got away, but more than likely they didn't give it a second thought after the next encounter or adventure began. What if that goblin warrior makes a deal with an evil wizard or a demon, or what if he just happened to be the son of the goblin chieftain? When he shows up again, more powerful, better equipped, and leading a war band of dangerous goblins, the player characters are going to be shocked, amazed, and sure that you planned the whole thing from the beginning. In their eyes, you're the best Dungeon Master ever! And that's just the way it should be.

But how do you build a continuous story for your D&D campaign? Really, you do it by adding recurring elements one adventure at a time. You might have the exact picture in your head of where you want the campaign to go, or you might decide to figure it out along the way, but if you take it one step at a time, before you know it, you'll have a campaign developing that keeps the players guessing and coming back each session to see what happens next.

## *Building a Campaign*

The term *campaign* refers to the ongoing game created by the Dungeon Master and his or her fellow players. It follows the linked adventures of a group of player characters. A campaign can have a single ongoing storyline, such as the quest to overthrow an evil kingdom, to save the peaceful lands from the ravages of an escalating war, or to destroy a terrible artifact from another realm. Then again, a campaign might follow several shorter plots, as long as the setting and player characters remain more or less the same.

A good campaign requires a bit more than simply stringing adventures together. The following sections examine some of the details you should consider as you plan out your D&D campaign.

### *Creating a world*

The core rulebooks for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game suggest a world set in an era of medieval technology, where magic works and monsters are real. As you create your own campaign world, you'll add details to this world. Whether you create everything yourself, use an existing campaign setting (such as FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON), or mix and match between the two extremes, a campaign is more than a backdrop or a series of related adventures. It's everything in your imaginary D&D world except for the player characters. A well-run campaign seems to unfold around the player characters, making them feel a part of something real and exciting.

Consistency is the key to a good campaign. When the player characters return to a town for supplies and to rest, they should recognize the place and the people that inhabit it. After you've established a level of consistency, making occasional changes keeps the campaign vibrant and alive. If the player characters come back to find that their favorite inn is now being run by the daughter of their old friend the innkeeper, they experience a change that doesn't really affect them directly but makes them feel as though their characters exist in a living world.

### *Using context*

You need to decide the context in which the player characters are placed. The context doesn't need to be obvious right from the beginning (and if you're approaching this after a few sessions, it probably isn't), but after you

figure it out, you can more easily design adventures and set goals for the campaign. What's the setting of your campaign? Will your adventures center around a frontier town surrounded by monster-infested wilderness? Is there one gigantic dungeon that the player characters will explore for the first five or ten levels of their adventuring careers? Or do you expect to present the heroes with a campaign that features mystery, intrigue, and skullduggery in a great, decadent city oppressed by evil wizards?

Context might relate to the player characters. Are they mercenaries, or do they work for a patron? Are they freelance adventurers in it for the gold and excitement, or do they have a larger sense of purpose that sends them into the dungeon every week? The initial context you create might have to evolve based on the decisions the players make when roleplaying their characters; see "Building on What the Players Give You," later in this chapter.



The best way to maintain the context and build upon it is to be consistent. To keep your campaign consistent, you need to take notes. Be consistent on names, places, and details — both large and small. If the barmaid the PCs meet at the Open Door Inn is Lani one week and Kati the next, the illusion of a consistent and real world is broken. If the bell over the door to the general store jingles when the PCs enter the first time, it should jingle every time — unless you have a reason for making a change.

Another way to build story and campaign is by keeping track of time. Track the passing of seasons, the change in the weather, the coming and going of holidays, the schedule of caravans — all this and more helps you build a calendar for your campaign and give it a sense of time and reality.

Along with the passage of time, use change to show that your campaign is alive. Events occur all the time in the real world, and they should take place in your campaign world, as well. Prices rise and fall. New characters come and go. Dry spells lead to drought. Long periods of rain or snow lead to floods. Leaders change. New shops open. Not every event needs to lead to an adventure or be campaign-shattering in nature. They just need to happen to show that the campaign is alive and things happen regardless of the actions of the player characters.

On the other hand, the actions of the player characters should also have an effect on the campaign. If the PCs break the law, they become unwelcome in the town. If they cause trouble for the local crime lord, they run the risk of becoming a target of the underworld. If they save the town from a terrible evil, the town reacts in a positive fashion. Your campaign should be a reactive environment, allowing the actions of the PCs to be catalysts for change as well as magnets for adventures.

## *Building on past events*

Use past events from previous adventures to provide motivation, drama, and consistency. If you use what has gone before to prepare for what is still to come, you create a campaign that is more than just a series of unrelated adventures.

Recurring nonplayer characters provide a powerful tool for bringing the past back into the present. These can be helpful or ambivalent NPCs, such as various town folk who trade with the player characters or provide news and information on a regular basis. They can also be opponents and villains who keep coming back to challenge the player characters. Don't overuse this technique; when you use recurring characters with care and precision, you create a more realistic campaign that remembers its past and the past of the player characters.

Allow the player characters to develop relationships that go beyond the adventures they participate in. Friendships and rivalries, love interests, mentors and patrons, helpful informants — all these relationships and more should be available to the player characters in your campaign. Let them develop naturally over time, as recurring characters come into and out of the lives of the PCs.

Allow for change in the campaign. As the player characters get to know the campaign world and become comfortable, change things. If the leader of the night watch has become a trusted and too-often-relied-upon friend to the PCs, have him killed in the line of duty. If the King's Road was once peaceful and well protected, make it become increasingly dangerous to travel. Such changes intrigue players and make them anxious to find out the reasons behind them.



When the player characters develop relationships, you can use these to motivate them and spin off adventures. A trusted merchant needs the PCs to protect a shipment, a friend is kidnapped, or a helpful monastery winds up the target of an evil enemy. Don't overuse this technique or the player characters will never make any attachments, but every so often you can hit them where it hurts and spur the campaign in a new direction.

Always look for ways to foreshadow future events in current adventures, and look for opportunities to turn previous events into hints of upcoming plots even when you didn't originally plan for it that way.





## ***Finding inspiration***

Depending on who you ask, there are anywhere from one to a dozen or more basic stories. Certainly, many D&D adventures follow one of several very common plot structures — plot structures shared by any number of novels,

comic book storylines, or action movies. For the purposes of having fun in your D&D game, feel free to borrow from your favorite sources as you work on building adventures and campaigns. Obviously, you have to watch out that you don't use something that the players will recognize and figure out immediately, but you can alleviate that by changing and adding details.

Where should you look for inspiration? Start with fantasy novels and movies. A villain, a plot, a monster, a kingdom — something in your favorite fantasy novel or movie is just itching to get into your D&D campaign. Change a name, alter an appearance, give a character a different race or class, and soon the inspiration begins to morph into something that is almost completely your own.

Don't stop at the fantasy section, though. You can do the same thing with almost any genre and any medium. That new techno-thriller you just read? That would make a great D&D adventure! You just need to “fantasy” it up so that it fits into your campaign. Turn a terrorist cell into a demonic cult, make a main bad guy a vampire, and change a real city's name to Waterdeep (for example), and you have the makings of an exciting series of D&D adventures.



Other sources of inspiration include comic books, movies and television series of all types, computer games, and any other idea-generating activities you participate in. You can basically take the story you want to borrow and perform only the changes necessary to make it into a D&D story, or you can simply use it as inspiration for storylines of your own creation. A few stories, endless variation. That's the secret. Now you know.

## ***Choosing themes for adventures and campaigns***

Themes help you and the players approach the game. You can have an overarching theme for the whole campaign, or you can vary the theme from adventure to adventure. Remember the original *Star Trek* television series? The overarching theme of the series was action and adventure with moral overtones as Captain Kirk and his crew explored the vast reaches of space. Every so often, however, the theme varied in individual episodes. The usual serious episodes (“The City on the Edge of Forever,” for example) sometimes gave way to lighter fare (such as “A Piece of the Action” or “The Trouble with Tribbles”). Even so, it still remained *Star Trek*. You can do the same thing in your campaign.

In the following subsections, we discuss some themes you might want to base individual adventures on or perhaps use for your entire campaign.

### ***Action/adventure***

Most D&D adventures and campaigns fall under this theme, where characters have a task to accomplish and obstacles to overcome. Such adventures are full of . . . well, action and adventure! It's the stuff that D&D is made of. Exploring dungeons, visiting fantastic locations, battling terrible monsters — that's D&D!



We suggest that you use this theme as the overall theme of your campaign, and then vary the themes of individual adventures every so often for a change of pace and to keep the players guessing.

### ***Comedy***

Comedy is hard. It's hard to do humor well, hard to maintain through an entire adventure (let alone an entire campaign), and it often causes game groups to fall apart because no one takes the game seriously when everything is presented as a joke.



Don't present *every single thing* as a joke in a comedic adventure — doing so makes it very difficult for the players to take the game seriously and could cause the game group to fall apart. Remember, many great comedies use a conventional, ostensibly serious storyline as a place for the gags, wisecracks, and caricatures to shine.

That said, as a change of pace, a good humorous D&D adventure every now and then can energize a campaign. When it works, it's memorable. When it falls flat, it has the potential to cause irreparable harm to your campaign. The purpose of a comedy-themed adventure is fun for fun's sake, setting up humorous situations that have little or no actual danger or tragedy associated with them. Plans (both villains' and player characters') go awry, amusing NPCs are commonplace, and encounters tend to be strange and peculiar. Imagine using *A Fish Called Wanda* or *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* as the inspiration for a D&D adventure and you begin to see what a comedy-themed session could look like.



What might work best for your campaign is to limit the comedic element to one or two NPCs who show up occasionally to provide comic relief. Interaction with these NPCs is best handled in small doses.

### ***Espionage***

Active and grim, the espionage theme involves political intrigue, spying, assassination, sabotage, and other cloak-and-dagger activities that usually require intricate planning, stealth, and roleplaying. This theme is hard to maintain over the course of an entire campaign, but it makes for powerful adventures when used sparingly.

### ***Exploration***

Similar to action/adventure, the difference here is that the search and discovery of new places tends to be the point of each adventure and perhaps the entire campaign. An exploration-themed campaign works if you set up a strange new land for the player characters to explore and that becomes the driving force of all your adventures. Although this theme is another example of a theme that's hard to sustain over an entire campaign, exploration-themed adventures form the basis of some of the most memorable game sessions that we've ever Dungeon Mastered.

### ***Horror***

Horror-themed adventures or campaigns require both the players and their characters to be scared. This is almost impossible to accomplish unless the players are willing to get into the mindset and treat the situations you present as though they were participating in a horror movie.

That said, when it works, horror and D&D make for a powerful combination. For horror to work, it has to be intense and potentially overwhelming. Because the player characters face monsters on a regular basis, you have to alter your approach to the monsters in a horror-themed adventure. Keep the monsters out of sight until the attack comes. Alter the powers and appearances of familiar monsters or use new monsters for the first time in a horror adventure to surprise and terrify the player characters. Make your descriptions dark, creepy, and menacing. (If the *Alien* movies were a D&D campaign, *Alien* would be a horror-themed adventure and *Aliens* would be an action/adventure-themed adventure.)

### ***Mystery***

This is another theme that's hard to maintain for an entire campaign but can be used very effectively in specific adventures. A mystery is something to solve, whether it's a murder or a robbery or something else. One way to use mystery as the theme of a campaign is to set up a Big Mystery that the player characters must solve over the course of many adventures. Who killed the player characters' mentor and set them on the path of adventuring? Where are the strange draconic monsters coming from? Who really controls the Cult of the Red Hand? If clues to the Big Mystery are revealed every few adventures, and some adventures relate directly to the Big Mystery, you're using mystery as the theme of your campaign. You can see examples of this theme over the course of a campaign in television series such as *Twin Peaks*, *24*, *X-Files*, and *Supernatural*.

### ***Revenge***

Revenge works as the theme of a campaign as long as not every adventure in the campaign focuses on it. When the player characters must hunt down the

one-armed mind flayer that murdered their mentor or work to undermine the evil king who ordered the destruction of their village, revenge is the motivation for their adventuring and the theme of your campaign. The same holds true when you use it as the theme for specific adventures. As with any long-term theme, revenge works best if you provide ways for the player characters to have small victories along the way. If after a hundred adventures the player characters are no closer to finding the one-armed mind flayer, the players will feel frustrated and cheated. (Revenge is best served cold, not frozen solid.) The payoff has to come sometime, and then maybe it's time to end the campaign and start something new or to spin off the campaign in a new direction with a new theme.

## *The Dungeon-of-the-Week Campaign Model*

You're building a campaign. You've selected a theme. How do you get it to roll out from game session to game session? Use the tried and true television series model — the dungeon-of-the-week campaign! Your campaign is just like your favorite ongoing television series. The player characters are just like the continuing characters in the show. Like the crew of the *Enterprise* (pick your favorite model and era), they set off on an exploration mission — but the PCs explore the depths of the dungeon instead of the depths of space. Like the title characters from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* and their friends, they fight monsters every week, often saving the world (literally) through their efforts.

If you imagine that your campaign is a television series, you can follow the same rules as used for any ongoing story. You want to establish certain ground rules. For example, almost anything can happen between the start and end of any particular episode or game session, just so long as things are put back mostly as they were by the climax. Sure, you can and should allow for major changes to occur, but you can control those changes and what they mean for your campaign. You want to treat each adventure as the next episode in your ongoing storyline. Some relate directly to the overall theme of your campaign, and some are side treks that explore a different theme and show off a different aspect of your world.

The easiest campaign to build uses the dungeon-of-the-week model (even though some dungeons might take more than one session to complete). Each time you need a new adventure, you create a new dungeon. Populate it with encounters worthy of the level of the player characters, and create a memorable villain to serve as the main antagonist or boss monster (see Chapter 22 for

more on creating villains). Just as the two brothers in the TV show *Supernatural* go to a new town each episode to deal with a new monster, so too do the player characters in your campaign go to a new dungeon each adventure.

## *Building on What the Players Give You*

Our last bit of advice about campaign building is simple: Use what the players give you. It's their story, too. Many players like to create interesting back stories for their characters, or think up long-term story goals and aspirations. For example, a player might decide that her wizard character hopes to learn the secrets of a long-forgotten tradition of elven high magic someday, or maybe another player says that his barbarian character is the last survivor of a tribe massacred by undead giants. Look for opportunities to incorporate these player-invented plots into adventures from time to time. Not only does it give you grist for your creative mill, you're guaranteed to provide an adventure that is immediately compelling to at least one of the players at the table.

Keep your ears open when the players are discussing the events of the adventure — you'll often hear them make suggestions that you never thought of but you just have to use. So use them! Later, the players will think they were clever for having figured it out, and you never have to let them know that they actually came up with the idea.



That's why we love to make the players recap the previous game session at the start of the current one. Let the players tell you what they think happened. This often leads them to speculate, toss around ideas, and come up with something you never thought of. Why should you do all the work? If the players want to give you ideas (even if they don't realize it), be willing to take them. It's that inspiration thing again. Take inspiration for your campaign from all sources, including the players. If anyone is thinking about the campaign anywhere near as much as you are, it's them. Let them help you. The campaign will be stronger because of it.

## Chapter 22

# Creating Memorable Villains

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Defining the villain
  - ▶ Examining the hero/villain connection
  - ▶ Reviewing villain archetypes
- 

**V**illains come in all shapes and sizes. From master villains to minor villains, evil overlords to minions and lackeys, every heroic player character needs a villain to battle and defeat.

In this chapter, we look at villains and how to turn them into memorable parts of your D&D game.

## *What Is a Villain?*

Player characters can have lots of foes, but they should have only a few villains. When we talk about *villains*, we mean the main antagonists, the boss NPCs or monsters and their chief lieutenants in an adventure, not the many minions and monsters that populate the bulk of a dungeon. A villain is more than a random monster or enemy (though every dungeon and adventure needs those, too). A villain is the evil behind the adventure, the catalyst that sends the player characters into action (whether they realize the connection or not).

For an NPC or monster to be a villain, he or she (or it) must possess most or all of the following qualities:

- ✓ Villains (directly or indirectly) oppose the player characters, forcing them to take action and make decisions.
- ✓ Villains are powerful adversaries, commanding great resources. Villains might not be able to defeat the player characters in direct melee combat, but with the resources at their command, they will have many guards and should be able to give the PCs a run for their money.

- ✓ Villains should be, for the most part, unsympathetic. Most villains should be despised and hated by the player characters.
- ✓ Villains want to do the wrong thing. Their motives and goals should be excessive, selfish, and to the detriment of others. Evil is what villains do.
- ✓ Villains need to be hated, but in a good way. You've done your job if you've created a villain that engages the emotions of the players and makes them love to hate the character.



You might be tempted to create villains with complex and “realistic” motives, but here’s the deal: You don’t have to work very hard to make a villain make sense. In the fantastic world of D&D, villains can be starkly, irredeemably evil. Crazy cultists and bloodthirsty orcs don’t turn to evil because of traumatic events in their past, social alienation, psychological disorders, or bad choices. They can just be *evil*, pure and simple. Keeping things “black and white” rather than drawn in shades of gray is good because you’re letting the players know that their characters can concentrate on defeating evil, not understanding it or redeeming it. Morally ambiguous villains should definitely be the exception, and not the rule.

