means that there's a very high chance at least one of them will succeed. Most of the time, that's perfectly fine, but sometimes you'll want the task to be a challenge, with some uncertainty as to whether the party can succeed. In these cases, make the check very hard, or incredibly hard if you want it to be particularly difficult or at high levels. At these DCs, most of the party will probably fail, but someone might still succeed, likely a character who has heavily invested in the given skill, as is expected for specialized characters.

MINIMUM PROFICIENCY

Sometimes succeeding at a particular task requires a character to have a specific proficiency rank in addition to a success at the check. Locks and traps often require a certain proficiency rank to successfully use the Pick a Lock or Disable a Device actions of Thievery. A character whose proficiency rank is lower than what's listed can attempt the check, but they can't succeed. You can apply similar minimum proficiencies to other tasks. You might decide, for example, that a particular occult theorem requires training in Occultism to understand. An untrained barbarian can't succeed at the check, but she can still attempt it if she wants—after all, she needs to have a chance to critically fail and get erroneous information!

For checks that require a minimum proficiency, keep the following guidelines in mind. A 2nd-level or lower task should almost never require expert proficiency, a 6th-level or lower task should almost never require master proficiency, and a 14th-level or lower task should almost never require legendary proficiency. If they did, no character of the appropriate level could succeed.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS

You as the GM set the DCs for certain checks or determine other parameters. Here are guidelines for the most common tasks. Remember that all of these are guidelines, and you can adjust them as necessary to suit the situation.

Craft

When a character Crafts an item, use the item's level to determine the DC, applying the adjustments for the item's rarity if it's not common. You might also apply the easy DC adjustment for an item the crafter has made before. Repairing an item usually uses the DC of the item's level with no adjustments, though you might adjust the DC to be more difficult for an item of a higher level than the character can Craft.

Earn Income

You set the task level when someone tries to Earn Income. The highest-level task available is usually the same as the level of the settlement where the character is located. If you don't know the settlement's level, it's

SIMPLE DCS

Proficiency Rank	DC
Untrained	10
Trained	15
Expert	20
Master	30
Legendary	40

DCS BY LEVEL

Level	DC		Level	DC
0	14		13	31
1	15		14	32
2	16		15	34
3	18		16	35
4	19		17	36
5	20		18	38
6	22		19	39
7	23		20	40
8	24		21	42
9	26		22	44
10	27		23	46
11	28		24	48
12	30		25	50

Spell Rank*	DC
1st	15
2nd	18
3rd	20
4th	23
5th	26
6th	28
7th	31
8th	34
9th	36
10th	39

* If a spell is uncommon or rare, adjust its difficulty accordingly.

DC ADJUSTMENTS

Difficulty	Adjustment	Rarity
Incredibly easy	−10	—
Very easy	−5	—
Easy	−2	—
Hard	+2	Uncommon
Very hard	+5	Rare
Incredibly hard	+10	Unique

usually 0–1 for a village, 2–4 for a town, or 5–7 for a city. A PC might need to travel to a metropolis or capital to find tasks of levels 8-10, and to the largest cities in the world or another plane to routinely find tasks beyond that. Some locations might have higher-level tasks available based on the nature of the settlement. A major port might have higher-level tasks for Sailing Lore, a city with a vibrant arts scene might have higher-level tasks for Performance, and so on. The Earn Income Tasks

table on page 47 includes some ideas for suitable tasks. If someone is trying to use a particularly obscure skill, they might have trouble finding tasks of an ideal level, or any at all—no one in most settlements is clamoring for the expertise of someone with Troll Lore.

Once the PC has decided on a particular level of task from those available, use the DC for that level. You might adjust the DC to be more difficult if there's inclement weather during an outdoor job, a rowdy audience for a performance, or the like.

Gather Information

To set the DC to Gather Information, use a simple DC representing the availability of information about the subject. Adjust the DC upward if the PC Gathering Information seeks in-depth information. For example, if a character wants to Gather Information about a visiting caravan, you might decide that a common person wouldn't know much about it, but any merchant or guard would, so learning basic facts uses the simple DC for trained proficiency. A caravan leader's name is superficial, so discovering it might be DC 15 (the simple trained DC). Learning the identity of the leader's employers, however, might be DC 20 if the employers are more obscure.

Identify Magic, Identify Alchemy, or Learn a Spell

The DC to Identify Magic, Identify Alchemy, or Learn a Spell is usually the DC listed for the spell's rank or the item's level, adjusted for its rarity. A very strange item or phenomenon usually uses a higher DC adjustment. For a cursed item or certain illusory items, you can use an incredibly hard DC to increase the chance of misidentification. If someone has already identified the spell or item, it's best to either let them automatically identify it or apply an easy or very easy adjustment.

Recall Knowledge

On most topics, you can use simple DCs for checks to Recall Knowledge. For a check about a specific creature, trap, or other subject with a level, use a level-based DC (adjusting for rarity as needed). You might adjust the difficulty down, maybe even drastically, if the subject is especially notorious or famed. Knowing simple tales about an infamous dragon's exploits, for example, might be incredibly easy for the dragon's level, or even just a simple trained DC.

Alternative Skills

As noted in the action's description, a character might attempt to Recall Knowledge using a different skill than the ones listed as the default options. If the skill is highly applicable, like using Medicine to identify a medicinal tonic, you probably don't need to adjust the DC. If its relevance is a stretch, adjust the DC upward as described in Adjusting Difficulty.

Additional Knowledge

Sometimes a character might want to follow up on a check to Recall Knowledge, rolling another check to discover more information. After a success, further uses of Recall Knowledge can yield more information, but you should adjust the difficulty to be higher for each attempt. Once a character has attempted an incredibly hard check or failed a check, further attempts are fruitless—the character has recalled everything they know about the subject.

Creature Identification

A character who successfully identifies a creature learns one of its best-known attributes—such as a hydra's head regrowth (and the fact that it can be stopped by acid or fire) or a manticore's tail spikes. On a critical success, the character also learns something subtler, like a weakness that's not obvious or the trigger for one of the creature's reactions.

The skill used to identify a creature usually depends on that creature's trait, as shown on the Creature Identification Skills table, but you have leeway on which skills apply. For instance, hags are humanoids but have a strong connection to occult spells and live outside society, so you might allow a character to use Occultism to identify them without any DC adjustment and make using Society harder. Lore skills can also be used to identify a specific creature. Using the applicable Lore usually has an easy or very easy DC (before adjusting for rarity).

Sense Direction

Pick the most appropriate simple DC when someone uses Survival to Sense Direction. This is usually the trained DC in normal wilderness, expert in deep forests or underground, master in featureless or tricky

CREATURE IDENTIFICATION SKILLS

Creature Trait	Skills
Aberration	Occultism
Animal	Nature
Astral	Occultism
Beast	Arcana, Nature
Celestial	Religion
Construct	Arcana, Crafting
Dragon	Arcana
Dream	Occultism
Elemental	Arcana, Nature
Ethereal	Occultism
Fey	Nature
Fiend	Religion
Fungus	Nature
Humanoid	Society
Monitor	Religion
Ooze	Occultism
Plant	Nature
Shade	Religion
Spirit	Occultism
Time	Occultism
Undead	Religion

locations, or legendary in weird or surreal environments on other planes.

Social Skills

When a character uses Deception, Diplomacy, Intimidation, or Performance to influence or impress someone whose level or Will DC you don't know, estimate the level of the creature and use that DC. A commoner is usually level 0 or 1. Don't worry about being exact. It often makes sense to adjust the DC based on the target's attitude for Deception, Diplomacy, or Performance, making the DC easy for a friendly creature, very easy for a helpful one, hard for an unfriendly one, or very hard for a hostile one. You might adjust the DC further or differently based on the PC's goal; for instance, the DC to Request something an indifferent NPC is fundamentally opposed to might be incredibly hard or impossible, and it might be easy to convince an unfriendly creature to do something it already wants to do.

Subsist

A simple DC is usually sufficient for the Subsist action, with a trained DC for a typical situation. Use the disposition of the environment or city as a guide; an environment with scarce resources or a city with little tolerance for transience might require an expert or higher DC.

Track

Often when a PC uses Survival to Track, you can pick a simple DC and adjust it based on the circumstances.

RECALL KNOWLEDGE CONSIDERATIONS

Use the following advice.

"What is it?": For the basic information referred to in Recall Knowledge, you'll typically want to answer with a sentence that includes a name, type or category, and some basic context. You have lots of freedom, and players will rarely complain about getting too much detail. *Examples:* "This statue represents Shelyn, the Eternal Rose, goddess of art, beauty, love, and music." "The merchant is a boggard, an amphibious humanoid with a froglike appearance." "The letter is postmarked from Magnimar, a city-state in Varisia famous for its ancient monuments." "This magic is *geas*, a ritual that binds a creature to perform or refrain from a certain act." Often, the answer you need is summarized in a sentence within the subject's description or stat block!

Redirection: You can freely make suggestions to a player if they seem stumped on what to ask or think of a question unlikely to be relevant. If they have a question they really want to ask, find a way to make the answer interesting even if you don't think the knowledge will be useful.

Adventure Details: Published adventures often include a piece of information characters can discover if they Recall Knowledge. A player doesn't need to ask the perfect question in order to get this knowledge! Feel free to feed it to them on any check to Recall Knowledge that hits the DC, often in addition to an answer to their original question.

General vs. Unique: Some elements, such as creatures or items, might require you to draw a distinction between a general concept and a unique individual, such as "pirates" vs. "Tessa Fairwind, the Hurricane Queen" or "a harrow deck" vs. "the *Deck of Harrowed Tales*." When a PC tries to Recall Knowledge, let them choose whether to ask about the general category or the unique person or item, and determine the DC and specifics based on that choice. If the unique character or item is famous enough, the DC might even be easier than for the general topic!

For example, an army is usually easy to track, so you could use the untrained DC of 10. If the army marched through mud, you could even adjust this down to DC 5. On the other hand, if the party pursues a cunning survivalist using Cover Tracks, you might use their Survival DC as the DC to Track. If the character is familiar with the terrain, you might want to apply an easy adjustment.

Train an Animal

Train Animal allows PCs to teach animals tricks. Use the level of the animal as the baseline; you can adjust the DC up if the trick is especially difficult or down if the animal is especially domesticated, like a dog.

REWARDS

In Pathfinder, player characters can receive three kinds of rewards for their heroic deeds: Experience Points, which they'll use to level up; treasure, which can be anything from powerful magical items to more intangible benefits; and Hero Points, which they can use to get out of sticky situations.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

As characters adventure, they earn Experience Points (XP). These awards come from achieving goals, completing social encounters, exploring new places, fighting monsters, overcoming hazards, and other sorts of deeds. You have a great deal of control over when the characters gain XP, though the following guidelines are what you're expected to give out in a standard campaign.

Normally, when a player character reaches 1,000 XP or more, they level up, reduce their XP by 1,000, and start progressing toward the next level, though you can choose to advance your players more quickly or slowly if it suits your group. These other means of advancement are noted in the Advancement Speeds sidebar on page 57.

XP Awards

Experience Points are awarded for encounters, exploration, and progress in an adventure. When the PCs face direct opposition, such as a fight or a social conflict, the XP earned is based on the level of the challenge the party overcame. Characters can also gain XP from exploration, such as finding secret areas, locating a hideout, enduring a dangerous environment, or mapping an entire dungeon.

The party is a team, so any XP awarded goes to all members of the group. For instance, if the party wins a battle worth 100 XP, they each get 100 XP, even if the party's rogue was off in a vault stealing treasure during the battle. But if the rogue collected a splendid and famous gemstone, which you've decided was a moderate accomplishment worth 30 XP, each member of the party gets 30 XP, too.

Adversaries and Hazards

Encounters with adversaries and hazards grant a set amount of XP. When the group overcomes an encounter with creatures or hazards, each character gains XP equal to the total XP of the creatures and hazards in the encounter (this excludes XP adjustments for different party sizes; see Party Size for details).

Trivial encounters don't normally grant any XP, but you might decide to award the same XP as for a minor or moderate accomplishment for a trivial encounter that was important to the story, or for an encounter that became trivial because of the order in which the PCs encountered it in a nonlinear adventure.

Accomplishments

Characters' actions that move the story forward—like securing a major alliance, establishing an organization, or causing an NPC to have a change of heart—are considered accomplishments and should be rewarded with XP. Their significance determines the size of the XP award. Determine whether the achievement was a minor, moderate, or major accomplishment, and refer to the XP Awards table on page 57 to award an appropriate amount of XP.

Minor accomplishments include all sorts of significant, memorable, or surprising moments in the game. A moderate accomplishment typically represents a goal that takes most of a session to complete, and a major accomplishment is usually the culmination of the characters' efforts across many sessions. Moderate and major accomplishments usually come after heroic effort, so that's an ideal time to also give a Hero Point to one or more of the characters involved.

As mentioned earlier, it's up to you how much XP to give out for accomplishments. As a general guideline, in a given game session, you'll typically give several minor awards, one or two moderate awards, and only one major award, if any. Try to be consistent about what is worth accomplishment XP and what isn't, and give out at least some accomplishment XP every session.

If two PCs pull off the same magnitude of task, they should get an equal amount of accomplishment XP. That doesn't mean you should allow XP "farming," however. Part of the assumption of accomplishment XP is that the accomplishment is novel and the result of something challenging. If someone got accomplishment XP for snatching a dragon's egg from a lair, someone collecting another egg wouldn't necessarily get accomplishment XP.

Party Size

The rules for advancement assume a group of four PCs. The rules for building encounters (page 57) describe how to accommodate groups of a different size, but the XP awards don't change—always award the amount of XP listed for a group of four characters. You usually won't need to make many adjustments for a differently sized group outside of encounters. Be careful of providing too many ways to get accomplishment XP when you have a large group, though. Since they can pursue multiple accomplishments at once, it can lead to the PCs leveling up too fast.

XP AWARDS

Accomplishment	XP Award
Minor	10 XP
Moderate*	30 XP
Major*	80 XP

* Typically earns a Hero Point as well.

Adversary Level	XP Award
Party level – 4	10 XP
Party level – 3	15 XP
Party level – 2	20 XP
Party level – 1	30 XP
Party level	40 XP
Party level + 1	60 XP
Party level + 2	80 XP
Party level + 3	120 XP
Party level + 4	160 XP

Hazard Level	Simple Hazard	Complex Hazard
Party level – 4	2 XP	10 XP
Party level – 3	3 XP	15 XP
Party level – 2	4 XP	20 XP
Party level – 1	6 XP	30 XP
Party level	8 XP	40 XP
Party level + 1	12 XP	60 XP
Party level + 2	16 XP	80 XP
Party level + 3	24 XP	120 XP
Party level + 4	32 XP	160 XP

Group Parity and Party Level

It's recommended that you keep all the player characters at the same XP total. This makes it much easier to know what challenges are suitable for your players. Having characters at different levels can mean weaker characters die more easily and their players feel less effective, which in turn makes the game less fun for those players.

If you choose not to keep the whole group at the same character level, you'll need to select a party level to determine your XP budget for encounters. Choose the level you think best represents the party's ability as a whole. Use the highest level if only one or two characters are behind, or an average if everyone is at a different level. If only one character is two or more levels ahead, use a party level suitable for the lower-level characters, and adjust the encounters as if there were one additional PC for every 2 levels the higher-level character has beyond the rest of the party.

Party members who are behind the party level gain double the XP other characters do until they reach the party's level. When tracking individually, you'll need to decide whether party members get XP for missed sessions.

HERO POINTS

Unlike Experience Points and treasure, which stay with a character, Hero Points are granted and used on a per-session basis. At the start of a game session, you give out

ADVANCEMENT SPEEDS

By varying the amount of XP it takes to gain a level, you can change how quickly characters gain power. The game rules assume a group playing with standard advancement. Fast advancement works best when you know you won't be playing a very long campaign and want to accomplish as much as possible quickly; slow advancement works best for a gritty campaign where all progress is hard won.

You can alter XP from one adventure to the next to get a different feel. During a street-level murder mystery and travel through a haunted wilderness, you might use slow advancement. When the PCs reach the dungeon, you might switch to standard or fast advancement. The values below are just examples. You can use values even higher or lower.

Advancement Speed	XP to Level Up
Fast	800 XP
Standard	1,000 XP
Slow	1,200 XP

Story-Based Leveling

If you don't want to deal with managing and handing out XP, or if you want to have progression based solely on events in the story, you can ignore the XP process entirely and instead simply have the characters level up at story-appropriate moments. Generally, the characters should gain a level every three to four game sessions, just after the most appropriate big event that happens during that time, such as defeating a significant villain or achieving a major goal.

1 Hero Point to each player character. You can also give out more Hero Points during the game, typically after a heroic moment or accomplishment (see below). As noted in the *Player Core*, a player can spend 1 Hero Point for a reroll, or they can spend all their Hero Points to recover when near death.

In a typical game, you'll hand out about 1 Hero Point during each hour of play after the first (for example, 3 extra points in a 4-hour session). If you want a more over-the-top game, or if your group is up against incredible odds and showing immense bravery, you might give them out at a faster rate, like 1 every 30 minutes (6 over a 4-hour session). You might also give them out at a faster rate during a shorter session. Try to ensure each PC has opportunities to earn Hero Points, and avoid granting all of the Hero Points to a single character.

Brave last stands, protecting innocents, and using a smart strategy or spell to save the day could all earn a character a Hero Point. Look for those moments when everybody at the table celebrates or sits back in awe of a character's accomplishments; that's your cue to issue that character a Hero Point.

You can also give out a Hero Point for a less impactful, but still notable moments. A PC landing the killing blow on a difficult foe or successfully navigating a social challenge could earn a Hero Point. There are times when the PCs' actions aren't exceptionally dramatic or world-shattering, but that shouldn't prevent you from handing out a Hero Point as a reward.

The party could also gain Hero Points for their accomplishments throughout the game. For a moderate or major accomplishment, consider giving out a Hero Point as well. This point typically goes to a PC who was instrumental in attaining that accomplishment.

TREASURE

As the GM, it's your job to distribute treasure to the player characters. Treasure appears throughout an adventure, and the PCs obtain it by raiding treasure hoards, defeating foes who carry valuable items or currency, getting paid for successful quests, and any other way you can imagine.

The game's math is based on PCs looking to find, buy, or craft items that are the same level as them— this includes weapons and armor with fundamental runes, and items that help with the PC's favorite skills or tactics. A PC who gets the item at that level will typically be ahead of the monsters, hazards, and skill

DCs briefly, before their challenges start to catch back up. The guidelines for awarding treasure, meanwhile, have you give the party items 1 level higher than the PCs. This means the items found on adventures are more powerful than those a PC could make (which are capped at the PC's level).

The treasure assignment is measured across a level instead of per encounter because some encounters won't have treasure, some will have extra treasure, and some treasure hoards or rewards might be found outside encounters entirely. You always have the freedom to assign extra treasure for a high-powered game, less treasure for a gritty survival horror adventure, or any amount in between.

As you choose treasure, look at the flow of treasure in the campaign, and see which PCs are ahead and which are behind. It's usually best to mix "core items," treasure linked to a PC's main abilities, with treasure that has unusual, less broadly applicable powers. For instance, the party's sword-and-shield fighter might not go out of their way to purchase an *lodestone shield*, but they'll likely use it if they find it. These items should always be useful—a party without a primal spellcaster won't have much use for an *animal staff*. The number of core items to give out depends partly on how much the campaign allows for crafting and buying items.

PARTY TREASURE BY LEVEL

Level	Total Value	Permanent Items (By Item Level)	Consumables (By Item Level)	Party Currency	Currency per Additional PC
1	175 gp*	**2nd**: 2, **1st**: 2	**2nd**: 2, **1st**: 3	40 gp	10 gp
2	300 gp	**3rd**: 2, **2nd**: 2	**3rd**: 2, **2nd**: 2, **1st**: 2	70 gp	18 gp
3	500 gp	**4th**: 2, **3rd**: 2	**4th**: 2, **3rd**: 2, **2nd**: 2	120 gp	30 gp
4	850 gp	**5th**: 2, **4th**: 2	**5th**: 2, **4th**: 2, **3rd**: 2	200 gp	50 gp
5	1,350 gp	**6th**: 2, **5th**: 2	**6th**: 2, **5th**: 2, **4th**: 2	320 gp	80 gp
6	2,000 gp	**7th**: 2, **6th**: 2	**7th**: 2, **6th**: 2, **5th**: 2	500 gp	125 gp
7	2,900 gp	**8th**: 2, **7th**: 2	**8th**: 2, **7th**: 2, **6th**: 2	720 gp	180 gp
8	4,000 gp	**9th**: 2, **8th**: 2	**9th**: 2, **8th**: 2, **7th**: 2	1,000 gp	250 gp
9	5,700 gp	**10th**: 2, **9th**: 2	**10th**: 2, **9th**: 2, **8th**: 2	1,400 gp	350 gp
10	8,000 gp	**11th**: 2, **10th**: 2	**11th**: 2, **10th**: 2, **9th**: 2	2,000 gp	500 gp
11	11,500 gp	**12th**: 2, **11th**: 2	**12th**: 2, **11th**: 2, **10th**: 2	2,800 gp	700 gp
12	16,500 gp	**13th**: 2, **12th**: 2	**13th**: 2, **12th**: 2, **11th**: 2	4,000 gp	1,000 gp
13	25,000 gp	**14th**: 2, **13th**: 2	**14th**: 2, **13th**: 2, **12th**: 2	6,000 gp	1,500 gp
14	36,500 gp	**15th**: 2, **14th**: 2	**15th**: 2, **14th**: 2, **13th**: 2	9,000 gp	2,250 gp
15	54,500 gp	**16th**: 2, **15th**: 2	**16th**: 2, **15th**: 2, **14th**: 2	13,000 gp	3,250 gp
16	82,500 gp	**17th**: 2, **16th**: 2	**17th**: 2, **16th**: 2, **15th**: 2	20,000 gp	5,000 gp
17	128,000 gp	**18th**: 2, **17th**: 2	**18th**: 2, **17th**: 2, **16th**: 2	30,000 gp	7,500 gp
18	208,000 gp	**19th**: 2, **18th**: 2	**19th**: 2, **18th**: 2, **17th**: 2	48,000 gp	12,000 gp
19	355,000 gp	**20th**: 2, **19th**: 2	**20th**: 2, **19th**: 2, **18th**: 2	80,000 gp	20,000 gp
20	490,000 gp	**20th**: 4	**20th**: 4, **19th**: 2	140,000 gp	35,000 gp

* Many 1st-level permanent items should be items from Chapter 6 instead of magic items.

