

THE PUBLIC IS MORE FAMILIAR WITH BAD DESIGN THAN GOOD DESIGN. IT IS, IN EFFECT, CONDITIONED TO PREFER BAD DESIGN, BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT IT LIVES WITH. THE NEW BECOMES THREATENING, THE OLD REASSURING.

PAUL RAND

ACKNOWLEDGE UP FRONT THAT THE PCS ARE GOING TO WIN, AND NEVER SWEAT IT. THEN USE THE DICE TO ESCALATE, ESCALATE, ESCALATE. WE ALL KNOW THE PCS ARE GOING TO WIN. WHAT WILL IT COST THEM?

LUMPLEY

A DESIGNER KNOWS THAT HE HAS ACHIEVED PERFECTION NOT WHEN THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO ADD, BUT WHEN THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO TAKE AWAY.

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

DIVANDRA AND I HAVE NOW RETURNED TO FULL HEALTH, AND IT IS TIME TO GO ON: HACKING AND SLASHING, LOOTING AND ROBBING, OPENING EVERY BOX AND BARREL IN THE HOPE THAT WE MAY UNEARTH A CLUE AS TO WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT. GOD SEND THAT IT IS NOT A VAIN HOPE.

ERNEST ADAMS

CROMLYN GAMES

ESCAPE THE DUNGEON

PUBLISHER OF THIS BOOK

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Contents

GM Agenda and Principles 15

Player's core 17

Brute 23

Creep 25

Undead 27

Horde 29

Beast 31

Hybrid 33

Construct 35

Magus 37

Dregs 39

Plant 41

Fey 43

Host 45

Elemental Ooze 47

Bibliography 49

Index 51

List of Figures

List of Tables

*Dedicated to those who appreciate \LaTeX
and the work of Edward R. Tufte and Donald E. Knuth.
And to the horde of goblins who died
defending them.*

Introduction

In this game you are in a typical fantasy dungeon. The overlord is dead ¹. You were one of his underlings. You were a monster. You still are, but for the first time in a long time, you're able to ask "Why?" So can all the other underlings. WHAT DO YOU DO?

¹ citation needed

We're going to start with the base outline of what the GM should be doing, then the core of what the player needs to know, then some playbooks of different underlings and then all the stuff the GM needs to show you an awesome time.

GM Agenda and Principles

THE GAME MASTER or GM is the referee. Master of Ceremonies in Apocalypse World, Dungeon Master in old-school hack and slash grid crawlers, they provide the stage, the setting, most of the background characters and the physics engine. They are here to make the game fun for you. If they're not doing that, either they're not running the game right, I've written it wrong, or you should both try a different game that suits what you are seeking.²

² this is a serious point really, it's worth taking the time at the start to discuss palette and previous games or stories you've enjoyed. This will be discussed more in the GM section

Agenda

- Agenda
 - └ Play to find out what happens
 - └ Make the players' character's lives not boring
 - └ Subvert that which is taken from granted

The Agenda is the key thing. If you, as GM, are in doubt what to do, choose the thing that follows the agenda. It's not a bad guide for players either.

Principles

- Principles
 - └ don't waste your players' time
 - └ the dungeon pressures to conform
 - └ take tropes to their logical, nonsensical extreme
 - └ sprinkle details of everyday fantasy everywhere
 - └ make the dungeon seem fantastically real
 - └ name everyone, make everyone rational within their role

- build a bigger dungeon through play, not plot
- create interesting dilemmas not interesting traps
- address yourself to the characters not players
- make your move, but never speak its name
- ask loaded questions and build on the answers
- sometimes, reflect a question back upon the players

The Principles are what the GM should be doing if they have their mouth open. If she's chewing pizza instead, call her out on it. Exactly how they translate to the fiction will vary on the tone of the game. These rules are supposed to support a game with a strong undercurrent of pathos with the silliness. The situation is ridiculous, because a lot of fantasy is ridiculous, but a lot of the player characters should be sympathetic or relatable as they struggle in this crazy situation.³ Fundamentally, they are outside of the mainstream surface society and trying to retain a sense of identity when it'd be much easier to slide into institutionalisation. The Dungeon only wants to help, to protect them from the weird outside world where there's no roof and much less glowy rocks. The GM represents the dungeon.

³ A bit like most sitcoms

Player's core

You play as an underling, someone or something recently awoken from your role in the broader dungeon. The dungeon ain't to happy about that, by the way. You'll have a playbook with some moves unique to you, some stats to help define how good you are at different things, some DEMONS that represent the things you fear and probably some other stuff like a tribe or some mates or a hoard or a soul-sucking artifact of glowy evilness. You also have access to the basic moves. Everyone has them, and they should be pretty useful.