## *Every Hero Needs a Good Villain*

Heroes have always been defined by the villains that oppose them. Peter Pan and Captain Hook. Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty. Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. Each of these heroes are tied to their villains in ways that go beyond simple storytelling. The villains are the heroes’ mirror images, potential selves, and polar opposites all at the same time.

When you consider villains for player characters, remember that the villain might have a particular hatred for a specific character, but usually serves as the nemesis for the entire party. Because of the ongoing nature of a D&D campaign, you might want to think of villains in the same way that comic book superheroes have rogues’ galleries. Batman can’t fight the Joker every issue, so the writers and artists invented Penguin, Two-Face, and Riddler. In the same way, the player characters in your campaign shouldn’t have to battle the same orc leader every adventure. Although not every adventure needs an arch villain that will hound the heroes across multiple story arcs, you do need to populate most adventures with a master villain and a few minor villains, in addition to the various monsters and obstacles that pop up along the way.

## *Good villains take work*

What makes a good villain? You want the villains you create (or at least the majority of them) to be plausible. Flesh them out. Give some thought as to



why a villain is doing what it is he or she is doing. How does a villain interact with the rest of your adventure story? With the other denizens of a dungeon? If you think that your villains are just bad guys for the player characters to defeat, so will the players.

Villains don't have to be stupid. Make your villains, or at least the majority of them, smart. Some can be evil geniuses, some can just be savvy, and once in a while a few can be powerful and dumb. Play them as smart as you want them to be, but no more or less than that. A bugbear chieftain might not be a brilliant strategist, but he can still be cagey and wily and able to match wits with the player characters. A mind flayer master villain, on the other hand, might be so intelligent as to have an amazing number of contingency plans and multiple schemes within schemes unfolding at any given time.



Don't be afraid to make some of your villains truly evil. Betrayal, devious lies, and hideous acts of evil for evil's sake allow you to paint compelling pictures of your villains. And when the player characters see them for the evil creatures they are, the feeling of success for defeating them will be that much sweeter.



On the other hand, not all antagonists need to be evil. Sometimes rivals will appear to challenge the player characters, and these rivals can be good-meaning nonplayer characters or even monsters with their own agendas. Setting up an opponent who the player characters can't or don't want to fight directly can make for an interesting change of pace.

## *Give villains every chance to succeed*

The diabolical dragon lord, the evil royal wizard, the murderous bounty hunter with a taste for blood — the range of intelligent villains is endless. Make your villains memorable, and they will become the hated foes of the player characters without any special effort on your part. Some villains can be recurring antagonists that appear from time to time to harass the player characters; others can be designed to serve that purpose for only the span of a single adventure.

A well-crafted villain must also be a well-played villain. Here are some ways to play a villain well:

- ✓ **Don't let a major villain confront the player characters too early in the adventure.** Use lackeys and other minions to fight for the villain whenever possible. Eventually, you want to give the player characters the satisfaction of confronting and defeating the villain, but not until the time is right. The right time is usually at the climax of the adventure.
- ✓ **Use every available resource to foil the player characters.** Villains should be sneaky and resourceful. Some villains can hide in plain sight, and others have vast wealth and power at their command. The villain's

tactics depend on the role you want the villain to play in the adventure and campaign. Keep in mind that for every ability that the player characters have, there is usually a way for a villain to counter it.

- ✔ **Sometimes, give a villain the opportunity to confront the player characters and get away.** Use this technique if you want the villain to meet the PCs early in an adventure or if you want the villain to become a recurring character. Create escape plans for some of your villains. Through misdirection, disguises, secret passages, magic, and swarms of minions, you can give a villain a chance to get away. Don't force the issue, though. If the player characters come up with a way to circumvent the plan, let them. You can always create a new villain as a replacement.
- ✔ **Don't let the player characters fight on their terms.** A smart villain fights the player characters from a place of strength and only when he or she is well and truly prepared. Confronting villains in their strongholds isn't the smartest thing for the player characters to do, but it should be the only place major villains are willing to put their own lives on the line.

## Villain Archetypes

Villains come in two basic forms: master villain and minor villain. An adventure or even an entire campaign should have a single master villain, but it can have as many minor villains as you feel comfortable including. Minor villains allow the player characters to gain small victories along the way without confronting the master villain too early.

If you ask seven different creative people to define archetypes for master and minor villains, you'll get seven similar but different answers. In the following sections, we provide our version of the master and minor villain archetypes most appropriate for use in a D&D game.

### Master villains

The master villain stands at the center of the evil plot, working to achieve some evil goal through the use of evil means. We're talking *evil* villains here, not adversaries who might be good but oppose the player characters as rivals.

The following list describes archetypes that would fit as master villains into most D&D campaigns:

- ✔ **Agent provocateur:** This is the clever spy who infiltrates an organization and works to destroy it from the inside. For example, how better to bring down a church devoted to law and order than to place a hidden agent of chaos high within its ranks? The identity of this master villain usually

remains a closely guarded secret until the end of the adventure or series of adventures that he or she is associated with, and he or she strews lots of deception and false trails along the way.

- ✓ **Avenger:** This is the villain who seeks to right a real or imagined wrong, but in the most heinous way possible. He or she seeks to ruin and ultimately destroy the object of the seething anger, perhaps in one-on-one battle, by destroying wealth and reputation or by using a death trap of some sort.
- ✓ **Conqueror:** The conqueror wants to seize control. He or she could be a warlord leading a vast army, or could be after control of an organization, a place, or a person. This villain wants to be the center of attention, the leader, and wants to gain this position by the force of his or her own will and the strengths that make him or her stand out from the common folk.
- ✓ **Corruptor:** The corruptor seeks to change the pure into impure, the orderly into the chaotic. On a small scale, the corruptor seeks to darkly influence a single character or group of characters, such as a king, priest, or town council. On a large scale, the corruptor seeks to alter an organization, city, or nation, turning it from a thing of law and order to a thing of chaos and confusion. In D&D campaigns, the corruptor can be an evil god or a demon prince as often as a human or a monster.
- ✓ **Destroyer:** The destroyer has one goal — to cause destruction. Instead of conquering or corrupting a nation or an organization, he or she wants to destroy it. Destroyers might have a reason for wanting to cause death and destruction, but they might also simply want to cause destruction for destruction's sake. (Villains don't need to be complex!)
- ✓ **Master thief:** The master thief wants the prize and usually has a grand plan for getting it. Gold, jewels, artifacts, ancient tomes . . . if it has worth, value, and a hint of power, the master thief can't wait to lay hands upon it. No challenge is too great, no vault secure enough to stop master thieves from plying their trade.
- ✓ **Organizer:** Some villains control vast syndicates, such as the Thieves' Guild or a slaver ring. Using brains, influence, and an army of underlings, the organizer sits at the center of a web of intrigue to control criminal activities of one sort or another.
- ✓ **Ravager:** Another version of the destroyer, the ravager uses terror as a means of operation. Why just destroy a village if you can terrorize (and have fun with) the villagers first? Such is the method used by this vile villain.
- ✓ **Zealot:** The zealot follows a cause to the detriment of everything else, seeking to re-create the world (or a portion thereof) in the image of his or her beliefs. These beliefs can be philosophical, political, or religious in nature, and the zealot can work alone or as the head of a widespread organization.

## *Minor villains*

Minor villains are the trusted lieutenants of the boss monsters, servants of the master villains but on a level above the typical minions and lackeys most often employed to trouble the player characters.

The following archetypes work well as minor villains in most D&D campaigns:

- ✓ **Advance agent:** This is the vanguard for some sort of invasion, whether of an enemy army or of supernatural forces from another plane of existence. The advance agent sets the stage and hints of greater threats to come, all the while accomplishing things that make it easier for the next part of the invasion to take place.
- ✓ **Assassin:** This is the favorite killing tool of the master villain, a powerful and deadly enemy in his or her own right who has no regard for life and is totally loyal to his or her master.
- ✓ **Corrupted hero:** What master villain doesn't have an ex-hero in his employ? This character shows the dark side of the player characters and shows what happens when a hero falls to evil. A corrupted hero usually has a player character class, such as fighter or ranger or wizard.
- ✓ **Inquisitor:** When master villains need answers, they turn to the inquisitor. The inquisitor is trained in torture and intimidation, and he or she enjoys inflicting pain and suffering on others to do the job.
- ✓ **Soldier:** Many lieutenants serving master villains fall into this category. Trained in battle and tempered by past campaigns, the soldier is experienced, competent, and persistent in the execution of his or her task.
- ✓ **Thug:** A thug has a single job in any master villain's organization — to fight as told and without thinking. The thug is more powerful than the typical minions serving the master villain and is often used to fill key encounters in an adventure.

## Chapter 23

# Bringing the World to Life

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Starting small and building out
  - ▶ Dissecting the parts of a world
  - ▶ Bringing all the elements together
- 

You're an expert at crafting fun and exciting adventures. You've taken a shot at making memorable master villains to plague the player characters. You've begun to link the adventures together to start building your campaign. Now you have to put everything in context and start fleshing out the world beyond the dungeons and other specific locations the player characters have visited.

When it comes to world building, you can get as complex as you want or keep it simple. For examples of fully detailed worlds, take a look at published campaign setting books such as *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* and *Eberron Campaign Setting*.

We advise you to keep things simple to start out with for your home-brewed world, but you can take the tips we provide in this chapter and make your world as simple or as complex and detailed as you like. You can create whatever details you want to craft a living, breathing campaign world.

## *The World in a Nutshell: The DM's Notebook*

When you're ready to go beyond one-time adventures and start building a world for your campaign, you need to get organized. Even if you keep your world relatively simple and small, you have a lot more maps, notes, timelines, and all other sorts of details to keep track of for a world than you do for a dungeon or one-time adventure.

A really helpful tool when it comes to developing your campaign world is the DM's notebook. All you need for a DM notebook are some folders or a binder in which you collect the following items, adding pieces as you build your world:

- ✓ **Maps:** You should have maps for your world, from large-scale maps that depict the entire world, down to maps of regions or countries, to maps of towns and dungeons. You don't have to create all of these maps until you need them, of course, but make sure that your DM's notebook contains all the maps you've drawn for previous and current adventures in your world.
- ✓ **Notes:** You should keep the notes for your world in your DM notebook. You might find it helpful to organize your notes into the following categories and place them in separate folders in your DM notebook:
  - Notes about the various places of interest in your world, such as dungeons, castles, towns, and so on, including any historical or background information you've created for those areas
  - A calendar and/or timeline for the campaign's world
  - Character sheets for major and minor villains and other important NPCs
  - Notes on minor NPCs
  - Notes on past adventures, including treasure collected, monsters defeated, and plot developments you want to remember
  - Up-to-date copies of each of the players' character sheets
  - Notes of long-term goals of the player characters
  - Notes regarding any house rules you're using

## *Building a World from the Inside Out: Start Small and Add Details*

What do you need in order to establish the basis of your campaign? You've already begun if you've gathered a team of players and run through a couple adventures. Now you need to set up a base for the player characters, a place where they can rest, train, obtain healing, buy equipment, and get missions. For low-level characters, a village or small town is all you need to set up. Just make sure the village has an inn, a church or temple, a general store, and some kind of mentor or group of patrons who can train the player characters through the first few levels of experience.

Take a look at the map of Griffonford presented in Chapter 8. That's a good example of a town map. You can always add detail and new locations as you

need them. The trick is not to worry about the parts of the world that the player characters aren't going to see right away. Leave the kingdom and the world map for later. Just concentrate on your town or village and the adventuring sites that are nearby.

As the player characters gain levels, you can start expanding your world outward in a circle from the starting areas, so that you have ready locations for whichever direction the PCs decide to follow. Sooner rather than later, your campaign world — or at least the parts of it that you're using — starts to take shape. Keep the details simple until you know where the player characters want to go next, and then you can develop the next portion of your world map, complete with environmental notes, adventuring sites, and the next community where the PCs can get training, equipment, and rumors of adventure.



Don't do more than you need to. When film makers build movie sets, they make only the portions that they need for the scene. Walls and rooms are half built, and doors lead to nowhere. Follow the same approach as you develop your campaign world: Determine where things are only as you need them. If the player characters aren't going to cross the mountains until they reach 10th level, you don't need to do the work necessary to populate that region until they get close to that point in their adventuring careers.

Conversely, don't feel constrained to creating only the areas the PCs are about to explore. Keep it simple, but if you really enjoy the process of creating the world, do whatever you feel like. Just don't spend so much time creating the unexplored continent that you don't put enough detail in the secret valley that the player characters will explore in the next game session.

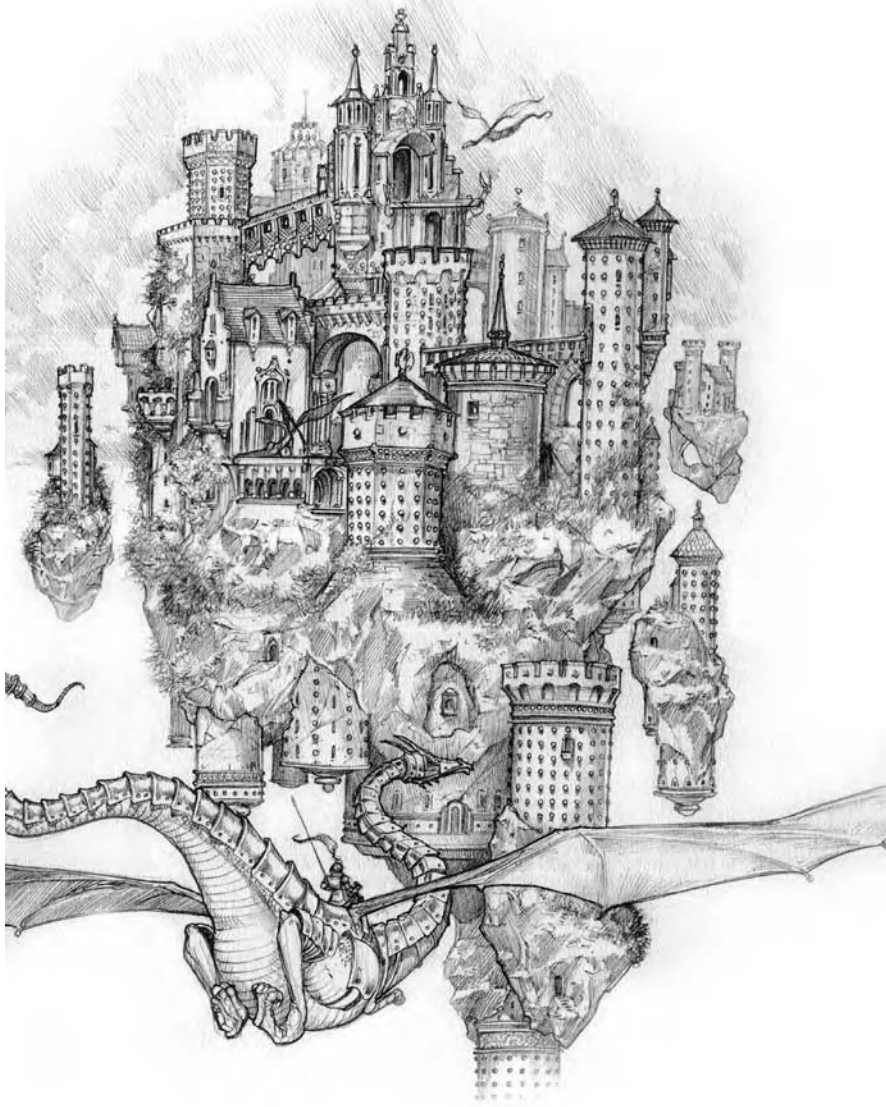
## *Putting the World Together*

You're ready to start piecing your campaign world together. We advise you to start small, detailing and nailing down only what you absolutely have to.

But what do you really need? You need to fix any locations already encountered in any adventures you have run to date. Begin by marking down on your setting map or recording in your notes the sites of dungeons, towns, ruins, and other such features the PCs have already explored. In addition to these locales, consider what else might be necessary to sustain the illusion of reality for your imaginary campaign setting.

Player characters need a base of operations, a place where they can return after an adventure to rest, purchase supplies, and train. From 1st to 3rd level or so, a small town works best for this, though a village can suffice in a pinch. You certainly don't have to figure out who all the 2,000 people living in the small town are, but you do need to put some thought into the places the

player characters are likely to visit. These places include the inn or tavern, the general store, the magic shop, the weapons shop, the local church or temple, the local keepers of the peace and other authority figures, and anyone who can serve as trainers for the characters.





You need to decide on the climate and geography for the area around your starting village or town. A temperate climate probably works best and usually presents the easiest solution. Geography should be a mix of terrain types, including forest, hills, and plains to start. Make a simple map that shows the relative locations and shape of the land, using the map of Griffonford as a guide (see Chapter 8). Then you need to add other locations of interest, including encounter sites from previous adventures you have run for this group of player characters.