- If there are few limits on buying items and there's plenty of downtime to craft items, make about half the permanent items you give out core items. The PCs have plenty of ways to obtain the items they want.
- If purchasing items and obtaining formulas is somewhat difficult, make about three-fourths of the permanent items core items. If a PC really wants an item, they might have to do extra work to get it.
- If there are no magic item shops or other ways to purchase items and formulas, make all the permanent items core items. In this case, it might work better for your game to use Automatic Bonus Progression (page 83) to eliminate the need for core items.

Treasure by Level

The Party Treasure by Level table above shows how much treasure you should give out over the course of a level for a group of four PCs. The Total Value column gives an approximate total value of all the treasure, in case you want to spend it like a budget. The next several columns provide suggestions for breaking down that total into permanent items, which the PCs keep and use for a long time; consumables, which are destroyed after being used once; and currency, which includes coins, gems, and other valuables primarily spent to acquire items or services.

The final column gives the amount of currency to add for each PC beyond four in the group; use this only if you have more than four characters in the game. (Different Party Sizes on page 61 provides more guidance on this.)

For instance, between the time your PCs reach 3rd level and the time they reach 4th level, you should give them the treasure listed in the table for 3rd level, worth approximately 500 gp: two 4th-level permanent items, two 3rd-level permanent items, two 4th-level consumables, two 3rd-level consumables, two 2nd-level consumables, and 120 gp worth of currency.

When assigning 1st-level permanent items, your best options are armor, weapons, and other gear from *Player Core* worth between 10 and 20 gp. The treasure listed in the row for 20th level represents a full level's worth of adventures, even though there is no way to reach 21st level.

Some creature entries in *Monster Core* list treasure that can be gained by defeating an individual creature; this counts toward the treasure for any given level.

Published adventures include a suitable amount of treasure throughout the adventure, though you should still monitor the party's capabilities as the PCs progress through the adventure to make sure they don't end up behind. You might also consider making changes to the treasure found in a published adventure to better fit the needs of the party, such as changing a *+1 longbow* into a *+1 longsword* if none of the PCs use bows.

Currency

A party will find money and other treasure that isn't useful on its own but that can be sold or spent on other

ADJUSTING TREASURE

The treasure you award to the party should be monitored and adjusted as you play. You might need to give out treasure you hadn't originally planned for, especially if the group bypasses part of an adventure. Keep an eye on the party's resources. If they're running out of consumables or money, or if they're having trouble in combat because their items aren't up to the task, you can make adjustments.

This is especially common in adventures that have little downtime or that take place far from civilization. If the group goes a long time without being able to purchase or Craft useful items, the PCs will be flush with coins and valuables but behind on useful equipment. In a situation like this, you can either place more useful treasure in the adventure or introduce NPCs who are willing to trade.

Megadungeons and Sandboxes

Some adventures have an expectation that the player characters explore where they want and find only what their skill, luck, and ingenuity afford. Two common examples of this type of adventure are the sprawling dungeon with multiple different sections and paths, often called a megadungeon, and free-form exploration, often called a sandbox and typically occurring in a wilderness. If you want to build a free-form adventure like this where characters are likely to miss at least some of the treasure, increase the amount of treasure you place. Be aware, however, that a meticulous group can end up with more treasure than normal and will have advantages in later adventures.

For a simple guideline to these situations, increase the treasure as though there were one more PC in the party. If the structure is especially loose, especially in sandbox adventures, you can increase this amount even further.

things. The gp values in the Party Currency column don't refer only to coins. Gems, art objects, crafting materials (including precious materials), jewelry, and even items of much lower level than the party's level can all be more interesting than a pile of gold.

If you include a lower-level permanent item as part of a currency reward, count only half the item's Price toward the gp amount, assuming the party will sell the item or use it as crafting material. But lower-level consumables might still be useful, particularly scrolls, and if you think your party will use them, count those items at their full Price.

Other Types of Treasure

Not all treasure has to be items or currency. Crafters can use the Crafting skill to turn raw materials directly into items instead of buying those items with coins. Knowledge can expand a character's abilities, and formulas make good treasure for item-crafting characters. A spellcaster might get access to new spells from an enemy's spellbook or an ancient scholar, while a monk might retrain techniques with rarer ones learned from a master on a remote mountaintop.

Treasure and Rarity

Giving out uncommon and rare items and formulas can get players more interested in treasure. It's best to introduce uncommon items as a reward fairly regularly but rare items only occasionally. These rewards are especially compelling when the adventurers get the item by defeating or outsmarting an enemy who carries an item that fits their backstory or theme.

Uncommon and rare formulas make great treasure for a character who Crafts items. Note that if an uncommon or rare formula is broadly disseminated, it eventually becomes more common. This can take months or years, but the item might start showing up in shops all around the world.

Different Item Levels

The levels listed for items on the Party Treasure by Level table aren't set in stone. You can provide items of slightly higher or lower level as long as you take into account the value of the items you hand out. For instance, suppose you were considering giving a party of 11th-level PCs a *runestone* with a *fortification* rune (with a Price of 2,000 gp) as one of their 12th-level items, but you realize they've had trouble finding armor in their recent adventures, so you instead decide to give them a suit of 11th-level *+2 resilient* armor (1,400 gp) instead. Since the armor has a lower Price than the rune, you might also add a 9th-level *shadow* rune (650 gp) to make up the difference. The total isn't exactly the same, but that's all right.

However, if you wanted to place a 13th-level permanent item in a treasure hoard, you could remove two 11th-level permanent items to make a roughly equivalent exchange. When you make an exchange upward like this, be cautious: not only might you introduce an item with effects that are disruptive at the party's current level of play, but you also might give an amazing item to one PC while other characters don't gain any new items at all!

If you're playing in a long-term campaign, you can spread out the treasure over time. A major milestone can give extra treasure at one level, followed by a tougher dungeon with fewer new items at the next level.

Check back occasionally to see whether each PC's treasure is comparable to the amount they'd get if they created a new character at their current level, as described under Treasure for New Characters below. They should be a bit higher, but if there's a significant

discrepancy, adjust the adventure's upcoming treasure rewards accordingly.

Different Party Sizes

If a party has more than four characters, add the following for each additional character:

- One permanent item of the party's level or 1 level higher
- Two consumables, usually one of the party's level and one of 1 level higher
- Currency equal to the value in the Currency per Additional PC column

If the party has fewer than four characters, you can subtract the same amount for each missing character, but since the game is inherently more challenging with a smaller group that can't cover all roles as efficiently, you might consider subtracting less treasure and allowing the extra gear help compensate for the smaller group size.

Treasure for New Characters

When your new campaign starts at a higher level, a new player joins an existing group, or a current player's character dies and they need a new one, your campaign will have one or more PCs who don't start at 1st level. In these cases, refer to the Character Wealth table, which shows how many common permanent items of various levels the PC should have, in addition to currency. A single item on this table is always a baseline item. If the player wants armor or a weapon with property runes, they must buy the property runes separately, and for armor or a weapon made of a precious material, they must pay for the precious material separately as well.

These values are for a PC just starting out at the given level. If the PC is joining a party that has already made progress toward the next level, consider giving the new character an additional item of their current level. If your party has kept the treasure of dead or retired PCs and passed it on to new characters, you might need to give the new character less than the values on the table or reduce some of the treasure rewards of the next few adventures.

Item Selection

You should work with the new character's player to decide which items their character has. Allow the player to make suggestions, and if they know what items they want their character to have, respect their choices unless you believe those choices will have a negative impact on your game.

At your discretion, you can grant the player character uncommon or rare items that fit their backstory and concept, keeping in mind how many items of those rarities you have introduced into your game. The player can also spend currency on consumables or lower-level permanent items, keeping the rest as coinage. As

CHARACTER WEALTH

Level	Permanent Items	Currency	Lump Sum
1	–	15 gp	15 gp
2	**1st**: 1	20 gp	30 gp
3	**2nd**: 1, **1st**: 2	25 gp	75 gp
4	**3rd**: 1, **2nd**: 2, **1st**: 1	30 gp	140 gp
5	**4th**: 1, **3rd**: 2, **2nd**: 1, **1st**: 2	50 gp	270 gp
6	**5th**: 1, **4th**: 2, **3rd**: 1, **2nd**: 2	80 gp	450 gp
7	**6th**: 1, **5th**: 2, **4th**: 1, **3rd**: 2	125 gp	720 gp
8	**7th**: 1, **6th**: 2, **5th**: 1, **4th**: 2	180 gp	1,100 gp
9	**8th**: 1, **7th**: 2, **6th**: 1, **5th**: 2	250 gp	1,600 gp
10	**9th**: 1, **8th**: 2, **7th**: 1, **6th**: 2	350 gp	2,300 gp
11	**10th**: 1, **9th**: 2, **8th**: 1, **7th**: 2	500 gp	3,200 gp
12	**11th**: 1, **10th**: 2, **9th**: 1, **8th**: 2	700 gp	4,500 gp
13	**12th**: 1, **11th**: 2, **10th**: 1, **9th**: 2	1,000 gp	6,400 gp
14	**13th**: 1, **12th**: 2, **11th**: 1, **10th**: 2	1,500 gp	9,300 gp
15	**14th**: 1, **13th**: 2, **12th**: 1, **11th**: 2	2,250 gp	13,500 gp
16	**15th**: 1, **14th**: 2, **13th**: 1, **12th**: 2	3,250 gp	20,000 gp
17	**16th**: 1, **15th**: 2, **14th**: 1, **13th**: 2	5,000 gp	30,000 gp
18	**17th**: 1, **16th**: 2, **15th**: 1, **14th**: 2	7,500 gp	45,000 gp
19	**18th**: 1, **17th**: 2, **16th**: 1, **15th**: 2	12,000 gp	69,000 gp
20	**19th**: 1, **18th**: 2, **17th**: 1, **16th**: 2	20,000 gp	112,000 gp

usual, you determine which items the character can find for purchase.

A PC can voluntarily choose an item that has a lower level than any or all of the listed items, but they don't gain any more currency by doing so.

If you choose, you can allow the player to instead start with a lump sum of currency and buy whatever common items they want, with a maximum item level of 1 lower than the character's level. This has a lower total value than the normal allotment of permanent items and currency, since the player can select a higher ratio of high-level items.

Buying and Selling Items

Characters can usually buy and sell items only during downtime. An item can typically be sold for only half its Price, though art objects, gems, and raw materials can be sold for their full Price. The PCs' ability to sell items plays a big part in their ability to equip themselves how they want. However, it may not make sense for the story that PCs can find a buyer for every item, especially if they're selling multiple copies of the same thing. Players should not have the expectation that they can sell whatever they want whenever they want. They might be unable to sell items that wouldn't be in demand, have to take a lower percentage, or have trouble selling items in places without massive wealth.

If you don't want to deal with that level of detail, you can choose to make selling items more abstract, allowing the PCs to sell anything for half Price essentially at any time. Since this makes it far easier for PCs to outfit themselves how they want, they might be more powerful.

CHAPTER 2:
BUILDING GAMES

Game Mastering can be an extremely creative endeavor, and this chapter gives you a suite of tools to make your own campaign or adventure. You can even create your own creatures, hazards, and items to populate your game, or even make your own game world!

Where Chapter 1 gave you the information to run a game, whether it was your own creation or someone else's, this chapter digs deep into making the game fully your own. This chapter is organized into the following sections.

• **Campaign Structure** (page 64) discusses how you might connect multiple different events, encounters, and adventures together to create a longer story.

• **Adventure Design** (page 68) suggests common themes and tropes used in role playing adventures and gives advice on how to make sure your game is fun and exciting for your players.

• **Encounter Design** (page 75) explains how to create compelling and dynamic conflict in your game, be it violent combat or clever social debate.

• **Variant Rules** (page 82) contains changes to the base Pathfinder rules that offer a different play experience from the baseline.

• **Afflictions** (page 86) provides a plethora of curses and diseases for use in your games.

• **Environment** (page 90) gives rules for overcoming obstacles and natural hazards that might be found in the surrounding area.

• **Hazards** (page 98) are harrowing traps that might protect a fortress or dungeon. This section is filled with hazards to challenge your players in their explorations.

• **Building Hazards** (page 109) offers advice on how to create your own brand-new hazards.

• **Building Creatures** (page 112) demonstrates a top-down approach for quickly and easily constructing the creatures and NPCs you want or need for any possible situation in your game.

• **Building Items** (page 130) teaches you how to create new pieces of treasure to delight your PCs.

• **Building Worlds** (page 134) explains how to go about building your own entire world or setting from scratch.

TO CREATE OR ADAPT

The material in this section can be used as an example for when you actually need to make your own rules elements or adventure and for when you can adapt. Many times, a small adjustment to an existing creature, item, adventure, or other part of the game can serve you just as well as building something brand new. Before you delve into creating your own new content, ask yourself a few questions.

1. **Does something similar already exist?** Look beyond the surface level. Maybe you want a low-level electrical construct that zaps people. It might not look like an electric eel on the surface, but copying the statistics for the eel are going to get you mostly there.

2. **What do you need to change between your idea and the existing material?** This will help you decide between using the original rule with minimal modification, using the original with adjustments, starting with the original as a framework to build your own, or just starting from scratch. Typically, creating something from scratch is a lot more work than modifying existing content.

3. **How much time do you have to prepare the content?** If time is tight, you might want to spend your time on something with a bigger impact. The less important an element is to your game, or the less time you'll be using it at the table, the more likely you should modify something that already exists. Unless you're building your entire game world from scratch, you can usually wait to implement any new rules and creations until you think you'll need it for your next session.

SCOPE OF CHANGES

It's up to you to determine how much of your game you want to customize. Many GMs use the default rules and creatures and set their adventures on Golarion or another published game world. Other GMs devise and incorporate all-new creatures and places with strange themes that don't fit in the standard Pathfinder game or world. Neither of these approaches is inherently better than the others. The most important thing remains creating a story collaboratively with the rest of your group while having fun.

Determining what your group wants out of the game and setting makes a big difference here. If you're playing Pathfinder with a major goal of exploring the Age of Lost Omens setting, it's more likely you'll use "stock" elements rather than creating new ones. On the other hand, it could be more interesting for your players to see brand-new things if they play with you to experience your own creative voice, or if they're experienced Pathfinder players looking for variety.

CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

Each adventure presents one contained story, but your campaign tells a more expansive one. Think of each adventure like an episode or arc and the campaign as a whole series. Though each adventure might tell a vastly different story, they should all tie into the themes and characters that stretch across the whole campaign.

A campaign interweaves multiple stories: the events of each adventure, the personal triumphs and failures of each PC, and the stories of NPCs who appear throughout. That means a campaign can become more than the sum of its parts. A campaign provides the overall structure for your Pathfinder game. As you prepare for your campaign, you'll establish its scope and themes, which you'll then reinforce in the adventures and scenes that take place within it. When you start out, you'll likely have a core structure in mind for your campaign, but through play, it can—and should—grow and evolve.

Campaign Length

The length of a campaign can range from just a few sessions to many years. Two main factors determine campaign length: how much time you need to complete the story and how much time players want to devote to the game.

You can estimate how long a campaign will take by looking at the amount of time you actually have to play, or the number of character levels you intend the characters to advance. It typically takes three to four sessions for a group to level up. Since you'll probably cancel sessions on occasion, playing once a week for a year results in roughly a 14-level campaign, playing every 2 weeks for a year gives you an 8-level campaign, and playing monthly allows for a 5-level campaign. If you play monthly, you might consider holding longer sessions and using fast advancement (800 XP to level up).

Some campaigns go all the way to 20th level, ending after the player characters attain the height of power and confront the greatest threats any mortal could face. Others end at a lower level, after the group takes down a

major villain or solves a crucial problem. And still other campaigns end when players become unable to attend or decide it's a good time to stop playing.

You should have an end point in mind when you start a campaign. Still, you have to be flexible since you're telling the story alongside other players, and your initial expectations for the campaign might be proven incorrect. It pays to be conservative when estimating your campaign's length and scope. It's always tempting to run a 20-level epic campaign with complex, interwoven plots, but such games can fall apart long before the end if your group can play only once a month and the players have other responsibilities.

When you think you're heading toward a satisfying conclusion, check in with the other players. You might say, "I think we have about two sessions left. Does that work for everyone? Is there any unfinished business you want to take care of?" This lets you gauge whether your assumptions match up with the rest of the group—and allows you to make any necessary adjustments.

BASIC STRUCTURES

When building your campaign, you can use these structures as a starting point. The Adventure Design section explains various styles of adventures on pages 69–71 that can be used to inspire the creation of the adventures in your campaign. For a campaign consisting of multiple adventures, you'll need to add some story elements that speak directly to the characters in your game rather than just to the events of the adventure. In other words, the characters should have individual goals in addition to the group's overall goals.

One-Shot

An adventure lasting one session, a one-shot works well for a highly themed adventure using characters or concepts that are novel but that players might not want to stick with long-term.

Adventures 1, typically a dungeon crawl, horror, intrigue, or mystery

Top Level 1, but often starts at a higher level

Time Frame 1 session

Brief Campaign

This structure is meant for a brief, self-contained campaign. It can be ideal for introducing new players to Pathfinder and can be extended to a longer campaign if the group wishes.

Adventures 2, typically one dungeon crawl followed by one high adventure; this format also works well for horror adventures

Top Level 4-5

Time Frame 3 months weekly, 6 months biweekly

Extended Campaign

An extended campaign works well for a dedicated group that might want to switch to a new campaign or a different game after a year or so. It allows for significant character and plot development but doesn't reach the higher levels of the game.

Adventures 5, typically with multiple adventures fitting the main theme of the campaign (such as high adventure or gritty adventure), with other adventure styles for variety

Top Level 11–13

Time Frame 1 year weekly, 1-1/2 years biweekly

Epic Campaign

An ambitious and complex game, the epic campaign takes PCs all the way to level 20, pitting them against the greatest threats in the world and beyond. This can be challenging in terms of time commitment and complexity, but it lets PCs develop into true legends, and the players will likely remember it for years.

Adventures 6 long adventures, typically starting with high adventure or a dungeon crawl and including military adventure, planar adventure, and romantic adventure

Top Level 20

Time Frame 1-1/2 years weekly, 3 years biweekly

THEMES

The themes you choose for your campaign are what distinguish it from other campaigns. They include the major dramatic questions of your story and the repeated use of certain environments or creatures, and they can also include embracing a genre beyond traditional high fantasy, such as horror or paranormal. The themes you choose for your campaign also suggest storyline elements you might use.

A storyline's themes usually relate to the backstories, motivations, and flaws of the player characters and villains. For example, if you've chosen revenge as one of the themes of your game, you might introduce a villain whose quest for revenge tears his life apart and causes tragic harm to those around him. You might choose a theme of love, leading to nonplayer characters involved in doomed romances, seeking to regain lovers they've lost, or courting the player characters.

LINKING ADVENTURES

In a campaign that includes multiple adventures, a smooth transition from one adventure to the next ties the story together. You might use NPCs who could appear in both adventures, a treasure or clue found in one adventure that becomes important in a later one, or even fallout from one adventure that causes the next adventure to take place. Related locations can help, too. Adventures that take place in neighboring regions, or both in the same region, have an inherent link. If they take place in two different places, you'll need a reason the PCs should travel between the two, and you can use this journey as a short, interstitial adventure.

Using similar locations and related creatures helps you form connections between disparate adventures. For

example, you might have the players explore a frozen tundra early on, then later travel to an icy plane filled with more difficult challenges that can be overcome using knowledge they've previously developed. Likewise, hobgoblin soldiers might be tough enemies for your group at low levels, but as the PCs attain higher levels and the hobgoblins become mere minions of another creature, the players feel a sense of progression. Over time, the players feel like their characters are becoming experts at negotiating with giants, navigating seaways, battling devils, exploring the planes, or dealing with whatever the recurring elements are.

Consider how each adventure's theme plays into the campaign as a whole. You might want to keep similar or recurring themes, especially if each adventure is part of one overarching storyline. On the other hand, this can feel repetitive, and some groups prefer variety and seeing their characters play off of different situations. To convey shifting themes, you can show established parts of the world changing to reflect the new theme. For instance, if you're switching from an adventure about subjugation to one of mayhem, the PCs could take down a villain who wants to cruelly rule over the populace but then face opportunistic brigands who loot and pillage once order breaks down.

Player Goals

Ask what you and the other players enjoy and would like to see in the game. You can use these ideas as touchstones to build off of. When you get into the campaign itself, the PCs' goals come to the forefront. Find out what each character wants to achieve and look for opportunities you can place in the game world and adventures. Consider which part of the game most closely ties to each goal. A PC who wants to build an institution will need money and interpersonal connections, so you can use treasure and NPC interactions to give them the resources they need. For a character whose purpose is to help people in danger, build some encounters that include people who need to be rescued.

Look for good times to recap the state of a character's goals and remind the player how their character has progressed, particularly when something changes in relation to their goals. The Long-Term Goals section on page 45 gives you more details on how you can use goals in downtime.

Changing the World

As the group moves through the campaign, the events of their adventures and downtime should change the world around them. Show this through the responses the characters get from other people, the scenery they see around them, and their environment. You might be able to anticipate some changes, but most will come up in play and require you to make adjustments later on.

