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Dungeon Master®
4th Edition
FOR DUMMIES®

James Wyatt
Bill Slavicsek
Richard Baker

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by James Wyatt, Bill Slavicsek, and Richard Baker

Foreword by Jeff Grub

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About the Authors

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

1n 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc., then publishers of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game lines, as a game designer and editor. His design credits for the company include the *Alternity Science Fiction Game* (which he co-designed with Richard Baker), the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*, the *d20 Star Wars Roleplaying Game*, the *Star Wars Miniatures Game*, *Urban Arcana*, *Council of Wyrms*, and the EBERRON *Campaign Setting*.

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

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

Rich's list of D&D design credits numbers over 60 game products, including the Origins Award–winning *Birthright Campaign Setting*, the *Alternity Science Fiction Roleplaying Game* (which he co-designed with Bill Slavicsek), and the 3rd Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He has also served as creative director for the Alternity and FORGOTTEN REALMS game lines. As an author, Rich has published ten fantasy and science fiction novels, including *Swordmage*, the *Last Mythal* trilogy, and the New York Times bestseller *Condemnation*.

Rich is currently employed as a senior game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and works every day on new products for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. He married his college sweetheart Kim in 1991; they have two daughters, Alex and Hannah. When he's not writing (a rare occurrence), Rich likes to hike in the Cascades, play wargames, and root for the Philadelphia Phillies — because somebody has to.

James Wyatt is a game designer and sometime novelist who joined the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS design staff in 2000. He credits *The Lord of the Rings* and D&D with starting him on a winding life path that has taken him through a college degree in religion and a Master of Divinity degree, on through a short stint as an ordained minister in two United Methodist churches in Ohio, and still onward past some time as a technical writer before finally landing at Wizards of the Coast.

James won Origins Awards for his work on the FORGOTTEN REALMS adventure *City of the Spider Queen* and the EBERRON *Campaign Setting*, and he was the main designer for the award-winning *Oriental Adventures* sourcebook. He spent three years on various teams as one of the lead designers for the fourth edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game and compiled wisdom from the greatest minds in gaming for the fourth edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He's also the author of three fantasy novels set in EBERRON.

James is now the Lead Story Designer for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, which means he leads a team of writers and creative geniuses to shape the story and worlds of the D&D game, as well as writing the polished prose of background and flavorful material for the D&D rulebooks. His wife, Amy, is an artist, actor, home-school teacher, minister, and spiritual director as well as a great sounding board for his novel and game ideas. James and Amy have one son, Carter, who wants his father's job.

Dedication

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

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

James Wyatt: To Carter, whose boundless creativity is constantly inspiring, even (or especially) when I can't keep up.

Author's Acknowledgments

Bill Slavicsek: The newest edition of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game owes its existence to a lot of talented people. The work that James, Rich, and I have done on this *For Dummies* book would not have been possible if not for the original effort of a formidable team of creatives and business people. Thank you to my creative team on the massive redesign project, which included Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins, James Wyatt, Mike Mearls, Chris Perkins, Kim Mohan, Michele Carter, and Jeremy Crawford. Also thank you to the brand team, who help bring D&D products to market, which includes Liz Schuh, Scott Rouse, Kieren Chase, Sarah Girard, Linae Foster, and Martin Durham.

I have to also acknowledge the efforts of the rest of my game design staff. This amazing collection of designers, developers, and editors work every day to push the envelope and expand the horizons of our products, and as much as I lead them, they influence the way I think about and approach game design and D&D. Every part of this *For Dummies* book owes at least a little to the ideas and work of Richard Baker, Greg Bilsland, Logan Bonner, Bart Carroll, Bruce Cordell, Peter Lee, Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Julia Martin, David Noonan, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Chris Sims, Rodney Thompson, Rob Watkins, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, Steve Winter, and Chris Youngs.

Finally, thanks to everyone at Wiley Publishing who worked with us on this book, including Amy Fandrei, Jean Nelson, and Virginia Sanders, and to everyone at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., who help us make great games and other great products on a regular basis.

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Foreword

*1*t is time to step up your game.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS has been reinvented with its 4th Edition. A lot of sacred cows have met their maker, a plethora of mechanics have been rethought and overhauled, a host of basic tenets questioned and made anew. Traditional classes have been reforged with an eye towards playability and old monsters have returned with a nod to ease of use. Yet the core of D&D remains, the part of that is absolutely necessary for the game to be. The art that is the heart of the game.

The fine art of Dungeon Mastering.

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

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

I can vouch for Bill's DM credentials. For many years now, a group of us creative types, present and former members of Wizards of the Coast, have gathered at his house every Thursday night for our weekly game. Bill has used us as a test-bed for new projects he has worked on, including the Star Wars RPG, d20 Modern, EBERRON, the new arrangement of the Planes, and now 4th Edition. Yes, we get to play the first drafts (and take the initial lumps) of the new systems. It's a tough job, and Bill makes it a heckuva lot of fun.

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

And James Wyatt brings it all together and up to date as the lead designer on the new *Dungeon Master's Guide* for 4th Edition. This one volume is the summation of over 25 years of D&D history, explaining not only the what and how of running a campaign, but the why as well. James produced the most readable and well-reasoned version of this classic and necessary book, and now helps distill it into this format.

Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies gives you a box of tools. *Dungeon Master 4th Edition For Dummies* shows you what you can build with those tools. *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies* gives you a rainbow of paints. *Dungeon Master 4th Edition For Dummies* shows you what you can portray with those paints. *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies* opens the door to a new universe. *Dungeon Master 4th Edition For Dummies* goes through that door, and shows you how to create your own worlds and delight and entertain your players.

There is a whole new universe out there — it's time to go play.

Enjoy.

Jeff Grubb

Co-founder of the Dragonlance campaign setting and co-creator of the FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign setting, Jeff is the author of over a dozen novels, thirty short stories, and more game products than is either polite or proper to mention. When he's not building worlds for computer game companies, he's making up Chuck Norris jokes about the 4E fighter exploits. Some of his characters in Bill's Thursday Night Games have been Moondog Greenberg the kabalistic biker, Whappamanga the Wookiee, Captain Keldon of the interplanar ship *Dragon Roar,* and Emm the Inappropriately Exuberant warlord.

Introduction

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

It's good to be the DM!

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

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

About This Book

We wrote this book because the nice folks at Wiley Publishing, Inc., liked our previous *For Dummies* books and they asked us to update this book for the 4th Edition of the D&D game. But we also wrote it because we have a passion for the D&D game, and we want to share that love with as many people as possible. We wrote in our previous *For Dummies* books that the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game speaks to and feeds the human condition. As a game of the imagination, D&D builds on the myths and fantasies that shape our culture. In an age when so many activities involve isolated people, D&D is a social experience. Nothing else — no computer game, no board game, no movie — comes close to delivering the interactive and unlimited adventure of the D&D experience.

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

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

About This Revision

This book is a complete revision of the original *Dungeon Master For Dummies,* updated to make use of the 4th Edition D&D rules. It doesn't just update the rules material, though. It's revised to speak to new assumptions about the role of the Dungeon Master and the way he or she interacts with the other players. Frankly, it's also rewritten to remove what would otherwise have been a duplication of what's already in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.* The original *Dungeon Master For Dummies* did such a good job of explaining how to be a Dungeon Master that the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* learned from its example and included a lot of the same kinds of advice!

As an example of what we mean, take a look at Chapter 7 in this book. In the original book, that chapter was a simple sample dungeon. Now the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (DMG) gives you a sample dungeon, so here in this book we help you make the best use of the sample dungeon in the DMG instead. Similarly, Chapter 8 discusses how to make the best use of Fallcrest, the sample "home base" in the DMG, rather than creating a new base town for you to use.

Why You Need This Book

New Dungeon Masters need this book because it's written by D&D experts to serve as a comprehensive guide for DMing. Even though the D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* is a great resource, it glosses over topics we cover here in much more detail. This book offers more examples, including a complete adventure to complement the short dungeon in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

It's written as a training manual in a straightforward, direct manner (the *For Dummies* style).

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

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

How to Use This Book

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

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

This book assumes you have at least some experience with the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. If this isn't the case, we suggest you start with this book's

companion volume, *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies.* You might also want to buy the *Dungeons & Dragons Roleplaying Game Starter Set* from Wizards of the Coast.

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

TIP This book's Cheat Sheet is a handy DM screen you can use to conceal your notes (and perhaps your die rolls) from your players. On the side that faces you, it also presents some of the most common things you need to look up during a game, such as the definitions of conditions, target DCs and damage numbers for when you're improvising, and common attack and defense modifiers.