## Climate and geography

The great thing about a fantasy setting is that you can just make things up. Still, you want to apply some level of logic to the world you build. Don't put a scorched desert next to an arctic plain, for example, unless you come up with a fantastical reason for such a juxtaposition to exist. Chapter Five of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* covers this and related topics in greater detail, but we discuss the basics in this section.

You really need to consider only three basic climate types when building a D&D campaign world:



✓ **Cold climates** resemble arctic and subarctic regions on Earth and usually feature winter conditions throughout most of the year. Portions of your world can have a cold climate, or you can make the climate persistent throughout much of the land. Bear in mind that adventurers need special gear or magic to deal with cold.

✓ **Temperate climates** enjoy approximately equal periods of warm and cold seasons throughout the year.

If you set up a campaign that takes place mostly in a temperate climate, remember to keep a calendar so that you can make the seasons pass as the game progresses.

✓ **Warm climates** range from subtropical to tropical environments, featuring summer (or hotter) conditions for most of the year. In extremely warm regions, adventurers might suffer adverse conditions for wearing a lot of armor and carrying a load of equipment.

Likewise, you can keep it simple for the geography of your world. A fantasy setting doesn't need to have complex geology, ecosystems, and environments. Consider eight basic geographic types as you construct your D&D campaign world:

✓ **Aquatic** geography consists mainly of salt or fresh water, such as lakes, oceans, rivers, and inland seas.

- ✓ **Desert** describes any dry area that has little to no vegetation. Warm deserts resemble places like Death Valley and the Sahara, and cold deserts appear much like Antarctica. Player characters need to deal with survival issues in this kind of terrain, not the least of which is acquiring food and water (though magic can help in this).
- ✓ **Forest** terrain features large tracts of tree-covered land. Food and water are usually plentiful, and animal life is abundant.
- ✓ **Hills** describe rugged, raised terrain that doesn't reach the level of mountainous.
- ✓ **Marsh** terrain features low, flat, waterlogged areas, such as what is usually found in swamps and bogs. Travel through marshes can be difficult if not treacherous.
- ✓ **Mountains** feature high elevation, little level ground, and decreasing sources of food and water the higher you ascend. Travel is difficult and often requires special equipment.
- ✓ **Plains** describe any relatively flat area that isn't also one of the other terrain types covered. Food and water are usually plentiful in a plains region.
- ✓ **Underground** describes subterranean passages and caverns. The D&D game assumes that there is a vast expanse of underground areas (whether they're naturally occurring, made by people or monsters, or both) where many adventures take place.



The *Dungeon Master's Guide* features a good discussion on demographics, population centers, and the types of resources that can generally be found there. Check out Chapter Five: Campaigns, especially the material on pages 136–139.

## Sites of interest

By *sites of interest*, we mean the places you expect the PCs to explore and adventure in. These sites should be scattered across your world map, and you can add new ones whenever you see fit.

You want to create enough sites of interest in the region to sustain the PCs' adventure needs at least through the level to which the PCs' home base can support their needs. When the PCs can no longer get the weapons, armor, magical supplies, and other equipment appropriate for their levels in the local settlement or town, they should move on to a larger, more populated area.

The following subsections describe some of the sites of interest that you should add to your world's map as places the PCs will eventually explore.

### ***Castles***

Castles and other kinds of keeps and strongholds guard the land, providing places of protection for the population, barracks for soldiers, and supply centers for armies. Somewhere in your starting area there should be a few of these structures, though perhaps not immediately near your starting village or town. Of course, larger and more important centers of civilization should get larger castles, but small towns and village might have only a keep to protect them. Evil warlords and rival kingdoms also maintain castles, and you can use these as adventure sites for when the player characters are ready to take on such a challenge.

### ***Ruins***

No campaign is complete without a few crumbling towers, abandoned temples, ruined castles, or forgotten cities hidden in the swamps and forests of your world. Ruins can reveal historical secrets about your campaign, and most serve as great adventure sites due to the large concentration of monsters that often make ruins into lairs. Ruins can be obvious and known or hidden and yet to be discovered. They can exist in the wilderness, away from settlements, or they can serve as the foundation upon which current settlements have been constructed.

### ***Dungeons***

You can place dungeons wherever you need them to be. They take the form of carefully constructed complexes or natural caverns that snake through hillsides and underground. Sewer networks, basements, and actual dungeons fall into the category of man-made (or monster-made) dungeons, and extensive cavern systems can link caves that are dozens or hundreds of miles apart, forming regions of sunless expanse often referred to as the Underdark. All these places usually hold terrors and treasures beyond imagining, waiting for player characters to explore.

### ***Monster lairs***

When you consider placing monster lairs, don't worry about every cave or crack or crevice that hides a monster. Concentrate on the places where the unusually tough or intelligent creatures live, or the areas occupied by large congregations of monsters. The bandits hiding in the old mine, the medusa's macabre garden of victims turned to stone, a dragon's treasure cave, and the cemetery haunted by wights or wraiths all come to mind as places worthy of entries on your constantly growing campaign map. Side treks, filler encounters, and adventures on the fly can all be thrown together quickly if you have a handful of monster lairs sitting in your notebook.

Not all monster lairs need to focus on dangerous creatures or threats to the player characters. A grove of friendly treants, the grazing grounds of a herd of unicorns, and a druid's circle are all examples of friendly to neutral monster lairs that the player characters might have reason to visit from time to time. You can even set up special arrangements where monsters that are usually considered to be enemies have worked out a deal with a nearby settlement that allows each side to exist more or less in peace.

Even though a D&D world is imaginary and fantastic, you want to put just a little consideration into the ecology of your campaign. For example, when you place a settlement, you also need to consider how that settlement feeds itself. Does its citizens hunt and gather from a large forest, fish from a river or lake, or support itself with vast tracts of farmland? Consider these kinds of questions when choosing locations for monster lairs. Are there enough prey animals available in the area for a large, predatory monster? How do nearby monsters interact with each other? Do they assist each other, ignore each other, or fight each other at every opportunity? You don't need to get too technical, because it's just a game and it is a fantasy, but some amount of forethought can help add a touch of realism to your campaign. Check out a monster's entry in the *Monster Manual* for some ecological information, and then use your own imagination to make it fit into your campaign.

### ***Unusual phenomena***

To accentuate the fantastic nature of your D&D world, be sure to judiciously include a few places that just couldn't exist in the real world. Nothing says you're in a place of magic more than areas that inspire awe, wonder, and even fear.

A waterfall of lava, a forest of wild magic, a lake of glowing liquid that heals whoever bathes in it, and a blasted patch of badlands where magic doesn't work are all example of sites of unusual phenomena. Let your imagination go wild. How about a village where the fog never dissipates? Or a range of hills where spectacular and deadly fountains of fire erupt without warning? Or an ancient cliffside where a deep crack in the rock echoes with the warnings of tragedies to come? Make these sites strange and spectacular and a little otherworldly, and the player characters will certainly want to investigate them and find out more about them.



Don't go overboard with unusual phenomena and create dozens or hundreds of them throughout your world. If you overuse this element, each one will feel commonplace and less fantastic.

## Steal this campaign setting!

You can certainly do all the work of world building yourself, but there are other options. The D&D game is bolstered by two ongoing campaign settings: FORGOTTEN REALMS and EBERRON. The *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* book presents a world that is very much a traditional D&D setting and is easy to use as is or to borrow elements from to create your own campaign world. In the *Eberron Campaign Setting*

book, on the other hand, you'll find a world that has more of an attitude and an air of action that harkens back to pulp adventures. Both of these settings are fully DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. You can play them straight up as written, modify them, or steal from them to make your own world. However you use them and the supplements that support them, they make great resources for content-hungry campaigns like yours.

### Other settlements

As the player characters strike out deeper into your world, they should encounter other settlements of intelligent beings. Some of these should be human or elf or dwarf settlements, or even places where the common races mix and meet. Others can be settlements of monsters, such as places where goblinoids or orcs gather. Vary the size and wealth of these settlements. Include more thorps, hamlets, and villages across the landscape than cities and metropolises. Check out the discussion on generating towns and communities in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, starting on page 137, for a detailed look at this topic.



Now, you don't have to do all the work necessary to flesh out something as large and complex as a city by yourself. Wizards of the Coast publishes two campaign supplements that detail and populate two fantasy cities, Waterdeep and Sharn. *City of Splendors: Waterdeep* is a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign supplement that details a grand city on the edge of a busy sea. For something different, check out *Sharn: City of Towers*, an EBERRON campaign supplement that explores a vertical metropolis on the coast of a mighty river. With detailed city maps, ready-to-use NPCs, and a wealth of adventure hooks, there's no reason we can think of for not using one or both of these products as the basis for a city in your campaign. You can use the cities exactly as written and drop them wherever you like in your campaign, or you can make modifications to names and other details so that the cities better suit your world's needs.



# Part V

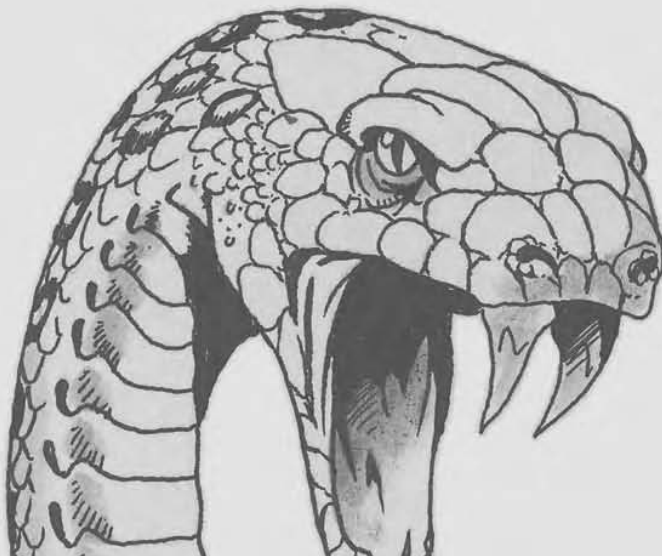
## The Part of Tens

### The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant

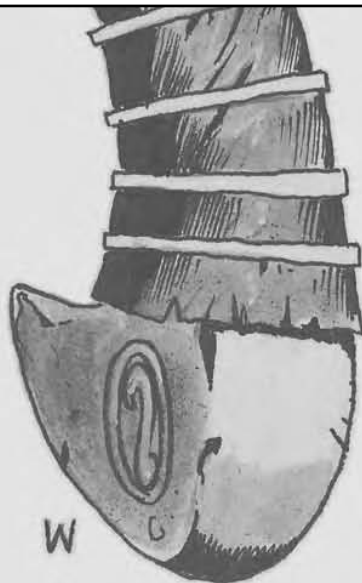


"I'm just saying, be careful running the game tonight. I invited my two cousins and they're just out of prison for assaulting their parole officer."



## *In this part . . .*

**I**n this part, we give you some pointers and building-blocks for the next game you DM. Check out our picks for the top ten adventures published for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game and the top ten adventures from *Dungeon Magazine*. Peruse our suggestions for great traps and ready-to-play encounters to use in your own adventures. Finally, take a look at our last words on common DMing mistakes and great DMing tips. You might not agree with everything we've come up with for these top ten lists, but you just might find an idea or a suggestion that will make your next game the best one you've ever run.





## Chapter 24

# Ten Best Classic Adventures

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Here are our choices for the ten best D&D adventures from the original 1st Edition of the game. We present these for nostalgia, for posterity, and to show you some of the roots of the game that really influenced us back when we started playing.

We've arranged these adventures in chronological order, beginning with the oldest. The odd letter and number combinations ("S1," "S2," and so on) are series codes designed to help readers identify which modules belonged with each other. Sometimes this indicated that the adventures actually formed a series of sequential adventures (such as the "A" series or "T" series), but more often, the series code didn't really mean much.

All of these adventures were published in the 1st Edition *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* game. They're long out of print, but many long-time D&D players still talk about favorite traps, monsters, villains, and puzzles from these classics.

## *S1—Tomb of Horrors*

*by Gary Gygax; published by TSR, Inc., 1978*

This adventure for character levels 8–14 features a trap-filled tomb of a dead wizard and a book of illustrations to show to players as the adventure unfolds. This was the original "deathtrap dungeon," and many of the traps killed characters just for making poor choices — not many saving throws here! Anyone who has played the D&D game since 1st Edition has a story or two about how their characters died in this early classic. In 1998, designer Bruce R. Cordell revisited this classic in the outstanding 2nd Edition adventure *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, which greatly expanded on the original.

## ***G1—Steading of the Hill Giant Chief***

*by Gary Gygax; published by TSR, Inc., 1978*

The first AD&D adventure module ever published, this adventure for character levels 8–12 kicks off the “G” series of modules that pit the player characters against a variety of giants types, starting with hill giants. Other titles in this series include *The Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl* and *Hall of the Fire Giant King*.

## ***D1—Descent into the Depths of the Earth***

*by Gary Gygax; published by TSR, Inc., 1978*

This adventure for character levels 9–14 kicked off the “D” series of adventures that take the player characters into the underground world of the drow — the wildly popular dark elves of D&D lore. Other titles in the series include *Shrine of the Kuo-Toa* and *Vault of the Drow*. It was designed as a sequel to the “G” series of modules.

## ***S2—White Plume Mountain***

*by Lawrence Schick; published by TSR, Inc., 1979*

This adventure presents a classic dungeon crawl for character levels 5–10. In it, the player characters must make their way through a complex dungeon beneath an active volcano while overcoming the magical traps devised by an insane wizard. *White Plume Mountain* introduced three of the most notorious magic items ever created for the D&D game, including the powerful sword *Blackrazor*.

## ***A1—Slave Pits of the Undercity***

*by David “Zeb” Cook; published by TSR, Inc., 1980*

This adventure kicked off a four-part series where the player characters (levels 4–7) tried to defeat a band of slavers while dealing with a number of ingenious situations. Other titles in the series include *Secret of the Slavers’ Stockade*, *Assault on the Aerie of the Slave Lords*, and *In the Dungeons of the Slave Lords*, which starts with the player characters trapped without any weapons or armor deep beneath a volcanic island.

## C1—The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan

*by Harold Johnson and Jeff R. Leason; published by TSR, Inc., 1980*

Originally a convention tournament scenario, this adventure for character levels 5–8 sends the player characters into a Mayan-style temple full of surprising traps and devious tricks. It includes an illustration booklet of what the characters see in specific encounters.

## Q1—Queen of the Demonweb Pits

*by David C. Sutherland III with Gary Gygax; published by TSR, Inc., 1980*

This sequel to the “D” series of modules presents an epic adventure for character levels 10–14. It sends the player characters to another plane of existence to defeat the evil demigod of the drow, Lolth. It featured an amazing map of the maze-like Demonweb Pits.

## I3—Pharaoh

*by Tracy and Laura Hickman; published by TSR, Inc., 1982*

The first in the *Desert of Desolation* series, this Egyptian-inspired adventure for character levels 5–7 includes a pyramid map and a trap-filled maze. Other adventures in this series include *Oasis of the White Palm* and *Lost Tomb of Martek*. Later, Tracy Hickman would go on to help create the DRAGONLANCE campaign setting.

## I6—Ravenloft

*by Tracy and Laura Hickman; published by TSR, Inc., 1983*

Perhaps our favorite D&D adventure of all time, this scenario for character levels 5–7 takes the Dracula legend and gives it a D&D spin. With isometric maps that were ahead of their time, alternate plotlines, and an amazing amount of storytelling crammed into such a small space, this adventure inspired game designers and Dungeon Masters to take the art of adventure creation to the next level. It set the stage for gothic D&D and led to the creation of the RAVENLOFT campaign setting.



## ***T1–4–The Temple of Elemental Evil***

*by Gary Gygax with Frank Mentzer; published by TSR, Inc., 1985*

This was the one we were all waiting for in the early days of D&D. In 1979, T1–*The Village of Hommlet* was published, hinting at the terrible Temple of Elemental Evil and promising a sequel to make your hair stand on end. Six years later, the massive dungeon finally came out as a single book that included the original Hommlet adventure. With two towns, the temple, and four large dungeon levels, this was the grandfather of all huge dungeon crawls.

## Chapter 25

# Ten Best *Dungeon Magazine* Adventures

One of the best sources of adventure material available is *Dungeon Magazine*, the sister publication of *Dragon Magazine*. *Dungeon Magazine* has been around for almost 20 years, and as of the time of this book's publication, it's on its 135th issue. For about \$7 a shot, you get three or four professionally developed, illustrated, and edited D&D adventures, each of which provides you with weeks of great gaming. You can't find a better value in gaming.

For this chapter, we asked the folks at Paizo Publishing (publishers of both magazines) to give us their picks for the best ten adventures to appear in *Dungeon Magazine* during the current edition of the D&D game. James Jacobs, Erik Mona, and Jeremy Walker of Paizo Publishing sat down and hashed out a list based on the feedback they've seen from their readers and their own likes and dislikes. Thousands of D&D players from all around the world have enjoyed countless hours of gaming in these highly regarded adventures; we think it's a pretty good list.