Power Level

As the game progresses, the power level of the PCs and their foes increases. Going up in level brings new, stronger abilities into the game, and likewise, adventures bring in new monsters with commensurate capabilities. Higher-level adventures should present new challenges appropriate to the PCs' abilities, such as areas that can be accessed with flight at 7th level or higher. Beyond just the rules, PCs should elicit different reactions from the people they meet as their reputation spreads and they exhibit abilities beyond what most people have ever seen.

Recurring Villains

Consider including villains who can appear multiple times over the course of several adventures. They don't necessarily need to be masterminds. Imagine an unscrupulous mercenary who works for major villain after major villain. When you create a recurring villain, it's best not to make them too integral to the story since the PCs might take them down earlier than you expect! Have some contingency plans in place.

The advice about Roleplaying NPCs on page 13 applies especially to these recurring villains. As they reappear throughout the campaign, they should change in some of the same ways PCs do. Think about how previous run-ins with the PCs have shaped the recurring villain's emotions and plans. Which PC do they have the biggest grudge against, and why? Do they bear scars from previous battles? Have they developed a countermeasure against a PC's spells or tactics?

Villain Goals

Just as PCs have goals, so do your villains. A recurring villain might have a vision for what the world should be and a step-by-step plan to get there. A plan gives you a clear way to progress the plot, and an underlying goal guides you in deciding what the NPC does if their plan goes awry. It can be especially helpful to contrast the villain's goals with those of the PCs. If a PC wants to establish a trade network, maybe a villain plans to get rich robbing caravans or merchant ships. Just like with the PCs' goals, show how the villain's goal has impacted the world, even in small ways. Try to find ways the villain can make a difference, even if the PCs are successful against them. A villain will look ineffective if the PCs foil every single plot or plan. For instance, the villain might turn a memorable NPC to their cause, set an institution ablaze, or invade a village.

Starting the Campaign

Before your first session begins, communicate back and forth with the players about the following details to make sure you've planned your campaign to fit their preferences, then recap and communicate your final decisions.

- Establish the expected schedule and, generally, how long you expect the campaign to last. It's okay if you don't know the total length for sure, but you should still give an estimate.
- Inform the players when and where the first session will take place, what they should prepare in advance, and what materials to bring. If you're running a session zero to create characters first (page 9), let them know. You might also need to tell them whether to bring food, drinks, and other supplies beyond what they'll use for the game itself.
- Let the players of know any restrictions or extra options for character building. Even if you plan to run a session zero, give them a heads-up before the session starts.
- Tell the players where in the game world the first session will take place.
- Give the players a basic idea of the genre or theme.

At the First Session

If you're running a session zero, read the Session Zero section on page 9 for advice on your first session. For the first time you play through an adventure, follow these bits of advice.

- Recap the basics of the campaign you established earlier, particularly where it starts and any themes you feel will be important for the players to understand as they roleplay.
- Have the players introduce their characters. If they have detailed backstories, it's usually best that they start out just describing what the other PCs could learn from first impressions. If they want to go deeper into their backstory during play, they can do so later.
- Ask questions about the characters. Note down anything you think will be significant, so you can adjust your plans for later sessions. You'll want to keep doing this throughout play.
- Begin the adventure using the Starting a Session steps on page 11. For your first adventure, find a good place for the PCs to meet and a reason for them to be together.

Starting at a Higher Level

A typical campaign starts at 1st level, but you can start at a higher level if you choose. This can be especially satisfying for a one-shot or short campaign, or if your group wants to play a specific adventure made for higher-level groups. The PCs should all start at the same level. They simply make a 1st-level character, then level it up the number of times needed to reach the starting level.

The Character Wealth table on page 61 indicates how much currency and what common items of various levels the character should start with. Let the players choose their own items as well as spend their currency on common items if they choose. This table gives them fewer items than they might have had if they'd gained items through adventuring, but it balances the fact that they can choose what items they want.

ENDING THE CAMPAIGN

A campaign might have a well-planned, emotionally resonant ending that executes perfectly, or the group might die in a ridiculous fashion at the worst time possible. It's important that the ending follows the story, wherever it has gone, even if it doesn't match the idea you had in your head at the start. Check in with your group, especially when you're getting close to the end of each adventure, to see how long they want the campaign to go on. Check in with yourself, too, and express your opinion to the other players. Ideally, you know at least a session in advance that the end is coming, allowing you to prepare for a thrilling conclusion. You might plan for the final session's gameplay to be a bit shorter—possibly just one big showdown—to allow time for an epilogue and for the group to reminisce and decompress at the end.

An epilogue can make the end of a campaign more fulfilling. First, let the group finish out their roleplaying in the final moments of the adventure until they're content. Then tell the group the results of what they accomplished in broad terms, with concrete details of what happens to certain places or allied NPCs. Ask the players what their characters do after the adventure. You might want to narrate a few short scenes. When your epilogue is done, thank everyone for playing. If the campaign ended in success for the PCs, give yourselves a round of applause. A victorious ending warrants celebration!

Dealing with Failure

If a campaign ends prematurely, get a sense from the players about whether they want to continue. The advice on Total Party Kills on page 33 should be helpful. If the campaign ended in a stranger way than a total party kill—say, a PC handing over the powerful relic the villain needed to complete a master plan—you can still look for ways the campaign might continue. Maybe the PCs struggle to survive in the world after the calamity, or maybe they have just enough time to still be able to stop the plan.

The Next Campaign

If the group plays another campaign in the same world that takes place after your previous campaign, think through the repercussions of the last campaign and change the world as needed. You might introduce new elements into the world that call back to the previous campaign: newly powerful factions, new settlements, or new options for player characters, such as backgrounds, all based on the impact the previous PCs made on the world.

ADVENTURE DESIGN

Creating an adventure for your players can be one of the most fulfilling parts of being a GM. This is much more challenging than using a published one but lets you express yourself, be even more creative, and tailor the game directly to the players and their characters.

Adventure plotting can start at many different points. You might begin with a particular antagonist, then construct an adventure that fits that villain's theme and leads the group to them. Alternatively, you could start with an interesting location for exploration, then populate it with adversaries and challenges appropriate to the setting.

PLAYER MOTIVATIONS

One of your most important and rewarding tasks is getting to know your players and what makes them tick, then implementing plot hooks that speak to their motivations. If your players all like similar things (maybe they all like epic storylines or all prefer tactical combat), your job will be a bit easier. For most groups, there's a mix, and you'll want to put in a detailed NPC who appeals to one player's love of social scenes, a powerful villain to engage a player who loves stories of winning against overwhelming odds, and exotic animals that attract a player who's into having animal friends. If you're not sure what your players enjoy, ask them in advance what they'd like to see in the game!

Considering player motivations doesn't mean assuming you know what the players or their characters will do! It can be risky to expect PCs to react in certain ways or take certain paths. Knowing their motivations gives you a way to put in elements you expect will appeal to your players, but their decisions will still take the adventure in unexpected directions. The important thing is getting the players engaged, not predicting the future.

THEME AND FEELING

Think about the emotional and thematic touchstones you want to hit during play. Good games elicit strong emotions, and planning for them can give an emotional arc to an adventure in addition to the narrative arc. Consider what you want players to feel as they play. Is it triumph? Dread? Sadness? Optimism? None of these will be the *only* emotions to come out, but they'll inform how you build the settings and NPCs. Adventure Recipes gives steps to effectively implement theme and feeling.

KEEPING IT VARIED

You can give players variety through the types of challenges the group faces (combat, social, problem-solving, and so on), the locations they explore, the NPCs they meet, the monsters they face, and the treasure they acquire. Even if you're building an enclosed dungeon,

you don't want to place a combat in every room, or exploration will quickly become stale.

Think in terms of sessions. If your group gets through five scenes per session, how do you make one game session feel different from another? Maybe two of the scenes in each are fairly basic combat encounters, but if you make the other scenes significantly different, or even if you set the encounters in different environments, the sessions won't feel repetitive. Also think about the tools used to solve each situation. Maybe one requires complex negotiations, another brute force, and a third sneaking about. Aim to give everybody something compelling, and ideally targeted at their motivations.

ADVENTURE RECIPES

These procedures help you build an adventure skeleton or outline. You'll then go through and flesh out the details of the adventure, including adversaries and locations. As you play, you'll keep adjusting to fit the events of the game. Anything you haven't already introduced can be changed as needed. Just like with any recipe, you're meant to adjust the details to fit your group's preferences. You might stray far from your starting point, and that's OK!

These recipes use eight steps. You might want to look ahead to your future steps and make choices out of order based on what's most important for you to convey. The catch-all term "opposition" refers to the various adversaries and obstacles the PCs will face. The opposition should be thematically consistent but not necessarily monolithic. It might contain multiple individuals or groups who might not get along with one another.

- **Styles (page 69):** The overall vibe of your game, such as a gritty game, dungeon crawl, or high adventure. These frameworks offer guidelines for the number of sessions and types of encounters that work best.
- **Threats (page 71):** Thematic dangers to incorporate into your game, and ways to evoke them as you play. The style and threat are the core parts of your recipe.
- **Motivations (page 72):** Determine more specifically what the opposition's goals and motivations are.
- **Story Arcs (page 73):** This section gives you guidance on how to construct story arcs that will play out over your adventure and maybe beyond.
- **NPCs and Organizations (page 74):** The characters and factions you include should fit the theme.

- **Locations (page 74):** The adventuring sites and settlements featured in your adventure.
- **Encounters (page 74):** The individual rooms and locales within your adventuring sites, including the creatures and hazards found at these places.
- **Treasure (page 74):** The rewards you give out to characters after dealing with encounters.

Styles

These frameworks for building your adventure include some basic elements to get you started outlining an adventure. Slot ideas from the threats section (page 71) into this structure, then customize as you see fit.

Dungeon Crawl

Number of Sessions 3–4

Exploration Scenes 1 long voyage to reach the dungeon; 3 voyages through long, trapped hallways or mazes; 1 secure cave or other staging area; 2 secret passages or rooms

Combat Encounters 2 trivial, 4 low, 6 moderate, 6 severe. Many encounters can be bypassed through secret routes.

Roleplaying Encounters 4 conversations with dungeon creatures; 1 negotiation to establish a truce

Encounter Tropes Cramped quarters, short lines of sight, and poor lighting conditions, with occasional vaulted chambers and flooded crypts. Traps and puzzles.

Gritty Adventure

Number of Sessions 5–7

Exploration Scenes 1 long voyage, plagued by attacks; 2–3 voyages through urban environments; 1 prison break, heist, or other test of skill

Combat Encounters 2 trivial, 4 low, 7 moderate, 8 severe; possibly 1 extreme. Foes are often other humanoids.

Roleplaying Encounters 2 battles of wits, 2 chances to bypass opponents with deception or threats, 2 opportunities to gather information and rumors

Encounter Tropes Stakes are often more personal, such as the PCs clearing their names from a false accusation or being paid to eliminate a problem. Betrayal, ambushes, and other duplicity. Town fires, weather conditions, unfriendly crowds. The *Pathfinder Critical Hit Deck* is particularly appropriate.

High Adventure

Number of Sessions 6–8

Exploration Scenes 2 long voyages, often by sea or air, punctuated with combat; 1 trapped dungeon, tournament, or other test of skill

Combat Encounters 16 moderate, 8 severe. Avoid low- and trivial-threat battles.

Roleplaying Encounters 2 battles of wits; 4 conversations with bizarre creatures

Encounter Tropes Unique environments and terrain for dynamic battles. Swinging from balconies on curtains, fighting atop high wires, racing chariots, and so on. Use

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ADVENTURE RESEARCH

In addition to the advice and adventure recipes detailed here, reading other adventures is a great way to get ideas, whether they're published adventures or ones your friends have written. You can borrow ideas and structures if they work for your game and tweak as needed.

You don't need to go into the same level of detail you'd see in a published adventure. You might be able to get by with just an outline, some bullet points for each NPC, a breakdown of encounters, and a few rough maps. Or maybe for your style of running games, you prefer to have some text written about each scene, or even particular lines of dialogue. If you're creating your first adventure, it can be good to write out a little more than you need. Just keep in mind that things might change in play. If you prepared more than you actually used, that's normal! Detailing NPCs or locations in particular can be useful, especially if they're going to appear again. But in many of these cases, you'll add details at the table and can jot down those notes for later.

RUNNING YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

It's often easier to run an adventure you made yourself, but that's not true for everybody. If you notice as you run your adventure that your notes don't have enough for you to go on, you can be more thorough next time. And if something ended up inconsistent, there's nothing wrong with telling your players you want to revise something you previously said.

Because this is your own creation, it's closer to your heart. If the adventure doesn't go well, it can sting. Sometimes this is because of random chance, sometimes due to unforeseen decisions, and occasionally because you made a mistake. Those are all normal parts of the game! One of the things you'll internalize the more you run games is that you're a part of the creative process and don't need to be perfect.

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difficult terrain sparingly, coupled with creative ways to get around it. Large groups of low-level enemies the PCs can defeat with ease.

Horror

Number of Sessions 1–2

Exploration Scenes 1 short voyage on foot; 2–4 creepy areas to investigate, like haunted mansions or dark forests

Combat Encounters 2 moderate, 1 severe, possibly 1 extreme. Avoid trivial- and low-threat encounters, except as moments of relief in a longer adventure. Extreme-threat encounters against overwhelming foes are excellent in horror one-shots.

Roleplaying Encounters 2 conversations with doubtful authority figures, 1 opportunity to gather information and rumors, 1 revelation of a horrible truth

Encounter Tropes Surprising and jarring encounters, making it hard for the PCs to feel safe. Encounters that feel overwhelming, even when they're not. Retreat is often the right option (include a reasonable way for the PCs to escape).

Intrigue
Number of Sessions 2–3

Exploration Scenes 1 long voyage, often by land or sea; 3–4 competitions, performances, or other test of skill; 1–2 infiltrations or escapes

Combat Encounters 2 trivial, 2 low, 4 moderate, 1 severe. Severe-threat encounters should be reserved for major reveals of the ongoing intrigue–an ally is revealed to be a foe, a schemer is exposed and must call on his guard, and so on.

Roleplaying Encounters 2–3 battles of wits; 2 political or courtroom scenes; 1 conversation with a cryptic source; 2 opportunities to gather information and rumors

Encounter Tropes Urban environments, including fights atop runaway carriages, around (and atop) banquet tables, and running over rooftops. Ambushes in apparently safe social settings. Assassination attempts.

Military Adventure
Number of Sessions 2–3

Exploration Scenes 1 long march and 2–3 short marches, or a tour of the defenses for a siege; 2–3 trapped enemy campsites and secret spy redoubts

Combat Encounters 4 low, 4 moderate, 1 severe. Most combat encounters should be made up of 2–4 foes, typically humanoid soldiers with a range of capabilities.

Roleplaying Encounters 1–2 skill challenges to convince neutral parties to become allies or raise troops' morale

Encounter Tropes Fortified battlegrounds with moats, high walls, defensive towers, and siege weapons. Victory conditions that are goal or deadline oriented–holding a gate for 10 minutes while reserves rush to defend it, setting fire to an enemy catapult, rescuing prisoners, and so on.

Mystery
Number of Sessions 2–3

Exploration Scenes 2–3 trapped rooms, concealed hideouts, or other tests of skill; 2 puzzles or investigations

Combat Encounters 2 trivial, 4 low, 6 moderate, 6 severe. Solving the mystery uncovers an advantage over the most powerful foe.

Roleplaying Encounters 1 battles of wits, 1 conversation with a bizarre creature, 1 opportunity to gather information and rumors, 1 gathering to reveal the answer to the mystery

Encounter Tropes Encounters come naturally during investigations or upon discovering some element of the mystery. Multiple clues can send PCs to the same locations; if the mystery stalls, some creature that doesn't want the PCs to solve the mystery can attack to move the plot forward.

Planar Adventure

Number of Sessions 6–8

Exploration Scenes 3–4 long voyages through different planes, often by *gate*, spells, or planar vessel, punctuated by combat; 1–2 scouting a demiplane, planar city or fortress, or other planar stronghold

Combat Encounters 12 moderate, 12 severe. Avoid trivial- and low-threat encounters, except as set dressing to introduce a new plane.

Roleplaying Encounters 6 conversations with bizarre creatures, including some with alien ways of thinking; 2 opportunities to gather information and rumors

Encounter Tropes Fights showcasing otherworldly environs—on the sides of glaciers, in limitless oceans, on chunks of rock floating along rivers of lava, atop bottomless pits, or on the chains of 100-foot-tall gates.

Romantic Adventure

Number of Sessions 4–6

Exploration Scenes 1 tour of a kingdom or other central locale; 1 adventure into the wilds on a hunting trip or bandit hunt; 1 tournament to prove a PC's love or worth

Combat Encounters 3 low, 6 moderate, 3 severe. Emphasize emotional stakes and battles that end with the loss of honor or pride, not life.

Roleplaying Encounters 2 battles of wits, 1 grand ball, 1 entreaty before a ruler, 2 scenes of relaxation or carousing with unexpected import

Encounter Tropes Duels—social or combat—against romantic rivals. PCs and their foes fight only for a purpose or cause. Savvy enemies have strong connections to the PCs.

Threats

Think of each type of threat as the deep, visceral danger the enemies represent. NPCs should be avatars of the threat, whether they're enemies who represent different aspects of the threat or allies and bystanders damaged by it. Each threat entry gives a brief description, followed by some bullet points you can use to guide you in expressing the consequences of the threat. This is followed by monsters that typify this theme. As always, you can come up with your own thematic threats too!

Corruption

The opposition wants to weaken or even change the motivation of a place, person, institution, ideal, or group.

- Show the effects of corruption on people and places, especially those closely connected to the PCs. Once-safe areas become less friendly and present threats, allies become unable to help or even turn against the PCs.

BUILDING A SANDBOX

In a "sandbox" game, you give the players a sizable location to explore and let them decide how to go about it. A sandbox doesn't have as many time-sensitive events as a directed adventure, and the flow of the game is driven more by the players than by the opposition. You can put self-contained dungeons or other locations within the sandbox, but it's up to the players when and how to visit them or deal with them.

To make a sandbox, create about triple the number of encounters and spread them out among multiple locations or factions. You can expect the PCs won't deal with all of them. In most cases, you'll want to determine where the PCs are headed next before the end of a session so you can prepare for the next session. Depending on the size and complexity of the location, the number of encounters might be much higher. Treat each sub-area as a kind of mini-adventure and only loosely sketch it until you know what the PCs' plans are.

- Make enemies subtle; patient; and willing to allow rumors, lies, diseases, and poisons time to take effect. In battle, they might be satisfied to curse PCs and their allies or otherwise inflict long-term afflictions, then retreat.
- Contrast the corruption with education, healing, and working towards betterment.
- When the PCs make progress, allow them to expose agents of corruption and to inoculate allies and neutral parties against the growing threat or educate them about it.

Foes alghollthu, fiends, rakshasas, undead

Devastation

The opposition wants to destroy or lay waste to a place, person, institution, ideal, or group.

- Show the effects of destruction on people and places, especially those the PCs hold dear. Show them desperate, devoid of resources, and psychologically changed.
- Make enemies hard to reason with and overwhelming in number. In battle, they want not just to win, but to kill, maim, or devour.
- Contrast devastation with forces of preservation and order.
- When the PCs make progress, show the slow recovery from devastation.

Foes dragons, demons

Extremism

The opposition seeks a massive change—one they think is for the better. Their violent means of achieving it put them in conflict with the PCs.

- Demonstrate the ruthlessness of the enemy, especially the discrepancy between their care for their cause and their ambivalence or hatred toward everything else.
- Have enemies focus purely on their goal. Have them fall back on their rhetoric or dogma to justify themselves.

- If something about the extremists' cause is just—such as preserving the natural world or protecting their people—reveal the foes' sympathetic side. Demonstrate the horror of what they're fighting against in addition to the horror of the way they fight it.
- When the PCs make progress, show uncertainty or demoralization in their foes, possibly even desertion in their enemies' ranks.

Foes cultists, revolutionaries

Mayhem

The opposition is a force for mayhem, without any greater plan or long-term goal. It might be a mindless force of violence such as a wounded beast, or a thinking foe that simply revels in causing chaos and damage.

- Mayhem is easy to track and find, often leaving a trail of destruction in its path. Show how the senseless violence causes uncertainty and fear, disrupting both settlements and the natural order of things.
- A single powerful foe is a common source of mayhem, but a pack, herd, cult, or secret society could also be to blame. The source of the mayhem might have resulted from the natural order being out of balance or might be a distraction set off by a different foe looking to use it to further its own goals.
- Emphasize the cascading effects of unchecked mayhem. Normal trade, farming, migration, and similar systems are disrupted, causing problems far from the immediate location of violence and disruption.
- When the PCs make progress, show how resilient systems can recover from massive disruptions but might need additional help or protection.

Foes beasts, dinosaurs, drakes, giants

Subjugation

The opposition wants to rule over a group, location, or even the world. Their ultimate objective is to control and rule.

- Show how groups submit to subjugation rather than suffer the consequences of resistance. The PCs see elements of culture destroyed to ensure subjugation—are religions and churches destroyed, subverted, or replaced? Are lackeys put in place to keep oppressed populations in line?
- Make enemies self-righteous, focused, and in control of groups they have previously subjugated. Fights aren't just for the sake of violence, but steps towards greater control.
- Show opposition: open conflict, rebellion, secret groups, sabotage, and countercultural art. Give PCs the opportunity to support or participate in each.
- When the PCs make progress, have previously cowed or neutral parties be moved to rebel.

Foes devils, dragons, hags, hobgoblins

Motivations

Think about your opposition, and what their goals and motivations are. The motivation of the opposition needs to match your threat. If you have multiple adversaries, their motivations should all work toward your theme, but they might have different goals and act more as rivals or enemies. Motivations should be more than one dimensional. There should be a reason for every action the opposition takes—not necessarily a good one or a smart one, but a believable one. Be true to each character!

Consider these questions so you can use the answers when deciding what the opposition will do.

- What does the opposition want?
- Who or what does the opposition fear? (And no, "the PCs" isn't an answer.)
- Why is the opposition sure to succeed? If the PCs don't do anything, what makes the opposition unstoppable?