D&D Terminology

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

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

- ✔ **Dungeons & Dragons:** The original roleplaying game of medieval fantasy and adventure. In the game, players take on the role of imaginary characters defined by a series of statistics, cool powers, and magical abilities. The game is played around a table or other comfortable location where players can spread out books and papers and roll dice. D&D (the short form of the name) is a game of the imagination, part group storytelling game and part wargame. There are no winners or losers in this game; the point is to build an exciting fantasy story through the actions of the characters and the challenges set forth by the Dungeon Master.

- ✔ **Dungeon Master:** One player is the Dungeon Master (the DM). Other players control single characters, while the DM controls all the monsters and enemies, narrates the action, referees the game, sets up the adventures, and develops the campaign. Every D&D game needs a DM.

- ✔ **Player character:** The character controlled by a player is called a player character (PC). A player character might be a powerful fighter, a sneaky rogue, a crafty wizard, or a charismatic cleric, for example.

- ✔ **Nonplayer character:** A character controlled by the Dungeon Master is called a nonplayer character (NPC). An NPC might be a friend, a hireling, a merchant, or a villain, for example, that the player characters interact with in some way.

- ✔ **Adventure:** The player characters are adventurers in a fantastic world of magic and monsters. Multiple PCs (controlled by players) join together to form an adventuring party to explore dungeons and battle amazing creatures such as dragons and trolls. Each mission (or episode of the story) is called an adventure. An adventure might last for a single session of play or stretch over the course of several game sessions.

- ✔ **Campaign:** The D&D game doesn't have to end with a single adventure. When the same characters continue from one adventure to another in an ongoing storyline, the overall story is called a campaign.

- ✔ **Dice:** The D&D game uses dice to resolve actions and determine other factors where the outcome isn't certain. The twenty-sided die is the most important, as all major actions in the game are resolved using it. The game also uses a four-sided die, a six-sided die, an eight-sided die, a ten-sided die, and a twelve-sided die. You often see abbreviations used for dice where *d* is followed by the number of sides for that particular die, such as d20, d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12. Sometimes you need to roll multiple dice of a specific shape, such as three ten-sided dice, which is abbreviated as 3d10. Sometimes you need to roll multiple dice and add a modifier, such as two four-sided dice plus two, which is abbreviated as 2d4 + 2.

- ✔ *Player's Handbook:* The first of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume contains the basic rules of play and character creation. No D&D player should be caught without one.

- ✔ *Dungeon Master's Guide:* The second of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume contains the information the Dungeon Master needs to run the game, set up adventures, build campaigns, and award treasure and experience to the player characters.

- ✔ *Monster Manual:* The third of the three books that make up the rules of the D&D game. This volume is packed with monsters to challenge even the toughest D&D heroes and contains information that every DM needs to know.

How This Book Is Organized

Dungeon Master 4th Edition For Dummies consists of five parts. The chapters within each part cover specific topics in detail. In each chapter, we start with the basics of the topic and build from there. Whenever a point needs further clarification, we reference the appropriate chapter so you can immediately find any additional information you need. Whenever it comes up, we also refer you to the appropriate place in one of the core D&D game books, or even in *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies* if we think something in that book will help.

Part I: Running a Great Game

Dungeon Master, meet your game. Game, meet your Dungeon Master. The chapters in this part assume you're a new to moderately experienced DM and provide all kinds of tips and methods for running and improving your D&D game.

Part II: Advanced Dungeon Mastering

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

Part III: Creating Adventures

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

Part IV: Building a Campaign

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

Part V: The Part of Tens

No *For Dummies* book is complete without this section of top-ten lists. We take this concept to a new level by presenting encounters, maps, and traps that you can use in your own D&D games.

Bonus chapters and full-color pages

You can find three bonus chapters on the Dummies.com Web site at www.dummies.com/go/dungeonmaster4e. The first two bonus chapters give ten major and ten minor quests you can use as the basis for an adventure or for side stories. The third bonus chapter provides ten epic-level encounters, complete with maps, monsters, and traps.

We also included eight full-color pages filled with fantastic artwork in the middle of this book. We hope the artwork will give you inspiration for your next adventure!

Icons Used in This Book

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

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

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

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

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

Where to Go from Here

We recommend starting with Part I, but feel free to turn to whatever chapters interest you. Just remember to have fun! Approach this book in the spirit of the D&D game, trust us and the wisdom we try to impart, and you'll be well on your way to becoming a DM or to improving the DMing skills you already possess. (Be sure to check out the bonus chapters at `www.dummies.com/go/dungeonmaster4e`.)

Part I

Running a
Great Game

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

In this part . . .

This part of *Dungeon Master 4th Edition For Dummies* speaks to all D&D Dungeon Masters. Whether you're thinking about running a game of D&D, have recently joined the ranks of DMs, or have a bit of DMing experience under your belt, the chapters in this part provide all kinds of tips and techniques for improving your D&D game. The final chapter in this part walks you through using the sample dungeon in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, helping you jump right into the action behind the DM screen. After mastering the techniques in the earlier chapters, this sample dungeon makes a great practice tool to hone your DMing skills.

Chapter 1

The Role of the Dungeon Master

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

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

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

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

What Is a DM?

A Dungeon Master is one of the players in a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game group. The other players each create a single character and use that character to interact with the imaginary world depicted in the game, but the DM plays a pivotal role that goes beyond that of the other players. In short, the Dungeon Master runs the game. You can get along without a fighter, rogue, or cleric, at least for a game session or two, but it's harder to play a game of D&D without a DM.

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

REMEMBER

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

So You Want to Be the Dungeon Master?

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

We also show you that the role of DM doesn't have to mean a lot of work and hardship. We provide plenty of tips and shortcuts to help you along the way. Although Dungeon Mastering can sometimes be as easy as showing up to the game (just like the other players), more often than not the DM has to do a little bit of upfront preparation so that the game session unfolds smoothly. With our hints and techniques, it can look as though you spent hours working on your adventure. Granted, some DMs *do* spend hours on their craft,

creating the adventure before the game session, and that's a big part of the fun for them. But if you're like us and you don't have a lot of free time to devote to your role as DM, we think you'll appreciate the time-saving suggestions we provide in this book.

Being the DM doesn't have to be a full-time job. If you're already a player in another DM's game, you might take a turn as DM for just a single session to try your hand at the DM's job. When you're comfortable with it, maybe you can take turns, alternating sessions, adventures, or campaigns so that each player in your group gets some time behind the DM screen and some time as a regular player. Even if you DM most of the time, it can be good to enjoy the game from a player's perspective once in a while.

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

What Do You Need for Playing?

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

- ✔ **The game itself:** D&D is a unique type of game, a roleplaying game, that's presented in three core books — *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. There's also the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Roleplaying Game Starter Set* that comes in a box for people new to the hobby.

- ✔ **Dice:** The D&D game uses a unique collection of dice, each with a different number of sides. Dice add a random element to the game; in fact, they turn D&D into a *game* (as opposed to merely an improvisational activity). A set of D&D dice includes at least one each of the following types of dice:

Type of Dice	Abbreviation
Four-sided dice	d4
Six-sided dice	d6
Eight-sided dice	d8
Ten-sided dice	d10
Twelve-sided dice	d12
Twenty-sided dice	d20

In addition to the basic set of dice, it pays to have extras of certain types of dice. For example, you might find it handy to have several extra d8s or d10s when rolling damage for powers. The players ought to have several sets of dice (one set per player is best) so that they don't have to waste time collecting the dice they need from all over the table.

✔ **Character sheets:** Every player needs a character sheet that details the character he or she is playing. You can photocopy a character sheet out of the *Player's Handbook* or purchase a pack of deluxe character sheets. Players should use a pencil to fill out their character sheets because the game stats change as the character gains experience and picks up loot. The D&D Insider Web site (`www.dndinsider.com`) also provides PDF versions of the character sheet that you can download and print for personal use.

✔ **DM screen:** As DM, you need a DM screen. It provides useful charts and tables you need in the game and helps you hide your maps and notes and other accouterments so that the players can't peek at what's to come.

✔ **Miniatures and a battle grid:** *D&D Dungeon Tiles* provide a ready-to-use battle grid, a play surface where your miniatures can represent tactical situations (such as combat encounters). D&D *Miniatures* booster packs contain a variety of cool monsters and hero figures that you can use to represent characters in tactical situations. Although miniatures and a battle grid aren't strictly necessary, they do speed up play and help players better visualize the fantastic situations you put their characters in. (They're also pretty cool and fun to collect, and you can use them to play a more competitive version of the game, if you like.)

✔ **Pencils and paper:** D&D players need a way to keep notes, track their progress through a dungeon, write down what kind of treasure they find, and otherwise record important game information. For this reason, it pays to have a lot of pencils (with good erasers), paper, and graph paper handy during a game session.