We decided to stick to 3rd Edition adventures for this chapter, just because we felt that you, the reader, would get more benefit from a list of adventures you could easily get your hands on if you were so inclined. *Dungeon Magazine* boasts a number of outstanding adventures from the previous game editions, too, but you might have a hard time finding older issues or converting these adventures to the current edition of the game.

Now, in reverse chronological order (most recent first, older adventures later), we present the top ten *Dungeon Magazine* adventures.

## *The Age Of Worms Adventure Path*

*Issues #124 through #135; all character levels; by Erik Mona, Mike Mearls, Sean K. Reynolds, Jason Bulmahn, Tito Leati, Wolfgang Baur, Jesse Decker, Richard Pett, Nicolas Logue, Greg A. Vaughan, and James Jacobs*

This isn't just one adventure — it's 12, a whole year of *Dungeon* goodness. *Age of Worms* is a series of sequential adventures by a number of different authors. Taken together, they comprise a complete D&D campaign that takes the player characters from 1st to 20th level. *Age of Worms* pits the adventurers against the cult of the worm-god Kyuss and his armies of undead minions, including some of the most hideous and terrifying undead monstrosities yet conceived for the game. Along the way, the heroes have chances to become gladiators fighting in desperate arena battles, recover powerful magical artifacts, and eventually rule a kingdom of their own.

## *The Shackled City Adventure Path*

*Various issues beginning in #97 and continuing through #116; all character levels; by Christopher Perkins, James Jacobs, David Noonan, Tito Leati, Jesse Decker, and Chris Thomasson*

We cheated again; the *Shackled City* adventure path consists of eight adventures appearing in various issues between #97 and #116. This was the first complete campaign to appear in a serialized format in *Dungeon Magazine*. In the *Shackled City* adventures, the player characters must investigate, expose, and defeat a sinister cult that aims to convert a whole city into a prison terrorized by fiends from the lower planes.

## *The Styes*

*Issue #121; mid-level characters; by Richard Pett*

Okay, so now we actually begin picking single, solitary adventures for this Top Ten list. *The Styes* presents the player characters with an unforgettable setting — a decrepit, diseased port city. Once a major ocean gateway, the port city known as The Styes is now a perfect haven for sadists, cultists, and hungry things that flop and writhe. In this atmospheric adventure, the heroes must solve a string of gruesome murders in which the murderer himself is the least of the city's worries.

## *Mad God's Key*

*Issue #114; low-level characters; by Jason Bulmahn*

A hunt for a missing key leads the player characters from the streets of one of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game's most beloved cities to a sinister cult hideout in the nearby hills.

## **Maure Castle**

*Issue #112; high-level characters; by Robert J. Kuntz and Gary Gygax*

This award-winning adventure is a re-envisioning of a classic adventure from the early days of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, *Mordenkainen's Fantastic Adventure*. It's set in one of the classic dungeons that started it all over 30 years ago. This adventure is expanded upon yearly in the pages of *Dungeon Magazine*, so you can use it as a launching point for a major dungeon-delving campaign.

## **Tammeraut's Fate**

*Issue #106; mid-level characters; by Greg A. Vaughan*

The heroes come upon an abandoned hermitage on a remote island . . . but when night falls, the dead shamble out of the sea. The player characters find themselves in a desperate fight against the angry undead who lay siege to the old hermitage.

## **The Lich-Queen's Beloved**

*Issue #100; high-level characters; by Christopher Perkins*

The githyanki are a classic race of D&D villains who raid the lands of humankind from their great fortresses on the Astral Plane. In *The Lich-Queen's Beloved*, the player characters travel to the imperial capital of the fearsome githyanki and confront the undying lich-queen of the race in a desperate attempt to stop her quest for godhood.

## **Tears for Twilight Hollow**

*Issue #90; mid-level characters; by Angel Leigh McCoy and Christopher Perkins*

The demise of a beloved paladin brings pain and despair to the village of Twilight Hollow. As the player characters investigate the circumstances of the paladin's death, they might have the chance to solve a mystery, save a legendary paladin's soul, and end a dreadful evil.

## *Rana Mor*

*Issue #86; mid-level characters; by Richard Baker*

Rich swears he had nothing to do with how the editors at Paizo settled on this list! James, Erik, and Jeremy picked this one all by themselves. In any event, *Rana Mor* sends the player characters on a terrifying journey into the depths of a fearsome jungle in search of a great prize: the wondrous emerald known as the Rain Tiger. But before the heroes can claim their prize, they'll have to survive the traps and perils of an ancient ruin.

## *The Harrowing*

*Issue #84; high-level characters; by Monte Cook*

The first high-level 3rd Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure published, *The Harrowing* remains one of the best. In this fine adventure by Monte Cook, the player characters travel to the Abyss itself to stop the machinations of a powerful drow priestess, who has plans to usurp control of the Demonweb Pits from her mother — Lolth, the Queen of Spiders.



### **Finding older adventures**

Many bookstores and game stores carry *Dungeon Magazine*, but you might have a hard time finding some of the older issues we mention in this chapter. If you think you might want to try out an adventure that's a couple years old,

don't despair — you can order back issues of *Dungeon Magazine* from Paizo's Web store. Visit [www.paizo.com](http://www.paizo.com) and check it out for yourself.



## Chapter 26

# Ten Best 3rd Edition Adventures

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Here are our choices for the ten best D&D adventures for the current edition of the game, selected in consultation with the rest of the D&D R&D department (we didn't let Rich vote for his own adventures, but a few of them wound up on the list anyway — go figure). These adventures are presented in order, from low level to high level. If you haven't run any of these adventures for your gaming group yet, look through the list and pick up the one that you think will best fit your needs for your next session. All of them are currently in print and available at your local game store.

## *The Sunless Citadel*

*by Bruce R. Cordell; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

This 1st-level adventure kicked off the newest edition of the D&D game and highlights many of the newest innovations in the game system. It's a site-based adventure that sends the PCs into a sunken fortress to discover the secret of a magical tree and the twisted druid that guards it.

## *Shadows of the Last War*

*by Keith Baker; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

This adventure for 2nd-level characters is designed as an introduction to the world of EBERRON. It sends the PCs on a quest to the Mournland to recover the secrets of a terrible arcane weapon. With a little work, this adventure can be tailored for use in any D&D campaign.

## *Forge of Fury*

*by Richard Baker; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

An abandoned dwarven stronghold sets the stage for this adventure for 3rd-level characters. This dungeon crawl designed in the classic style pits the PCs against a number of terrible opponents, including a grand finale with the black dragon Nightscale!

## *Whispers of the Vampire's Blade*

*by David Noonan; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

An adventure for 4th-level characters set in the EBERRON game world, it puts the player characters on the trail of a king's agent who has apparently turned traitor — and taken a powerful magic sword with him as he fled! The continent-spanning chase is on in this adventure that can be reworked for use in any D&D campaign.

## *Sons of Gruumsh*

*by Christopher Perkins; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

This adventure, set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS game world, sends a group of 4th-level characters to confront rampaging orcs intent on doing the vile will of their god, Gruumsh. With a minimum amount of work, this adventure can be tailored for use in any D&D campaign.

## *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*

*by Monte Cook; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

This sequel to the classic adventure (see Chapter 24) takes the form of a massive super adventure designed to take characters from level 4 to 14. Ancient evils stir in the village of Hommlet and the nearby temple, and a new generation of heroes must rise to take on the terrible challenge. With 196 pages plus a book of maps, this is the largest adventure created for the new edition of the D&D game and published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



## *The Speaker in Dreams*

*by James Wyatt; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

An adventure for 5th-level characters, this scenario is a city adventure where the player characters work to overturn the evil forces besieging the town. It uses a flowchart to help DMs plot a course through the intricate storyline, depending on the actions of the player characters.

## *Red Hand of Doom*

*by Richard Baker and James Jacobs; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

This adventure is designed to take characters from 6th to 12th level by the time they've plowed through it. A *super adventure* that includes a miniatures-friendly poster map, it puts the PCs right in the middle of a war. The PCs must undertake vital missions to change the course of the war, all the while trying to discover the secret behind the mysterious Red Hand and its leader.

## *City of the Spider Queen*

*by James Wyatt; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

Another D&D super adventure, this one takes characters from 10th to 18th level as they plunge into an epic adventure deep in the Underdark to take on the forces of the drow (dark elves). Although this adventure is set in the FORGOTTEN REALMS game world, you can tailor it for use in any D&D campaign.

## *Lord of the Iron Fortress*

*by Andy Collins; published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc.*

Designed to challenge 15th-level characters, this adventure features planar travel, powerful dragons, new monsters, and an iron fortress full of secrets that might destroy the PCs before they unravel all of this adventure's mysteries.

## Chapter 27

# Ten Challenging Traps

One of the most fiendish implements in the DM's toolbox is the trap. Traps come in a bewildering variety of shapes, sizes, and functions, ranging from the simple pit trap to something as magical and complicated as a giant chessboard where the player characters are living pieces.

Back in the “old school” days of gaming, traps were more commonplace and arbitrary than they are in adventures nowadays. The reason traps aren't featured as much in adventures as they used to be is that most DMs have realized that including too many traps slows play to a crawl. When the dungeon itself arbitrarily stabs, slices, dices, or fries characters for just walking down a hallway, the players respond by playing the game with excessive caution. Who really wants to play a game where the PCs spend 10 minutes searching the next 10 feet of hallway before they consent to advance, and start the process all over for the next 10 feet of hallway?

The current thinking on traps is that they're best as complicating factors to creature encounters or physical challenges. A trap by itself isn't much fun, but a trap that might go off while the PCs are fighting a monster or trying to navigate some difficult path is a lot more interesting. At the very least, a trap that doesn't have a monster nearby when the characters encounter it might summon, conjure, alert, or otherwise introduce a monster to the scene in very short order. True standalone traps ought to be pretty rare in most adventures, and pretty obvious to the players. Use standalone traps to discourage characters from exploring certain paths or chambers in a dungeon in the first place, as opposed to arbitrarily whacking the characters for no discernible reason at all. An obvious trap makes players think about ways to get around it, but a surprise trap is just punishment. Don't punish the characters unless the players disregard the warning signs.

With that in mind, we present ten fiendish tricks and traps to challenge the player characters.

You can find dozens of trap ideas and a discussion of how traps are created and triggered on page 67 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



## Scything Blade Trap

*You step in the wrong spot, and a big sickle-shaped blade shoots out of a well-hidden slit in the wall and slices right through the spot where you're standing.*

**Scything Blade Trap:** CR 1; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +8 melee (1d8/×3); Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 20.

This is a mechanical trap, triggered by entering a certain location — usually moving into a square where the character's weight sets off the trap. The scything blade strikes only one time, and then someone has to reset it manually. When it strikes, it makes a single melee attack at an attack bonus of +8 against the character who set it off, dealing 1d8 damage if it hits (or triple damage if it scores a critical hit). A character can locate it before it strikes with a successful Search check (DC 21), and disarm it with a DC 20 Disable Device skill check. It's considered a CR (or Challenge Rating) 1 encounter, so this trap is appropriate for 1st-level characters.

The scything blade works well in a room where the player characters might fight an intelligent monster (or monsters). The denizens of the room know which squares are trapped, and so they don't step there — but the PCs find out the hard way that some places in the room harbor a deadly threat. The monsters might try to maneuver the PCs into stepping into the wrong square, or even just shove them into the spot with a bull rush maneuver.

For variations on this trap, try a bigger, more dangerous blade, add poison to the blade, or have the blade reset one round after striking, so that a character who remains in the square is attacked every second round.

## Symbol

*A terrible, glowing rune is inscribed into the stone above the archway. When you approach too closely, it gives off a blinding flash of light and blasts you with a sickening wave of lethargy and weakness, draining the strength from your limbs.*

**Symbol of Weakness Trap:** CR 7; magical; proximity trigger (characters within 60 feet who view the symbol are subject to its effects); no reset; weakness (3d6 Strength damage, Fort save DC 20 negates); Search DC 32; Disable Device DC 32.

The *symbol* spells create dangerous magical traps. The caster can be extremely specific in describing what sort of creature or what types of actions will set off the trap, but most symbols affect any creature who views the symbol or passes through a doorway or opening guarded by it. The symbol we describe in this section is a *symbol of weakness* that affects any creature looking at it — so as

soon as any character comes close enough to view the *symbol*, he or she must succeed on a Fortitude save or take 3d6 points of Strength damage.

A *symbol* like this one works best if the player characters are thrown into a fight after some or all of them have been exposed to it — if the PCs can just turn around and go home to repair the spell's effects, all the trap does is delay the adventure. To create a nasty combo encounter, add this *symbol* to a room guarded by sightless monsters, who are immune to its effects because they literally can't look at it. Grimlocks, oozes, or destrachans are all good examples of monsters without eyes.

*Symbol* spells include *symbol of death*, *symbol of pain*, *symbol of persuasion*, *symbol of sleep*, and *symbol of stunning*.

## Burning Hands Trap

*The image of a grinning devil is carved into the wall. When you come too close, a blast of flame shoots out of the image's mouth!*

**Burning Hands Trap:** CR 3; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset; spell effect (*burning hands*, 5th-level wizard, 5d4 fire damage, DC 11 Reflex half); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.

Almost any spell can be turned into the basis for a trap. This simple trap uses the lowly *burning hands* spell. Any creature that moves within a certain distance of the trap's location sets it off. *Burning hands* affects a 15-foot cone, so this trap might catch two or three characters at the same time. It automatically resets — you can decide how often it goes off, but we recommend once every two or three rounds.

This trap works very well when paired up with monsters who are resistant or immune to fire — for example, hell hounds, salamanders, or fire giants. For an especially insidious trap, combine the *burning hands* trap with an iron golem. Fire damage heals iron golems.

Other spells that work well in a trap like this include *fireball*, *wall of fire*, *lightning bolt*, *ice storm*, or *cone of cold*. Monsters resistant or immune to cold and electricity are almost as common as monsters immune to fire. You can also use spells that don't cause damage but certainly complicate a fight, such as *slow*.

## Portcullis Trap

*When you advance into the room, a loud rattle and clanking begins behind you. A heavy portcullis of iron bars slams down in the doorway, blocking your retreat!*

**Portcullis Trap:** CR 1; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +10 melee (3d6, only to those under the portcullis); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20. The portcullis now blocks the passageway.

This simple mechanical trap drops a heavy grate somewhere nearby when a character steps on the wrong square. The falling portcullis is dangerous to any character underneath it when it falls, and it makes a single attack. After that, the portcullis remains in place as an obstacle. A typical iron portcullis has hardness 10, 60 hit points, and requires a DC 25 Strength check to lift (or DC 28 to break through).

A portcullis is an excellent example of a dividing trap — when it falls, some characters might be on one side, and some on the other. Any monsters who wander in to see who or what set off the portcullis now face only one or two of the player characters, instead of the whole party. Depending on whether the characters are strong enough to lift the portcullis, they might have to split into two groups and find separate ways through the dungeon in order to reunite.

The portcullis works well with monsters who have ranged attacks. Archers standing behind a portcullis can shoot through it at the player characters, who can't get at them with melee attacks.

## Teleport Trap

*A mist-filled doorway waits before you. When you step through, you find yourself teleported into the fiery depths of a volcano!*

**Teleport Trap:** CR 9; magic device; touch trigger; automatic reset; spell effect (*teleport*, no save); Search DC 30; Disable Device DC 30.

There is no end to the mayhem you can create with traps based on the *teleport* spell. This sort of trap normally uses a touch trigger — it doesn't go off until a character actually walks through the trapped doorway or touches the trapped object. Spells using touch attacks rarely allow any kind of saving throw, so the *teleport* trap doesn't either. If a character touches it, he or she goes wherever the creator of the trap wanted when the trap was built.

Most *teleport* traps are one-way: The character can't just turn around and hop back through the doorway. He or she will have to find a way back from wherever the *teleport* trap sent him or her. More insidious *teleport* traps work once or twice, and then turn off for a time — a few minutes, an hour or two, even a day or a week. This can serve to divide the party for quite some time because some characters might be stuck on one side of the trap while other characters remain behind.





Although you can certainly design instant-kill *teleport* traps (for example, a *teleport* trap that sends the victim to a random spot a mile or two above the ground, into the depths of the sea, or just to a small 10-foot cell thousands of feet deep in the earth to die a lonely death of asphyxiation), those aren't really much fun. It's far more sporting to have a *teleport* trap send the player characters someplace exciting, such as a desert island they have to escape from, an icebound mountain peak where remorhazes wait to hunt them, an ancient donjon haunted by the ghosts of previous adventurers who failed to find a way out, or even just to another part of the dungeon they are currently exploring.

## Poison Gas Trap

*When you set foot on the highest step of the dais, there's a click. You hear a faint whoosh of something igniting inside the stone altar, and then sickly brown fumes begin to pour out of the nostrils of the dragon skulls atop the altar.*

**Burnt Othur Fumes Trap:** CR 7; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; gas; multiple targets (all targets in a 5-foot radius); onset delay (3 rounds); poison (burnt othur fumes, DC 18 Fort save, 1 Con drain/3d6 Con); Search DC 21; Disable Device DC 21. The poison cloud persists 10 rounds.