- What are the opposition's weaknesses? How can they be bribed or tricked? What's something they ignore that might be used against them?

Story Arcs

Keep several story arcs in mind. Most of these arcs will be driven by the opposition in the early going, but PCs might initiate their own story arcs. Think of what the beginning, middle, and end of each arc might look like. Imagine a logical end point the arc would reach if nothing else changes. Then, adjust it based on events in the game. As changes occur, revisit the end point you've imagined. If the adversary's plan has been derailed, what might they do instead? Story arcs should reflect the theme of the adventure and be well-positioned to show off motivations.

Many arcs will last only for the duration of one adventure, but others build up and recur across the whole campaign. Include some of each so you have variety. This also provides closure, as the players can see some storylines wrapped up in the short term and others over a long period. Too many dangling plot threads can result in some being forgotten or make players feel overloaded.

Touchstones like the ones below make a story arc adaptable, not too restricted to specific scenes or characters.

- **Use motifs.** Use repeated thematic elements, visuals, phrases, and items to reinforce the connection between one adventure or segment of the story and another. The motif can also build in complexity as you move further along in the overarching story.
- **Follow character growth**. Respond to how the PCs changed in previous adventures. Their next undertaking should reflect who they are now.
- **Escalate!** Build on the previous story and show that the next threat is scarier. The first adventure might endanger a village, the next a city, the next a whole nation, and so on.
- **Bring in recurring characters.** A recurring character is especially strong if they appear in similar circumstances each time. For instance, a merchant who travels the world might appear in the campaign only when she wants the PCs to undermine her rivals.
- **Make each adventure count.** While developing an arc, don't diminish individual adventures by making what happened in them inconsequential compared to the larger story. Illustrate the consequences of such adventures so the players feel a sense of accomplishment for completing one before they move onto the next. Each adventure needs some sort of denouement to show immediate and lingering effects of the PCs' victory or defeat.

NPCs and Organizations

Allied, neutral, and adversarial NPCs and organizations can all contribute to the theme. You'll want most to follow the theme directly, like the examples in Threats on page 71. However, you can add a few counterpoints to the theme. For example, a horror game might include one or two NPCs who are more hopeful, either to grant respite from the dread or to kill off to show just how bad things are. Including NPCs who aren't adversaries makes the world feel more real. It also increases the stakes, as PCs have people to care about, protect, and socialize with. You'll often find that NPCs you create will become more or less important than you expected. You can "demote" an NPC if the players don't find them interesting or "promote" them if the PCs like them more than expected.

Locations

Memorable settings that include mysterious and fantastical locations for players to visit can elicit the players' curiosity. Exploring each location should be a treat in itself, not just a chore the players must complete to get from one fight to the next. As you create a locale, picture it in your mind's eye and write down minor details you can include as you narrate the game. Describing decorations, natural landmarks, wildlife, peculiar smells, and even temperature changes make a place feel more real. See Quick Environmental Details on page 39 for some ideas.

Beyond monsters and loot, your locations can include environment-based challenges, from environmental conditions like blizzards to puzzles, traps, or other hazards. These challenges should suit your adventure's location: walls of brambles in a castle ruin overrun with vegetation, pools of acid in a cursed swamp, or magical traps in the tomb of a paranoid wizard.

Additional Guidance: building your own hazards (page 109), environments (page 90), hazards (page 98)

Encounters

A robust set of encounters forms the backbone of your adventure. Encounters often feature combat with other creatures, but they can also include hazards, or you might create social encounters in which characters duel only with words. The rules for building encounters appropriate to your group's level begin below.

Some adventures have a clear and direct progression, with encounters occurring at specific times or in a specific order. Others, such as a dungeon filled with interconnected rooms the group can investigate in any order, are nonlinear, and the group can face encounters in any order—or even avoid them entirely. Most adventures are somewhere in between, with some keystone encounters you know the characters will need to contend with, but others that are optional.

Additional Guidance: building your own creatures (page 112), building your own hazards (page 109), encounter design (page 75)

Treasure

Your adventure should give out an amount of treasure that's appropriate to the characters' level. You can dole out treasure in all kinds of ways. Treasure could be items carried by an adversary, rewards from a patron for completing a mission, or a classic pile of coins and items inside a wooden chest guarded by a monster. It's best to spread treasure throughout an adventure rather than stockpiled in a single hoard. This gives the players incremental rewards, letting their characters advance in frequent small steps rather than giant leaps separated by many hours of play.

Additional Guidance: assigning treasure (page 58)

ENCOUNTER DESIGN

Encounters play a fundamental part in roleplaying games, but it can be tricky to know where to start when building them. It's important to follow the rules and guidelines, but creating a compelling encounter goes beyond that. Good encounters have a place in the story, compelling adversaries, interesting locations, and twists and turns to make them dynamic.

Encounter design goes hand in hand with location, map, and adventure design. You might set an adventure in a swamp and populate it with swamp creatures and environmental features. Or you might have a dungeon denizen in mind, and structure a section of your dungeon to fit that creature.

When you're starting out, straightforward encounters of low or moderate threat can let you get your bearings. Then, you can increase complexity as you get more confident and as the PCs collect more tools to use against their foes. The more encounters you build, the more comfortable you'll get with your own personal style. You can always come back here to get more ideas or advice on executing a certain type of encounter.

COMBAT THREATS

The most common type of encounter is a combat encounter, where the PCs face other creatures. Combat encounters are strictly governed by rules; the guidelines that follow will help you build combat encounters that pose appropriate challenges for your group. Building hazard encounters works the same way.

To build a combat encounter, first decide how the encounter fits in the adventure as a whole. Then, estimate how much of a threat you want the encounter to pose, using one of five categories below.

Trivial-threat encounters are so easy that the characters have essentially no chance of losing. They're unlikely to spend significant resources unless they're particularly wasteful. These encounters work best as warm-ups, palate cleansers, or reminders of how awesome the characters are. A trivial-threat encounter can still be fun to play, so don't ignore them just because of the lack of challenge.

Low-threat encounters present a veneer of difficulty and typically use some of the party's resources. However, it would be rare or the result of very poor tactics for the entire party to be seriously endangered.

Moderate-threat encounters are a serious challenge to the characters, though unlikely to overpower them completely. Characters usually need to use sound tactics and manage their resources wisely to come out of a moderate-threat encounter ready to continue on and face a harder challenge without resting.

Severe-threat encounters are the hardest encounters most groups of characters have a good chance to defeat. These encounters are appropriate for important moments in your story, such as confronting a final boss. *Use severe encounters carefully*—there's a good chance a character could die, and a small chance the whole group could. Bad luck, poor tactics, or a lack of resources can easily turn a severe-threat encounter against the characters, and a wise group keeps the option to disengage open.

Extreme-threat encounters are so dangerous that they are likely to be an even match for the characters, particularly if the characters are low on resources. This makes them too challenging for most uses! *Use an extreme encounter only if you're willing to take the chance the entire party will die.* An extreme-threat encounter might be appropriate for a fully rested group of characters that can go all-out, for the climactic encounter at the end of an entire campaign, or for a group of veteran players using advanced tactics and teamwork.

XP Budget

Once you've selected a threat level, it's time to build the encounter. You have an XP budget based on the threat, and each creature costs some of that budget. Start with the monsters or NPCs that are most important to the encounter, then decide how you want to use the rest of your XP budget. Many encounters won't match the XP budget exactly, but they should come close. The XP budget is based on a group of four characters. If your group is larger or smaller, see Different Party Sizes on page 76.

ENCOUNTER BUDGET

Threat	XP Budget	Character Adjustment
Trivial	40 or less	10 or less
Low	60	20
Moderate	80	20
Severe	120	30
Extreme	160	40

CREATURE XP AND ROLE

Creature Level	XP	Suggested Role
Party level – 4	10	Low-threat lackey
Party level – 3	15	Low- or moderate-threat lackey
Party level – 2	20	Any lackey or standard creature
Party level – 1	30	Any standard creature
Party level	40	Any standard creature or low-threat boss
Party level + 1	60	Low- or moderate-threat boss
Party level + 2	80	Moderate- or severe-threat boss
Party level + 3	120	Severe- or extreme-threat boss
Party level + 4	160	Extreme-threat solo boss

Choosing Creatures

In all but the most unusual circumstances, you'll select creatures for your encounter that range from 4 levels lower than the PCs' level to 4 levels higher (see the Creature XP and Role table). Each creature has a part to play in your encounter, from a lowly lackey to a boss so mighty it could defeat the entire party single-handedly.

Each creature costs some of the XP from your XP budget for the encounter, based on its level compared to the levels of the characters in your party. For instance, if the PCs are 5th level, a 2nd-level creature is a "party level – 3" creature, a lackey appropriate for a low- to-moderate-threat encounter, and it costs 15 XP in an encounter's XP budget. Party level is typically equal to the level of all the characters in the party (find more detail on page 57).

Different Party Sizes

For each additional character in the party beyond the fourth, increase your XP budget by the amount shown in the Character Adjustment value for your encounter on the Encounter Budget table. If you have fewer than four characters, use the same process in reverse: for each missing character, remove that amount of XP from your XP budget. Note that if you adjust your XP budget to account for party size, the XP awards for the encounter don't change—you'll always award the amount of XP listed for a group of four characters.

It's best to use the XP increase from more characters to add more enemies or hazards, and the XP decrease from fewer characters to subtract enemies and hazards, rather than making one enemy tougher or weaker. Encounters are typically more satisfying if the number of enemy creatures is fairly close to the number of player characters.

VARIETY

Variety in encounters is essential to let players try new tactics and give different PCs chances to shine as they face foes with weak points they're uniquely suited to exploiting.

Consider the following forms of encounter variety.

- **Theme:** Look for ways to include varied creatures and locations. Even if the PCs delve into a dungeon inhabited by undead, they should encounter other creatures, too! All creatures should have a justification for fitting in, but no place needs to be uniform.
- **Difficulty:** A string of moderate-threat encounters can feel flat. Use low- and even trivial-threat encounters to give PCs chances to really shine, and severe-threat encounters for especially powerful enemies. Extreme-threat encounters should be used sparingly, for enemies who match the threat posed by the PCs and have a solid chance of beating them! The adventure recipes on page 68 include a mix of combat difficulties that can be useful to look at.
- **Complexity:** Use high complexity judiciously, saving it for important or memorable fights.
- **Encounter Composition:** The number of creatures per encounter and their levels should vary. Higher-level single enemies, squads of enemies, and large numbers of lackeys all feel different.
- **Setup:** Not all encounters should start and end the same way. PCs might sneak up on unprepared enemies, get ambushed by foes hunting them, enter into a formal duel, or find a diplomatic overture fails and turns into a fight. On the other side, enemies might all be taken out, retreat, beg for mercy, or even shift the encounter to a chase or other phase.
- **Information:** Uncertainty can increase the tension and sense of danger the players feel. Ambushes, fights against unknown foes or foes behind battlements, and other scenarios can create this basic uncertainty.

ENCOUNTER LOCATIONS

Choose compelling settings for your encounters. When encounters take place in a building or lair, the most significant environmental features originate from the occupants, both past and present. Think about their tastes, biology, or wealth. These features could be natural, such as the sickening reek of decay in the lair of a great predator. They could also be alchemical, such as a cloud of poisonous gas, or magical, such as a strange electric current that arcs through the walls and occasionally leaps out at passersby.

In some cases, you'll have a location in which an enemy always appears, and you can design your location to suit that specific creature. Other times, an encounter might appear in a variety of places, such as a guard patrol or wandering monster. In these cases, you'll need several terrain and structure options so there's something interesting about the environment no matter where the battle takes place.

Maps and Terrain

Features on the map have a substantial impact on the flow of combat. Three considerations to keep in mind

when designing a map are maneuverability, line of sight, and attack ranges. Even empty rooms and corridors can provide variety based on their size and shape. Narrow passageways make natural choke points. In particularly small rooms, space is at a premium, favoring melee combatants and making area effects hard to aim without friendly fire. By contrast, huge areas lend themselves to spread-out combat, which gives plenty of room to use all manner of abilities but poses challenges for ones with limited range. To make large rooms more interesting, add furniture, stalagmites, or other features the PCs and their foes can duck behind for cover.

Inhabitant or Intruder?

In most cases, the PCs enter territory that's far more familiar to their foes than it is to them. NPCs and monsters who live in an area are likely to be adapted to its dangers, either because they know where they are and how to avoid them, or because they are unaffected by them. A kobold in their lair might bait a PC into walking into a trap the kobold avoided. Marshland may be troublesome terrain for most PCs, but it poses little inconvenience to amphibious creatures. When using creatures with the ability to burrow, climb, or swim, consider incorporating features such as mazelike corridors, high walls with platforms, or rivers. If the foes

are smaller or larger than the PCs, consider including paths, cubbyholes, staircases, or narrow passages that one side of the fight can use more effectively.

Sometimes, though, the PCs must defend their own base from intruders. In these situations, you're flipping the script, so give the PCs time to trap and ward the area. Watching the invaders fall prey to hazards and ambushes can be a delightful change of pace for your players.

Wild Weather

On a bright, sunny day, the PCs see clearly and fight without obstruction, but adding wind, precipitation, or fog creates additional challenges. Rain creates sloshy, muddy ground that slows movement, and cold weather introduces the threat of slippery patches of ice. Only the most extreme temperatures have a direct impact on the PCs during an encounter, but a slog through blistering heat or freezing cold can leave the PCs worn out and more vulnerable to foes. Light levels play a key role in both outdoor and indoor encounters. Although torches are plentiful, their reach is limited, and lights are sure to draw attention in dark areas.

Budgeting for Terrain

If you include terrain that's tricky to navigate or takes extra work to deal with, consider whether it should count toward the encounter's XP budget. A fight that requires

Climbing, Swimming, or pushing through difficult terrain can be much tougher—especially if the enemies have strong ranged attacks. Think about the impact of the terrain in advance, especially if the battle would already be a severe threat, or you might kill the party. You can pick an equivalent monster level for your terrain and factor that into your budget, or just assign extra XP at the end if the threat without terrain is on the low or moderate end.

ENEMY MOTIVATIONS

Every encounter should happen for a reason. Consider a creature's motivation to fight. Is it defending its lair? Robbing to enrich itself? Following sadistic impulses? Simply being paid to fight? You may realize a creature doesn't have a compelling motivation, or that the PCs have done something that eliminates the impetus to fight. In that case, the encounter doesn't need to happen! Your game might be more satisfying if the PCs' clever actions avoid the fight—provided you award them XP accordingly.

Morale

Think how an enemy reacts when a fight is going poorly for them—or well! Enemies who do something other than fight to the death make an encounter more dynamic and believable. While PCs occasionally encounter truly fanatical zealots or single-minded creatures that would never back down from a fight, most creatures—even nonsapient creatures like animals—back down from a battle they're obviously losing. This normally means foes fleeing at a certain point, potentially ending the encounter, but if the PCs need to capture those opponents, it could add a secondary objective and split their focus. Look at how differences in morale between participants impact the fight. For instance, after the necromancer's living allies surrender to the PCs, she might activate a latent magic she implanted within them, killing them and merging their bodies into an enormous undead abomination. An enemy's morale could even change the encounter from combat to social, as the PCs enter negotiations over a surrender or try to convince foes of the errors of their ways.

DYNAMIC ENCOUNTERS

While you can certainly create enjoyable encounters by placing a group of opponents in a square room with little else, you have numerous tools to create encounters that are more interactive and dynamic. These tools can challenge your players to invent new strategies, inspire interesting character decisions, and make your setting richer.

No encounter needs to use all of the elements presented here, and not all encounters need more than one or two. The more complex a dynamic encounter is, the longer it takes to run and the more demanding it is. In general, these tools are perfectly suited for boss encounters, for memorable foes, and as a spice to add throughout your campaign however often works best for you and your players.

Hazards in Combat

In isolated encounters where the PCs have plenty of time to recover from hazards' effects, simple hazards can feel more like speed bumps than true challenges. But when combined with other threats, even simple hazards can prove perilous. A noisy explosion can draw attention, allowing foes to burst through the door for a dramatic start to the encounter. Simple hazards can also be an active part of an encounter, particularly if the foes know how to avoid triggering them.

As their name suggests, complex hazards are a more powerful tool for encounters. Because they continue to act, they are an ongoing presence in the fight. When combined with hostile creatures, complex hazards offer the PCs plenty of choices for what they want to do next. This is particularly true if foes benefit from the hazard. Should the PCs first disable the array of pipes spewing magical fire into the room, or should they prioritize the fire elemental growing stronger with exposure to the inferno? There's no right answer, and the PCs' choices have a clear impact on the obstacles they face. Hazards in combat shine when they give the PCs ways to contribute meaningfully other than dealing damage to a creature. Interesting actions to disable a hazard are a fun way to give several PCs something fresh and different to do rather than piling on damage.

Evolving Battlefields

While some battlefields are relatively static, allowing the PCs and foes to clobber each other until one side wins, complex or evolving battlefields can lead to far more memorable encounters. One of the most straightforward ways to create an evolving battlefield is with dynamic environmental features. Maybe the floating platforms that make up the room's floor shuffle around on their own turn each round, or various points teleport creatures to different locations—possibly between two rooms where separate battles take place simultaneously. These dynamic features have some overlap with complex hazards, though they don't tend to be an opposition or obstacle specifically threatening the PCs.

Similarly, a third party in the encounter, perhaps a rampaging monster or a restless spirit, could pose a danger to both sides but potentially benefit either. For instance, perhaps the PCs or their foes could harness this third party as a dangerous but powerful ally with a successful skill check of some kind or by making a risky bargain.

Sometimes the evolving battlefield is more of a state change, or series of state changes, and less of a constant presence. For instance, defeating a ritualist and ending his ritual could cause the foes to lose a powerful beneficial effect but unleash a demon that crawled through the remains of the botched ritual, or cause part of the room to collapse from the magical backlash. Major physical changes to the environment,

like such a collapse, portions of the room rising or falling, or water beginning to rush in and fill the room, can force the PCs to rethink their plans to handle the new situation. Sometimes the evolving battlefield is more of an unexpected plot twist that occurs in the middle of the encounter. Perhaps the evil tyrant reveals that they were a dragon all along, or reinforcements arrive for whichever side was outmatched. Whatever you choose, make sure it changes things up and makes the encounter feel more dynamic and different. For instance, raising up a portion of the battlefield that isn't particularly relevant when neither the PCs nor their foes are likely to care is less interesting than raising up the pedestal holding the jewel the PCs and their enemies are trying to recover.

Combining and Separating Encounters

Picture this: the PCs storm a castle. They choose to eschew stealth in favor of a direct approach. On the ramparts, a guard spots them and raises an alarm. The sound of horns and whistles blares throughout the keep as each defender ensures that everyone is ready for a fight. And then, they politely wait in whatever room they were already standing in for the PCs to come and attack them. It sounds pretty unrealistic, and it feels unrealistic at the table. Many players find it far more satisfying when their foes take reasonable actions and countermeasures against them, such as moving to defensible positions or banding together with allies. Taken to an extreme, combining encounters can quickly lead to fights that are unwinnable, so be careful. In the castle example, some guards may come out to attack the PCs, while others cluster around the central keep. Perhaps each individual patrol of guards around the castle is a trivial-threat encounter, but as they gather together, they form groups of gradually escalating threat. Such groups give the PCs a sense of how challenging their opposition is, so that if a fight against six guards is a challenge, they won't try to pick a fight with 30. When the PCs' foes amass into an overwhelming force, give the PCs fair warning and a chance to retreat and try again another day. Of course, if the PCs come back after the alarm has been raised, the guards are likely to change their rotations to better secure the keep.

The most common reason to separate an encounter into multiple pieces is to set up a combined encounter, like when an injured foe retreats to gather reinforcements. This provides the PCs with a choice: do they ignore the fleeing enemy and focus on the battle in front of them, or do they split their own forces, weighing the risk of being led into a dangerous encounter against the chance of stopping later foes from preparing for their approach? An encounter might also separate into pieces because of dramatic changes to the battlefield, such as a collapsing ceiling or a magical wall that prevents those on each side of the barrier from accessing the other without spending actions to bypass the obstruction.

PITFALLS

This section arms you with a wide variety of useful tricks to add interest to your encounters, but you should keep an eye out for some common pitfalls of encounter building.

- **Don't Make Every Encounter Complex:** There are many ways to make complex and dynamic encounters, but making every single encounter complex will become exhausting for you and your players. Some encounters should be simple, both because it will make the world feel more real and because it's a good way for the group to relax without as much to keep track of.
- **Avoid Flat Difficulty:** Ensure that not too many of your encounters fall at the same threat level. Having some low- and even trivial-threat battles adds variety, and it's great to throw in a few severe encounters beyond just bosses.
- **Beware of Unexpected Difficulty:** You might end up with creatures that have abilities that fit well together, making them extremely powerful as a combo, or that are particularly well-suited against your PCs. Compare the creatures and what you know about your PCs in advance, especially if the encounter is already a severe threat by the numbers. Page 26 has suggestions for what to do if you find a spike in difficulty during an encounter rather than in advance.
- **Watch for Overpowered Terrain:** As noted under Budgeting for Terrain, some features of the environment can increase the danger drastically. Consider your creature and the environment, and see whether the creature has a massive advantage compared to PCs in that terrain, such as a monster with powerful, long-range attacks when PCs are stuck at a distance. If so, you might want to adjust.

Time Pressure

Time pressure adds an extra sense of urgency to any encounter and can be a great way to make an otherwise trivial- or low-threat encounter tactically engaging, satisfying, and memorable. After all, while low- and trivial-threat encounters have an incredibly low chance of defeating the PCs, the opposition can usually hold on long enough to make the PCs spend a few rounds to defeat them unless the PCs expend more resources than they normally would on such foes. Time pressure is often related to a secondary objective in the encounter, though it could be a countdown directly related to the encounter itself. For instance, if the ritual will grant a lich its apotheosis in 4 rounds, the heroes need to defeat the lich before then!