The Expressions of Dungeon Mastering

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

It boils down to this fact: The Dungeon Master takes on a lot of functions in the game. To help you better understand this fact, we've divided the role into

its many expressions. This division is kind of artificial, set up so we can discuss the role of the DM in a logical and clear manner. In reality, many of these expressions blend into each other or might not even come into play in a typical game session. Still, exploring the role of DM is easier when you look at it in this fashion. We discuss each of these expressions of DMing in the sections that follow, and we delve deeper into each expression in later chapters.

DM as rules moderator

When the players gather around the table for D&D, as the DM, you're in charge. This means that you make the call when the game rules aren't clear or when the rules can be interpreted in different ways. Like an umpire at a baseball game or a referee moderating a basketball game, you have to use the rules as you understand them and apply them to the situations that present themselves.

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

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

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

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

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

DM as narrator

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

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

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

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

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* discusses the ins and outs of narrative description in the sections on "Narration" (pages 22–23) and "Dispensing Information" (pages 26–27).

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

DM as a cast of thousands

Each player controls one character in the game. You, as the DM, control the entire supporting cast, called *nonplayer characters* (NPCs). All the roles from the bit characters to the prominent allies and adversaries that inhabit your campaign are yours to use as you see fit. These are the people (and creatures) that the player characters interact with, and they're all yours to breathe life into. Most of your NPC cast of thousands will require only a key descriptor or

a single detail that helps you play a role. Many NPCs can even be improvised on the spot as the need arises. You need to create full-on game statistics for an NPC only if that character is an opponent or a major ally. Otherwise, just like in the movies, you need to put together only as much as you think you're going to use in the game.

TIP

Whether an NPC serves as a walk-on or has a minor or major role in the story, play each one as an individual. Roleplay! Nothing makes an NPC come alive like roleplaying a key feature to give him or her personality and pizzazz. For major NPCs, such as the dastardly villain or the regal king who hires the adventurers, roleplay to the hilt. Even the lowliest kobold minions, though, really come alive if they have distinctive voices — even if all they ever say is, "I am slain!" Ham it up, act it out, and make each character memorable in the scene.

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

REMEMBER

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

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

DM as player

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

So, when the monster needs to decide what to do during an encounter, or when the villainous lich lord ponders which of its many necromantic powers to use, or when the hired scout weighs her options when deciding whether to help the adventurers or flee to a safer place, that's when the DM gets into character, decides on a course of action, and rolls some dice.

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

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

The best DM as player plays fair and lets the adventure develop as it will.

DM as social director

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

First, you must form your gaming group. This can happen naturally among friends with a common interest, or you can go out and actively recruit players from a gaming club, in a gaming store, at school, or at work. Because it's hard to play D&D without a DM, the DM is the one who usually goes about forming the gaming group.

Then, you have to set up the particulars of when and where your gaming group will meet. This is rather similar to planning a party or other social get-together. You need a *when* that works for the majority of the group, a regular time when the group will get together for the express purpose of playing D&D. This could be every week (for example, every Thursday evening from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.); or every other week (the second and fourth Sunday of every month, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.); or once a month (the first Saturday of every month, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.); or whatever other consistent schedule works for you and the group. The *where* can be the DM's house, or you can rotate playing locations among the group, or you can meet in a conference room at work or school, or you can meet wherever everyone can get to and be comfortable while playing the game.

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* discusses some of the practical questions of gathering a group, finding a place to play, coordinating food and beverages, and structuring the game session. See sections "The Gaming Group" on pages 6–7, "Table Rules" on pages 14–15, "Getting Started" on page 19, and "Ending" on page 29.

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

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

The best DM as social director keeps in touch with the players between sessions and keeps everyone talking to each other to work through disagreements.

DM as creator

You might be the type of Dungeon Master who uses only published adventures and campaign setting books. Or you might be the type of DM who looks

to purchased items for inspiration but tends to create adventures from scratch. Either way, you have a role as a creator when you're the DM.

Every decision, every rules call, every utterance by a monster or a villain, every descriptive flair you add to your narration of a scene — all of these things and more reveal the creator inside you. The DM creates whole worlds one encounter at a time. That's a big part of the fun of being the DM: You get to lay the foundation for the story, the adventure, and the world that will unfold with every game session you play. Sure, the players add to the story and the world through the actions of their characters, but it all begins with the DM.

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

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

The Goal of Dungeon Mastering

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

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

Chapter 2

Preaparing for Play

In This Chapter

▶ Building a game group

▶ Deciding whether to use a published adventure or to create your own

▶ Making preparations before a game session

▶ Understanding game etiquette

*B*efore swords are drawn and deadly spells are whispered in the dark, someone has to arrange a game session. Usually, that someone is the Dungeon Master. You need to find some players, pick a time and place to play, and figure out what sort of adventure you can throw at them. Without players, the adventure you create or pick out doesn't get played. Without an adventure, you have nothing for the players to do. When a great group of players comes together for a great adventure, that's when the D&D game is at its best! This chapter explores those two essential ingredients.

Gathering a Game Group

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

Here's an interesting fact: All of the current D&D products are written with the assumption that your game group contains five player characters. That's how the writers and game developers of D&D products balance the encounters and determine the level of difficultly of a challenge — what would be challenging for a party of five characters of a specific level? If your group has fewer than five player characters, you might want to tone down encounters

that you find in published material. On the other hand, if your group has more than five player characters, you might want to increase the number of opponents or otherwise compensate to increase the challenge for the party. (Part II of this book provides tips and advice on how to do this and other advanced DMing techniques.)

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

Finding players

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

Friends and relatives

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

School

Many high schools and colleges have game clubs of one kind or another. These extracurricular activities provide a good source of players and might even provide you with access to existing D&D game groups. If you're in school, check to see whether your school has an active game club — and if not, look into starting one!

Work

If school is behind you, your place of business might contain folks with an interest in D&D who could join your regular game group. Or, depending on your work environment, you might even be able to play D&D at your workplace during lunch or after work hours. You can use lunchtime or after-hours games to kick off a workplace campaign. If you're lucky enough to have a workplace with conference rooms and interested players, you have almost everything you need right there to get a gaming group started. (We use conference

rooms at the Wizards of the Coast building to run D&D games at lunch and in the evenings for fun, and we often play as part of work at other times during the day!)

D&D Insider

Another good source of helpful DM information (and D&D information in general, such as news about upcoming products) is the D&D Insider Web site (`www.dndinsider.com`). A robust online community hangs out at the Web site, engaging in message board discussions and debates, playing online D&D games, and attending online seminars. You can find gaming stores in your area, upcoming D&D events and conventions, and other information that can help you build your gaming group. Using the D&D Game Table, you can also gather old or new friends around a virtual table on the internet for a D&D game! See Chapter 12 for more about using the Internet.

Game store

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

Conventions

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

RPGA

The ROLEPLAYING GAMERS ASSOCIATION (or RPGA) is devoted to making it easier to enjoy face-to-face DUNGEONS & DRAGONS experiences. Run by Wizards of the Coast's Organized Play department, the RPGA is a global gaming group that runs sanctioned roleplaying events all over the world. Joining the RPGA is easy, and your free membership lasts a lifetime. Because finding a gaming group can be challenging and because creating new adventures can be time-consuming, the RPGA provides free DM material and makes an event calendar available to members so they can find games happening in their community. Check out the RPGA online at `www.wizards.com/rpga`.

Inviting players to the game

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

In fact, when you establish it, your weekly (or monthly, or whatever) D&D game resembles a weekly poker game. You and your gaming buddies get together at regular intervals, either in the same place or at alternating locations. You play at a table with game pieces (in the case of the D&D game, dice

and miniatures and books instead of cards and chips). And the table usually overflows with snacks and refreshing beverages of one sort or another.

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

- ✓ **When should the players create characters?** Decide whether you want the players to create characters before they arrive or at the table. If the players know what they're doing, they can make characters on their own and come to the first session ready to play. But if they're still learning the game, it's a good idea to devote the first session to making characters so you can help them through the process and check what they're doing as they go. Also, creating characters at the game table allows the players to discuss options and form a more compatible party of adventurers, covering each of the character roles. ("We need a leader! Who wants to be the leader?")

  If you're playing with people who are totally unfamiliar with the game, you might want to use pregenerated characters for this initial game session. You can find ready-to-use player characters in _Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies_ (Wiley Publishing, Inc.), in the _D&D Roleplaying Game Starter Set_, or in the adventure _Keep on the Shadowfell_. After you and the group get a session or two of the game behind you, you can start over and let everyone create exactly the characters they want to play. After seeing the game in action, everyone will be able to make better informed decisions concerning class, race, ability scores, and powers for their characters.

- ✓ **When and where are you playing?** For the first session, you need to pick a location to play and a time that's convenient for you and the players.

- ✓ **How long do you and the players feel comfortable playing the first time?** We find that two to four hours makes a good beginning session length.