This trap uses burnt othur fumes (see "Poison," on page 297 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). It goes off when a character steps in the wrong spot (the dais surrounding a dragon-skull altar, in this example), creating a cloud of poison gas that fills an area 10 feet across. Any characters within this area when the trap goes off and any characters who move into the cloud of poison gas remaining afterwards are subject to its effects. Three rounds after initial exposure, the character must attempt a Fortitude save or lose 1 point of Constitution. Any player who fails that save must attempt a second Fortitude save 1 minute later or take 3d6 Constitution damage. To be reset, the hidden glass spheres that contained the poison must be replaced.

A poison gas trap works well when combined with monsters immune to poison — for example, constructs or undead. To create a tense time-pressured encounter, have the poison cloud slowly expand over time. Each round, the cloud grows to fill squares that it was adjacent to the previous round, making more and more of the room unsafe. You can add a portcullis in order to trap the player characters in the affected area. The struggle to get through the portcullis ahead of the gas while skeletons and wights attack is a great encounter.

To change up this trap, simply substitute a different poison with a different effect.

## Dart Trap

*From dozens of hidden launchers shoots a storm of razor-sharp darts, hissing past you and ricocheting from the opposite wall.*

**Fusillade of Darts:** CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +18 ranged (1d4+1, dart); multiple targets (1d6 darts per target in a 10 × 10-foot area); Search DC 19; Disable Device DC 25.

Okay, so this trap is here because of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. But it's a great concept for a trap. When the player characters move into the wrong spot of the dungeon, a whole barrage of darts fires down the hallway or across the room. Every character in the affected area is attacked by 1d6 darts; each dart makes an attack roll with an attack bonus of +18, and deals 1d4+1 damage if it hits.

The fusillade of darts doesn't combine very well with many monsters, but if you want to give the player characters fits, include a dart fusillade in a fight against a monster with natural damage reduction of 5 points or more. A monster such as a gargoyle or stone golem can easily shrug off the darts. For that matter, even a lowly skeleton has little to fear from piercing damage.



You can easily make this trap more deadly by poisoning the darts. As a CR 7 trap, coat each dart with greenblood oil (see page 297 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). For each dart hit, the victim must attempt a DC 13 Fortitude save or take 1 point of Constitution damage.

## Glyph of Warding

*When you touch the treasure chest, a brilliant green rune suddenly appears, crackling with divine power. An instant later, it bursts into a cloud of sulfurous smoke, out of which three huge ruby-red scorpions scuttle.*

**Glyph of Warding (summon monster III):** CR 3; spell; proximity trigger (characters entering area); no reset; spell effect (casts *summon monster III*, 5th-level cleric); Search DC 28; Disable Device DC 28. Summons 1d3 fiendish monstrous scorpions (Medium size) that remain 5 rounds.

Like the *symbol of weakness*, the *glyph of warding* is a spell that creates a trap all by itself. A glyph can blast trespassers with various sorts of energy damage, or it can cast a cleric spell on the character setting it off. We especially like the *glyph of warding* when coupled with a *summon monster* spell (as shown in the example trap), because it's a trap that makes its own fight.

A *glyph of warding* (or its big brother, the *greater glyph of warding*) typically goes off when a creature touches, opens, or passes through the warded object or area. The caster can set very precise conditions — for example, an orc warpriest might create a *glyph* that doesn't detonate when orcs pass by, but goes off if any other sort of creature approaches. A *glyph of warding* is nearly invisible, so it does not serve as a visible deterrent in the same way that a *symbol* spell does.

You can easily create any number of variations on this trap by changing the spell the *glyph of warding* employs or using a simple blast *glyph* instead. Spells such as *bestow curse*, *blindness/deafness*, or *contagion* work well. Because *glyphs* can discriminate between different types of targets, you could easily include them in a room or encounter with creatures or guardians that do not meet their triggering conditions.

## Water Trap

*The door slams shut behind you, and then cold water begins to flood into the room through spouts shaped like grinning gargoyles. Stones grate against each other somewhere beneath the rising water, and something swims in to join you in the rapidly filling room.*

**Water-Filled Room Trap:** CR 4; mechanical; touch trigger; automatic reset; multiple targets (all characters in 20 × 10-foot room); never miss; onset delay (room requires 10 rounds to fill); Search DC 17; Disable Device DC 23. Three rounds after activation, a stone block near the floor slides open to allow 2 Medium-size sharks to enter.



This trap isn't just a feature of a dungeon room — it *is* the room. It works best as a 20-foot-long room, with an iron door at the entrance and what seems to be a matching door on the opposite side. When a character attempts to open the apparent exit, the iron door by the entrance slams shut and locks, and water begins to fill the room at the rate of 1 foot per round. The room fills entirely in 10 rounds, assuming the room is 10 feet high. After that, you'll need to refer to the rules on holding breath and drowning, found on page 304 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

To escape, characters trapped inside must disable the trap or break open the door that's locked behind them (an iron door normally has hardness 10, 60 hit points, and a Break DC of 28). The door that set off the trap isn't a way out — it's a false door. Characters who were outside the room when the door slammed shut can certainly try to force it open from the outside, too.

Just for fun, we suggest introducing a couple water monsters into the trap. A concealed door might open when the room fills to a certain point, allowing a creature such as a shark or kapaoicinth (marine gargoyle) to swim in. Undead or constructs work well, too, because they don't need to breathe.

## Pit Trap

*The floor suddenly gives way beneath you, revealing the yawning mouth of a deep stone pit. Rusty iron spikes wait at the bottom.*

**Spiked Pit Trap:** CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 20 feet deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (first target in each of two adjacent 5-foot squares); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 damage each); Search DC 18, Disable Device DC 15.

The pit trap is the quintessential DUNGEONS & DRAGONS trap. Step on the wrong spot, and you find that the floor isn't there anymore. Usually, a character stepping onto a pit trap is allowed a Reflex save to leap back to the nearest safe square before plummeting in.

Pits come in a variety of depths, ranging from a 10-footer (really only a nuisance to most characters) to true killers that are 50 or 100 feet deep. The bottom might be hard, bare stone; water in which even a strong swimmer will eventually tire and drown; rusted metal spikes, possibly covered in poison (now that's not fair); a dungeon-dwelling mold or slime; or even an ooze monster, such as a gelatinous cube or gray ooze. This particular pit is 20 feet deep, which means 2d6 points of falling damage. (Usually, a fall deals 1d6 damage per 10 feet the victim falls.) It also has spikes; when a character falls in, he or she receives 1d4 attacks, each striking at an attack bonus of +10 and dealing 1d4+2 damage per hit.



Pit traps are best used in places where other things might be happening at the same time — for example, a fight against intelligent monsters who know where the pits are and avoid them. If you do place a pit out in a dungeon hallway, think about putting a monster in the bottom of the pit that the victim now must fight after being injured. Monstrous spiders or centipedes are good choices, as are undead (skeletons or zombies) and ooze monsters.

## Chapter 28

# Ten Ready-to-Use Encounters

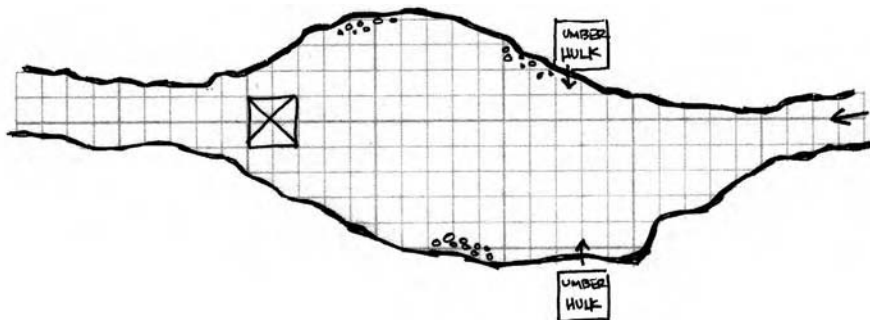
Memorable encounters are the building-blocks of great adventures. In this chapter, we present ten encounters you can drop into your own adventure, use as the basis to build an entire adventure around, or throw at the players when you need something in a hurry — like when the player characters go right and all you've prepared is the left side of the dungeon!

The encounters presented in this chapter feature a map, monsters, some details to set the scene, and a recommended Encounter Level (EL). As DM, you get to decide when, how, and where to use these encounters. You can easily customize them by changing the monster selection, omitting some of the special terrain features or traps, or redrawing the maps to fit into your dungeon.

### *Umber Hulk Ambush (EL 9)*

**Set Up:** Place this encounter in a part of the dungeon the player characters have to move through to get to their main objective. See Figure 28-1 for the map of the umber hulks' ambush site.

**Figure 28-1:**  
The umber hulks are hidden in the walls, ready to ambush unwary PCs.



Umber hulk			
A powerfully built creature that looks like a humanoid beetle, the umber hulk has great serrated mandibles and huge compound eyes. An umber hulk is a Large creature.			
Initiative	+1	Armor Class	18 (touch 10, flat 17)
Speed	20 ft., burrow 20 ft.	Hit Points	71
Claws	d20+11	Claws Damage	2d4+6
Full Attack	2 claws +11 melee (2d6+6 damage), and bite +9 melee (2d8+3 damage)	Special	Confusing gaze (Will DC 15 negates)
Skill: Listen	d20+11	Skill: Climb	d20+12
Skill: Jump	d20+5	Saves	Fort +8, Ref +3, Will +6
Alignment	Chaotic evil	Challenge Rating	7

**Read Aloud:** *This portion of the dungeon appears old and the walls seem to be made of dirt and crumbling rock. The path ahead appears to be clear and unobstructed.*

**Scene:** When the player characters start to move through this corridor, the two umber hulks hiding in the walls notice them (thanks to the monsters’ tremorsense ability). The creatures burst out of the walls to each side of the corridor, surprising the party. The two umber hulks get a surprise round to act before you call for initiative checks.

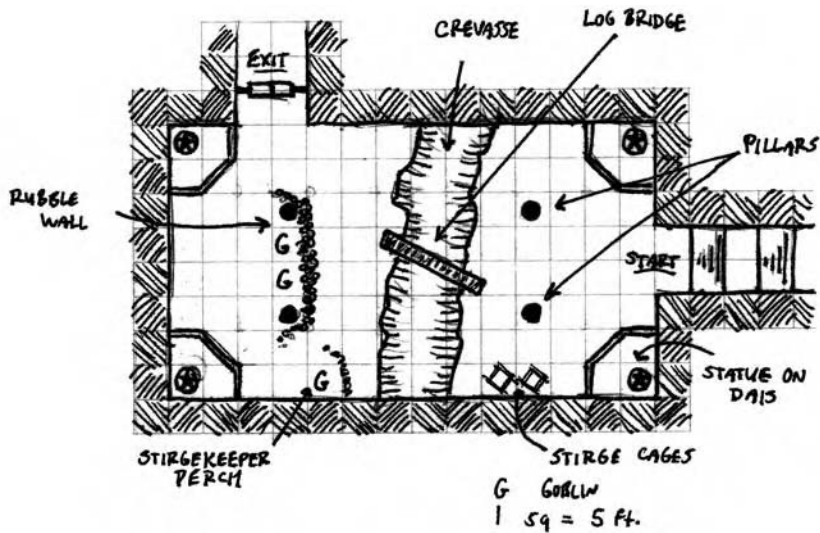
Note that the umber hulks have dug a pit farther along the passage. Any PC that moves over the pit falls 20 feet, taking 2d6 damage upon landing.

**Umbur Hulk Tactics:** The umber hulks use the surprise round to get in attacks on player characters. Remember to check for the effects of their confusing gaze special ability. As they fight the party, they try to herd the characters toward the pit trap. If one of the umber hulks falls in battle, the other tries to escape by burrowing into solid rock. An escaping umber hulk leaves no tunnel behind it.

Walking the Plank (EL 3)

**Set Up:** Add this chamber to your dungeon in any place it fits. Make sure you set it in a spot where the player characters enter from the direction indicated as “Start” on the map shown in Figure 28-2.

**Figure 28-2:**  
The PCs  
might want  
to bring  
stirge  
repellant  
when  
entering this  
chamber.



**Read Aloud:** A jagged crevasse 10 feet wide runs through the middle of this large hall. A rough-planed log serves as a crude bridge. Statues of grim-faced warriors stand on low daises in each corner of the room, and four large pillars support the hall's ceiling, 20 feet overhead. On the far side of the chamber, piles of rubble have been heaped up into simple walls. Several odd-looking wooden crates sit against the wall on your side of the room.

## Goblin

Goblins are short, ugly humanoids with long arms, pointed ears, and evil dispositions. They're cruel but somewhat cowardly creatures who see no reason to fight fair.

<b>Initiative</b>	+1	<b>Armor Class</b>	15 (19 behind wall)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	5 each
<b>Longbow</b>	d20+3	<b>Longbow Damage</b>	1d6/x3
<b>Morningstar</b>	d20+2	<b>Morningstar Damage</b>	1d6
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+5	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+2
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +3, Ref +1, Will -1	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1/8		

Stirge

Stirges are small, bloodsucking monsters that look like a cross between a bat and a giant mosquito.

Initiative	+4	Armor Class	16
Speed	10 ft., fly 40 ft. (8 squares)	Hit Points	5
Attach	Touch d20+7	Damage	Blood drain
Skill: Hide	d20+14	Skill: Spot	d20+4
Saves	Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1	Alignment	Neutral
Challenge Rating	½		

*Attach:* If the stirge hits with its touch attack, it latches on and automatically grapples its target. In subsequent rounds it can drain blood. An attached stirge is AC 12, and its grapple check after attaching is d20+1.

*Blood Drain:* The stirge deals 1d4 points of Constitution damage in any round when it begins its turn already attached to a target. After it drains 4 points of Constitution, it lets go and flies off to digest its meal.

**Scene:** This chamber is a goblin guardpost. When the player characters approach the crevasse or the bridge spanning it, two goblin archers lurking behind the rubble walls open fire. Meanwhile, a third goblin hiding in the perch on the south wall tugs on cords leading to the wooden crates, releasing bloodthirsty stirges into the room!

**Features:** Special features in this room include the following:

- ✓ *Crevasse:* The crevasse is 10 feet wide and 30 feet deep. A character can leap across with a DC 10 Jump check. A character who falls in takes 3d6 damage. The walls can be scaled up or down with a DC 15 Climb check.
- ✓ *Log Bridge:* The bridge is narrow and uneven. A character crossing the bridge must succeed on a DC 5 Balance check or fall into the crevasse. Remember, a character who takes damage while balancing might fall; see the Balance skill description on page 67 of the *Player's Handbook*.
- ✓ *Rubble Wall:* The walls provide the goblins with improved cover against ranged attacks. The goblins gain a +4 cover bonus to their Armor Class.
- ✓ *Pillars:* A character hiding behind a pillar gains cover against ranged attacks.
- ✓ *Statues:* The statues show human warriors in ancient armor. A character in the same square as a statue gains cover.



- ✓ **Stirge Cages:** Each of the crates holds two stirges. The doors are held fast by simple pins attached to long lanyards, which run across the crevasse to the stirgekeeper's post. By yanking on a lanyard, the stirgekeeper can open a crate and release the stirges inside.

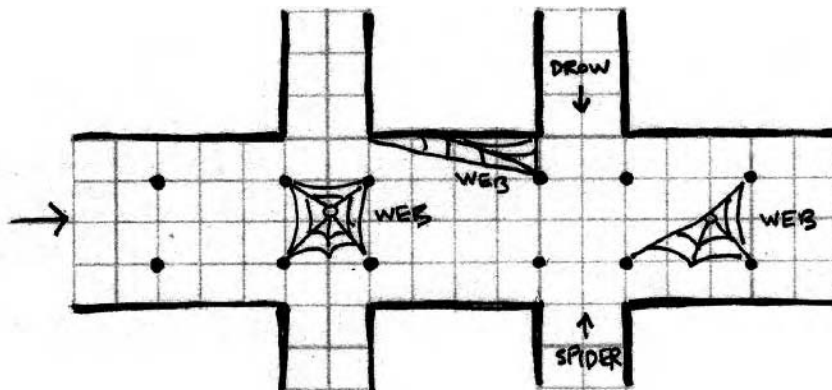
**Goblin and Stirge Tactics:** Two of the goblins use their shortbows to shoot at the heroes. They concentrate on any character trying to cross the log bridge or jump the crevasse; if a character gets across, one goblin shoots at him or her while the other tries to keep shooting at PCs still on the other side. The goblin in the stirgekeeper's perch uses his first round to yank on the lanyard of one stirge cage, and his second round to open the other. Then he picks up his bow and begins shooting.

The stirges naturally attack the nearest warm-blooded creature they see. The goblins have trained their pets to not attack them, of course. The goblins avoid shooting at characters who have stirges attached unless there are no other targets.

## Corridor of Webs (EL 2)

**Set Up:** This encounter works best as part of a larger dungeon complex, either a place controlled by drow or where drow serve as partners in some greater scheme. Figure 28-3 shows a map of the corridor of webs.