Secondary Objectives

One of the simplest and most exciting ways to create a dynamic encounter, even if the combat itself is not so

difficult, is to add a secondary objective beyond simply defeating foes. Perhaps the villains are about to burn captives in a fire, and some of the PCs need to divert their efforts to avoid a pyrrhic victory. Encounters with a parallel objective that require PCs to take actions other than destroying foes can keep those foes around long enough to do interesting things without inflating their power level. It also gives PCs skilled in areas related to the side mission a chance to shine.

Sometimes a secondary objective might present a time limit, like if the PCs need to prevent evidence from being burned, either by fighting quickly or by actively protecting the documents. Another type of secondary objective relates to how the PCs engage in combat with the primary opposition. The PCs might need to use nonlethal attacks against guards who mistakenly believe the PCs are criminals, or they might need to prevent slippery scouts from retreating to alert others. Options like these highlight mobile characters like the monk. You could even create truly off-the-wall secondary objectives that require the PCs to lose the encounter in order to succeed. The PCs might need to put up a believable fight but retreat and let foes steal their caravan in order to follow the foes back to their lair. Secondary objectives are a great way to highlight different abilities in combat and make for a memorable encounter, but—like all of these tactics—they can become annoying if overused.

Opponent Synergy

Most encounters assume that the PCs' opponents work together to oppose the PCs, but when groups of foes have been collaborating and fighting together for a long time, they can develop additional strategies. Consider giving each member of these tightly knit teams a reaction triggered by their allies' abilities, or another benefit they gain based on their allies' actions. Just as a team of PCs learns how to best position the rogue to flank enemies and minimize the harm they take from the wizard's *fireball* spell, NPCs can learn to complement each other's strategies and avoid interfering with each other. On the opposite end of the spectrum, opponents with poor coordination make the fight much easier for the PCs. Poor coordination between mindless creatures is common, and PCs can use clever tactics to run circles around these foes. When intelligent creatures accidentally (or deliberately) harm each other or pursue conflicting strategies, particularly if they engage in banter with each other as they fight, it can make for an amusing break in the typical rhythm of combat.

When taken to its extreme, synergy can represent the actions of a hive mind or a single massive creature. These synergistic components can be creatures, hazards, or both. For example, instead of representing a kraken the size of a warship as a single foe, you could represent each of its tentacles as an individual opponent. Perhaps the kraken can sacrifice actions it would otherwise use to crush PCs in its maw to use its tentacles more freely. In this case, you could model a field of tentacles as a complex hazard that mainly reacts to the PCs moving within it, but allow the kraken's head to act with a few tentacles directly.

Misdirection

Sometimes, a bit of misdirection can add a lot of interest to an encounter, especially against offense-heavy groups. Rather than amping up the opposition to match the PCs' firepower and creating opponents whose own offenses are too powerful for the PCs' defenses, consider a little sleight of hand. For instance, a villain might have an illusory or disguised decoy target with just enough durability to take a few hits while the true villain is hiding nearby, ready to emerge and attack. Illusion spells can allow a foe to attack from a safer position, and *possession* grants the foe a disposable body unless the PCs brought along *spirit blast* or similar magic. Sometimes you can even hide the villain in plain sight: for instance, in an encounter with three goblins with similar-looking gear and an ogre, one of the goblins might be the biggest threat, but the PCs are likely to target the ogre first.

Care when setting up the battle map can also go a long way to misdirect your players—or at least avoid accidentally telegraphing what an encounter will be. For instance, if you always put out statue minis whenever

there are statues in the room, the PCs might at first be overly suspicious of ordinary statues, but they will be more surprised later on when a statue turns out to be a construct than if you place minis only when the statue is actually a construct.

Recurring Villains

Not every villain dies the first time the PCs defeat them in combat. Some may escape, perhaps through teleportation, misdirection, or with other ploys. When a villain escapes and lives to fight the PCs again another day, it's good to have that foe learn from their past failures. In their next encounter with the PCs, give them additional minions, spells, or other defenses designed to counteract the strategies the PCs used against them previously. Even if the villain doesn't escape, they might have other tricks up their sleeves, such as rising again to oppose the PCs. They could well return later in the adventure—or they might come back immediately for a second battle, so long as there is a proper justification for doing so. For example, defeating an otherworldly villain's outer shell might reveal its terrible true form, or a previously living necromancer might rise again as an undead monstrosity bent upon destroying the PCs.

Social Encounters

Details on how to run a social encounter, and the differences between a social and combat encounter, appear on page 31. The setup for a social encounter tends to be less detailed. For the NPCs involved, you'll just need statistics for their social skills, Perception, and Will. These use the non-combat level of the creature (page 31), based on the creature's social skills, *not* its combat level. You determine the challenge of a social encounter based on this non-combat level.

You also need to decide the objective or consequences of the social encounter—what the PCs can achieve and what happens if they fail—and the form of the challenge. It might be a public debate, a private audience with a powerful person, or some kind of contest. Just like with combat encounters, think about the environment, with a particular eye toward the other people around. Is there a crowd the PCs can sway? Are they in an imposing, luxurious throne room or at a city gate? Is the atmosphere oppressive? Hopeful?

You might find the PCs' goals end up being quite different from what you initially thought they would be. Fortunately, social encounters are adaptable. Thinking of their likely objective helps you construct the scene in your mind more easily but shouldn't limit you.

Treasure by Encounter

The standard rules count treasure over the course of a level, rather than dividing it up by encounter. If you need to select treasure for a single encounter, such as in a sandbox game, you can use the table below. It takes the treasure budget for each level and breaks that down per encounter based on the encounter threat, similar to how XP varies by threat. The final column shows extra treasure you should award if you build an entire level this way. Unlike the standard table, this doesn't include items by item level, as the value doesn't cleanly break down for most single encounters. It's recommended you still give out those permanent items, but you'll need to borrow from other encounters' treasure to account for their value. Include encounters against creatures without treasure to account for this.

TREASURE BY ENCOUNTER

Level	Total Treasure per Level	Low	Moderate	Severe	Extreme	Extra Treasure
1	175 gp	13 gp	18 gp	26 gp	35 gp	35 gp
2	300 gp	23 gp	30 gp	45 gp	60 gp	60 gp
3	500 gp	38 gp	50 gp	75 gp	100 gp	100 gp
4	850 gp	65 gp	85 gp	130 gp	170 gp	170 gp
5	1,350 gp	100 gp	135 gp	200 gp	270 gp	270 gp
6	2,000 gp	150 gp	200 gp	300 gp	400 gp	400 gp
7	2,900 gp	220 gp	290 gp	440 gp	580 gp	580 gp
8	4,000 gp	300 gp	400 gp	600 gp	800 gp	800 gp
9	5,700 gp	430 gp	570 gp	860 gp	1,140 gp	1,140 gp
10	8,000 gp	600 gp	800 gp	1,200 gp	1,600 gp	1,600 gp
11	11,500 gp	865 gp	1,150 gp	1,725 gp	2,300 gp	2,300 gp
12	16,500 gp	1,250 gp	1,650 gp	2,475 gp	3,300 gp	3,300 gp
13	25,000 gp	1,875 gp	2,500 gp	3,750 gp	5,000 gp	5,000 gp
14	36,500 gp	2,750 gp	3,650 gp	5,500 gp	7,300 gp	7,300 gp
15	54,500 gp	4,100 gp	5,450 gp	8,200 gp	10,900 gp	10,900 gp
16	82,500 gp	6,200 gp	8,250 gp	12,400 gp	16,500 gp	16,500 gp
17	128,000 gp	9,600 gp	12,800 gp	19,200 gp	25,600 gp	25,600 gp
18	208,000 gp	15,600 gp	20,800 gp	31,200 gp	41,600 gp	41,600 gp
19	355,000 gp	26,600 gp	35,500 gp	53,250 gp	71,000 gp	71,000 gp
20	490,000 gp	36,800 gp	49,000 gp	73,500 gp	98,000 gp	98,000 gp

VARIANT RULES

While the rules presented in **Player Core** *and the rest of this book are designed to give you and your group a baseline experience that's easy to learn and fun to play, sometimes you're looking for more customizable options. That's where variant rules come in: options to alter the game's rules to fit your needs. This section adds a collection of variant rules to your toolbox, often with additional options for how to use them.*

The variants included in this chapter are divided into the following sections.

- **Automatic Bonus Progression** (page 83) presents a variant for playing the game without relying on fundamental runes to enhance damage and accuracy.
- **Free Archetype** (page 84) presents a method of character generation that adds an archetype to a character's advancement without requiring them to spend their standard class feats.
- **Level 0 Characters** (page 84) can play through the characters' adventures before they take on character classes.
- **Proficiency without Level** (page 85) changes the math of the proficiency system to tell stories where being outnumbered by weaker foes remains a challenge and high-level characters are less superhuman.

CHOOSING VARIANT RULES

When you and your group are deciding which variant rules to use, think about the types of stories you want to tell together, including the genre, themes, and characters, to choose which variant rules might be the best fit.

If you're not sure about a variant rule, take a chance! Make sure everyone in your group understands that this is a trial run and that you might need to adjust or remove the variant rules later on if they're causing unexpected side effects or not working as you intended. When you're playing with variant rules, be sure to let any new players who join the group know about the variant rules your group has chosen. This helps them set their expectations, which is important for making sure there is a feeling of fairness among your players.

If your group is playing a game with themes that call for it, you might wind up combining multiple variant rules together, possibly applying several options at the same time. For instance, in a gritty, low-magic, survival-horror game, you might start the PCs as 0-level characters and alter the proficiency bonus progression to remove level at the same time. In general, the variant options in this chapter are sufficiently self-contained, with explanations of how they change the game, that you should be able to combine them without trouble. When you design your own variant rules, be on the lookout for places where new rules might have unexpected overlapping effects on each other and the game.

AUTOMATIC BONUS PROGRESSION

This variant removes the item bonus to rolls and DCs usually provided by magic items (with the exception of armor's item bonus) and replaces it with a new kind of bonus—potency—to reflect a character's innate ability. In this variant, magic items, if they exist at all, can provide unique special abilities rather than numerical increases.

Special Class Features

Every character automatically gains the class features on the Automatic Bonus Progression table.

AUTOMATIC BONUS PROGRESSION

Level	Benefits
1	–
2	Attack potency +1
3	Skill potency (one at +1)
4	Devastating attacks (two dice)
5	Defense potency +1
6	Skill potency (two at +1 each)
7	Perception potency +1
8	Saving throw potency +1
9	Skill potency (one at +2, one at +1)
10	Attack potency +2
11	Defense potency +2
12	Devastating attacks (three dice)
13	Perception potency +2; skill potency (two at +2 each, one at +1)
14	Saving throw potency +2
15	Skill potency (three at +2 each, one at +1)
16	Attack potency +3
17	Ability apex; skill potency (one at +3, two at +2 each, two at +1 each)
18	Defense potency +3
19	Devastating attacks (four dice), Perception potency +3
20	Saving throw potency +3; skill potency (two at +3 each, two at +2 each, two at +1 each)

Attack Potency   2nd
Starting at 2nd level, you gain a +1 potency bonus to attack rolls with all weapons and unarmed attacks. This increases to +2 at 10th level, and +3 at 16th level.

Skill Potency   3rd
At 3rd level, choose a single skill. You gain a +1 potency bonus with that skill. At 6th level, choose a second skill to gain a +1 potency bonus. At 9th level, choose one of those skills and increase its potency bonus to +2. At 13th level, increase the potency bonus of your second skill to +2 and choose a third skill to gain a +1 potency bonus. At 15th level, increase the third skill's potency bonus to +2 and choose a fourth skill to gain a +1 potency bonus. At 17th level, choose one of your three skills with a +2 potency bonus to increase to +3, and choose a fifth skill to gain a +1 potency bonus. Finally, at 20th level, choose one of the two skills with a +2 potency bonus to increase to +3, choose one of the three skills at a +1 potency bonus to increase to +2, and choose one new skill to gain a +1 potency bonus. You can spend 1 week to retrain one of these assignments at any time.

Devastating Attacks   4th
At 4th level, your weapon and unarmed Strikes deal two damage dice instead of one. This increases to three at 12th level and to four at 19th level.

Defense Potency   5th
At 5th level, you gain a +1 potency bonus to AC. At 11th level, this bonus increases to +2, and at 18th level, to +3.

Perception Potency   7th
At 7th level, you gain a +1 potency bonus to Perception, increasing to +2 at level 13 and +3 at level 19.

Saving Throw Potency   8th
At 8th level, you gain a +1 potency bonus to saves, increasing to +2 at level 14 and +3 at level 20.

Ability Apex   17th
At 17th level, choose one attribute score to either increase by 2 or increase to 18 (whichever grants the higher score).

Adjusting Items and Treasure
With this variant, you can ignore as much of the Party Treasure by Level table on page 59 as you want, though you'll usually want to provide consistent currency. The main area your choice will impact is in spellcasting items, such as scrolls and wands.

Remove all potency runes, *striking* runes, and *resilient* runes. Items that normally grant an item bonus to statistics or damage dice no longer do, other than the base item bonus to AC from armor. Apex items do not increase attribute modifiers. If your world still includes magic items, a safe bet is to continue to give out consumable items at roughly the rate on page 59.

If you choose to eliminate runes entirely, this can reduce the PCs' damage since they won't have runes like *flaming* or *holy*. If you've removed nearly all treasure, challenges might become more difficult, even with automatic bonuses.

FREE ARCHETYPE

Sometimes the story of your game calls for a group where everyone is a pirate or an apprentice at a magic school. The free archetype variant introduces a shared aspect to every character without taking away any of that character's existing choices.

Building a Character

The only difference between a normal character and a free-archetype character is that the character receives an extra class feat at 2nd level and every even level thereafter that they can use only for archetype feats. You might restrict the free feats to those of a single archetype each character in the group has (for a shared backstory), those of archetypes fitting a certain theme (such as only ones from magical archetypes in a game set in a magic school), or entirely unrestricted if you just want a higher-powered game.

If the group all has the same archetype or draws from a limited list, you might want to ignore the free archetype's normal restriction of selecting a certain number of feats before taking a new archetype. That way a character can still pursue another archetype that also fits their character.

Playing with Free Archetypes

Free-archetype characters are a bit more versatile and powerful than normal, but usually not so much that they unbalance your game. However, due to the characters' increased access to archetype feats, you should place a limit on the number of feats that scale based on a character's number of archetype feats (mainly multiclass Resiliency feats). Allowing a character to benefit from a number of these feats equal to half their level is appropriate.

LEVEL 0 CHARACTERS

Before they were heroes, every PC came from somewhere, whether they worked on a farm like Valeros or picked pockets on the streets like Seelah. Sometimes, it can be a lot of fun to play a prequel game set years before the PCs' first adventure as heroes, or you may have an idea for a low-powered adventure that calls for commoners and apprentices. The rules below provide ways to build and use level 0 PCs.

Building Characters

Building a level 0 character is similar to building a 1st-level character, but you stop after choosing your ancestry and background. A level 0 character still gets the four free attribute boosts from Step 6 of the normal character creation process, but not the class attribute boost.

Initial Proficiencies

A level 0 character is trained in Perception, all saving throws, unarmed attacks, unarmored defense, and one simple weapon of their choice. Additionally, they are trained in a number of skills equal to 2 + their Intelligence modifier. The proficiency bonus for a level 0 character works the same way as normal, but since the level is 0, the total proficiency bonus for being trained is +2.

Hit Points

A level 0 character adds their Constitution modifier to their ancestry Hit Points to determine their starting Hit Points.

Starting Money

A level 0 character starts with 5 gp (50 sp) for equipment.

Apprentice Option

If the story you want to tell is about characters who have started training to become a particular class, you can grant them a small number of additional abilities. An apprentice character is trained in the skill or skills specified for their chosen class (such as Occultism and Performance for a bard) in addition to the skills they gain through their initial proficiencies. They also gain benefits based on the class.

Alchemist: An apprentice alchemist gains the advanced alchemy portion of the alchemy class feature. Their advanced alchemy level is 1, and they have one batch of infused reagents each day. They can make only infused alchemical items.

Monk: An apprentice monk gains the powerful fist class feature.

Other Martial Class: An apprentice of another martial class (fighter, ranger, or rogue, for example) is trained in light armor, all simple weapons, and one martial weapon listed in the class's initial proficiencies. If a martial class not listed here lacks light armor or martial weapon training (as the monk does), give it a different ability as well.

Spellcaster: An apprentice spellcaster is trained in the appropriate magic tradition and gains two cantrips from their class. A prepared caster can't change these cantrips each day.

Gameplay

Combat can be especially dangerous for level 0 characters. For safety's sake, you might treat the characters as level −1 when determining what combat encounters are appropriate. For skill checks, they can still accomplish tasks with a simple trained DC using their trained skills, but success is less certain. Since they have fewer skills, the party might not have anyone trained for a
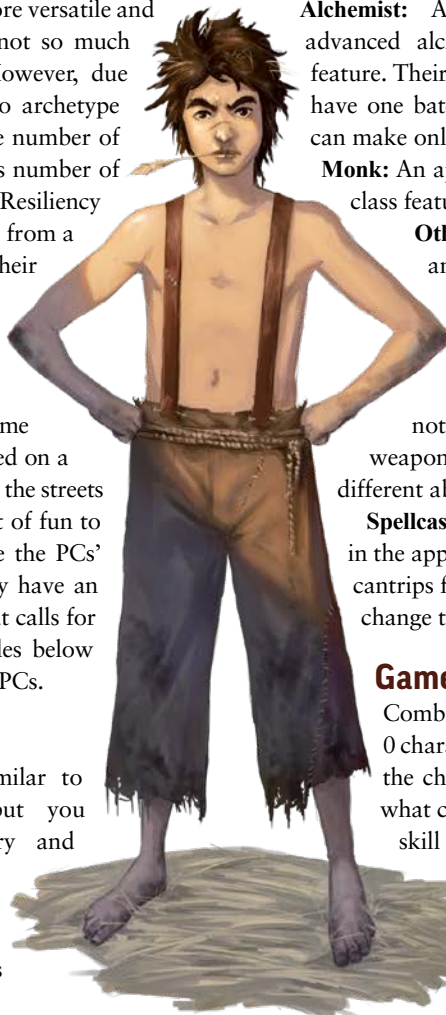
given task. If you're playing these characters for more than a few sessions, consider advancing them to 1st level using the fast advancement speed (800 XP). If your group wants a longer experience at level 0, start the group without the apprentice benefits, then level up to apprentice (gaining those benefits and the apprentice adjustments for their class), and then level up to 1st level.

Treasure

As the characters start with 5 gp, their adventures up to 1st level should account for the rest of a 1st-level character's starting money. That means you'll distribute treasure worth 10 gp × the number of PCs, a large percentage of which should be in currency.

PROFICIENCY WITHOUT LEVEL

This variant removes a character's level from their proficiency bonus, scaling it differently for a style of game that's outside the norm. This is a significant change to the system. The proficiency rank progression in *Player Core* is designed for heroic fantasy games where heroes rise from humble origins to world-shattering strength. For some games, this narrative arc doesn't fit. Such games are about hedging bets in an uncertain and gritty world, in which even the world's best fighter can't guarantee a win against a large group of moderately skilled brigands.

The initial implementation is fairly straightforward: the proficiency bonus just becomes +2 for trained, +4 for expert, +6 for master, and +8 for legendary. It's best to give an untrained character a –2 proficiency modifier instead of a +0 proficiency bonus.

Additionally, for creatures, hazards, magic items, and so on, reduce each statistic that would include a proficiency bonus by the level of the creature or other rules element. These statistics are typically modifiers and DCs for attacks, ACs, saving throws, Perception, skills, and spells.

Finally, decrease the skill DCs of most tasks. You can just subtract the level from the DC tables on page 53, or you can reference the Simple Skill DCs (No Level) table for a set of DCs that's easier to remember. The new DCs make it a little harder for high-level characters to succeed than it would be when using the default numbers, in keeping with the theme mentioned earlier. Combat outcomes will tend to flatten out, with critical successes and critical failures being less likely across the game. This is particularly notable in spells, where you're less likely to see the extreme effects of critical failures on saves.

SIMPLE SKILL DCS (NO LEVEL)

Proficiency Rank	DC
Untrained	10
Trained	15
Expert	20
Master	25
Legendary	30

Adjusting Encounters

Telling stories where a large group of low-level monsters can still be a significant threat to a high-level PC (and conversely, where a single higher-level monster is not much of a threat to a group of PCs) requires some significant shifts in encounter building, including shifts in the PCs' rewards.

Under the default math, two monsters of a certain level are roughly as challenging as a single monster 2 levels higher. However, with level removed from proficiency, this assumption is no longer true. The XP budget for creatures uses a different scale, as shown in the Creature XP (No Level) table. You'll still use the same XP budget for a given threat level as shown on the Encounter Budget table on page 75 (80 XP for a moderate-threat encounter, 120 for a severe-threat encounter, and so on).

CREATURE XP (NO LEVEL)

Creature's Level	XP
Party level – 7	9
Party level – 6	12
Party level – 5	14
Party level – 4	18
Party level – 3	21
Party level – 2	26
Party level – 1	32
Party level	40
Party level + 1	48
Party level + 2	60
Party level + 3	72
Party level + 4	90
Party level + 5	108
Party level + 6	135
Party level + 7	160

While the XP values in the Creature XP (No Level) table work well in most cases, sometimes they might not account for the effects of creatures' special abilities when facing a party of a drastically different level. For instance, a ghost mage could prove too much for 5th-level PCs with its incorporeality, flight, and high-rank spells, even though it's outnumbered.

Adjusting Treasure

Items on standard creatures are chosen to avoid giving out too much treasure for the level at which PCs will typically fight them. However, using this variant, PCs might defeat a creature 5 levels higher than they are, or even more! Too many encounters with higher-level foes can wind up giving the PCs more treasure than you expected, or vice versa if they're fighting weaker foes that put up more of a fight but still have poor treasure. You can make periodic adjustments if the PCs' treasure drifts too far from expectations. Making it so they can't easily sell or buy magic items will mean it's harder for them to exploit treasure they gain. To sidestep the issue entirely, you can use automatic bonus progression (page 83).