- ✓ **Who's in charge of snacks and beverages?** Do you want to suggest that everyone bring snacks and drinks to share, or do you want to make it a bring-your-own-snacks kind of event? Either way is fine, just so long as you let everyone know what's expected of them.

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

Using a Published Adventure

As the Dungeon Master, you have to determine what adventure you want to run for your game session. If this is going to be your first adventure (for you or your group or the players' newest characters), we recommend starting with something official. The *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the *D&D Roleplaying Game Starter Set*, *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies*, and this book (see Chapter 19) all have ready-to-use adventures designed for 1st-level characters. If you're looking for an adventure for an established group of higher-level characters, you can turn to a number of sources.

Wizards of the Coast products

As the publishers of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, Wizards of the Coast makes a number of adventures and publishes new adventures all the time. Current in-print adventures include *Keep on the Shadowfell* (1st to 3rd level), *Thunderspire Labyrinth* (4th to 6th level), and *Pyramid of Shadows* (7th to 10th level).

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

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

Dungeon magazine

Wizards of the Coast also produces the official *Dungeon* magazine. This monthly online periodical contains all kinds of tips and advice for DMs, and it also provides encounters, lairs, and three or four full-length adventures for characters of varying levels in every issue. It makes a great resource for DMs looking for something to run on a moment's notice or for exciting

encounters to drop into any campaign. Find out more about *Dungeon* maga-zine at `www.dndinsider.com`.

RPGA

Members of the RPGA gain access to convention-style adventures for all levels of play. Because they're designed to be played through in a four- or five-hour convention slot, these adventures are great for filling in those evenings when you're not quite prepared for your regular game with your friends. You can also use these adventures to run sanctioned events. Check out `www.wizards.com/rpga` for more information.

Other d20 publishers

Wizards of the Coast allows other companies to produce material for use with D&D — including adventures — under a license called the *Game System License* (GSL). Look for the d20 SYSTEM logo, shown in Figure 2-1, for products that are compatible with D&D.

Figure 2-1:
The d20
SYSTEM logo.

Creating Your Own Adventures

When you have some experience with being a Dungeon Master and feel ready, you can create your own adventures for your campaign. Most DMs (ourselves included) use a mix of published adventures and their own creations to gen-erate their ongoing campaigns. We recommend that new DMs start out by using published adventures to get a feel for how adventures come together, and then start altering published adventures to suit the purposes of their campaigns. After you've had some experience, go ahead and make your own. Part III of this book is devoted to helping you in this endeavor.

Even when you get to the point where you're creating your own adventures on a regular basis, you can still utilize published adventures in your cam-paign. Running a published adventure every so often gives you a break from

adventure creation. Plus, we're confident that you'll find something in every published adventure that you can lift out and use in your adventures. Use every available resource to your best advantage, we always say.

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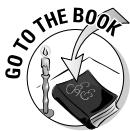
Before the big night (or afternoon, or whatever) of your game session, in addition to informing the players about the particulars of character creation, time, location, and snack expectations (as we describe earlier in this chapter), you have a few more things to do to get ready. As Dungeon Master, you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

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

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

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

GO TO THE BOOK
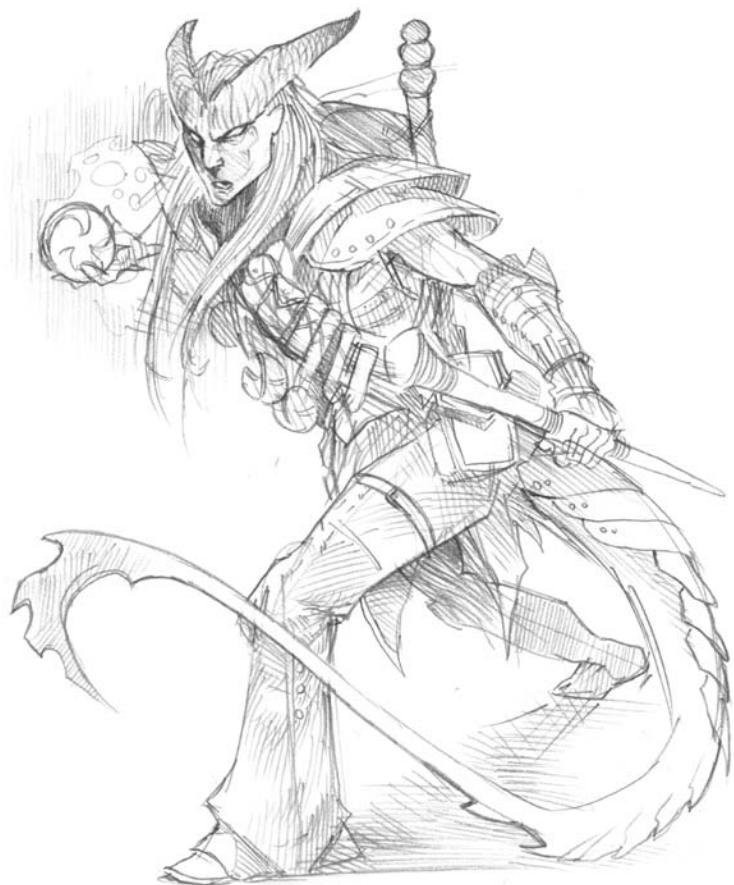
Take a look at page 18 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for tips on how to get ready to run a published adventure.

Establishing the Ground Rules: Gaming Etiquette

As in any social experience, a D&D game benefits from common courtesies and ground rules that are followed by players and DMs alike. These rules of conduct aren't revolutionary, but it's good to review them with your gaming group so that everyone knows what's expected of them when they come to play D&D:

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

- **Play fair.** Players shouldn't cheat, even to save their characters' lives. There are ways to deal with bad rolls (even ones that will result in a character's death) that don't force a player to stoop so low as to cheat.

- **Accentuate the positive.** Players should compliment the DM on a good game. Likewise, DMs should praise players when they have their characters do something especially clever or heroic or just plain fun.

- **Let the players play.** The DM needs to be kind to the players, treating them fairly and letting them make their own decisions. The DM shouldn't force the player characters to follow a specific path through the adventure, shouldn't punish them for being clever, and shouldn't intentionally and maliciously try to kill them.

- **It's the players' game, too.** The DM needs to treat players with respect and should ask them for their opinions on difficult rules interpretations.

- **Eliminate the negative.** The DM and the players should leave the real world behind when they play D&D, including any disagreements or lingering bad feelings that might otherwise color the way they play for a particular session. The DM and players should avoid distractions that make it hard for everyone to enjoy the game.

- **And most importantly, have fun!**

Chapter 3

Running the Game

. . . .

In This Chapter

▶ Understanding the DM's role

▶ Exploring the parts of a game session

▶ Discovering ways to end a game session

▶ Examining out-of-session activities

. . . .

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

There really aren't any hidden secrets to making the game session come off well so that everyone has fun. That said, if you know going in what a typical game session might look like, you'll have an easier time of it. In this chapter, we explore the game session by breaking it down into its component parts. Then we provide tips and advice on how you can make the most out of each of those parts.

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

Taking Charge as Dungeon Master and Running the Game

As we point out time and again in this book, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game features a unique element that makes it different from all other games — the role of the Dungeon Master. The DM is a movie director, storyteller, and computer processor all in one. The DM tells the players what their characters see and hear, determines the outcomes of their actions (with the help of the rules

and the dice), and keeps the adventure moving. Because of the presence of the DM, players can have their characters try anything, go anywhere, or risk everything. The only limits are the imagination of the gaming group and the dice rolls the players make.

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

DM laws

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

- ✔ Make it up when you're in doubt! It's better to keep the game moving and the story progressing than to get bogged down looking up rules or arguing about a result.
- ✔ Say yes! It's better to make a generous interpretation that rewards the players for doing something creative and interesting than to look for a reason why something fun won't work.

✔ Use ability checks to determine success if the players try to do something that isn't otherwise covered by any other rules.

✔ Remember that you as the DM aren't competing against the players. Instead, you're like a referee who helps advance the story and challenges the players.

✔ Don't think of the adventure as your story. Don't think of the adventure as the players' story. It's the *group's* story. Let everyone participate in advancing the story.

✔ Be fair above all else. If you determine that a rule should work in a specific way, make sure it works that way in the future. Don't play favorites. Be consistent.

If you do these things, everyone will have a good time.

DM basics

The DM runs the game, so even if you're using a published adventure and not creating your own, you need to read the adventure before the game session and think about possible outcomes and twists and turns. Then you can bring the adventure to life as the players make their contributions to the tale through the actions of their characters. Why read a published adventure beforehand? Because the game session will go more smoothly if you as the DM have a feel for the pace of the story and know how to adjust the plot based on the actions of the player characters.