**Figure 28-3:**  
How big a  
spider does  
it take to  
make 10-  
foot-wide  
webs?



**Read Aloud:** *The pillar-lined corridor ahead appears dark and deserted. Thick cobwebs hang from the ceiling and between many of the pillars. The floor features an intricate pattern carved into the great stone tiles.*

## Drow warrior

A drow, or dark elf, is a slender humanoid with jet black skin, white hair, and pointed ears. Drow are typically evil, and they usually dwell in subterranean dungeon complexes.

<b>Initiative</b>	+1	<b>Armor Class</b>	16 (touch 11, flat 15)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	6
<b>Rapier</b>	d20+3	<b>Rapier Damage</b>	1d6+1/18–20
<b>Hand Crossbow</b>	d20+2	<b>Hand Crossbow Damage</b>	1d4/19–20
<b>Special</b>	Poisoned weapons, darkvision 120 ft., spell resistance 12, <i>dancing lights</i> 1/day, <i>darkness</i> 1/day (already cast), <i>faerie fire</i> 1/day	<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+0
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+2	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+3
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +1, Will –1	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1		

**Scene:** A drow warrior and its companion beast, a small monstrous spider, lie in wait for the intruding player characters. Aware of the characters' presence, the drow has been watching their progress and has set an ambush in this pillar-lined corridor. He has had the small monstrous spider create webs, as shown on the map in Figure 28-3. Also, he has cast his *darkness* spell in the far end of the corridor, where he and the spider hide and wait.

**Drow Warrior and Spider Tactics:** The drow warrior hopes to slow or otherwise hinder the player characters by luring them into the webs and attacking under the cover of the *darkness* spell. The small monstrous spider has spun three webs; it can throw its web five more times before it exhausts its webbing supply for the day.

**Poisoned Weapons:** All the drow warrior's weapons are poisoned. Any PC who is hit by the drow's weapons must succeed on a DC 13 Fortitude save or fall unconscious.

**Webs:** See page 288 of the *Monster Manual* for details on webs.

**Darkness:** See page 216 of the *Player's Handbook* for details on this spell.

## Small monstrous spider

A monstrous spider, about 2 feet across, has powerful mandibles and a dark, alien appearance.

<b>Initiative</b>	+3	<b>Armor Class</b>	14 (touch 14, flat 11)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft., climb 20 ft.	<b>Hit Points</b>	4
<b>Bite</b>	d20+4	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d4–2 plus poison
<b>Special</b>	Poison, darkvision 60 ft., web 7/day	<b>Poison</b>	Fortitude save DC 10, 1d3 Strength damage
<b>Skill: Jump</b>	d20–2	<b>Skill: Climb</b>	d20+11
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+11	<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral	<b>Challenge Rating</b>	½

## Mummy Crypt (EL 7)

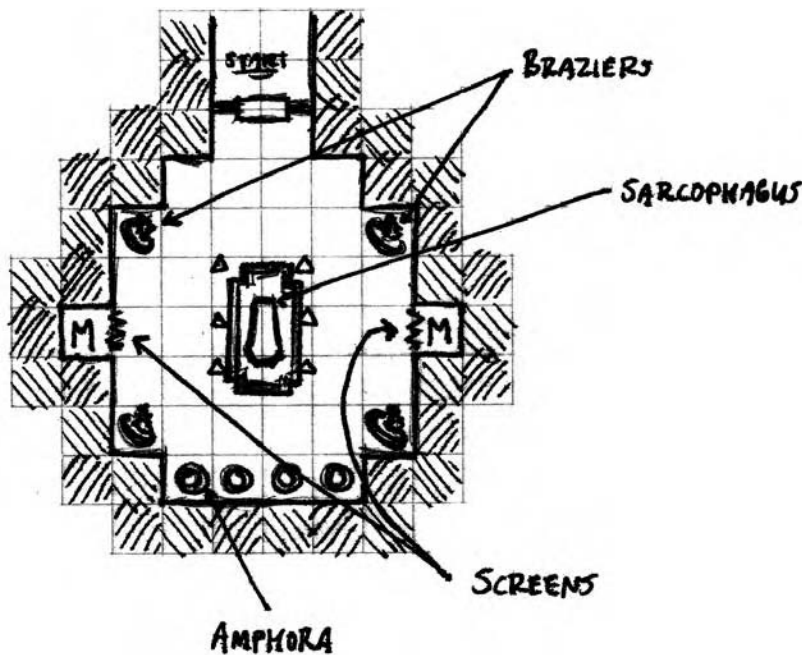
**Set Up:** Add this chamber to your dungeon in any spot where it fits. See Figure 28-4 for a map of the mummies' crypt. The room has no egress. The door at the entrance of the chamber is made of iron plate and secured with a good lock (Open Lock DC 30, break DC 28).

**Read Aloud:** *This chamber is a resplendent tomb. A great stone sarcophagus dominates the center of the room. Four braziers of brass in the corners hold silent, eerie flames of emerald green, and a row of tall stone amphora, each 5 feet tall, lines the back wall. Midway along the side walls are decorative wooden screens that cover dark alcoves.*

**Scene:** The mortal remains of an evil high priest are interred within the great sarcophagus, but the long-dead priest is not the threat here — his two faithful guards are. Behind the screens along the east and west walls lurk two mummies, standing guard over the remains of their one-time master. They attack any creature that enters the room.

**Features:** Special features in this room include the following:

- ✓ **Braziers:** The eerie green flames are nothing more than colorful versions of the *continual flame* spell. The braziers are about 3 feet tall, 3 feet wide, and weigh almost 100 pounds apiece.
- ✓ **Sarcophagus:** The 6 squares surrounding the sarcophagus are filled with the tall pedestals. Each square is considered difficult terrain (characters pay 2 squares of movement to enter each square). The lid of the sarcophagus is carved in the image of the dead high priest, a haughty and aristocratic visage dressed in regal robes.



**Figure 28-4:**  
Guard  
mummies  
on duty —  
enter at  
your own  
risk.

- ✓ **Amphora:** Each stone amphora is filled with a symbolic gift: wine (long since turned to vinegar), sacred oil (still good), grain (mostly mold now), and the last contains gold (1,200 gp).
- ✓ **Screens:** The wooden screens contain subtly carved vision-slits, allowing the mummies to watch over their master's tomb from within the alcoves. Each screen is quite light and can be pushed over or tossed aside with a move action.

**Mummy Tactics:** The two mummies remain hidden within their alcoves until a player character moves adjacent to the sarcophagus, an amphora, or either mummy's hiding place. At that point, they burst out of their alcoves. Roll initiative.



Mummies have the special ability to cause despair. As soon as they emerge from their alcoves, all characters in the party who can see the undead creatures must succeed on a Will save (DC 16) or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. The mummies ignore paralyzed characters to attack nonparalyzed characters. Only when no active characters oppose them do they turn on paralyzed PCs. Paralyzed characters are helpless, so the mummies hit them automatically.

## Mummy

Mummies are the animated remains of ancient warriors, still wrapped in the cerements of the grave. They move slowly, but they can render a mighty warrior helpless with fear, and they deal out blows of great power.

<b>Initiative</b>	+0	<b>Armor Class</b>	20
<b>Speed</b>	20 ft. (4 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	55
<b>Slam</b>	d20+11	<b>Slam Damage</b>	1d6+10
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+7	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+8
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +8	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	5		

*Damage Reduction 5:* The mummy subtracts 5 from all damage dealt by melee and ranged weapons.

*Despair:* At the mere sight of a mummy, the viewer must succeed on a DC 16 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save succeeds, that viewer cannot be affected again by the same mummy's despair ability.

*Mummy Rot:* Any creature hit by the mummy's slam attack must succeed on a DC 16 Fortitude save or contract mummy rot after 1 minute, taking 1d6 Constitution and 1d6 Charisma damage. A character casting a Conjuraton (healing) spell on a creature suffering from mummy rot must succeed on a DC 20 caster level check, or else the healing spell fails. See "Disease" on page 292 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

*Undead:* The mummy is immune to critical hits, mind-affecting effects, paralysis, poison, *sleep* spells and effects, sneak attacks, and stunning. It is not subject to fatigue or exhaustion.

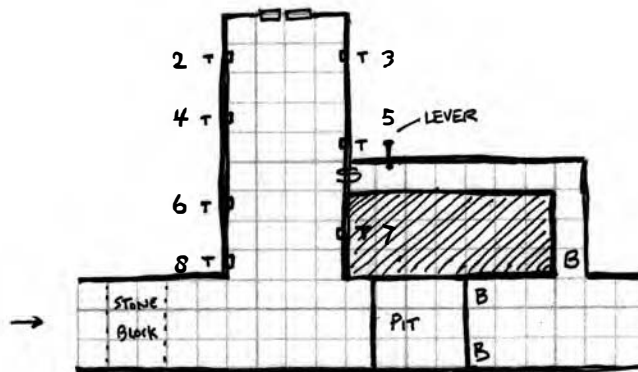
*Vulnerability to Fire:* The mummy takes half again as much damage from fire (+50%), regardless of whether a save is allowed or the save is successful.

## Rain of Arrows, Rain of Fire (EL 6)

**Set Up:** This encounter presents a particularly nasty trap for any adventurers that dare to push too far into a dungeon complex. Player characters must run a gauntlet of fire and arrows to reach one of the two exits available to them. This encounter area is shown on the map in Figure 28-5.

**Figure 28-5:**

Player characters must run through a gauntlet of fire and arrows.



**Read Aloud:** *Two bugbears stand in the corridor ahead of you, looking mean and nervous at the same time. “Thought I smelled something bad,” one bugbear says. “Yup, nothing worse than sweaty adventurers,” the other agrees.*

**Scene:** This portion of the dungeon is an elaborate trap operated by a trio of bugbear thugs. The two visible bugbears do their best to insult and draw the player characters toward them to activate the first part of the trap. The third bugbear hides in the secret corridor, ready to throw the lever that activates the second part of the trap.

**Bugbear Tactics:** The two bugbears try to goad the player characters to rush toward them. The first character to step onto the area marked “Pit” on the map causes the floor to fall away. A DC 15 Reflex save allows the character to jump back to a safe part of the corridor. Otherwise, the character and the floor crash to the bottom of the pit, 15 feet down, which causes 2d6 damage. At the same time that the pit is activated, a great stone block drops out of the ceiling to seal off the passage behind the PCs. Any PCs standing in the squares that the block drops into must make a DC 15 Reflex save to leap into the corridor and avoid damage. Anyone who fails the save is moved forward to the first open square and takes 2d6 points of damage from the heavy stone block.

Now the bugbears on the other side of the pit pull out longbows and make ranged attacks against any player characters they can see. At the same time, the third bugbear moves to the lever and activates the second part of the trap.

When activated by the third bugbear, the side corridor becomes a fiery deathtrap. Every round, roll 1d8. On a roll of 1, nothing happens. On a roll of 2–8, the wall section indicated on the map shown in Figure 28-5 spews forth a gout of flame 5 feet wide and 20 feet long (the width of the corridor) that deals 1d6 points of fire damage to anyone standing in that row.

**Secret Door:** To find the secret door in the fire trap corridor requires a DC 20 Search check.

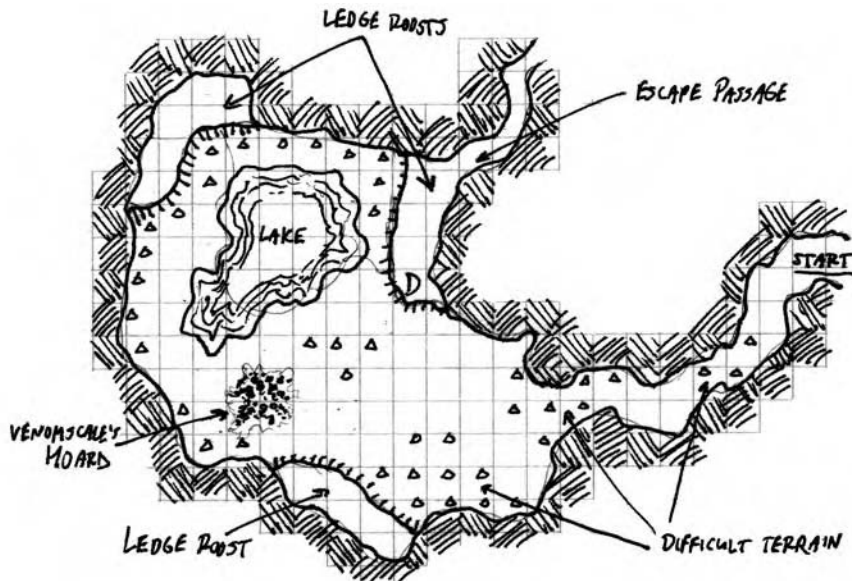
## Bugbear

A muscular, savage humanoid standing 7 feet tall and covered in coarse hair, a bugbear can be a formidable opponent.

<b>Initiative</b>	+1	<b>Armor Class</b>	17 (touch 11, flat 16)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	16
<b>Morningstar</b>	d20+5	<b>Morningstar Damage</b>	1d8+2
<b>Longbow</b>	d20+3	<b>Longbow Damage</b>	1d8
<b>Skill: Climb</b>	d20+3	<b>Skill: Move Silently</b>	d20+6
<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+4	<b>Saves</b>	Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1
<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic evil	<b>Challenge Rating</b>	2

## Dragon's Den (EL 4)

**Set Up:** Use this encounter as the *boss* (or climactic) encounter in a low-level dungeon, or use the dragon's cave as a single standalone lair for the player characters to explore. A map of the dragon's cave is shown in Figure 28-6.



**Figure 28-6:** Venomscale's home, complete with hoard and an indoor swimming pool.

When the player characters reach the area marked “Start,” read the following to them:

**Read Aloud:** *A dripping cave-passageway leads into the darkness. The floor is quite rough and uneven, and the walls simply slope inward about 15 feet above, meeting in a jagged fissure. The air is filled with a foul, acrid reek; your eyes water, and your throat burns. Ahead you can see that the passage opens into a large chamber. Gold glitters there.*

**Scene:** The cavern beyond the passage is the lair of a young green dragon named Venomscale. The clever dragon uses its hoard as a lure for bold adventurers, attacking when the curious (or greedy) venture into its den.

**Features:** Special features within this cavern include the following:

- ✓ **Floor:** The floor of the passage and most of the cavern (every square marked with a triangle) is a natural stone floor. It takes 2 squares of movement to enter each square, and it's impossible to run or charge over these squares. Because Venomscale can fly, the dragon isn't bothered by these restrictions.
- ✓ **Cavern Lake:** This large, cold lake is 5 feet deep in any square next to the edge, and 15 feet deep in all other squares. Creatures in the shallow water gain cover (+4 bonus to AC). It requires 4 squares of movement to move from 1 square of shallow water to another. (A character can jump in the water just by moving into a water square.) Otherwise, a character in the water has to swim.
- ✓ **Ledge Roosts:** These ledges are 10 feet above the cavern floor. It's a DC 15 Climb check to scramble up to the ledge. (The dragon just flies, of course.) A character with a melee weapon can't reach Venomscale while it's up in a ledge roost.
- ✓ **Escape Passage:** A small, winding passage leads from the third ledge roost to a hidden exit from the dungeon or cavern. Characters can't see the escape passage from the floor of the cave.
- ✓ **Venomscale's Hoard:** The dragon's hoard is displayed in clear sight in the middle of the room. It includes 300 gp; 8,000 sp; two red garnets worth 100 gp each; a *scroll of web*; and a +1 *longsword*.

**Green Dragon Tactics:** Venomscale hears the player characters approaching down the passage unless they're attempting to move silently or using a *silence* spell to not be heard. (Allow Venomscale a Listen check to see whether it can hear a character who is using the Move Silently skill.) If the dragon doesn't hear the PCs, it's idly playing with its hoard when they first appear.

Presuming the dragon hears the player characters, it moves to the spot marked D on the map before the PCs see it and hides (Hide check d20+11, +4 for excellent cover). Allow the player characters to make a Spot check; each



character who equals or exceeds Venomscale's Hide check is not surprised and can act in the surprise round. Characters who don't see the dragon before it attacks are surprised and can do nothing.

Venomscale charges the PCs on its first turn, attacking the first character it sees with its bite attack. On the next round, it breathes acid on the party, trying to catch as many characters as it can in the area. (Venomscale will *not* breathe acid on its treasure hoard and makes sure that its cone of acid does not cover the treasure.) In subsequent rounds, Venomscale may make a full attack, using its bite, claws, and wings all in the same turn, or it may choose to withdraw, flying up to a ledge roost in order to allow its acid breath to recharge.

If the dragon feels that it's in a very good position, it may offer the player characters the chance to surrender. If the player characters leave their armor, weapons, and treasure here, the dragon allows them to leave alive. Otherwise, Venomscale is happy to kill them all.

## Green dragon

Green dragons are cruel, deceitful, and avaricious. They can breathe out a cone of deadly corrosive acid on their enemies or tear them apart with a whirlwind of melee attacks. This green dragon is a very young dragon, which means that it is a Medium-sized creature.