There are six main stats in this game.

- WIZARD - how good you are brainpower, thinking or arcane magic stuff
- THIEF - how good you are with cunning and delicate or precise skill
- FIGHTER - how good you are with violence or raw strength
- BARD - how good you are with charm and social connections
- IDENTITY - how good you are at remembering who you actually are beneath the stereotypes.
- HEALTH - how much more damage you can take, for now

They'll get set in your playbook. Different underlings have different stats. They may change over play too. Identity certainly will. Unless the move specifically says so, none of those five stats can go above +3 (or below -2, if you are a masochist). A move that uses a stat will state something like ROLL + STAT NAME. That means roll two normal six-sided dice and add the total to your stat. If you have WIZARD of -1, and you roll a 2 and a 5 the total is 6. Most rules use the format of get 6 or below total and you've messed up, get 7-9 and you succeed, but at a cost. Rolling 10+ is a success, sometimes with a bonus. Try to do that. Sometime you'll see things like a +1 forward. That means you get to add +1 to your next roll. In the case above, that'd be enough to turn the 6 into 7 and the dangerous failure into a dangerous success.

In play, don't make moves. Do stuff, and keep doing stuff until the GM calls for a move. Dice should only hit the table when the stakes are interesting and the outcome uncertain. You don't need a ROLL+THIEF to use a doorhandle. You don't even need it to pick a lock when you've got all afternoon and someone making you cups of tea. When you're trapped in a corridor with fire elementals drifting towards you from both sides and your head is bleeding

HEALTH is the sixth stat and typically starts at nine and fluctuates wildly if you are playing hard enough. You heal up 3 health in a LONG REST - which means a night⁴ in the fiction, or probably the gap between sessions in real life. Don't hoard your health, we'll cover running out under basic moves.

During play, or possibly starting out, you'll pick up items of various use. The 'item' is the basic unit of currency in the dungeon, those pesky heroes keep dropping them when they die and there's not a lot of other use for half the stuff it seems. The playbook is also a good place to record favours, debts and stuff you want to go back to later. It's also the place to record hobbies and Xp.

HOBBIES, in this game, are important. They keep you grounded and bolster your sense of identity. Every time you take the time to act out your hobby, you mark a little tick next to it. Every three ticks means +1 to your identity stat.

XP stands for Experience and represents how far down the path to the extreme expression of your stereotype you've walked, lurched or slithered. Collecting XP will unlock more moves, stat bonuses, moves from other playbooks or more major character development. These advances will be shown in the playboook.

OBJECTIVES VS DAMAGE. In the basic moves below, commonly you will be told you've succeeded at your objective OR you deal damage. There are two intentions here. The first is to allow a move to be used for different problems where damage is not appropriate: "I want to climb out of the pit", "I want to pick the lock", "I want to study the runes, see if I can find a clue to the ritual." The second intention is to clarify how much damage you do if your objective is something like "I move to stab her in the back," "I exhale and shoot an arrow at that gap in his armour.". Basically, you can't state your objective is to 'behead the world-turtle' and succeed when Great A'Tuin still has a few thousand hitpoints left.⁵ As a rule, the FIGHTER should be able to deal the most damage to a single target, the THIEF can spread it around but might go through a lot of vials of poison or throwing knives and the WIZARD is an unstable powderkeg of potential.

WIZARD: *basic move*

When you try to solve a problem with raw brainpower, knowledge or magic ROLL+WIZARD.

- On a 7+ you succeed at your objective OR you cast a damaging spell of raw magic.⁶
- On a 10+ you succeed at your objective. Choose two:

⁴ how do underlings in your dungeon keep track of time?

⁵ And the corollary is that the GM should note that relying on hitpoints is bad challenge design. You should be building a jungle-gym not a treadmill. There's an excellent essay for Dungeon World called "The 16Hp Dragon" that I recommend.

⁶ This represents basic, almost instinctual attacks. Detailed wizard spells are in the playbooks. The difference is like hitting someone with a ripped open electricity wire and constructing a freezer, or a drill or a light bulb that can take the electricity and make something new with it.