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

Narrating

When you narrate an adventure, you bring the imaginary adventure to life. Narration takes a number of forms. First, you present a scene to the players, which usually ends with the question, "What is your character going to do?" If you use a published adventure, the narration is often provided to you in the form of *read aloud text* (portions of the adventure meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players). If you're using your own adventure or if the players ask a question that isn't covered by the read aloud text, you get to make something up. Be careful, though. Don't reveal more details than the characters would be able to acquire with a casual glance. If the players want

their characters to spend more time studying or examining something, let them know that time passes. You might even want to call for a Perception check or other appropriate skill use check.

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

Running NPCs and monsters

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

Winging it

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

Playing through the Game Session

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

Setting ground rules

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

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

Settling in as everyone arrives

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

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

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

Gathering around the game table

The *game table* is the term we use for where you play a game of D&D. In reality, it might be a table surrounded by comfortable chairs, such as found in a

kitchen or dining room. Or it might be a coffee table surrounded by couches and chairs, such as found in a living or family room. As long as you have places to sit, flat surfaces where you can roll dice and spread out battle grids and miniatures, and space to put snacks and drinks and books, you have a D&D game table.

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

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

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

Updating characters

Existing campaigns eventually reach the point when the player characters have earned enough experience points (XP) to advance to the next level. You need to decide whether you want to allow the players to update their characters on their own time or whether you want to set aside a portion of the game session for this activity. Just as with character creation (see Chapter 2), if you have them level up at the table, you can participate in the process, answer questions, and make sure they're following the rules correctly.

If you decide to make character updating part of the game session, it probably should happen at the beginning of the session. If you have the players do the updating away from the table, use a portion of the beginning of a session to review what the players did to their characters. As DM, you aren't just checking to see whether the characters are legal; you need to know what direction the players have taken their characters and what abilities are in the group so you can better plan future adventures. Take a look at new powers the characters have learned and new feats they've acquired. It's a good idea to pay particular attention when characters cross the threshold into new tiers of play — make sure you know what paragon paths or epic destinies they adopt because those decisions can say a lot about the player's goals for the character.

Opening with the prologue

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

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

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

Don't worry about this for the first time you play, but when you start a new adventure or campaign in the future, you might want to get information (such as character background, old enemies, most feared monsters, or long-term character goals) about the player characters beforehand so that you can work that information into the plot or background you want to establish for the campaign. Nothing roots the players and their characters in your world more than having a place for their characters to immediately fit into. If the player characters have a bit of history in the world, the world feels a bit more real. See Chapter 11 for explicit ideas in this area.

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

- ✔ **If the player characters start the adventure already knowing each other,** you can establish that they have a rapport and a desire to help each other right from the beginning. This can be a little artificial, but without this connection, you can run into some bad player character interaction for no reason. Possible starting connections include that the player

characters grew up together in the same village or town, that they have been working together for a short time prior to the start of the adventure, that they all serve the same master or patron who has provided their training to date, or that they all got together to face a menace in the past and continue to work together as they seek to find it and destroy it. These are just examples. You can and should include the players in a discussion to set up party connections if this is something you want to establish right off the bat.

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

Recapping the previous session

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

Player character alignment

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

That said, we've found that, at the very least, characters in a party need to have compatible alignments. Nothing can destroy a campaign faster than good-aligned characters and evil-aligned characters in the same party deciding to work against each other. Frankly, we've found that evil alignments are better left to the monsters and villains; player character parties work out better when the characters take on good alignments or stay unaligned. Motivations for adventures come together easier, character interaction goes more smoothly, and the heroic aspects of D&D shine through in ways that just don't happen when players play evil characters.

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

- ✔ It lets you see what the players remember and think they've figured out about the events and situations that they've previously encountered.

- ✔ It lets you get a feel for the story from the players' points of view (which are always going to be at least slightly different from your own).

- ✔ It allows the players to make conclusions and throw out ideas that you can use to best advantage later in the adventure.

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

Taking on encounters

The heart of every adventure, the unit in which adventures and game sessions are built, is the encounter. Most encounters in a game of D&D include a battle with one or more monsters. Encounters in a typical game session fall into two broad categories:

- ✔ **The combat encounter:** Combat encounters are structured in rounds, where most of the rules of the game come into play. Most of the encounters in your adventure are, or will evolve into, combat encounters.

- ✔ **The noncombat encounter:** An encounter that doesn't involve combat is, naturally, a noncombat encounter. This might be a skill challenge, which requires multiple skill checks as the player characters attempt to defeat a natural hazard, a deadly trap, or a tense negotiation. It could be a puzzle, which tests the players' minds as well as (or instead of) the characters' abilities.

During a game session, you might run a single dramatic encounter with a complex battle scene and waves of multiple monsters, or you might have time for a number of short encounters. It all depends on not only the encounter

you've developed but the actions of the player characters. Even an encounter you thought would take the whole session can be cut short by clever play, the use of a powerful spell, unexpected diplomacy, or simply by the player characters turning south in the dungeon instead of going north. Let this kind of thing play out naturally. Never force a battle or a specific kind of encounter. The fun of the game is seeing what the players do with the situations you set up — let them play out with the player characters' actions.

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

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

For combat encounters, think about what elements will make visually interesting and dynamic battles. (We cover this in more detail in Chapter 13.) Consider not only the monsters or other opponents to throw at the party, but think about the terrain in which the fight will occur. Fighting in a plain dungeon room of stone is fine, but battling it out in a cavern filled with a lake of molten fire is really exciting and turns the terrain into a participant in the battle.

Handling combat

Combat encounters are where the D&D game really comes alive, and they can also be where your head starts to explode. Tracking initiative, handling the various effects of powers on both the player characters and their opponents, moving creatures around on the battle grid, keeping track of monster hit points, remembering which monster on the grid is which — there's a lot going on in combat, and a lot of it is the DM's job.

There are plenty of tricks you can use to keep things under control, but the most important is to delegate. If you're playing D&D, you have a table full of reasonably smart people you can call on to help you manage the information load of even the most complicated combat encounter. For example, you might have one player act as the initiative tracker in combat. It's that person's job to tell the other players (including you) when it's their characters' turn to act. Or you might tell the players that it's their job to remember both conditions they put on monsters ("Hey, remember I gave that orc a –2 penalty on this attack.") and conditions the monsters put on them (". . . and I roll a saving throw against being slowed."). Use your players' collective

knowledge of the rules, too — though you might need to remind them to correct you and the other players gently, when it's necessary ("Oh, remember that you can't shift past the corner of the wall like that.").

GO TO THE BOOK

Most DMs (or designated players) use one of two methods to keep track of initiative: cards or a list. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* discusses tracking initiative on pages 38–39. It covers some of the pros and cons of using cards or lists and whether a list is visible to the players or hidden behind the DM screen. In addition, it gives advice on how to handle sudden changes to the initiative order, such as when a character decides to hold his or her actions until later in the round. Page 220 in the *DMG* is a set of combat cards you can photocopy to track initiative and other information in your game.

Tracking monster hit points and conditions

Keeping track of monster hit points (hp), penalties, and conditions that come and go as combat progresses is pretty straightforward, but the more monsters and characters are involved in the encounter, the more complex it can become. Choose a way to track these conditions that works best with the way you track initiative:

✔ **Combat cards:** If you're using cards (like the combat cards in the back of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) to track initiative, keep track of monster hit points right on the card. When a monster is affected by a penalty or condition (such as being dazed or slowed), note the condition on the card as well.

TIP

We find it useful to write the condition down, note when it ends (either at the end of someone's turn or with a save), and put a little box or circle beside it. Then, when the condition ends, put a check in the box rather than crossing out the name of the condition. In many encounters, monsters and (especially) characters suffer from the same condition multiple times. When this happens, you can just put another check box after the condition name instead of writing it out again.

✔ **Initiative list:** Keep track of monster hp and conditions right next to their names on the initiative list.

✔ **Statistics blocks:** If you're running monsters from a published adventure or from a printed copy of their statistics, you can write on the page right next to the relevant statistics. Record a monster's hit points near the hit point entry on its statistics — and you'll find it easy to see when the monster is bloodied and whether something happens when it gets bloodied. If it has a penalty to its defenses, note that near its defenses line. If it gets an attack penalty (or bonus), note it near its attacks. If it's dazed, put that near its speed (because that most likely means it's not going to move on its turn).

TIP

If you don't want to write in your book, you can use sticky notes stuck on the *Monster Manual* page or in your adventure to track this information.

✔ **Condition cards:** You can also use cards to indicate conditions and penalties, perhaps even with the definitions of the conditions copies onto the cards. Players can put these cards on top of their character sheets or on the top of their own power cards to remind them of conditions affecting their characters. As DM, you can put them on top of monster statistics or clip them to the combat cards you use to track initiative.

Telling the monsters apart

In an encounter with three orc brutes and two orc archers, it can be tricky to keep track of which orc is bloodied, which one is dazed, and which one has a –2 penalty to its next attack roll. There are two basic methods you can use to help you keep track of which monster is which.