<b>Initiative</b>	+4	<b>Armor Class</b>	17 (touch 10, flat 17)
<b>Speed</b>	40 ft. (8 squares), fly 150 ft.	<b>Hit Points</b>	68
<b>Bite</b>	d20+10	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d8+2
<b>Claws</b>	d20+8/d20+8	<b>Claws Damage</b>	1d6+1
<b>Wings</b>	d20+8/d20+8	<b>Wings Damage</b>	1d4+1
<b>Full Attack</b>	bite d20+10, 2 claws d20+8, 2 wings d20+8	<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+11
<b>Skills: Spot, Listen</b>	d20+11	<b>Saves</b>	Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +6
<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil	<b>Challenge Rating</b>	4

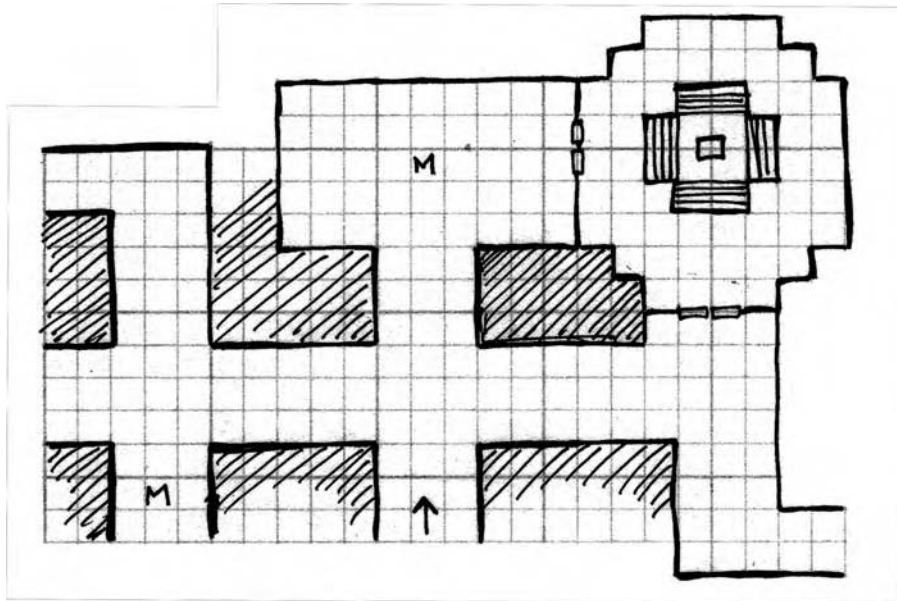
**Breath Weapon:** The green dragon breathes a 30-foot cone of acid (4d6 damage, Reflex DC 16 half). It can breathe acid once every 1d4 rounds.

**Immunities:** The green dragon is immune to acid, paralysis, and *sleep* spells and effects.

**Blindsense:** The dragon pinpoints invisible creatures within 60 feet (but invisible creatures still gain total concealment against it).

## Minotaur Maze (EL 7)

**Set Up:** You can use this encounter to guard a treasure or other object that the player characters might want to acquire. Place it in the midst of winding dungeon corridors to create a maze of passages in which the minotaurs can track the PCs and employ their powerful charge attacks. Figure 28-7 shows a map of the minotaurs' maze.



**Figure 28-7:**  
The heart of  
the labyrinth  
is home to a  
pair of  
minotaurs.

**Read Aloud:** *The winding maze of corridors takes you deeper into the dungeon until you reach an area permeated by a powerful animal stench. In the shadows up ahead, you see a tall, muscular form, with ambient light glinting off great horns that curve atop the creature's head. It roars in rage and challenge, raising sparks from the stone floor as it stomps its hooved feet.*

**Scene:** A pair of minotaurs patrols this section of the dungeon, guarding the locked room. The treasure or whatever object the player characters seek is within the locked room, atop a raised platform in the center of the odd-shaped chamber.

**Minotaur Tactics:** The two minotaurs work in tandem, setting up flanks and charging opportunities for each other whenever possible. They concentrate on a single target at a time, working to systematically defeat the player characters one at a time. If a minotaur makes a full attack, it strikes with both its greataxe and its gore attack in the same round.

## Minotaur

An incredibly tall, powerfully muscled humanoid covered in shaggy fur and with the head of a bull, a minotaur is strong, fierce, and frighteningly savage. A minotaur is a Large creature.

<b>Initiative</b>	+0	<b>Armor Class</b>	14 (touch 9, flat —)
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	39
<b>Greataxe</b>	d20+9	<b>Greataxe Damage</b>	3d6+6/×3 crit
<b>Gore</b>	d20+9	<b>Gore Damage</b>	1d8+4
<b>Full Attack</b>	Greataxe +9/+4, and Gore +4	<b>Special</b>	Powerful charge attack 4d6+6
<b>Skill: Intimidate, Search</b>	d20+2	<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+7
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5	<b>Alignment</b>	Chaotic evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	4		

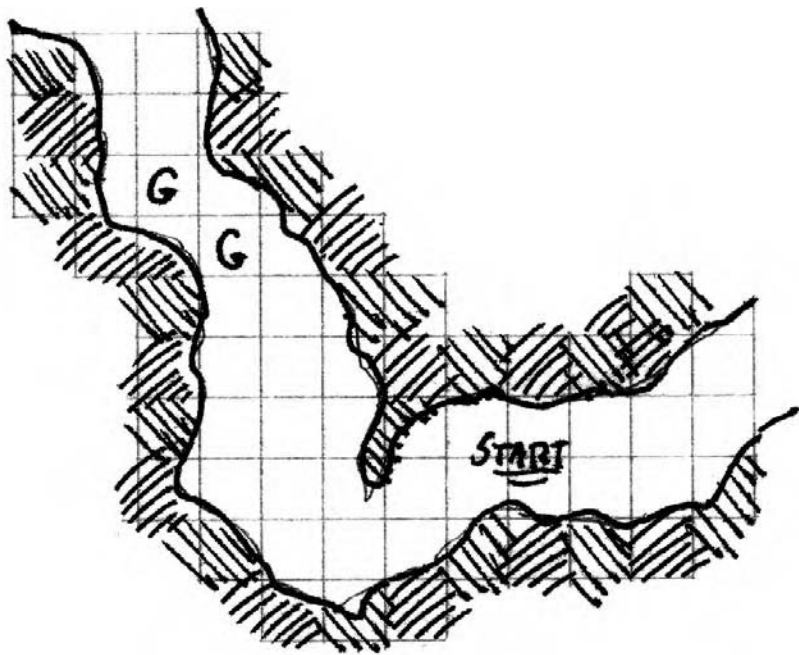
*Treasure Chamber:* The doors that protect this chamber are made of iron. Iron doors have a 10 hardness, 60 hp, and a break DC 28. Good locks seal these doors (Open Lock DC 30). Inside, a ceiling pendulum trap protects the 5-foot section in front of each pair of doors. When a character steps on any of the squares inside the room and adjacent to the doors, a greataxe swings out of the ceiling. The pendulum trap attacks anyone in a square adjacent to the doors with a +15 melee attack (1d12+8/×3). To find the trap, a PC must succeed on a DC 15 Search check. To disarm the trap, a PC must succeed on a DC 27 Disable Device check. Each pendulum resets automatically and can attack again one round later.

## Grimlock Hunters (EL 3)

**Set Up:** This is an encounter you can run anytime in a dungeon or cavern. Monsters sometimes roam through cavern complexes and dungeon halls looking for trouble, so you can simply throw this fight at the player characters if the action starts to drag. For convenience, the map in Figure 28-8 shows a typical dungeon corridor.

**Read Aloud:** *You turn a corner in the winding passageway and find two gray-skinned, black-haired humanoids approaching from the other direction. The creatures wear breechcloths of badly tanned leather and carry crude iron axes. They are completely eyeless, but they seem to see you just fine — they snarl and leap forward, axes raised!*

**Figure 28-8:**  
The grimlocks have no eyes, but they still see the PCs coming.



### Grimlock

Grimlocks are humanoid creatures with thick, gray, scaly skin and lank black hair. They are completely eyeless but can see by means of their blindsight ability. They are savage and bloodthirsty marauders.

<b>Initiative</b>	+1	<b>Armor Class</b>	15
<b>Speed</b>	30 ft. (6 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	11 each
<b>Battleaxe</b>	d20+4	<b>Battleaxe Damage</b>	1d8+3/×3
<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+3 (+10 in caves)	<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+5
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +2	<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	1		

*Blindsight:* Grimlocks sense all creatures within 40 feet as a sighted creature would. Beyond that, they treat all targets as having total concealment.

*Immunities:* Grimlocks are immune to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, and other attack forms that rely on sight.

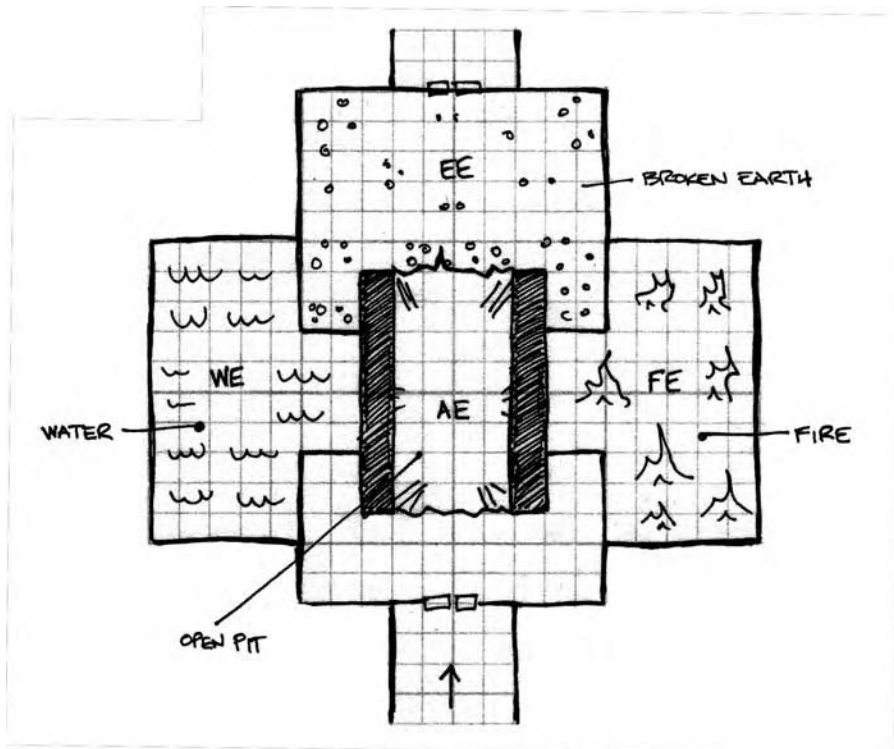
**Scene:** Grimlocks are violent, ill-tempered marauders and savages who haunt the foul depths of dungeons and caves. While they have no eyes, they “see” quite well with their uncanny blindsight — a natural ability to perceive the tiniest sounds, smells, and movements nearby. Their only plan is to hack the heroes into pieces, and then loot the corpses.

**Features:** None of note. This is a straight-up fight.

**Grimlock Tactics:** The grimlocks rely on savagery, not planning. They try to spread out and catch a player character between them, so that they can flank their foe and gain the normal +2 attack bonus for attacking from a flank.

## Elemental Fundamentals (EL 9)

**Set Up:** This encounter should separate two portions of a dungeon — where the player characters are and where the player characters want to be. To get there, they have to cross the gauntlet of elemental dangers shown on the map in Figure 28-9.



**Figure 28-9:**  
An elementary problem: Finding the way past elementals.

**Read Aloud:** *You stand upon a stone platform just inside a pair of double doors. Straight ahead, high walls frame a deep chasm that cuts through the center of the chamber. To your right, the ground consists of hot coals, and the air above it shimmers with heat and the occasional flare of fire. To your left, a pool of still water blocks the way. On the other side of the chamber, past the gaping chasm, you see that the ground consists of rocky, broken earth instead of smooth stone. A pair of double doors beyond the broken earth seem to be the only exit from this chamber — other than whatever may wait at the bottom of the chasm or beneath the still water.*

**Scene:** This chamber is divided among the primary elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Each section is guarded by two elementals of the same type. The player characters don't have to defeat all the elementals to exit this chamber, but they do have to find a way to reach the broken earth and deal with the two earth elementals that wait there. The Encounter Level is based on the assumption that the player characters will deal with two of the elemental types (by going through the air, fire, or water elementals' areas to get to the earth elementals' area), but not all four elemental types. If they do try to enter each area, they must deal with more than the four types of CR 5 creatures that this encounter is based upon, and the challenge becomes increasingly harder.

**Elemental Tactics:** Each section of the chamber (other than the entry area) is guarded by a pair of elementals. The matched pairs cooperate with each other, and once encountered, the elementals follow the PCs throughout the chamber — even into other elemental areas.

This encounter contains the following features:

- ✓ **Chasm:** The chasm is very deep, dropping 100 feet below the chamber. It even extends upward, 100 feet toward the surface. Two air elementals guard this area. If the player characters try to cross the chasm in any way, the air elementals attack.
- ✓ **Fire Pit:** The fire pit area has a 20-foot-tall ceiling. Two fire elementals guard this area. In addition, the fire pit deals 1d6 points of fire damage per 5 feet of movement to any character moving through the area, or 1d6 points of fire damage per round for characters standing or fighting in the area.
- ✓ **Pool of Water:** The pool of water is 50 feet deep. Two water elementals guard this area. As soon as a character enters the water, whirlpools kick up that attempt to pull characters under. (See Drowning rules on page 304 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.) The whirlpools require Swim DC 20 checks to move each 5 feet through the water. If a PC fails a check, the PC is pulled under and begins to drown.
- ✓ **Broken Earth:** The area of broken earth is guarded by two earth elementals. Treat this area as difficult terrain; it costs double to move through this area. The doors at the end of the chamber are made of stone (8 hardness, 60 hp, break DC 28) and are locked (Open Lock DC 30).

## Air elemental

A shifting cloud surrounded by fast-moving currents of air, an air elemental is a terrible force of nature. An air elemental is a Large creature.

<b>Initiative</b>	+11	<b>Armor Class</b>	20 (touch 16, flat 13)
<b>Speed</b>	Fly 100 ft. (20 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	60
<b>Slam</b>	d20+12	<b>Slam Damage</b>	2d6+2
<b>Full Attack</b>	2 slams +12	<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+5
<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+6	<b>Saves</b>	Fort +5, Ref +13, Will +2
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral	<b>Challenge Rating</b>	5
<b>Special</b>	Damage reduction 5/—, whirlwind (see <i>Monster Manual</i> page 95)		

*Air Mastery:* Airborne opponents take a –1 penalty on attack, damage rolls.

## Earth elemental

A vaguely humanoid shape rises from out of the earth, appearing as a walking hill of rock and soil. An earth elemental is a Large creature.

<b>Initiative</b>	–1	<b>Armor Class</b>	18 (touch 8, flat 18)
<b>Speed</b>	20 ft. (4 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	68
<b>Slam</b>	d20+12	<b>Slam damage</b>	2d8+7
<b>Full Attack</b>	2 slams +12	<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+6
<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+5	<b>Saves</b>	Fort +10, Ref +1, Will +2
<b>Alignment</b>	Neutral	<b>Challenge Rating</b>	5
<b>Special</b>	Damage reduction 5/—, earth glide (see <i>Monster Manual</i> page 98)		

*Earth Mastery:* Gains +1 on attack, damage rolls if it and foe touching ground, –4 penalty on attacks, damage if foe is airborne or in water.

*Push:* Can start a bull rush without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Fire elemental

A mass of ambulatory flame, a fire elemental is a walking conflagration. A fire elemental is a Large creature.

Initiative	+9	Armor Class	18 (touch 14, flat 13)
Speed	50 ft. (10 squares)	Hit Points	60
Slam	d20+10	Slam Damage	2d6+2 plus 2d6 fire
Full Attack	2 slams +10	Skill: Listen	d20+5
Skill: Spot	d20+6	Saves	Fort +5, Ref +11, Will +2
Alignment	Neutral	Challenge Rating	5
Special	Damage reduction 5/—, immunity to fire, vulnerable to cold		

*Burn:* If hit by a slam, opponent must make Reflex save DC 17 or catch on fire (2d6 fire damage); the flame burns for 1d4 rounds.

Water elemental

A vortex of water surrounded by churning waves, a water elemental channels the force of an ocean storm. A water elemental is a Large creature.