AFFLICTIONS

Wherever there is life, there are insidious perils that threaten the health and well-being of living creatures. Some of these afflictions, including many diseases, are inherent to the natural world. Others—curses being the most notorious—exist solely to cause harm to others.

Afflictions strike creatures with potent and often escalating results. This section presents a variety of curses, and diseases for use in your game. A broad sampling of poisons can be found beginning on page 248, and the rules for afflictions start on page 430 in *Player Core*.

Depending on the tone of the campaign, the GM might want to roll secret saving throws for PCs affected by an affliction. This is particularly effective when the affliction is an element within a survival or horror game, or when it's part of a mystery.

CURSES

A curse is a manifestation of potent ill will. Curses typically have a single effect that takes place upon a failed saving throw and lasts a specified amount of time, or can be removed only by certain actions a character must perform or conditions they must meet. Rarely, curses will have stages; these follow the rules for afflictions.

Curses may come from a malicious action, such as a lich's Paralyzing Touch or a spell from an evil spellcaster. Guardians of a tomb or treasure might ward their charge with a curse as protection against thieves. Gods may inflict curses on servants who have raised their ire. In some rare cases, a curse might manifest as a response to a terrible act, such as a massacre. When using a curse in your game, assign the curse to an item, location, situation, or similar element. Then, decide on a trigger for the curse—such as a creature attempting to steal a warded book, destroy a work of art, or slay a specific creature. A curse can even be tied to a specific location, in which case it functions as a simple hazard. Once that trigger occurs, the curse affects the triggering creature or creatures. Each affected creature must attempt a saving throw against the curse; if they fail, they are subject to the effects specified in the curse's Effect entry.

CURSE OF NIGHTMARES   CURSE 2

`CURSE` `MAGICAL` `MENTAL`

This curse plagues you with terrible nightmares whenever you sleep, preventing you from resting properly.

Saving Throw DC 16 Will; **Effect** You must rest for 12 hours instead of 8 to avoid becoming fatigued and can't gain any benefits from resting or long-term rest. You can still make your daily preparations.

THEFT OF THOUGHT   CURSE 3

`CURSE` `MAGICAL` `MENTAL`

This curse protects a single book and activates against any creature who Steals it.

Saving Throw DC 18 Will; **Effect** You begin to lose details from your memories, as well as a portion of your procedural memory. After being cursed, the first time you attempt a check using a skill in which you are trained or better, your proficiency rank in the skill used decreases by one rank for as long as you are cursed.

SLAYER'S HAUNT   CURSE 4

`CURSE` `ILLUSION` `MAGICAL` `VISUAL`

You are haunted by all those you have killed.

Saving Throw DC 19 Will; **Effect** You see all creatures around you as those you have slain, still bearing their wounds. You can't identify, Recall Knowledge about, or otherwise interact with these creatures in any way that involves seeing their true form without first succeeding at a Will save against the curse's DC to see through the illusion. On a critical failure for such a Will save, you become frightened 1.

COWARD'S ROOTS   CURSE 5

`CURSE` `EMOTION` `FEAR` `MAGICAL` `MENTAL`

You find all courage stolen from your heart. When faced with something frightening, you flee in terror or stand frozen in place.

Saving Throw DC 20 Will; **Effect** At the start of your turn, if you are frightened, you become your choice of immobilized or fleeing until the end of that turn.

CURSE OF THE RAVENOUS   CURSE 5

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

This hideous curse kills through constant hunger. You become gaunt and repeatedly gnash your teeth as your body begins to consume itself.

Saving Throw DC 20 Fortitude; **Effect** No matter how much you eat, you aren't satiated. After 1 day, you begin starving (page 43). Each week, you receive a new saving throw against the curse.

WIZARD'S WARD   CURSE 6

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

A wizard's ward is placed upon a single book, usually a spellbook. If you damage the book, you must attempt a save against the curse's effect.

Saving Throw DC 22 Will; **Effect** You take 5d6 damage of the same damage type as the damage you dealt to the book, and the damage can't be healed as long as the curse lasts. Repairing the book, including replacing any missing text, ends this curse.

OATH OF THE FLESH   CURSE 7

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

When you swear an oath, you must obey that oath or suffer terrible consequences.

Saving Throw DC 23 Fortitude; **Effect** Each time you make a promise to someone, an ornate symbol representing that promise is magically carved into your flesh. Breaking any of these promises causes the symbol tattoo to grow into a gaping wound, dealing 3d6 slashing damage to you; damage from the curse can't be healed as long as the curse is still in effect.

SELLSWORD'S FOLLY   CURSE 9

`CURSE` `EMOTION` `MAGICAL` `MENTAL`

Even the most experienced combat veteran becomes as reckless as a rookie when suffering from sellsword's folly.

Saving Throw DC 26 Will; **Effect** The chaos of combat overwhelms you. Each time you roll initiative for a combat encounter, you must attempt a new saving throw against the curse; on a failure, you become confused for 1 round. This is an incapacitation effect.

CURSE OF SLUMBER   CURSE 11

`CURSE` `INCAPACITATION` `MAGICAL` `SLEEP`

This legendary curse sends you into a sleep indistinguishable from death.

Saving Throw DC 28 Fortitude; **Effect** You fall asleep for 1 round (or permanently on a critical failure) and seem to be dead; a creature must succeed at a DC 30 Medicine check to realize you are alive. Noise doesn't awaken you, but taking damage gives you a new saving throw against the curse.

REVILING EARTH   CURSE 12

`CURSE` `DEATH` `MAGICAL`

A reviling earth curse usually appears across a specific geographical region, such as a ruined town, a necromancer's domain, or a similar area.

Saving Throw DC 30 Fortitude; **Effect** When you enter the area, you become doomed 1, or doomed 2 on a critical failure.

SPIRIT ANCHOR   CURSE 13

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

This curse prevents your soul from moving on after death.

Saving Throw DC 31 Fortitude; **Effect** If you die while affected, your spirit is anchored to the plane you currently inhabit, and you become a ghost or other incorporeal undead.

UNENDING THIRST   CURSE 15

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

This curse kills through dehydration in the same vein as the curse of the ravenous, but with deadly speed.

Saving Throw DC 32 Fortitude; **Effect** You gain no benefit from drinking water or other liquids and begin suffering from thirst (page 43). Each day, you receive a new saving throw against the curse.

REVILED OF NATURE   CURSE 18

`CURSE` `EMOTION` `MAGICAL` `MENTAL`

This curse makes the hunter into the hunted, drawing the ire of animals wherever you go.

Saving Throw DC 38 Will; **Effect** Creatures of the natural world abhor you. Whenever an animal becomes aware of you, it must attempt a Will save against the curse. On a failure, it attacks you and fights to the death.

THIEF'S RETRIBUTION   CURSE 19

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

This punishment causes you to lose something dear to you whenever you rob or steal. If you have nothing to lose, the curse exacts its punishment upon your body instead.

Saving Throw DC 39 Fortitude; **Effect** Each time you steal something, you lose something more valuable–this item is whisked away and can't be found again. Typically this item is one of greater monetary value, but it might be one of greater value in another sense, such as one of greater emotional value, or something you need to complete a task. If you aren't carrying anything of greater value at the time of the theft, you lose one of your limbs instead, taking 10d6 slashing damage and losing use of that limb. The damage can't be healed, nor the limb restored, until the stolen item is returned, even through use of spells like *regenerate*.

SWORD OF ANATHEMA   CURSE 20

`CURSE` `DIVINE`

With divine intervention, followers of a deity can bestow this curse upon an enemy of the faith.

Saving Throw DC 40 Will; **Effect** You are marked by the deity invoked as an enemy of the church. You gain weakness 10 to damage dealt by worshippers of that deity.

GRAVE CURSE   CURSE, LEVEL VARIES

`CURSE` `MAGICAL`

A grave curse punishes you for stealing from a tomb or other resting place.

Saving Throw Will save, with a high spell DC for a monster of its level (page 53); **Effect** You are hounded by undead creatures of the same level as the curse. Every night, you must attempt a DC 15 flat check. On a failure, an incorporeal undead manifests to hassle and harry you throughout the night, retreating before it can take much damage and often preventing you from gaining a full night's rest. Whenever you enter a graveyard or other area where bodies are buried, you must succeed at the same flat check or a body animates as a corporeal undead (typically a skeleton or zombie) to attack you.

These undead are temporary and exist only to harry you; if you take control of the undead, move on, or otherwise avoid their attacks, incorporeal undead discorporate and corporeal undead collapse into ordinary corpses. The curse can be removed by returning the stolen items to their resting place.

DISEASES

Exposure to disease can be a hazard, such as when PCs come into contact with a plague-ridden corpse; such hazards grant XP as a simple hazard of the disease's level. When a disease gives a sickened condition that can't be reduced until it runs its course, that typically means the disease has symptoms such as a difficulty swallowing, loss of appetite, or nausea that make eating and drinking difficult but not impossible. Despite the condition's prohibition on eating or drinking, a creature can slowly and carefully eat and drink as long as they aren't in an encounter.

BOG ROT   DISEASE 0

DISEASE

Sometimes called bog foot, bog rot is caused by having waterlogged feet for an extended period of time. In addition to the usual cures for an affliction, bog rot can be cured through amputation of the affected appendages.

Saving Throw DC 13 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** clumsy 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** clumsy 1 and a −5-foot status penalty to Speed (1 day); **Stage 3** clumsy 2 and a −10-foot status penalty to Speed (1 day)

SCARLET FEVER   DISEASE 1

DISEASE

The relatively simple sore throat caused by this disease leads many victims to initially dismiss it as a mild illness, but scarlet fever can be deadly if left untreated. You can't reduce your sickened condition while affected with scarlet fever.

Saving Throw DC 13 Fortitude; **Onset** 2 days; **Stage 1** sickened 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** sickened 2 (1 day); **Stage 3** sickened 3 and can't speak (1 day); **Stage 4** death

TETANUS   DISEASE 1

DISEASE

An infection introduced through open wounds, tetanus can produce stiffness, muscle spasms strong enough to break bones, and ultimately death.

Saving Throw DC 14 Fortitude; **Onset** 10 days; **Stage 1** clumsy 1 (1 week); **Stage 2** clumsy 2 and can't speak (1 day); **Stage 3** paralyzed with spasms (1 day); **Stage 4** death

TUBERCULOSIS   DISEASE 1

DISEASE

An extended respiratory disease, tuberculosis can pose particular challenges to spellcasters and some performers due to the intense coughing fits it produces.

Saving Throw DC 15 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 week; **Stage 1** carrier with no effects (1 week); **Stage 2** coughing requires you to succeed at a DC 5 flat check to Cast a Spell that has the concentrate trait or Activate an Item that has the concentrate trait (1 week); **Stage 3** fatigued, can't recover from the fatigued condition, and coughing requires a successful DC 15 flat check to Cast a Spell that has the concentrate trait or Activate an Item that has the concentrate trait (1 week); **Stage 4** unconscious (1 week); **Stage 5** death

MALARIA   DISEASE 2

DISEASE

A pernicious disease spread by bloodsucking insects, malaria sometimes enters long periods of dormancy. If you succumb to malaria, you may continue to be periodically affected by the disease, even if you're cured. You can't reduce your sickened condition while affected with malaria.

Saving Throw DC 16 Fortitude; **Onset** 10 days; **Stage 1** sickened 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** sickened 2 (1 day); **Stage 3** sickened 2, and disease recurs every 1d4 months even if cured (1 day); **Stage 4** unconscious (1 day); **Stage 5** death

BUBONIC PLAGUE   DISEASE 3

DISEASE

This widespread illness can sweep through entire communities, leaving few unaffected. The first indication of the disease is a telltale swelling of glands. In some cases, the disease can move into your lungs (pneumonic plague) or blood (septicemic plague), which is even more fatal. If you have bubonic plague, you can't remove the fatigued condition while affected.

Saving Throw DC 17 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** fatigued (1 day); **Stage 2** enfeebled 2 and fatigued (1 day); **Stage 3** enfeebled 3, fatigued, and take 1d6 persistent bleed damage every 1d20 minutes (1 day)

SCARLET LEPROSY   DISEASE 4

DISEASE **VIRULENT**

Scarlet leprosy is widely feared for its devastating effects, crushing bones and organs while making recovery nearly impossible. Damage taken from scarlet leprosy can't be healed until the disease is cured.

Saving Throw DC 19 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** 2d6 bludgeoning damage (1 day); **Stage 2** 2d6 bludgeoning damage, and whenever you gain the wounded condition, increase the condition value by 1 (1 day); **Stage 3** 4d6 bludgeoning damage and can't heal any Hit Point damage (1 day)

BONECHILL   DISEASE 5

DISEASE **PRIMAL**

If you are wounded and exposed to persistent cold, you might contract bonechill.

Saving Throw DC 20 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** clumsy 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** clumsy 2 and can't heal cold damage until this disease is cured (1 day); **Stage 3** clumsy 3 and all cold temperature effects are one step more severe for the victim (page 95) (1 day); **Stage 4** paralyzed and all cold temperature effects are one step more severe for the victim (1 day)

CHOKING DEATH   DISEASE 6

DISEASE

This disease is capable of wiping out nations or even entire continents. A few pockets of the disease still remain in Iobaria, keeping that region's population sparse.

Saving Throw DC 22 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** hoarse voice but no other symptoms (1 day); **Stage 2** drained 1 (1 day); **Stage 3** drained 2 and can't speak (1 day); **Stage 4** death

BLINDING SICKNESS   DISEASE 7

DISEASE

Endemic to jungles of the Mwangi Expanse, blinding sickness is transmitted by dirty water or the bites of certain creatures.

Saving Throw DC 23 Fortitude; **Stage 1** carrier with no effects (1 day); **Stage 2** enfeebled 1 (1 day); **Stage 3** enfeebled 2 (1 day); **Stage 4** enfeebled 2 and permanently blinded (1 day); **Stage 5** enfeebled 4 (1 day); **Stage 5** unconscious (1 day); **Stage 6** death

SEWER HAZE   DISEASE 7

DISEASE   VIRULENT

Many healers and alchemists suspect that sewer haze has a supernatural origin, but the study is so unpleasant that research has made little progress.

Saving Throw DC 23 Fortitude; **Onset** 2 days; **Stage 1** stupefied 2 (1 day); **Stage 2** drained 2 and stupefied 2 (1 day); **Stage 3** drained 3 and stupefied 3 (1 day)

NIGHTMARE FEVER   DISEASE 8

DISEASE   OCCULT

Thought to be caused by a divine curse, nightmare fever inflicts you with terrible nightmares, and you awaken with the wounds you received in your dreams. Some versions cause you to dream of being wounded by bludgeoning or piercing weapons, in which case you take that type of damage instead. Damage and the fatigued condition caused by the disease can't be healed until the disease is removed.

Saving Throw DC 25 Will; **Stage 1** 2d6 slashing damage and fatigued (1 day); **Stage 2** 4d6 slashing damage and fatigued (1 day); **Stage 3** 4d6 slashing damage, fatigued, and whenever you take slashing damage, you must succeed at a Will save against the disease's DC or become frightened 2 (1 day); **Stage 4** 6d6 slashing damage, fatigued, and whenever you take slashing damage, you must succeed at a Will save against the disease's DC or become paralyzed for 1 round (1 day); **Stage 5** 6d6 slashing damage and unconscious

BRAIN WORMS   DISEASE 11

DISEASE   VIRULENT

Scholars suspect these brain parasites have an otherworldly or extraplanar origin. Though transmitted by the bites of infected targets, the disease remains relatively rare—most hosts are killed by the effects before they can pass it on. While infected, whenever you attack due to confusion, you bite your target (if you don't have a jaws or fangs attack, you deal piercing damage as an unarmed attack with damage equal to your lowest unarmed attack).

Saving Throw DC 28 Fortitude; **Onset** 1 day; **Stage 1** stupefied 2 (1 day); **Stage 2** stupefied 2, and whenever you take damage, you must succeed at a Will save against the disease's DC or become confused for 1 round (1 day); **Stage 3** stupefied 3, and whenever you take damage, you must succeed at a Will save against the disease's DC or become confused for 1 minute (1 day); **Stage 4** stupefied 4 and confused, damage does not end the confused condition (1 day); **Stage 5** unconscious (1 day); **Stage 6** death

CRIMSON OOZE   DISEASE 15

DISEASE   VIRULENT

This devastating fungus infects your hand and can be cured by amputating the limb before you reach stage 4.

Saving Throw DC 34 Fortitude; **Stage 1** clumsy 1 (1 day); **Stage 2** clumsy 2, and using the infected hand deals 3d6 persistent bleed damage (1 day); **Stage 3** clumsy 2, stupefied 2, and the infected hand is unusable (1 day); **Stage 4** clumsy 3, stupefied 3, and infected hand is permanently unusable (1 day); **Stage 5** confused, and damage does not end the confused condition (1 day); **Stage 6** death

ENVIRONMENT

Primarily used during exploration, environment rules bring the locales your party travels through to life. You'll often be able to use common sense to adjudicate how environments work, but you'll need special rules for environments that really stand out.

Each of the environments presented in this section uses the terrain rules (*Player Core* 423) in different ways, so be sure to familiarize yourself with those rules before reading this section. Some environments refer to the rules for climate (page 95) and natural disasters (beginning on page 96). Many places have the traits of multiple environments; a snow-covered mountain might use both the arctic and mountain environments, for example. For environmental features with effects based on how tall or deep they are, those effects vary further based on a creature's size. For instance, a shallow bog for a Medium creature might be a deep bog for smaller creatures, and a deep bog for a Medium creature could be only a shallow bog for a larger creature (and so insignificant for a truly massive creature that it isn't even difficult terrain).

The Environmental Features table (below) lists the features of various environments alphabetically for quick reference. The Proficiency DC Band entry indicates a range of appropriate simple DCs for that environmental feature, while also providing a rough estimate of the danger or complexity of the feature.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Some environmental features or natural disasters deal damage. Because the amount of damage can vary based on the specific circumstances, the rules for specific environments and natural disasters use damage categories to describe the damage, rather than exact numbers. Use the Environmental Damage table to determine damage from an environment or natural disaster. When deciding the exact damage amount, use your best judgment based on how extreme you deem the danger to be.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Category	Damage
Minor	1d6–2d6
Moderate	4d6–6d6
Major	8d6–12d6
Massive	18d6–24d6

ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

Feature	Pages	Proficiency DC Band
Avalanches	96	Expert–legendary
Blizzards	96	–
Bogs	92	Untrained–trained
Canopies	91	Trained–master
Chasms	91	–
Cliffs	91	Trained–master
Collapses	96	Expert–legendary
Crowd	92	Trained–master
Currents	91	Trained–master
Doors	91	See page 93
Earthquakes	96	Trained–legendary
Floods	96	Expert–legendary
Floors	93, 94	Untrained–expert
Fog	95	–
Gates	93	–
Guards	93	–
Hedges	92	Untrained–trained
Ice	91	Trained–master
Lava	97	Expert–legendary
Ledges	94	Untrained–master
Portcullises	93	See page 93
Precipitation	95	–
Rooftops	93	Trained–master
Rubble	91, 94	Untrained–expert
Sand	91	Untrained–expert
Sandstorms	96	Trained–master
Sewers	93	–
Slopes	92	Untrained–trained
Snow	91	Untrained–expert
Stairs	94	Untrained–trained
Stalagmites and Stalactites	94	Trained–expert
Streets	94	Untrained–trained
Temperature	95	–
Tornadoes	96	Master–legendary
Trees	91	Untrained–master
Tsunamis	96	Master–legendary
Undergrowth	91, 92	Untrained–expert
Underwater Visibility	91	–
Volcanic Eruptions	97	Trained–legendary
Walls	94	See page 93
Wildfires	97	Expert–legendary
Wind	95	Untrained–legendary

AQUATIC

Aquatic environments are among the most challenging for PCs short of other worlds and unusual planes. PCs in an aquatic environment need a way to breathe (typically a *water breathing* spell) and must usually Swim to move, though a PC who sinks to the bottom can walk awkwardly, using the rules for greater difficult terrain. Characters in aquatic environments make frequent use of the rules for aquatic combat (page 30, *Player Core* 437) and the drowning and suffocation rules (*Player Core* 437).

Currents and Flowing Water

Ocean currents, flowing rivers, and similar moving water are difficult terrain or greater difficult terrain (depending on the speed of the water) for a creature Swimming against the current. At the end of a creature's turn, it moves a certain distance depending on the current's speed. For instance, a 10-foot current moves a creature 10 feet in the current's direction at the end of that creature's turn.

Underwater Visibility

It's much harder to see things at a distance underwater than it is on land, and it's particularly difficult if the water is murky or full of particles. In pure water, the maximum visual range is roughly 240 feet to see a small object, and in murky water, visibility can be reduced to only 10 feet or even less.

ARCTIC

The main challenge in an arctic environment is the extreme low temperature, but arctic environments also contain ice and snow. The disasters that most often strike in arctic environments are avalanches, blizzards, and floods.

Ice

Icy ground is both uneven ground and difficult terrain, as characters slip and slide due to poor traction.

Snow

Depending on the depth of snow and its composition, most snowy ground is either difficult terrain or greater difficult terrain. In denser snow, characters can attempt to walk along the surface without breaking through, but some patches might be loose or soft enough that they're uneven ground.

DESERT

Desert encompasses sandy and rocky deserts as well as badlands. Though tundra is technically a desert, it's classified as arctic, as the climate is the primary challenge in such areas. Sandy deserts often have quicksand hazards (page 107) and sandstorms.

Rubble

Rocky deserts are strewn with rubble, which is difficult terrain. Rubble dense enough to be walked over rather than navigated through is uneven ground.

Sand

Packed sand doesn't usually significantly impede a character's movement, but loose sand is either difficult terrain (if it's shallow) or uneven ground (if it's deep). The wind in a desert often shifts sand into dunes, hills of loose sand with uneven ground facing the wind and steeper inclines away from the wind.