✔ **Distinguish the miniatures:** If you have three different miniatures that can all represent orc brutes, you can use them. Otherwise, you can use little stickers on the miniatures' bases, some other kind of marker on or under the miniature, or even hand-painted details to distinguish three otherwise identical orcs from each other. Then, wherever you track information about the monsters, you can identify the orcs by those details. Your combat card for the orc brutes might show, for example, that the orc with the greataxe (a different miniature than the others), the orc with the little skull sticker on its base, the orc with the blue magnetic disk beneath its base, or the orc with a blood-red shield is the one that's bloodied and dazed.

✔ **Use position:** Often, it's enough to remember that one orc archer started out more to your right and the other one more to your left. Even as they move around in battle, their relative positions can stay fairly constant. You might also note that one orc archer is the one Travok is attacking, while the other is the one that's been shooting at Baredd. You can track their hit points on a combat card or your initiative list using the same relative position (hit points for the orc on the left go on the left), or with a word or two noting which orc goes with which hit point total (write "Travok" by the one Travok has been beating on).

Using markers on the table

A marker placed on the battle grid can be useful for more than just differentiating one orc brute from another. Some groups find them useful for indicating which monster is the ranger's quarry, which monster is under the warlock's curse, and which ones are marked by the fighter or the paladin. A marker might also show the location of the wizard's *cloud of daggers* or the cleric's *spiritual weapon.* Alternatively, you can use different-colored markers to show conditions affecting creatures on the battle grid — a black disk might mean the creature is stunned, whereas a purple one means it's slowed.

What makes a good marker? You can buy colored magnetic disks that fit underneath a Medium miniature's base. Smaller cardboard tokens work well, too. Glass beads, small tokens from a board game, coins, or even candies can

do the job. It's best if you can use different color markers to mean different things — and be consistent about what each color means, so you and your players will develop a shared vocabulary.

Ending a game session

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

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

Closing with an epilogue

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

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

You can find the XP tables and the rules for awarding experience points on page 120 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

You might also want to set up some activities for the players to deal with between sessions. Have them decide what they want to do next (if you haven't left them at an obvious next step in the adventure) and let you know before the next session. If the break occurred at a place where this is possible, let them go shopping for their characters, upgrade their characters, or look for a new rules supplement to add to the game for the next session — all pending your approval, of course.

Chapter 4

Narrating the Adventure

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

Understanding D&D as a Storytelling Experience

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

The group story concept

The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game provides a fun, interactive method for telling group stories in a fantasy setting. What's a group story? A group story is a

story told cooperatively by a group of people. A D&D group story uses the setting and game mechanics to provide a framework for how events unfold. It isn't a story in the traditional sense; the scenes that make up the story come together as the players play the game.

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

Speaking of the world, the DM can simply let the implied world of D&D shine through or use an existing campaign world, such as Forgotten Realms or Eberron, or the DM can create his or her own campaign setting. (See Chapter 22 for advice and suggestions for creating your own campaign world.)

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

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

An ongoing epic

Other games have a set beginning, middle, and end. Each session of D&D that you play, however, is just one tale in a continuing epic set in a medieval world where magic and monsters fill the land. This epic stars the characters that the players create, characters that improve and develop from one adventure to the next. Furthermore, events have consequences. Treasure, equipment, and magical items that the player characters find can be used in subsequent adventures, and monsters and villains can escape to trouble them again in a future game session. So your adventures operate just like the episodes of a weekly television series or like individual novels in a trilogy or series.

The DM's role

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

1. You select the adventures to run for the players (either creating them yourself or using published adventures).

2. You create the campaign in which these adventures take place (either overtly, with lots of planning, or just by letting the world develop naturally with each adventure you run).

3. You narrate the adventure by setting each scene and describing the results of the player characters' actions.

4. You portray the cast of thousands that inhabit the world, playing all the characters that aren't the player characters — the extras, the friends and foes, the monsters. (It really never adds up to thousands, by the way. That just sounds more impressive than "a cast of dozens.")

Telling Interesting and Exciting Stories

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

You have plenty of tools to help you with this, not the least of which are the encounters you've prepared. Encounters make up the scenes of the story, but they usually aren't constructed to happen in any particular order. Sure, in the adventure presented in Chapter 7, we number the encounters and present them in an order. How the player characters navigate the dungeon — which doors they open or pass, which corridors they explore and in what order, and so on — determines when and how the encounters are, well, encountered.

Here's the big secret to running a great adventure and telling a fantastic group story: The action and the drama take place in the encounters. As good as the premise you create might be, as intricate as the plot you decide to weave becomes, the story happens in the encounters. That's where the players and

DM come together to perform actions, make decisions, and ultimately advance the story with good roleplaying, good tactics, and a lot of dice rolling. So, as the DM, you have to let the encounters and what happens in them override whatever plot you imagined for the story. Again, it isn't your story. It's the group's story. And the group needs the freedom to tell it.

Does this mean that your perfectly crafted plot (whether you made it up yourself or purchased an adventure) is subject to the whims of the player characters? For the most part, yes. You can use advanced techniques to steer the plot or get the story back on track if it strays too far (as we describe in Chapter 10), but for now just go with the flow and see where the group's imagination takes the story.

Making a story a D&D story

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

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* gives an overview of these fundamental conventions on page 150 and talks about what happens if you alter them on page 151. There are three conventions you shouldn't mess with, though:

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

- ✔ **D&D worlds are permeated with magic.** From magic-using classes (such as wizards, warlocks, and clerics) to magic items of all descriptions, the wonders of spells and arcane knowledge make for exciting and mysterious trappings for stories and encounters. Because of the presence of magic, the medieval setting becomes wondrous and frightening. With magic, heroes can accomplish miracles, villains can launch plots to take over or destroy the world, and a sense of wonder (both dark and light) fills the land.

✔ **D&D worlds are filled with monsters.** The monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Some are relentlessly evil, others overtly friendly, and many can show up to help or hinder adventurers as their own whims and the needs of the story dictate. In many ways, monsters are the ultimate manifestation of magic in the land because most D&D creatures depend on magic to exist, if not to survive. Undead monsters, misshapen creatures, giants, and constructs of all descriptions — the monsters of D&D fill volumes and provide you with a huge toolbox of opponents to challenge the player characters.

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

Choosing an adventure premise

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

✔ **Capture:** The adventurers take a job to capture the leader of a marauding band of goblins that have been raiding the village and the surrounding area.

✔ **Discover:** The adventurers seek to discover the hidden tomb of the Knight of the Flaming Sword.

✔ **Escape:** The adventurers have been captured by the evil priest of Asmodeus and must find a way to escape the dungeon beneath the vile temple.

✔ **Protect:** The adventurers have been hired to protect the baron's envoy and get her safely to the meeting in Wellford, a village that lies on the other side of the Forsaken Forest.

✔ **Rescue:** The adventurers must rescue the dwarf prince from the troll Nurgo before the monster feasts on its captive's royal flesh.

✔ **Search:** The adventurers come across an ancient dungeon just waiting to be explored.

Mastering the Adventure Narration

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

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

Directing the adventure

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

When you set the scene, make sure to play up the drama and tension of the moment. Be descriptive. Show, don't tell, the players what their characters see and hear with strong adjectives and evocative language. Look to published adventures, including "Kobold Hall" in Chapter 11 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and "The Necromancer's Apprentice" in Chapter 19 of this book, for examples of this in action.

Your enticements need to be subtle enough not to hit the PCs like a brick, but overt enough for them to notice. For example, in your description of the scene before them, you can slip in that they see a glint of gold among the blanket of bones that cover the floor, or spot an ancient book lying open in a corner, or notice an arcane glow from among the pile of weapons and armor, or hear the muffled cry of a prisoner in distress. Not every scene or encounter needs this kind of enticement, depending on the overall story and motivation of the player characters, but once in a while it helps to move the PCs in a particular direction.

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

✔ **DM as Director Do's:**

- Do set the scene, describing what the PCs see, hear, and smell with evocative language.

- Do exude drama and tension and excitement in your scene descriptions.

- Do entice the PCs to interact with the scene by subtly calling attention to features that reward closer inspection.

✔ **DM as Director Don'ts:**

- Don't tell the players what their characters are doing; that's up to them to decide.

- Don't give away all the secrets of the encounter in your description; allow the players to experience the fun of working some of it out for themselves.

- Don't overwhelm the players with too much detail. A description can be evocative without being long.

Adding special effects

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

By thinking in terms of a movie, the DM tries to make the imaginary action of the D&D game as visual and as real as possible. The DM describes what the player characters see and otherwise sense — make those descriptions as vibrant and colorful as possible. Published adventures, such as the sample adventure in Chapter 11 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, help by providing the basics of such descriptions for you, but you need to breathe life into those descriptions by the way you present them.