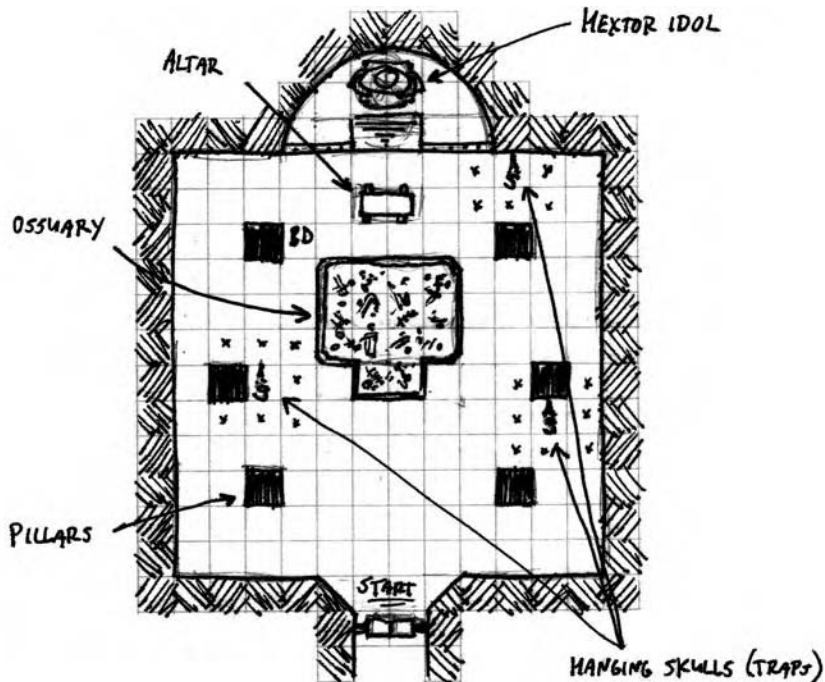
Initiative	+2	Armor Class	20 (touch 11, flat 18)
Speed	20 ft., Swim 90 ft.	Hit Points	68
Slam	d20+10	Slam Damage	2d8+5
Full Attack	2 slams +10	Skill: Listen	d20+5
Skill: Spot	d20+6	Saves	Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +2
Alignment	Neutral	Challenge Rating	5
Special	Damage reduction 5/—, drench, vortex (see <i>Monster Manual</i> page 101)		

*Water Mastery:* Gains a +1 on attack, damage rolls if it and opponent are touching water, –4 penalty on attacks, damage if foe is touching ground.



## Shrine of Evil (EL 10)

**Set Up:** Add this chamber as a challenging encounter area in a high-level dungeon, or use it as the climactic encounter of a mid-level dungeon. The shrine has only one entrance, so you can place it anywhere it fits. See Figure 28-10 for a map of the shrine of evil.



**Figure 28-10:**  
A shrine to Hextor, god of war and tyranny, and playground of a bone devil.

**Read Aloud:** *This grim chamber seems to be a shrine dedicated to a fearsome and evil deity. Above the altar stands a 10-foot-tall idol, depicting a six-armed dark lord in battle armor, three hands raised in a gesture of imperious command. Before the altar is a great round pit — an ossuary, full of the broken bones of hundreds of creatures. Several skulls hang suspended from chains in the ceiling, burning with weird blue flame like macabre censers. You sense a cold and hateful presence in the room, and a dry, rasping voice whispers, “Have you come to honor Hextor with your blood, foolish mortals?” It seems to come from the empty air.*

**Scene:** This shrine is dedicated to Hextor, the god of war and tyranny. The shrine is also the domain of a bone devil, a powerful creature of the lower planes. The devil can turn itself invisible, and so it begins the encounter in this state. The creature amuses itself by whispering terrible threats against the player characters and extols the might of Hextor until it gets tired of playing with its prey. Then it attacks.

Bone devil

A bone devil is a tall, skeletal creature that has tight, dried skin, a fearsome skull-like head, and a scorpion tail. An odor of decay fouls the air around it. The bone devil is a Large creature.

<b>Initiative</b>	+9	<b>Armor Class</b>	25 (touch 14, flat 20)
<b>Speed</b>	40 ft. (8 squares)	<b>Hit Points</b>	95
<b>Bite</b>	d20+14	<b>Bite Damage</b>	1d8+5
<b>2 Claw Attack</b>	d20+12/d20+12	<b>Claw Damage</b>	1d4+2
<b>Sting</b>	d20+12	<b>Sting Damage</b>	3d4+2 and poison
<b>Skill: Concentration</b>	d20+18	<b>Skill: Hide</b>	d20+14
<b>Skill: Listen</b>	d20+17	<b>Skill: Spot</b>	d20+17
<b>Saves</b>	Fort +12, Ref +12, Will +11	<b>Alignment</b>	Lawful evil
<b>Challenge Rating</b>	9		

*Damage Reduction 10/good:* The bone devil reduces the damage dealt by melee and ranged attacks by 10 unless the weapon is good-aligned.

*Immunities:* The bone devil is immune to fire and poison.

*Resistances:* The bone devil has acid resistance 10 and cold resistance 10.

*Spell Resistance:* The bone devil has SR 21.

*Fear Aura:* The bone devil radiates fear in a 5-foot aura. All PCs in this area must succeed on a DC 17 Will save or be affected as though by a *fear* spell. A PC that saves successfully cannot be affected again by the same bone devil's fear aura for 24 hours.

*Poison:* The bone devil's sting delivers poison. If the devil hits with its sting, its enemy must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 20) or suffer 1d6 points of Strength damage. One minute later, the stung PC must save again or suffer 2d6 more Strength damage.

*Spell-Like Abilities:* At will — *greater teleport* (self only), *dimensional anchor*, *fly*, *invisibility* (self only), *major image* (DC 15), *wall of ice*. Caster level 12th.

**Features:** The shrine includes the following unusual features:

- *Idol:* The idol of Hextor is big and impressive, but it isn't dangerous. A hidden compartment in its back (Search DC 20) contains a small iron cask, which holds 5 perfect rubies worth 1,200 gp each.

- ✓ *Hanging Skulls:* Each of these flaming skulls is a magical trap. Any character who moves into a square adjacent to a hanging skull is attacked by a ray of blazing blue fire, which is an empowered *scorching ray* spell. The ray makes a touch attack (attack roll d20+10) and deals 6d6 fire damage if it hits. The bone devil is immune to fire, but it avoids moving next to a skull until after a PC sets off the trap. It doesn't want to give away the surprise. After firing a ray, a hanging skull must recharge on the following round, but it can shoot again on the round after that if somebody else moves adjacent to it.
- ✓ *Ossuary:* The bone pit makes for very bad footing. Any PC trying to walk on the bones must pay 4 squares of movement for each square of the ossuary he or she enters, and he or she must succeed on a DC 15 Balance check or fall prone in the square.

**Bone Devil Tactics:** The bone devil is armed with a formidable array of special powers and abilities. We recommend that you take a moment to review its stat block before you begin this encounter.

The bone devil begins the encounter invisible, so unless the player characters have some way to see invisible creatures, it surprises the party when it finally attacks. It begins by striking from invisibility against any cleric or paladin in the party because it hates the servants of good deities. An invisible creature gains a +2 bonus on its attack rolls against a creature that can't see it, and ignores its target's Dexterity bonus to AC. Attacking ends the bone devil's invisibility, just like normal.

In its next round, the bone devil uses its spell-like abilities to create a *wall of ice* that divides the party in half — hopefully, leaving it with only one or two characters to deal with on its side of the wall. After beating on any clerics or paladins for a round or two, it begins to spread its attacks around and tries to sting as many characters as possible, hoping its poison will weaken or cripple multiple opponents. The bone devil can teleport to get around its own ice walls and may create more *walls of ice* to keep the party separated.



## Chapter 29

# Ten Things to Avoid When DMing

.....

**K**eeping track of all the things you're supposed to be doing (or not doing) when you're behind the DM screen can be hard. You're supposed to be the unquestioned master of a 1,000-page game system . . . and a riveting storyteller, a talented worldbuilder, and a passable amateur thespian, to boot.

You're going to make a goof at some point, so in this chapter, we list some of the DMing don'ts you should try hardest to follow. These list items are Big Picture problems that many DMs struggle with, not details of how the rules work or what's actually in the game.

## *Don't Get Attached to Your Villains*

When you spend hours crafting interesting, powerful, and charismatic villains for your game, you can easily get attached to your favorite bad guys. It's especially easy when you've worked all week to come up with a great storyline featuring that villain as the principal nemesis of the heroes for your next game. You might be tempted to go to some effort to prevent the player characters from beating your mastermind before they're "supposed to."



Here's our advice: Don't ever cut your villains a break. The stars of the story are the player characters, and if the players outwit you or just blunder into victory through sheer dumb luck, you need to let them win.

## *Don't Try to Kill the PCs*

Back in the dark old days of gaming, many Dungeon Masters cultivated a reputation as "killer DMs." They'd gloat over how tough their dungeons were, what sort of mortality rate they achieved, and exactly how they humbled even the most cocksure and disrespectful players by mincing, mashing, or flat-out disintegrating their characters.

Here's the deal: Killing a character is nothing to be proud of, because anyone can do it. You can do in the heroes any time you like by dropping death traps or monsters far above their power level into the adventure. Try throwing a

*symbol of death* or a nightwalker at a party of 1st-level characters if you don't believe us. On second thought, don't do that; just trust us that it'll mean game over.



You don't win anything when one of your monsters or traps kills a player character. There might be times in your game (possibly even most of the time) when you're indifferent to character deaths and let the dice fall where they may — but don't ever go gunning for the player characters. Clever, vicious, or evil monsters may certainly do so within the constraints of a fair and balanced encounter, but *you* shouldn't.

## *Don't Let the Players Become Too Frustrated*

The ultimate measure of a successful D&D game is simply: “Did everybody have fun?” If the players get stuck on a particular obstacle, opponent, or dead end and become frustrated, you should intervene.

If you're crafty enough, the players might not even realize that you're helping them because the exact form of your intervention doesn't even *seem* to be helpful. For example, imagine that the party is stuck in a dungeon room, confronting a door that they can't open until they solve a puzzle. The players can't figure it out, and they're getting bored and frustrated — so you intervene by suddenly throwing a couple of wandering monsters into the room. You might have had no intention of giving the players a fight at this point in the adventure, but now you've changed the challenge. And, if the player characters discover a clue when they defeat the monsters you threw their way, the players might not even suspect you're tossing them a softball to help them beat the puzzle.

## *Don't Compete With Other Entertainment*

Wherever and whenever you set up the game session, avoid playing while the players are distracted by something else. For example, don't try to run your game while a couple players are over on the couch playing a video game, or at the computer instant-messaging other friends, or keeping an eye on the football game. D&D works best when you have the full use of the players' imaginations, and you need their undivided attention for that.



If you find yourself trying to run the game with a truly unavoidable distraction (maybe the Big Game is on the TV in the other room, and several players are really trying to keep half an eye on it), consider calling a break. Wait until the players are ready to pay attention to the game before resuming.

## *Don't Overcomplicate the Encounter*

What's better than a memorable villain or monster? Two memorable villains or monsters! Three! Four! With arrow traps, and a lighting storm, and an icy cliff the player characters are trying to climb!

Well, not really. The best encounters need only about two to three discrete elements. Anything beyond that becomes hard to keep track of for everyone.

## *Don't Play Favorites*

You're only human, so it's inevitable that you like some of the characters the players bring to the game more than others. For that matter, you might just like some players better than others (especially if your significant other is in your game group). Be careful not to show preferential treatment at the table.

## *Don't Give the Players Everything . . .*

Players like it when their characters get rewarded. You might be tempted to make sure the players like your game by giving their characters frequent and powerful rewards — quick level-ups, powerful NPC allies, or great hauls of magic items.

In our experience, players enjoy the rewards their characters gain much more if they have a sense that their characters really earned them. To keep the players interested in your game, make sure that they stay a little hungry. If they aren't anxious to get to the next reward because you've already given it away, they have little motivation to play.

## *. . . But Don't Be Stingy, Either*

Conversely, the players deserve and expect regular rewards from your game. Without a sense that their characters are indeed making progress and becoming more capable and powerful, the players might begin to wonder why they're showing up. If a fighter in your game reaches 6th level and is still toting around the scale mail and longsword he started with at 1st level, you're keeping that player from enjoying some of the fun the game promises.



Reward success appropriately, and the players can't help but come back to your game with just the right balance of hunger for the next big thing and real satisfaction at the progress they've already made. To make sure you're handing out treasure at the right rate, refer to Table 5-1 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

## ***Don't Sit There Like a Lump***

You can easily fall into the habit of parking behind your DM screen, reading the adventure's boxed text, and announcing attack results without any particular inflection. Some people are naturally low-key, and even a high-energy DM can show up for a game tired or distracted. We don't expect you to deliver riveting lines every time you speak, but you need to make yourself the center of attention to be an effective and engaging DM. That often means standing up, moving around, and speaking with some animation and excitement. Deliver your own color commentary when you're narrating a combat. If the ogre swings and misses, pantomime a gigantic swing and say something like, "Wow, Jozan, that would've taken your head clean off your shoulders if it had landed! Good thing you ducked!"

## ***Don't Center the Game on One Player***

Don't let one player do all the talking. If your gaming group includes a loud, expressive, or flamboyant roleplayer who wants to engage every NPC he meets in deeply immersive conversations, keep an eye on how the other players react. When you go one-on-one with a single player at the table, no one else is playing D&D — they're watching their fellow player play. You might also run into this with a player who's more of a power gamer than a roleplayer; perhaps she insists on doing all of the thinking, planning, and leading in the party. Go out of your way to keep less assertive or confident players just as involved as the extrovert.



One of the classic ways a selfish player seizes the spotlight is to insist that his character is going to go off and do his own thing, regardless of what the rest of the party decides. Typically, that forces less assertive players to cave in to his plan or puts you in the awkward spot of trying to DM two separate parties at the same time. The next time the overly assertive player does this, let him go off and separate from the group. Then, instead of using cut-aways to give him equal time with the rest of the group, ignore him as much as possible. Give him a couple minutes of playing time every 20 or 30 minutes, sticking with the rest of the group and following their adventure for the rest of the time. When Mr. Assertive figures out that he's playing less D&D, he ought to come around.



## Chapter 30

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# Ten Things to Do All the Time When DMing

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**K**ee these ten suggestions in mind whenever you run a D&D game. They'll help you keep your eye on the big picture and make you a better Dungeon Master. You won't have a chance to use all these suggestions simultaneously, but watch for opportunities to put them into play in your game sessions.

### *Be Prepared*

Review the rules. Know your adventure. Be prepared.

It all boils down to doing a little before-game reading and being organized. Gather your adventure materials and notes before the game. Collect the miniatures you want to use ahead of time. Mark the sections of any rulebooks or *Monster Manuals* you plan to use in the game session. The players expect you to be ready to run the adventure when the group meets up, and if you're prepared, everything will run that much more smoothly.

### *Provide Various Challenges*

Don't just present combat encounter after combat encounter in your adventures. Player characters and roleplaying games can't survive on combat alone. You need to present encounters to challenge all character types, testing the skills and brains and roleplaying abilities of the players and their characters, at least every so often. This gives every character a chance to shine at some point in the adventure, and variety helps make your adventures more dynamic and satisfying.

## *Start Each Session with Action*

As often as possible, kick off each game session with some kind of action. Whether you drop the player characters into the middle of a fight, start off with a chase, provide the means for a breathtaking escape, or let them witness some awe-inspiring or terrible event, starting with action leads to excitement, and excitement leads to a good game session.

## *Look for Opportunities*

Because you never know what the player characters are going to do, you have to keep an open mind and look for opportunities to translate their actions back into your plot. For example, the players might decide that something you never thought of is really behind the whole adventure. If it sounds good to you, work it in! Look for places to drop hints and seeds that lead to future adventures. And always try to make it look like you planned it all along, even if you just thought of it thanks to something the player characters did.

## *Exude Drama in Your Descriptions*

Be entertaining. When you set the scene and describe the action, use evocative language, stand up, sit down, point, lean, talk slowly, talk fast, talk loud, whisper, explain what characters see, hear, feel, and smell. In other words, do whatever is dramatically appropriate to get the scene across to the players in a colorful, fun, and informative manner.

## *Use Visual Aids*

Maps, play surfaces, miniatures, music, and handouts of all descriptions help add context and texture to the imaginations of you and the players. A picture is worth a thousand words and helps you quickly get across the information you're trying to impart. So, use visual (and audial) aids. They're good for the game. And they're fun, too.



## ***Be Responsive***

Take cues from the players. If your description is running on and the players are beginning to get bored or fidgety, cut it short and move on. If they seem to need more information, provide it. If they really want to get to the action now, have a wandering monster show up or have the villains kick in the door. So, be responsive to the needs of the players, and you will be rewarded with attentive and excited play.

## ***Be Consistent***

When you create house rules, write them down. When you make a ruling on something in a rulebook that you and the players don't think is clear, make a note of it. When you describe a nonplayer character (NPC) that the player characters (PCs) meet, note any pertinent details so that you can play that NPC the same way the next time they encounter him or her.

In short, be consistent as a rules referee and as a narrator. It makes for a better game, builds trust, and helps encourage the fun.

## *Be Impartial*

Impartially interpret the rules, whether you're ruling on something for the player characters or the monsters. The players won't trust you if you play fast and loose with the rules, or if you play favorites, or if you cheat to help out your favorite monster or NPC. And if they don't trust you, your game group will collapse. Where's the fun in that?

## *Have Fun*

Relax! D&D is a game. There are no tests or pop quizzes. There aren't any right or wrong ways to play the game, because you can alter things to your own style and taste. In the end, D&D provides a fun activity that's part storytelling and part wargame. Have fun with it, and the players will have fun, too!

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