FOREST

These diverse environments include jungles and other wooded areas. They are sometimes struck by wildfires.

Canopies

Particularly dense forests, such as rain forests, have a canopy level above the ground. A creature trying to reach the canopy or travel along it must Climb. Swinging on vines and branches usually requires an Acrobatics or Athletics check. A canopy provides cover, and a thicker one can prevent creatures in the canopy from seeing those on the ground, and vice versa.

Trees

While trees are omnipresent in a forest, they typically don't provide cover unless a character uses the Take Cover action. Only larger trees that take up an entire 5-foot square on the map (or more) are big enough to provide cover automatically.

Undergrowth

Light undergrowth is difficult terrain that allows a character to Take Cover. Heavy undergrowth is greater difficult terrain that automatically provides cover. Some sorts of undergrowth, such as thorns, might also be hazardous terrain, and areas with plenty of twisting roots might be uneven ground.

MOUNTAIN

Mountain environments also include hills, which share many aspects of mountains, though not their more extreme features. The most common disasters here are avalanches.

Chasms

Chasms are natural pits, typically at least 20 feet long and clearly visible (barring mundane or magical efforts to conceal them). The main danger posed by a chasm is that characters must Long Jump to get across. Alternatively, characters can take the safer but slower route of Climbing down the near side of the chasm and then ascending the far side to get across.

Cliffs

Cliffs and rock walls require creatures to Climb to ascend or descend. Without extensive safety precautions, a critical failure on Climb checks can result in significant falling damage.

Rubble

Mountains often have extremely rocky areas or shifting, gravelly scree that makes for difficult terrain. Especially deep or pervasive rubble is uneven ground.

Slopes

Slopes vary from the gentle rises of normal terrain to difficult terrain and inclines, depending on the

TERRAIN RULES

Environments make frequent use of the rules for difficult terrain, greater difficult terrain, and hazardous terrain, so those rules are summarized here.

Difficult terrain is any terrain that impedes movement, ranging from particularly rough or unstable surfaces to thick ground cover and countless other impediments. Moving into a square of difficult terrain (or moving 5 feet into or within an area of difficult terrain, if you're not using a grid) costs an extra 5 feet of movement. Moving into a square of **greater difficult terrain** instead costs 10 additional feet of movement. This additional cost is not increased when moving diagonally. Creatures can't normally Step into difficult terrain.

Any movement creatures make while jumping ignores terrain that the creature is jumping over. Some abilities (such as flight or being incorporeal) allow creatures to avoid the movement reduction from some types of difficult terrain. Certain other abilities let creatures ignore difficult terrain while traveling on foot; such an ability also allows a creature to move through greater difficult terrain using the movement cost for difficult terrain, but unless the ability specifies otherwise, these abilities don't let creatures ignore greater difficult terrain.

Hazardous terrain damages creatures whenever they move through it. For instance, an acid pool, a pit of burning embers, and a spike-filled passageway all constitute hazardous terrain. The amount and type of damage depend on the specific hazardous terrain.

angle of elevation. Moving down a slope is typically normal terrain, but characters might need to Climb up particularly steep slopes.

Undergrowth

Light undergrowth is common in mountains. It is difficult terrain and allows a character to Take Cover.

PLAINS

The plains environment encompasses grasslands such as savannas and farmland. The most common disasters in plains are tornadoes and wildfires.

Hedges

Hedges are planted rows of bushes, shrubs, and trees. Their iconic appearance in adventures consists of tall hedges grown into mazes. A typical hedge is 2 to 5 feet tall, takes up a row of squares, and provides cover. A character trying to push through a hedge faces greater difficult terrain; it's sometimes faster to Climb over.

Undergrowth

Light undergrowth is difficult terrain that allows a character to Take Cover. Heavy undergrowth is greater difficult terrain that provides cover automatically. Undergrowth in plains is usually light with a few scattered areas of heavy undergrowth, but fields of certain crops, like corn, are entirely heavy undergrowth.

SWAMP

Wetlands are the most common kind of swamp, but this category also includes drier marshes such as moors. Swamps often contain quicksand hazards (page 107). Despite their soggy nature, swamps aren't very likely to experience heavy flooding, since they act as natural sponges and absorb a great deal of water before they flood.

Bogs

Also called mires, bogs are watery areas that accumulate peat, are covered by shrubs and moss, and sometimes feature floating islands of vegetation covering deeper pools. Shallow bogs are difficult terrain for a Medium creature, and deep bogs are greater difficult terrain. If a bog is deep enough that a creature can't reach the bottom, the creature has to Swim. Bogs are also acidic, so particularly extreme or magical bogs can be hazardous terrain.

Undergrowth

Light undergrowth is difficult terrain that allows a character to Take Cover, while heavy undergrowth is greater difficult terrain that provides cover automatically. Some sorts of undergrowth, such as thorns, are also hazardous terrain, and areas with plenty of twisting roots are uneven ground.

URBAN

Urban environments include open city spaces as well as buildings. The building information in this section also applies to ruins and constructed dungeons. Depending on their construction and location, cities might be vulnerable to many sorts of disasters, especially fires and floods.

Crowds

Crowded thoroughfares and similar areas are difficult terrain, or greater difficult terrain if an area is truly packed with people. You might allow a character to get a crowd to part using Diplomacy, Intimidation, or Performance.

A crowd exposed to an obvious danger, like a fire or a rampaging monster, attempts to move away from the danger as quickly as possible, but it is slowed by its own mass. A fleeing crowd typically moves at the Speed of an average member each round (usually 25 feet), potentially trampling or leaving behind slower-moving members of the crowd.

Doors

Opening an unlocked door requires an Interact action (or more than one for a particularly complicated or large door). Stuck doors must be Forced Open, and locked ones require a character to Pick the Lock or Force them Open.

Floors

Wooden floors are easy to walk on, as are flagstone floors made of fitted stones. However, floors of worn flagstone often contain areas of uneven ground.

Gates

Walled settlements often have gates that the city can close for defense or open to allow travel. A typical gate consists of one portcullis at each end of a gatehouse, with murder holes in between or other protected spots from which guards can attack foes.

Guards

Most settlements of significant size have guards working in shifts to protect the settlement at all hours, patrolling the streets and guarding various posts. The size of this force varies from one guard for every 1,000 residents to a force 10 times this number.

Portcullises

A portcullis is a wooden or iron grate that descends to seal off a gate or corridor. Most are raised on ropes or chains operated by a winch, and they have locking mechanisms that keep them from being lifted easily. The rules on lifting a portcullis or bending its bars appear in the sidebar on this page. If a portcullis falls on a creature, use a slamming door trap (page 104).

Rooftops

Rooftops make for memorable ambushes, chase scenes, infiltrations, and running fights. Flat roofs are easy to move across, but they're rare in any settlement that receives significant snowfall, since heavy buildups of snow can collapse a roof. Angled roofs are uneven ground, or inclines if they're especially steep. The peak of an angled roof is a narrow surface.

Hurdling from roof to roof often requires a Long Jump, though some buildings are close enough to Leap between. A High Jump might be necessary to reach a higher roof, or a Leap followed by Grabbing an Edge and Climbing up.

Sewers

Sewers are generally 10 feet or more below street level and are equipped with ladders or other means to ascend and descend. Raised paths along the walls allow sewer workers access, while channels in the center carry the waste itself. Less sophisticated sewers, or sections those workers don't usually access, might require wading through disease-ridden waste. Sewers can be accessed through sewer grates, which usually require 2 or more Interact actions to open.

Sewer Gas

Sewer gas often contains pockets of highly flammable gas. A pocket of sewer gas exposed to a source of flame explodes, dealing moderate environmental fire damage to creatures in the area.

DOORS, GATES, AND WALLS

Some of the most common obstacles that characters face in urban areas and dungeons are doors, gates, and walls.

Climbing

The table below gives the typical DC for Athletics checks to Climb a structure, which is usually a simple DC. You might adjust the difficulty based on the specifics of the structure and environment.

Demolishing

A character might want to smash their way through a door, a window, or certain walls. The Hardness, Hit Point, and Broken Threshold values provided in the table below are based on the material the structure is typically made out of, so a portcullis made of iron, for example, has a higher Hardness than one of wood. For more on damaging objects, see *Player Core* 269.

Strong walls, such as well-maintained masonry or hewn stone, can't be broken without dedicated work and proper tools. Getting through such walls requires downtime.

Door	Climb DC	Hardness, HP (BT)
Wood	20	10, 40 (20)
Stone	30	14, 56 (28)
Reinforced wood	15	15, 60 (30)
Iron	30	18, 72 (36)
Wall	**Climb DC**	**Hardness, HP (BT)**
Crumbling masonry	15	10, 40 (20)
Wooden slats	15	10, 40 (20)
Masonry	20	14, 56 (28)
Hewn stone	30	14, 56 (28)
Iron	40	18, 72 (36)
Portcullis	**Climb DC**	**Hardness, HP (BT)**
Wood	10	10, 40 (20)
Iron	10	18, 72 (36)

FORCING OPEN

Structures that can be opened—such as doors, gates, and windows—can be Forced Open using Athletics. This is usually necessary only if they're locked or stuck. The DC to Force Open a structure uses the Thievery DC of its lock but adjusts it to be very hard (increasing the DC by 5). If there's no lock, use the following table; when lifting a portcullis, use the lock DC or the DC from the table, whichever is higher.

Structure	Force Open DC
Stuck door or window	15
Exceptionally stuck	20
Lift wooden portcullis	20
Lift iron portcullis	30
Bend metal bars	30

DUNGEONS

Dungeon environments, which include both ruins and contemporary buildings constructed in the wilderness, are a fairly common venue for adventures. As an environment, they combine urban features like doors and buildings (page 92) with features from an underground environment, and occasionally components from other environments. While underground dungeons are particularly common, you might also consider setting your adventure in a ruin reclaimed by the forest, with giant trees spreading their roots through the walls, or a ruin deep in a swamp, with bogs covering access to some of the ruin's hidden secrets.

Stairs

Stairs are difficult terrain for characters moving up them, and shoddy stairs might also be uneven ground. Some temples and giant-built structures have enormous stairs that are greater difficult terrain both up and down, or might require Climbing every step.

Streets

Most settlements have narrow and twisting streets that were largely established organically as the settlement grew in size. These roads are rarely more than 20 feet wide, with alleys as narrow as 5 feet. Streets are generally paved with cobblestones. If the cobblestones are in poor repair, they could be difficult terrain or uneven ground.

Particularly lawful or well-planned cities have major thoroughfares that allow wagons and merchants to reach marketplaces and other important areas in town. These need to be at least 25 feet wide to accommodate wagons moving in both directions, and they often have narrow sidewalks that allow pedestrians to avoid wagon traffic.

Walls

Well-built structures have exterior walls of brick or stonemasonry. Smaller, lower-quality, or temporary structures might have wooden walls. Interior walls tend to be less sturdy; they could be made of wooden planks, or even simply of thick, opaque paper held in a wooden frame. An underground structure might have thick walls carved out of solid rock to prevent the weight of the ground above from collapsing the structure. Rules for climbing and breaking walls are in the sidebar on page 93.

UNDERGROUND

Underground environments consist of caves and natural underground areas. Artificial dungeons and ruins combine underground features with urban features like stairs and walls. Deep underground vaults have some of the same terrain features as mountains, such as chasms and cliffs. The most common disasters underground are collapses.

Floors

Natural underground environments rarely have flat floors, instead featuring abrupt changes in elevation that result in difficult terrain, uneven ground, and inclines.

Ledges

Ledges are narrow surfaces that overlook a lower area or provide the only means to move along the edge of a chasm. Moving across a narrow ledge requires using Acrobatics to Balance.

Rubble

Caverns can be covered in rubble, which is difficult terrain. Deep or pervasive rubble is also uneven ground.

Stalagmites and Stalactites

Stalagmites are tapering columns that rise from the floor of a cave. Areas filled with stalagmites are greater difficult terrain, and especially large stalagmites have to be sidestepped or Climbed. Stalagmites can be sharp enough they can be used as hazardous terrain in some circumstances, as can stalactites (icicle-shaped formations that hang from the roof of a cave) if they're knocked loose from a ceiling or overhang.

Walls

Natural cave walls are rough and uneven, with nooks, crannies, and

ledges. Since most caves are formed by water, cave walls are often damp, making them even more difficult to Climb.

CLIMATE

Weather is more than just set dressing to establish mood—it has mechanical effects you can combine with environmental components to create a more memorable encounter. Weather can impose circumstance penalties on certain checks, from –1 to –4 based on severity.

Fog

Fog imposes a circumstance penalty to visual Perception checks, depending on the thickness; it causes creatures viewed through significant amounts of fog to be concealed; and it cuts off all visibility at half a mile or less—possibly much less. Conditions limiting visibility to about a mile are called mist, and those that do so to about 3 miles are called haze.

Precipitation

Precipitation includes rain as well as colder snow, sleet, and hail. Wet precipitation douses flames, and frozen precipitation can create areas of snow or ice on the ground. Drizzle or light snowfall has little mechanical effect beyond limited visibility.

Visibility

Most forms of precipitation impose circumstance penalties on visual Perception checks. Hail often is sparser but loud, instead penalizing auditory Perception checks. Especially heavy precipitation, such as a downpour of rain or heavy snow, might make creatures concealed if they're far away.

Fatigue

Precipitation causes discomfort and fatigue. Anything heavier than drizzle or light snowfall reduces the time it takes for characters to become fatigued from overland travel to only 4 hours. Heavy precipitation can be dangerous in cold environments when characters go without protection. Soaked characters treat the temperature as one step colder (mild to severe, severe to extreme; see Temperature below).

Thunderstorms

High winds and heavy precipitation accompany many thunderstorms. There's also a very small chance that a character might be struck by lightning during a storm. A lightning strike usually deals moderate electricity damage, or major electricity damage in a severe thunderstorm.

Temperature

Often, temperature doesn't impose enough of a mechanical effect to worry about beyond describing the clothing the characters need to wear to be comfortable. Particularly hot and cold weather can make creatures fatigued more quickly during overland travel and can cause damage if harsh enough, as shown in the Temperature Effects table below.

Appropriate cold-weather gear can negate the damage from severe cold or reduce the damage from extreme cold to that of particularly severe cold.

TEMPERATURE EFFECTS

Category	Temperature	Fatigue	Damage
Incredible cold	–80ºF or colder	2 hours	Moderate cold every minute
Extreme cold every	–79ºF to –20ºF	4 hours	Minor cold 10 minutes
Severe cold	–21ºF to 12ºF	4 hours	Minor cold every hour
Mild cold	13ºF to 32ºF	4 hours	None
Normal	33ºF to 94ºF	8 hours	None
Mild heat	95ºF* to 104ºF*	4 hours	None
Severe heat	105ºF* to 114ºF	4 hours	Minor fire every hour
Extreme heat every	115ºF to 139ºF	4 hours	Minor fire 10 minutes
Incredible heat	140ºF or warmer	2 hours	Moderate fire every minute

* Adjust temperatures down by 15º in areas of high humidity.

Wind

Wind imposes a circumstance penalty on auditory Perception checks depending on its strength. It also interferes with physical ranged attacks such as arrows, imposing a circumstance penalty to attack rolls involving such weapons, and potentially making attacks with them impossible in powerful windstorms. Wind snuffs out handheld flames; lanterns protect their flame from the wind, but particularly powerful winds can extinguish these as well.

Moving in Wind

Wind is difficult or greater difficult terrain when Flying. Moving in wind of sufficient strength requires a Maneuver in Flight action, and fliers are blown away on a critical failure or if they don't succeed at a minimum of one such check each round.

Even on the ground, particularly strong winds might require a creature to succeed at an Athletics check to move, knocking the creature back and prone on a critical failure. On such checks, Small creatures typically take a –1 circumstance penalty, and Tiny creatures typically take a –2 penalty.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Climate and environmental features can be a hindrance or long-term threat, but natural disasters represent

acute danger, especially to those directly exposed to their fury. The damage in the following sections uses the categories in the Environmental Damage table on page 90.

Avalanches

Though the term avalanche specifically refers to a cascading flow of ice and snow down a mountain's slope, the same rules work for landslides, mudslides, and other similar disasters. Avalanches of wet snow usually travel up to 200 feet per round, though powdery snow can travel up to 10 times faster. Rockslides and mudslides are slower, sometimes even slow enough that a character might be able to outrun them.

An avalanche deals major or even massive bludgeoning damage to creatures and objects in its path. These victims are also buried under a significant mass. Creatures caught in an avalanche's path can attempt a Reflex save; if they succeed, they take only half the bludgeoning damage, and if they critically succeed, they also avoid being buried.

Burial

Buried creatures take minor bludgeoning damage each minute, and they potentially take minor cold damage if buried under an avalanche of snow. At the GM's discretion, creatures without a sufficient air pocket could also risk suffocation (*Player Core* 437). A buried creature is restrained and usually can't free itself.

Allies or bystanders can attempt to dig out a buried creature. Each creature digging clears roughly a 5-foot-by-5-foot square every 4 minutes with a successful Athletics check (or every 2 minutes on a critical success). Using shovels or other proper tools halves the time.

Blizzards

Blizzards combine cold weather, heavy snow, and strong winds. They don't pose a single direct threat as other disasters do; instead, the combination of these factors all at once poses a substantial impediment to characters.

Collapses

Collapses and cave-ins occur when caverns or buildings fall, dumping tons of rock or other material on those caught below or inside them. Creatures under the collapse take major or massive bludgeoning damage and become buried, just as with an avalanche. Fortunately, collapses don't spread unless they weaken the overall integrity of the area and lead to further collapses.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes often cause other natural disasters in the form of avalanches, collapses, floods, and tsunamis, but they also present unique threats such as fissures, soil liquefaction, and tremors.

Fissures

Fissures and other ground ruptures can destabilize structures, but more directly they lead to creatures taking bludgeoning damage from falling into a fissure.

Soil Liquefaction

Liquefaction occurs when granular particles shake to the point where they temporarily lose their solid form and act as liquids. When this happens to soil, it can cause creatures and even whole buildings to sink into the ground. You can use the *earthquake* spell for more specific rules, though that spell represents only one particular kind of localized quake.

Tremors

Tremors knock creatures prone, causing them to fall or careen into other objects, which can deal bludgeoning damage appropriate to the severity of the quake.

Floods

Though more gradual floods can damage structures and drown creatures, flash floods are similar to avalanches, except with a liquid mass instead of a solid one. Instead of burying creatures, a flash flood carries creatures and even massive objects away, buffeting the creatures and potentially drowning them. The drowning rules appear on page 437 of *Player Core*.

Sandstorms

Mild sandstorms and dust storms don't present much more danger than a windy rainstorm, but they can cause damage to a creature's lungs and spread diseases across long distances. Heavy sandstorms deal minor slashing damage each round to those exposed to the sand, force creatures to hold their breath to avoid suffocation, or both.

Tornadoes

In a tornado's path, wind conditions impose severe circumstance penalties, but creatures that would normally be blown away are instead picked up in the tornado's funnel, where they take massive bludgeoning damage from flying debris as they rise through the cone until they are eventually expelled (taking bludgeoning damage from falling).

Tornadoes usually travel around 300 feet per round (roughly 30 miles per hour). They normally travel a few miles before dissipating. Some tornadoes are stationary or travel much faster.

Tsunamis

Tsunamis present many of the same dangers as flash floods but are much larger and more destructive. Tsunami waves can reach 100 feet or more in height, wrecking buildings and creatures alike with massive bludgeoning damage from both the wave itself and debris pulled up along its path of destruction.

Volcanic Eruptions

Volcanic eruptions can contain any combination of ash, lava bombs, lava flows, pyroclastic flows, and vents.

Ash

Ash from volcanic eruptions is hot enough to cause minor fire damage each minute. It limits visibility like a thick fog and can make air unbreathable, requiring characters to hold their breath or suffocate (*Player Core* 437). Ash clouds generate ash lightning strikes, which typically deal moderate electricity damage but are very unlikely to hit an individual creature. Ash buildup on the ground creates areas of uneven ground, difficult terrain, or greater difficult terrain, and ash in the atmosphere can block the sun for weeks or even months, leading to colder temperatures and longer winters.

Lava Bombs

Pressure can launch lava into the air that falls as lava bombs: masses of lava that solidify as they fly and shatter on impact, dealing at least moderate bludgeoning damage and moderate fire damage.

Lava Flows

Lava flows are an iconic volcanic threat; they usually move between 5 and 60 feet per round over normal ground, so characters can often outrun them. However, flows can move up to 300 feet per round in a steep volcanic tube or channel. Lava emanates heat that deals minor fire damage even before it comes into contact with creatures, and immersion in lava deals massive fire damage each round.

Pyroclastic Flows

Mixes of hot gases and rock debris, pyroclastic flows spread much faster than lava, sometimes more than 4,000 feet per round. While cooler than the hottest lava, pyroclastic flows are capable of overwhelming entire settlements. They work like avalanches but deal half of their damage as fire damage.

Vents

Steam vents shoot from the ground, dealing moderate fire damage or more in a wide column. Acidic and poisonous gases released from beneath the surface can create wide areas of hazardous terrain that deals at least minor acid or poison damage.

Wildfires

Wildfires travel mainly along a front moving in a single direction. In a forest, the front can advance up to 70 feet per round (7 miles per hour). They can move up to twice as fast across plains due to a lack of shade and the relatively low humidity. Embers from the fire, carried by winds and rising hot air, can scatter, forming spot fires as far as 10 miles away from the main wildfire. Wildfires present three main threats: flames, heat, and smoke.

Flames

Flames are hazardous terrain, usually dealing moderate damage and potentially setting a character on fire, dealing moderate persistent fire damage. The flames from a small fire are often less dangerous than the advancing heat from the front of a large fire.

Heat

Wildfires increase the temperature in advance of the front, reaching nearly 1,500°F at the fire's arrival, as hot as some lava. This begins as minor fire damage every round at a reasonable distance from the front and increases to massive fire damage for someone within the wildfire.