- └ Deal one damage to someone
 - └ Deal one damage to all in the room
 - └ Expose a weakness, flaw or demon
 - └ You give good advice. You give an ally +1 forward.
 - └ Learn three words about the target
- On a 7-9 you succeed at your objective AND deal one damage to someone
 - On a 6- you deal one damage to yourself or an ally

THIEF: basic move

When you try to solve a problem with cunning, treachery or precise and delicate application of skill ROLL+ THIEF ⁷

- on a 7+ you succeed at your objective OR deal one damage⁸
- on a 10+ choose three from below
- on a 7-9 choose one:
 - └ Deal one damage to some other target
 - └ You do it quickly
 - └ You can get away cleanly
 - └ It can't be traced to you
 - └ You don't use up an item
- Now the GM chooses a remaining option to move against.
- On a 6- the GM may choose two options.

⁷ This is the stat to roll for stealth, or dodging arrows too. When it comes to lies and blather, there is some overlap with Bard moves. The GM is encouraged to be relaxed about this, but keep an eye on the consequences of a miss.

⁸ if your objective was to deal damage, then deal damage.

FIGHTER: basic move

When you try to solve a problem with violence, strength or sheer athleticism ROLL + FIGHTER: ⁹

- On a 7+ you succeed at you objective OR deal two damage.
- On a 10+: that's it, you succeeded. Deal with the consequences.
- On a 7-9: the player chooses two:
 - └ Take damage as the situation demands

⁹ This is the stat to roll for breaking down doors, taking blows on a shield or arm-wrestling in the ork canteen. There is some blurriness with THIEF. Stabbing someone in a fight is a fighter move, but stabbing them in the back is a thief. Shooting a charging hero is direct violence and typically therefore FIGHTER, but trying to pull off a trick shot that pins their dagger hand to the wall might be THIEF. The GM is encouraged to be relaxed about this, but encourage thought about the consequence of a miss. If players are pushing THIEF to try and avoid blowback damage, the GM should hit them with some very hard direct moves when a golden opportunity arrives. Players. I hope you read this.

- An ally takes damage as established
- Something in the next room hears you
- You drop an item in the middle of it
- You choose to fail your objective to prevent something worse
- Click! next move by anyone triggers a trap

- On a 6 or below: no success, but choose one from the list anyway

BARD: basic move

When you try to solve a problem with charm, social connections or distraction, ROLL+BARD:

- On a 7+ you succeed at your objective
- On a 10+: that's it, you succeeded. Deal with the consequences.
- On a 7-9 choose two:

- You distracted an ally too¹⁰
- You allow an ally to choose the second option for you
- The target becomes obsessed with you
- You owe someone.
- Someone will come after you, later
- They offer you a further opportunity, with a catch

- on a 6- the GM chooses another player who chooses one for you.

¹⁰ be careful with player agency here. It can be a fun running gag, but make sure the other player is on board.

IDENTITY: basic move

When you draw on knowledge of the dungeon, or wake after a LONG REST, then say the thing you know because of your role in the dungeon. You get that statement free. Now ROLL + IDENTITY

- On a 10+ Describe a hobby¹¹. Add it to your playbook. Gain +1 Identity when you have acted on that hobby three different times.
- On a 7-9 you keep a sense of identity but the dungeon presses on you. Choose one:

- I loved that part of my job
- I hate that part of my job

¹¹ Ideally this should be something outside of your stereotypical job. It's something you value and think about in your spare time and makes plans for. 'Three different times' doesn't mean three cups of tea satisfies a 'tea party' hobby for a Brute. It has to cost something

└ I had a fierce rival in my job

- On a 6- you slip back into your role. Mindlessly do what your job demands until obstructed or you fail a roll.

One Foot in the Grave: Basic move

When your health hits zero choose one:

- Die free.
- Come Back: The dungeon isn't done with you. Take -1 to your two highest stats, and wake up later with 3Hp and holes in your memory.
- Undergo a sea change: The dungeon has a new role for you. Wake up later with a new playbook as the story demands.¹² Unless the GM feels merciful assume all your items are stolen while you are dead to the world. You keep one hobby and one move but switch stats, including identity.
- 'He who kills monsters': where it makes sense, you may come back as the NPC who killed you. Choose an appropriate playbook that's not in use and get with the GM.

¹² UNDEAD or CREEP are obvious, but hideous experiments could bring you back as a HYBRID, BRUTE, BEAST ect.

Help or Interfere

¹³

Most Powered By the Apocalypse games include a move that allows you to modify someone else's roll if you take concrete action to support their action. In this game, this is handled in playbook moves and the WIZARD move. If it is player character vs player character, you don't both ROLL+FIGHTER to see who wins. The first person within the fiction to do something that triggers the move does the move, finishes the move and then the fiction continues.