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

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

REMEMBER

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

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

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

TIP

Although most of the special effects at your command involve evocative descriptions, exciting delivery, and abundant imagination, remember that cool play surfaces and miniatures can help you and the players better visualize the action of the story. Illustrated battle maps, such as those available in many published adventures and D&D Miniatures products, describe the area where an encounter takes place. Even dry erase or wet erase battle grids, where you make a rough sketch of the encounter area, help players get a better idea about the tactical situation their characters find themselves in. And miniatures or other tokens that represent the PCs and the monsters they face provide all the foundation you need to help everyone's imagination kick into high gear. See Chapter 10 for more on using visual and tactical aids in the game.

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

- Do treat the game as a cinematic event.

- Do describe what characters can discern with all five senses when providing narration.

- Do pull out all stops when describing your special effects — you have an unlimited budget, after all.

- Do be consistent in your descriptions of people, places, and things.

- Do improvise when players try unexpected things.

- Do be responsive to the needs of the players; expand descriptions when they need more information and cut your narration short when they're ready to get to the action.

- Do use battle maps, miniatures, and other visual aids to help the players better imagine the scene.

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

- Don't use bland language and technical terms when narrating the action.

- Don't use gamespeak (rules, terms, and jargon) when narrating the story.

- Don't be arbitrary in your descriptions of people, places, and things.

Playing the nonplayer characters

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

All of the NPCs are your characters, and they run the gamut from the shop-keeper and innkeeper who provide goods and services for the player characters to the foul vampire lord raising undead monsters in the catacombs beneath the ruined temple. Although your world might have thousands or even millions of people in it, you need to deal with only the dozen or so that the player characters might actually decide to interact with in a given adventure. The following subsections provide some tips for creating and controlling interesting nonplayer characters.

Villains and other opponents

As DM, you get to do something unique in the D&D game — you get to play the bad guys!

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

REMEMBER

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

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

Allies, innocent bystanders, and everybody else

Although playing villains and monsters certainly takes up a lot of your non-player character time, you also have to be ready to portray the rest of the world's population — at least those that come into contact with the player characters. These types of NPCs provide information, resources, resting places, expert assistance, background, obstacles, aid, motivation, amusement, and more for the player characters. They add color to the story. In many cases, these NPCs require only a name, a brief description, and a relevant skill or two. Because most if not all of the nonplayer characters that fill this role are never meant to get into combat, you don't have to give them a full set of game statistics (or "statting them out" in gamespeak).

WARNING!

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

> ✔ **DM as Nonplayer Character Do's:**
>
> • Do give your nonplayer characters personality by creating quirks, mannerisms, and oft-repeated phrases.
>
> • Do ham it up and use different voices for different types of characters. (One DM we know imagines particular actors in the roles of his NPCs, and he imitates those actors when playing his NPCs. His imitations are terrible, but they add to the fun and make every NPC feel unique.)

- Do talk in character and encourage the players to do the same.

- Do be consistent, remember the names and mannerisms of the NPCs you introduce, and take notes so you can pick them up again when they appear in a future adventure.

✔ **DM as Nonplayer Character Don'ts:**

- Don't waste time by overstatting your nonplayer characters; give them only the powers and skills they'll need for the role you want them to play in the adventure.

- Don't use nonplayer characters to overshadow or outshine the player characters.

- Don't take the side of the monsters or players when running NPCs; instead, play NPCs to the fullest without actively making things easy or difficult for the player characters.

Bringing the Adventure to Life

You've figured out how to narrate your adventure. You have a handle on running the monsters and nonplayer characters. Now all you need to do is make sure the rest of your adventure is as exciting and dramatic as you can make it. The following sections provide several ideas to keep in mind, whether you're creating your own adventure or using a published one, such as the adventure in Chapter 19.

Creating fantastic locations

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

No matter what type of encounter you plan to run (combat, challenge, or roleplaying), you can make the encounter that much more memorable and

fantastic by setting it in an extraordinary location. Imagine running a battle along a crystal bridge that spans a jagged chasm or challenging the player characters to cross a ruined expanse as fountains of flame erupt from the ground without apparent rhyme or reason. What about presenting a roleplaying encounter in an exotic marketplace filled with fantastic beings of all descriptions?

TIP

The adventure we present in Chapter 19, as well as the advice strewn throughout Part III, should provide you with plenty of examples of fantastic locations and advice on how to use them to get your own imagination flowing.

Describing intense battles

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

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

- **Weak narration:** "The hobgoblin attacks." [DM makes the attack roll.] "18 — that hits your character." [DM rolls for damage.] "The hobgoblin does 6 points of damage. Then it shifts one square away from your character. Your turn."

- **Stronger narration:** "The huge hobgoblin roars a challenge, and the terrible smell of its breath crashes against you like a wave. It swings its jagged longsword," [DM makes the hobgoblin's attack roll, sees that it succeeds, and rolls for damage] "connecting with a bone-rattling strike that deals 6 points of damage. With a wicked grin, the hobgoblin leaps back and barks a guttural laugh as it prepares to strike again."

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

- **Opponents:** A normal encounter pits a group of player characters against multiple opponents, usually with a mix of different types of monsters. Why? Because if you throw a single monster at the party of adventurers, it gets to act once for every four (or more) times the player characters act in a round. That isn't fun for you, it isn't a particularly interesting challenge for the players, and it just doesn't make for an

exciting encounter. (Solo monsters, such as dragons and beholders, are designed to work by themselves, but even they can sometimes benefit from having a little help in the form of weaker and simpler minions.) The game is designed to let you throw a group of different monsters at your players' characters, with the monsters filling different roles just as the player characters do.

✔ **Location:** Just like in a movie, your scene or encounter will become more exciting and memorable if it takes place in an exciting and memorable location. Why set up a fight in a plain old dungeon chamber when you can set it in a dungeon chamber with walls of glistening stone and a floor of black obsidian that makes for slippery footing? Or what if the floor is covered in the bones of the monster's earlier victims? Remember that anything you can imagine you can throw into your encounter locations. Not every location needs to be fantastic and complex, so save the really cool stuff for your major encounters, but don't be afraid to put a few twists and some detail into every location you present.

✔ **Complications:** Now, don't overuse this technique, but you can make a standard combat encounter more exciting and dangerous by throwing in a complication or two. What do we mean? Well, *complications* are traps, hazards, innocents in distress, or anything else that forces the player characters to split their attention between their opponents and something else. The slippery floor in the preceding bullet shows one kind of complication. Suddenly, in addition to battling whatever opponents are in the encounter, the player characters must also worry about slipping and falling. Or what if the pile of bones they have to walk over shifts and slides and sometimes gives way to plunge a character into bony darkness?

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

Giving the players exciting challenges

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

What's a skill challenge? Fundamentally, it's a game mechanic that requires the characters to achieve some number of successful checks before they get a smaller number of failures, as explained in Chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. In addition to making skill checks, though, the players might make ability checks, use spells or tools in clever ways to solve problems, and

most important, think their way past some obstacle. Traps, natural hazards, obstinate nonplayer characters, gaping chasms, a fast and furious chase, and other obstacles can constitute skill challenges.

A skill challenge can also work really well in combination with a combat encounter, helping to build tension and excitement. You can also pit characters against multiple challenges at the same time — making them negotiate with a petulant ghost at the same time as they're struggling to disarm a deadly trap, for example. See Chapter 14 for more on crafting good challenge encounters.

Roleplaying in encounters

All encounters should provide opportunities for roleplaying. In combat encounters, the player characters might exchange insults and taunts with the bad guys. In some skill challenge encounters, the player characters might discuss, in character, the best methods for overcoming the challenge as time ticks by. Other skill challenge encounters, though, require some amount of roleplaying as the primary activity in the encounter.

In these roleplaying-focused encounters, the player characters must talk to, convince, bluff, bribe, negotiate, intimidate, or otherwise interact with non-player characters to advance the plot. You could handle these interactions with plain skill checks, but the same principles of narration that make for interesting combat encounters apply even more here: You and your players should never let the result of a die roll pass as narration. When a player rolls a Diplomacy check, encourage the player to describe what the character is saying or even to give the speech in character. It's a great idea to give a bonus on these checks (+2 is fine) to reward players for throwing themselves into the drama of the encounter.

Interactions with NPCs can often lead to combat or another kind of skill challenge encounter (such as a chase), depending on where the interaction takes you. Use all the same tricks and narration techniques you would for other types of encounters, and roleplaying encounters will come together — often in ways that are more fun and memorable than combat or challenge encounters!