Smoke

Wind can carry smoke far in front of the wildfire itself. Smoke imposes a circumstance penalty to visual Perception checks, depending on the thickness. It causes creatures viewed through significant amounts of smoke to be concealed, and it cuts off all visibility at half a mile or less. Near or within the wildfire, the combination of smoke and heated air require characters to hold their breath or suffocate (*Player Core* 437).

HAZARDS

Dungeons are rife with devious traps meant to protect the treasures within. These range from mechanical devices that shoot darts or drop heavy blocks to magic runes that explode into bursts of flame. In addition to traps, adventurers may stumble into other types of hazards, including naturally occurring environmental hazards, mysterious hauntings, and more.

DETECTING A HAZARD

Every hazard has a trigger of some kind that sets its dangers in motion. For traps, this could be a mechanism like a trip wire or a pressure plate, while for an environmental hazard or haunt, the trigger may simply be proximity. When characters approach a hazard, they have a chance of finding the trigger area or mechanism before triggering the hazard. They automatically receive a check to detect hazards unless the hazards require a minimum proficiency rank to do so.

During exploration, determine whether the party detects a hazard when the PCs first enter the general area in which it appears. If the hazard doesn't list a minimum proficiency rank, roll a secret Perception check against the hazard's Stealth DC for each PC. For hazards with a minimum proficiency rank, roll only if someone is actively searching (using the Search activity while exploring or the Seek action in an encounter), and only if they have the listed proficiency rank or higher. Anyone who succeeds becomes aware of the hazard, and you can describe what they notice.

Magical hazards that don't have a minimum proficiency rank can be found using *detect magic*, but this spell doesn't provide enough information to understand or disable the hazard—it only reveals the hazard's presence. Determining a magical hazard's properties thoroughly enough to disable it requires either the use of more powerful magic or a successful skill check, likely using Identify Magic or Recall Knowledge. Magical hazards with a minimum proficiency rank cannot be found with *detect magic* at all.

TRIGGERING A HAZARD

If the group fails to detect a hazard and the hazard's trigger is a standard part of traveling (such as stepping on a floor plate or moving through a magical sensor while walking), the hazard's reaction occurs. Hazards that would be triggered only when someone directly manipulates the environment—by opening a door, for example—use their reactions only if a PC explicitly takes that action.

Reaction or Free Action

Most hazards have reactions that occur when they're triggered. For simple hazards, the reaction is the entirety of the hazard's effect. For complex hazards, the reaction may also cause the hazard to roll initiative, either starting a combat encounter or joining one already in progress, and the hazard continues to pose a threat over multiple rounds. Some hazards have a triggered free action instead of a reaction; for instance, quicksand can suck down multiple creatures per round.

Routine

A complex hazard usually follows a set of preprogrammed actions called a routine. Once triggered, the hazard first performs its initial reaction; then, if the PCs are not yet in encounter mode, they should roll initiative. If they are already in encounter mode, their initiative remains the same. The hazard might tell you to roll initiative for it—in this case, the hazard rolls initiative using its Stealth modifier.

After this happens, the hazard follows its routine each round on its initiative. The number of actions a hazard can take each round, as well as what they can be used for, depend on the hazard.

Resetting a Hazard

Some hazards can be reset, allowing them to be triggered again. This can occur automatically, as for quicksand, whose surface settles after 24 hours, or manually, like a hidden pit, whose trapdoor must be closed for the pit to become hidden again.

DISABLING A HAZARD

The most versatile method for deactivating traps is the Disable a Device action of the Thievery skill, though most mechanical traps can also simply be smashed, and magical traps can usually be counteracted. Environmental hazards often can be overcome with Nature or Survival, and haunts can often be overcome with Occultism or Religion. The specific skill and DC required to disable a hazard are listed in the hazard's stat block. Like using Disable a Device, using these skills to disable a trap is a 2-action activity with the same degrees of success, though the activity might have different traits determined by the GM. As with detecting a hazard, disabling a hazard might require a character to have a certain proficiency rank in the listed skill.

A character must first detect a hazard (or have it pointed out to them) to try to deactivate it. They can attempt to deactivate a hazard whether or not it has

already been triggered, though some hazards no longer pose a danger once their reactions have occurred, especially if there is no way for them to be reset.

For most hazards, a successful check for the listed skill against the DC in the stat block disables the hazard without triggering it. Any other means of deactivating the hazard are included in the hazard's stat block, as are any additional steps required to properly deactivate it. A critical failure on any roll to disable a hazard triggers it, including a critical failure on a roll to counteract a magical hazard.

Some hazards require multiple successful checks to deactivate, typically because they have a particularly complicated component or have several discrete portions. For hazards with a complex component, a critical success on a check to disable the hazard counts as two successes on a single component.

Damaging a Hazard

Rather than trying to carefully disable a hazard, a character might just smash it. Damaging a mechanical trap or another physical hazard works like damaging objects: the hazard reduces the damage it takes by its Hardness. In most cases, hitting the hazard also triggers it, as explained in Attacking a Hazard below. If a hazard's Hit Points are reduced to its Broken Threshold (BT) or lower, the hazard becomes broken and can't be activated, though it can still be repaired. If it's reduced to 0 HP, it's destroyed and can't be repaired. (See *Player Core* 269 for more information on damaging objects.)

Hazards' AC, applicable saving throw modifiers, Hardness, HP, and BT are listed in their stat blocks. A hazard that doesn't list one of these statistics can't be affected by anything targeting that statistic. For example, a hazard that has HP but no BT can't be broken, but it can still be destroyed. Hazards are immune to anything an object is immune to unless specifically noted otherwise, and they can't be targeted by anything that can't target objects. Some hazards may have additional immunities, as well as resistances or weaknesses.

Attacking a Hazard

If someone hits a hazard—especially if it's a mechanical trap—they usually trigger it, though you might determine otherwise in some cases. An attack that breaks the hazard might prevent it from triggering, depending on the circumstances. If the hazard has multiple parts, breaking one part might still trigger the trap. For example, if a trap has a trip wire in one location and launches an attack from another location, severing the trip wire could still trigger the attack. Destroying a trap in one blow almost never triggers it. These rules also apply to most damaging spells or other effects in addition to attacks.

MONSTERS AND HAZARDS

The statistics for NPCs and monsters usually don't list their proficiency ranks. Most of the time, they don't need to deal with detecting or disabling hazards the way PCs do, so you don't need this information. However, if a PC resets a trap in a monster's path or plans to lure a monster into a hazard, you can improvise this information.

For Perception, a monster is usually an expert at 3rd or 4th level, a master at 8th or 9th level, and legendary at 16th or 17th level. If the monster has Thievery listed in its skills, it has the highest proficiency possible for its level (trained at 1st, expert at 3rd, master at 7th, and legendary at 15th); otherwise, it's untrained. Of course, an individual monster might deviate from these guidelines, especially if it's mindless or not very perceptive.

Repairing a Hazard

You might allow a character to repair a damaged hazard to restore its functionality. You determine the specifics of this, since it can vary by trap. The Repair action might be insufficient if fixing the trap requires gathering scattered components or the like. If the item has a Reset entry, the character needs to do whatever is listed there, in addition to repairing the damage.

Counteracting a Magical Hazard

Some magical hazards can be counteracted using *dispel magic* and the counteracting rules (*Player Core* 303). These hazards' spell ranks and counteract DCs are listed in their stat block. Counteracting a hazard otherwise works like using a skill check to disable the hazard.

HAZARD EXPERIENCE

Characters gain Experience Points for overcoming a hazard, whether they disable it, avoid it, or simply endure its attacks. If they trigger the same hazard later on, they don't gain XP for the hazard again. The XP values for hazards of different levels also appear on page 57 but are repeated here for convenience. The XP for a complex hazard is equal to the XP for a monster of the same level, and the XP for a simple hazard is one-fifth of that. Hazards of a lower level than the party's level – 4 are trivial and award no XP.

HAZARD XP

Level	Simple Hazard	Complex Hazard
Party level – 4	2 XP	10 XP
Party level – 3	3 XP	15 XP
Party level – 2	4 XP	20 XP
Party level – 1	6 XP	30 XP
Party level	8 XP	40 XP
Party level + 1	12 XP	60 XP
Party level + 2	16 XP	80 XP
Party level + 3	24 XP	120 XP
Party level + 4	30 XP	150 XP

Hazard Format

Hazards are presented in a stat block format similar to those used for monsters. A few notes regarding the format follow the sample stat block.

HAZARD NAME [LEVEL]

TRAITS

Stealth This entry lists the Stealth modifier for a complex hazard's initiative or the Stealth DC to detect a simple hazard, followed by the minimum proficiency rank to detect the hazard (if any) in parentheses. If *detect magic* can be used to detect the hazard, this information is located here as well.

Description This explains what the hazard looks like and might include special rules.

Disable The DC of any skill checks required to disable the hazard are here; if the hazard can be counteracted, its spell rank and counteract DC are listed in parentheses.

AC the hazard's AC; **Saving Throws** the hazard's saves. Usually only haunts are subject to Will saves.

Hardness the hazard's Hardness; **HP** the hazard's Hit Points, with its Broken Threshold in parentheses; **Immunities** the hazard's immunities; **Weaknesses** the hazard's weaknesses, if any; **Resistances** the hazard's resistances, if any

Action Type ↺ or ◈ This is the reaction or free action the hazard uses; **Trigger** The trigger that sets off the hazard appears here; **Effect** For a simple hazard, this effect is often all the hazard does. For a complex hazard, this might also cause the hazard to roll initiative.

Routine This entry describes what a complex hazard does on each of its turns during an encounter; the number in parentheses after the word "Routine" indicates how many actions the hazard can use each turn. Simple hazards don't have this entry.

Action Any action the hazard can use appears here. Typically, this is a melee or ranged Strike.

Reset If the hazard can be reset, that information is here.

Level

The hazard's level indicates what level of party it's a good challenge for. If the hazard involves a toxin, curse, or other non-spell feature, that feature's level is the hazard's level.

Traits

The most notable hazard traits are trap (constructed to harm intruders), environmental (natural hazards), and haunt (spectral phenomena). Traps have a trait to indicate whether they're magical or mechanical. Hazards that have initiative and a routine have the complex trait.

Stealth or Stealth DC

Complex hazards list their Stealth modifier, which they use for initiative, instead of their Stealth DC. If you need the DC, it's equal to this modifier + 10.

Simple Hazards

A simple hazard uses its reaction only once, after which its threat is over unless the hazard is reset.

ARMAGEDDON ORB HAZARD 23

RARE **MAGICAL** **TRAP**

Stealth DC 10 or *detect magic*

Description A roiling red orb, forged from a drop of the god Rovagug's blood, rains fire from the sky when a specified condition is met.

Disable DC 48 Thievery (legendary) to imbue a thieves' toolkit with aspects representing Asmodeus and Sarenrae and use them to drain away the orb's power over 10 minutes; the character attempting this check takes 5 fire damage each round until the orb is depleted

Burn It All ↺ (death, divine, fire) **Trigger** A special condition set by the trap's creator occurs, typically the event of their death; **Effect** Fire rains from the sky in a 100-mile radius, dealing 10d6 fire damage to creatures and objects in the area. Each creature or object can attempt a DC 46 basic Reflex save. Any creature reduced to 0 Hit Points by this damage dies instantly. This is not enough damage to completely burn away a forest or level an entire mountain or city, but it typically kills most creatures in the area.
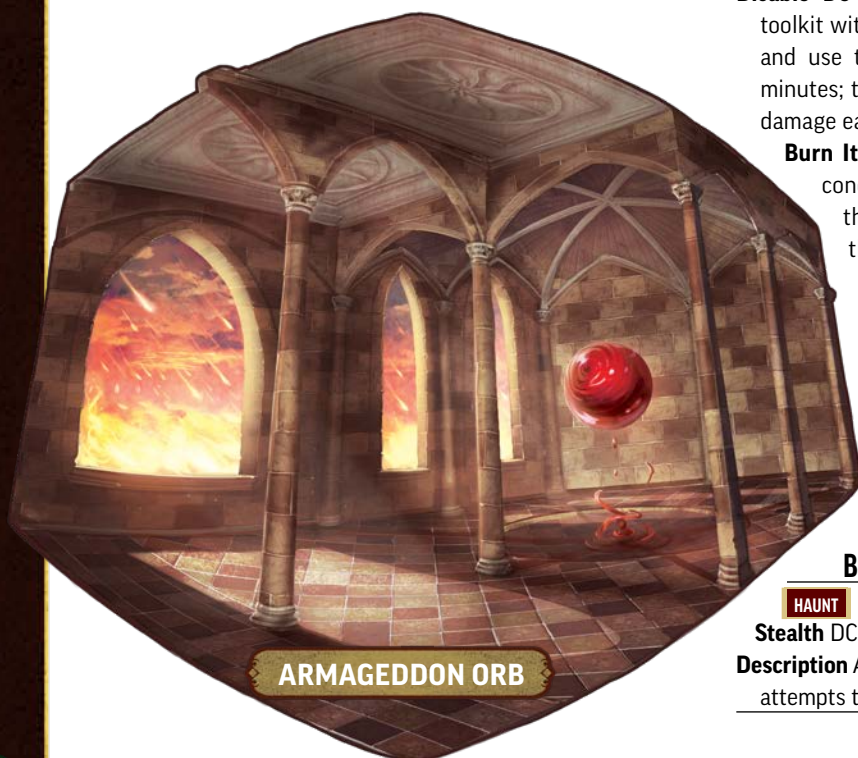
BLOODTHIRSTY URGE HAZARD 10

HAUNT

Stealth DC 31 (trained)

Description An object haunted by the echoes of a vicious mind attempts to kill someone who comes near.

ARMAGEDDON ORB

Disable DC 29 Religion (master) to exorcise the spirit or DC 31 Diplomacy (expert) to talk it down

Quietus ↻ (death, emotion, fear, illusion, mental, occult)
Trigger A creature moves within 10 feet of the haunted object; **Effect** The haunt takes control of the triggering creature, forcing it to attack itself. The creature must attempt a DC 29 Will save.
Critical Success The target is unaffected.
Success The target makes a Strike against itself and automatically hits; the target also becomes frightened 1.
Failure The target makes a Strike against itself and automatically scores a critical hit; the target also becomes frightened 2.
Critical Failure The target attempts a Fortitude save. If the target succeeds, it is subject to the effects of a failure instead. If the target fails, it is reduced to 0 HP and dies.

BOTTOMLESS PIT   HAZARD 9
`MAGICAL` `MECHANICAL` `TRAP`
Stealth DC 30 (or 0 if the trapdoor is disabled or broken) or *detect magic*
Description An iron trapdoor covers an infinitely deep 10-foot-square pit.
Disable DC 28 Thievery (trained) to remove the trapdoor
AC 28; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +12
Trapdoor Hardness 9; **Trapdoor HP** 36 (BT 18); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage
Infinite Pitfall ↻ **Trigger** A creature walks onto the trapdoor; **Effect** The triggering creature falls in and continues to fall, potentially forever. That creature can try to Grab an Edge to avoid falling (*Player Core* 419). The DC to Climb the walls or Grab an Edge is 26.

The pit contains many handholds, so the falling creature can try to Grab an Edge again every 6 seconds. If the creature succeeds, it can start to Climb out from that point (though it might be a very long climb, depending on how far the creature fell). Since the creature falls endlessly, it can rest and even prepare spells while falling, though items dropped while falling are usually lost forever.
Reset The trap still causes creatures to fall forever if they fall in, but the trapdoor must be reset manually for the trap to become hidden again.

ELECTRIC LATCH RUNE   HAZARD 3
`ELECTRICITY` `MAGICAL` `TRAP`
Stealth DC 20 (trained)
Description An invisible rune imprinted on a door latch releases a powerful electric discharge.
Disable DC 20 Thievery (expert) to scratch out the rune without allowing electricity to flow, or *dispel magic* (2nd rank; counteract DC 18) to counteract the rune
Electrocution ↻ (arcane, electricity) **Trigger** A creature grasps the door latch directly or with a tool; **Effect** The trap deals 3d12 electricity damage to the triggering creature (DC 22 basic Reflex save).

HAZARDS BY LEVEL
This chapter's hazards are organized by complexity, then by name. If you need to choose a hazard for a certain level of play, use the following table.

Hazard Name	Level	Complexity	Page
Hidden Pit	0	Simple	102
Snowfall	0	Simple	104
Hampering Web	1	Simple	102
Poisoned Lock	1	Simple	103
Slamming Door	1	Simple	104
Summoning Rune	1	Complex	108
Poisonous Mold	2	Simple	103
Spear Launcher	2	Simple	104
Drowning Pit	3	Complex	106
Electric Latch Rune	3	Simple	101
Quicksand	3	Complex	107
Scythe Blades	4	Simple	103
Spinning Blade Pillar	4	Complex	107
Titanic Flytrap	4	Simple	105
Fireball Rune	5	Simple	101
Spectral Reflection	5	Simple	104
Ghostly Choir	6	Simple	102
Hallucination Powder Trap	6	Simple	102
Wheel of Misery	6	Complex	108
Eternal Flame	7	Complex	106
Pharaoh's Ward	7	Simple	103
Confounding Betrayal	8	Complex	105
Poisoned Dart Gallery	8	Complex	107
Bottomless Pit	9	Simple	101
Bloodthirsty Urge	10	Simple	100
Hammer of Forbiddance	11	Simple	102
Flensing Blades	12	Complex	107
Polymorph Trap	12	Simple	103
Planar Rift	13	Simple	103
Dance of Death	16	Complex	106
Vorpal Executioner	19	Simple	105
Armageddon Orb	23	Simple	100

FIREBALL RUNE   HAZARD 5
`FIRE` `MAGICAL` `TRAP`
Stealth DC 24 (expert)
Description An invisible rune creates an invisible, spherical magical sensor with a 20-foot radius.
Disable DC 22 Thievery (expert) to erase the rune without triggering the sensor, or *dispel magic* (3rd rank; counteract DC 20) to counteract the rune
Fireball ↻ (arcane, fire) **Trigger** A living creature enters the sensor area; **Effect** The rune detonates a fireball centered on the triggering creature's square. This is a 3rd-rank *fireball* spell that deals 6d6 fire damage (DC 22 basic Reflex save).

GHOSTLY CHOIR   HAZARD 6

HAUNT

Stealth DC 20 (expert)

Description A choir of lost souls rises out of the floor, singing an eerie chant that terrifies its listeners and buffets their bodies with walls of sound.

Disable DC 28 Performance (trained) to disrupt the song's resonance with another tune or DC 28 Religion (trained) to ritually silence the spirits

Profane Chant ↺ (auditory, emotion, fear, mental, occult) **Trigger** A creature moves within 10 feet of the section of floor from which the choir can arise; **Effect** The choir rises, and its song deals 4d8+18 mental damage to non-evil creatures within 30 feet of the souls' spectral forms. Affected creatures must each attempt a DC 24 Will save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature takes half damage and becomes frightened 1.

Failure The creature takes full damage and becomes frightened 2.

Critical Failure The creature takes double damage. It also becomes frightened 3 and fleeing for 1 round.

HALLUCINATION POWDER TRAP   HAZARD 6

MAGICAL **TRAP**

Stealth DC 24 (expert)

Description A tube of hallucinogenic powder armed with a miniature explosive is connected to a doorknob or similar latch.

Disable DC 26 Thievery (expert) to disable the hammer that strikes the percussion cap

AC 24; **Fort** +0, **Ref** +0

Hardness 0, **HP** 1; **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Powder Burst ↺ (mental, poison) **Trigger** The latch is opened or the tube is broken; **Effect** The tube explodes, spraying hallucinogenic powder in a 30-foot cone. Any creature in the cone must succeed at a DC 24 Will save or be confused for 1 round and take a –2 status penalty to Perception checks and saves against mental effects for 1d4 hours. On a critical failure, the penalty is instead –4.

HAMMER OF FORBIDDANCE   HAZARD 11

MAGICAL **MECHANICAL** **TRAP**

Stealth DC 30 (expert)

Description An enormous hammer at an edifice's entrance swings down in an attempt to damage a creature entering an area, push it back, and prevent it from going any further.

Disable DC 28 Thievery (expert) once on the hammer itself and once on its joint to prevent the hammer from swinging

AC 32; **Fort** +24, **Ref** +15

Hammer Hardness 22; **Hammer HP** 88 (BT 44); **Joint Hardness** 16; **Joint HP** 64 (BT 32); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Forbid Entry ↺ (divine) **Trigger** A creature attempts to enter through the entrance; **Effect** The hammer swings down, making a Strike against the triggering creature.

Melee hammer +28, **Damage** 6d8+20 bludgeoning plus the target is knocked back 10 feet and must succeed at a DC 30 Will save or be unable to enter the edifice through any entrance for 24 hours (on a critical hit, the target automatically fails the Will save); no multiple attack penalty

Reset The trap resets over the course of the round, and is ready to swing again 1 round later.

HAMPERING WEB   HAZARD 1

ENVIRONMENTAL

Stealth DC 18 (expert)

Description Semitransparent sheets of webbing span the entryway, ready to capture small insects or hamper larger creatures that pass through.

Disable DC 17 Survival (trained) to dislodge it

AC 19; **Fort** +10, **Ref** +11

HP 26 (BT 13); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Ensnare ↺ **Trigger** A creature that isn't a spider walks into the web; **Effect** The web wraps around the triggering creature's body, clinging to their limbs. The triggering creature must succeed at a DC 20 Reflex save or take a –10-foot circumstance penalty to all their Speeds until they Escape the web (DC 20). On a critical failure, the webbing also clings to the creature's face, making them sickened 1, and they can't attempt to reduce this condition until they Escape the web.

HIDDEN PIT   HAZARD 0

MECHANICAL **TRAP**

Stealth DC 18 (or 0 if the trapdoor is disabled or broken)

Description A wooden trapdoor covers a pit that's 10 feet square and 20 feet deep.