¹³ Designer's note. I am a bit worried about how this will work out. Every game seems to try something different to Hx, and non seem to have settled on a good solution

Brute

Them? They were dead when I got 'ere. Natural shape for dwarves is that, two little shoes poking out of a helmet. Sniff.

Start with two moves.

Gut Feeling: Brute Move

When you witness a successful FIGHTER move then you can ROLL + WIZARD:

- On a 10+ you may ask two of the GM or the player.
- On a 7-9 you may ask one:
 - What motivates this fight?
 - What would they kill for?
 - What demon hunts them?
 - What must I beware of?
 - Who trained them?
- On a 6- you join the fight instead.

Roaring Charge: Brute Move

When you charge into another player's fight you may destroy the weapon you are holding to get +1 Fight (to a max of +4) for the scene.

Couple of mates: Brute Move

You have a couple of stupid and unruly mates. Name them. Name the body part that drives them. When you want them to do anything other than join a fight¹⁴ then ROLL + BARD

- On a 10+ they do it just like you asked.
- On a 7-9 choose one:

Name: Thoth, Ug, Charlie, Caliban, Schtump, Stoor, Begbie

Appearance (Pick 1-3): Hunchback; horns, no neck; huge shoulders; knuckle dragger; (broken)manacles; kilt; tattoos

Statistics: Start with FIGHTER +3. +1 and -1 to any of the others.

Job (Pick 1): Guard; Gladiator; Miner; Chef

Demon (Pick 3): Weakness; Stupidity; Chains; Accidental Harm; Electricity

Hobbies (fill in during play):

□□□□

□□□□

□□□□

Experience

□□□□ add a Brute move

□□□□+1 to any stat

□□□□ add a Brute move

□□□□+1 to any stat

□□□□ add a move from another playbook

□□□□ add a Brute move

¹⁴ sometimes including stopping again

- └ They do it, but really badly
- └ They do it, but need bribing
- └ They do it, but will take it out on an ally later
- └ They obey like the dungeon demands. Take -1 Identity.

- On a 6- they do their own thing.

It's a Weapon!: Brute Move

When you have taken damage and are weaponless, ROLL + FIGHTER

- On a 7+ you find something to use as a weapon
- On a 10+ choose one:
 - └ Improvised shield - you or an ally may ignore the next damage
 - └ Improvised missile - throw it to deal one damage and take the target out of the fight until you move again.
 - └ Puny elf - you overpower one enemy and use them as a weapon to hit others.
- On a 6- you find something, but can't get to it quickly enough

Scarred: Brute Move

When you take damage and reach your last health (1Hp), MARK XP and resolve any new advances immediately.

Creep

Sure baby, I can make you feel better. Just let me hold you and pull up a warm and fuzzy memory. Ain't that better?

Start with two moves and a chorus

Chorus

A creep is always accompanied by a CHORUS - a collection of soul fragments sustained by energies leaking through the hole in the world that the creep represents. The chorus members are fragments patched together almost randomly - faces squished together, rats and bat spirits filling holes in skin or missing body parts. The chorus are simple minded, fixated on pet topics and without agency.

Commune

When you ask a question of the chorus ROLL +WIZARD

- On a 10+ ask two questions from the list below
- On a 7-9 ask one question.
 - Who died here?
 - What was the last thing they saw?
 - Where is a dangerous item?
 - Who is lying about their memories?
 - Where is the person this body part belongs to?
- On a 6- you may still ask a question, and the chorus will reply truthfully, but the answer comes in the form of a riddle, eerie song or a crude cartoon in blood on the wall.

Name: Legionella; Peez; Latocula; Dalv; Fork-tounge; Shade-of-Grey

Appearance (choose 1-3): Rippling cloak; glowing eyes; bony fingers; scissors; tendrils; smokey hair; blank face

Statistics: WIZARD +2 THIEF +1. +1 and -1 to any of the others.

Job(Pick 1): Jester; Informant; Messenger; Power Source

Demon(Pick 3): Weakness; Stupidity; Chains; Accidental Harm; Electricity

Hobbies (fill in during play):

□□□

□□□

□□□

Experience

□□□ add a Creep move

□□□ +1 to any stat

□□□ add a Creep move

□□□ +1 to any stat

□□□ add a move from another playbook

□□□ add a Creep move

Undead

Horde

Beast

Hybrid

Construct

Magus

Dregs

Plant

Fey

Host

Elemental Ooze

Bibliography

Index

agenda, [15](#)

license, [4](#)

principles, [15](#)