Chapter 5

Dealing with Players

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

D&D: A Social Experience

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

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

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

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

Looking at the Game Group

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

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

Comparing DMs and Players

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

Being the DM

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

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

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

Interacting with players

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

- ✔ **Be fair.** You need to earn the trust of the players. When they trust you to treat their characters fairly, they'll cheerfully ignore rules mistakes and hesitations in the action as long as they believe you're playing fair and that you aren't picking on them.

- ✔ **Be consistent.** If a rule works a specific way on one encounter, it should work that way all the time. If a nonplayer character has a limp and talks with a strange accent, that character should behave the same way the next time the player characters meet him or her.

- ✔ **Be impartial.** You may play the monsters and villains as smart and powerful or dumb and weak, depending on their role in the adventure, but you still need to impartially interpret the rules when it comes to resolving actions between PCs and NPCs. If you don't deal impartially in this area, you will lose the trust of the players. And that's bad for you and for the game group.

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

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

✔ **Be entertaining.** You are the narrator and the cast of thousands that inhabit the world. You are the window through which the players experience the fun and adventure, so strive to be as entertaining as possible. Play your villains and monsters with gusto. Make the players really despise or hate or feel sorry for the bad guy, as appropriate to the story. Use evocative and exciting language to describe environments, scenes, and the action of the adventure. Make every moment action-packed, suspense-filled, scary, funny, or tense, as appropriate for the scene and the situation. When the whole group gets caught up in the fun of the story, that's entertainment!

✔ **Be prepared.** You don't do yourself or the players any favors if you aren't ready to run the game session. Better to engage in a different activity than to try to run a D&D adventure when you haven't made all the necessary preparations. You can alleviate some of the work by selecting a ready-to-run adventure, such as the ones presented in this book, but even then you need to read and review that material before sitting down to run the game. When you use published adventures, study the way they're designed so you can use some of the same tricks when you get around to crafting your own adventures. If you're organized, ready, and prepared, the game session will run that much more smoothly.

It isn't a competition

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

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

What do you want out of the game?

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

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

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

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

- ✔ **Hack-and-slash:** A straightforward, action-oriented style of play that focuses on fighting monsters and getting treasure. Little time is spent developing the roleplaying side of player characters, you provide few encounters that don't involve combat, and the story never strays very far from the dungeon. This style is also called *kick in the door* adventuring. We usually refer to players who prefer this style of play as *power gamers.* Power gamers typically work to maximize their statistics and abilities to take full advantage of the game mechanics.

- ✔ **Deep-immersion storytelling:** Talking, roleplaying, and developing complex personas for every player character take center stage in this style of play. Entire game sessions might pass without a single die being rolled. The story is the thing here, as well as character development and character interaction. Combat encounters are few and far between as adventures deal with intrigue, negotiations, and political maneuvering. We usually refer to players who prefer this style of play as *roleplayers.*

- ✔ **Something in between:** More than likely, your campaign and play style will eventually develop into something that falls somewhere between the hack-and-slash and deep-immersion storytelling extremes. The best adventures have a good mix of action, story, and interaction to keep all players happy.

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

Increasing the fun quotient

The DM can increase the game group's fun quotient by following these simple principles:

- ✔ **Understand the players.** Although discussing what they might want out of the game is a good start, a DM also has to observe indirect cues and play patterns to fully understand the players.

- ✔ **Provide something for everyone.** When you figure out what the players want (through discussion, observation, or both), you can adjust the adventures to cater to each of them. Depending on the group, you can deal with this collectively (by adjusting the play style) or individually (by providing encounters that speak to each player in turn).

- ✔ **Maintain a high level of energy.** Players take their cues from the DM, so you need to keep your enthusiasm up, your level of energy high, and your sense of excitement focused and on track. The players will respond and perform likewise.

- ✔ **Move it, move it, move it.** Pacing is everything. Never take away the players' sense of control over the actions of their characters, but develop the skills to nudge them along or reshape the adventure to minimize slow periods, keep the action going, and help bring the players back to the fun.

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

Setting Ground Rules and Expectations

To help you get along with the players, we suggest that you work together to establish some ground rules that have nothing to do with the game itself but can help everyone know what to expect from the interactions around the

table. The following sections describe some of the issues that might eventually crop up around the gaming table. It helps if you discuss these things with the players and decide on answers before you get too far into your campaign.

GO TO THE BOOK

This section expands on the discussion of DM style on page 12 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the section on table rules on pages 14–15. Be sure to check that latter section for advice on related issues, such as handling missing characters or letting players run multiple characters.

Choosing a theme and style

If you imagine the D&D game you want to run as a movie, what's the movie like? What's the soundtrack? Is it a sweeping, grandiose epic like *The Lord of the Rings*, with a symphonic score, tear-jerking moments of self-sacrificing heroics, and pulse-pounding battles against sinister foes? Is it more like the quirky humor of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, combining swashbuckling action and creepy monsters with wisecracking humor and physical comedy, underscored by music that swings between nautical jigs, sinister foreboding, and upbeat action? Is it a horror movie with shrieking strings, or a comedy with a laugh track?

Movies and soundtracks are an easy way to think about the theme and style of your D&D campaign. At the game table, the visuals are in your mind and the imaginations of your players, but the game plays more smoothly if you're all watching the same kind of movie — if one of your players is the guy who always laughs in a horror movie, it might be hard to hit the tone you're looking for. Using background music as a prop helps reinforce the tone and get all the players on the same page, especially if you select your soundtrack with the same care that film directors do. (*Tip:* If you want sweeping and epic, remove the "Concerning Hobbits" track from the *Fellowship of the Ring* soundtrack in your playlist.)

One of the most important elements of style you need to consider is how much humor you're after in your D&D campaign. Either a grand epic or a silly romp in the spirit of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* can provide a fun experience for you and your players, but it's better if you and the players agree on how you want to approach your fantasy before getting too far into an adventure. Nothing can destroy a game group faster than a DM intent on running a serious game when the players want to crack jokes and turn everything into a comedy. Bear in mind that even the most serious stories benefit from moments of humor, especially in the form of a wise-cracking hero or a funny villain.

TIP

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

Adding new players

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

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

Bringing books

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

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

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

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

Handbook instead of constantly borrowing someone else's during or after the game.

Players shouldn't need to bring an armload of books to every game session. Most players can get by just fine with between one and four books: the *Player's Handbook* at minimum, and also the book the character's class appears in, if it's not the *Player's Handbook*. Many players will also want access to the power source book for their characters' class. If you're running a game set in a published campaign world, your players might want the *Player's Guide* for that world. So a player with a dwarf fighter in a generic D&D setting just needs the *Player's Handbook* and maybe *Martial Power*. A player playing a gnome bard in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting needs the *Player's Handbook*, *Player's Handbook II* (where the gnome race and bard class both appear), perhaps *Arcane Power*, and the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Player's Guide*. (Note that *Player's Handbook II* and *Arcane Power* will be published in 2009, and so may not yet be available as you read this.)

As DM, you might want to have more books on hand, which can be a good reason to play at your house. On the other hand, if you're running a published adventure, all you really need is the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the adventure, which should contain all the monster statistics and other information you need to run it. If you run a campaign in a published setting, you'll want the *Campaign Guide* for that setting on hand as well.

Managing off-topic discussions

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

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

Considering computers

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

The computer can also be a powerful tool for you to use as the DM, but not if it draws your attention away from the table and takes up too much time. Using the programs that are part of D&D Insider, you can use a computer screen (or a large-screen TV attached to your computer!) as a battle grid, with personalized virtual miniatures for each character. You can use the computer to track initiative and the status of characters and monsters (hit points and conditions). You can even use the Internet as your game table, assembling a gaming group of players who can't meet face-to-face. Chapter 12 offers more suggestions for using the Internet to enhance your game.

Who rolls the dice?

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

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

✔ Bluff

✔ Diplomacy

✔ Insight

✔ Perception

✔ Stealth

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

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

✔ **Failed Perception checks or checks made when there's nothing unusual to notice:** "You scan the forest ahead and strain to hear any unusual sounds. A calm wind rustles the leaves of the overhanging trees, and birds chirp as they hop among the branches. You hear the distant rush of water from a nearby river."

✔ **Successful Perception checks when there's something unusual to notice:** "You scan the forest ahead and strain to hear any unusual sounds. A calm wind rustles the leaves of the overhanging trees, and birds chirp as they hop among the branches. You hear the distant rush of water from a nearby river. You also catch a few whispered words that you can't make out and the tiniest glint of sunlight on metal. Someone must be hiding up ahead, trying not to be seen or heard."

Sharing DM Duties

Being the Dungeon Master is fun! Why should you get to have all that fun by yourself? And why shouldn't you get to be a player every now and then? You and your group can use a number of approaches to spread the fun around and let everyone have a turn behind the DM screen — or everyone who wants a turn, anyway.

Guest DMs

Even if you're the primary DM for your group and the group is happy with that arrangement, sometimes someone else in your game group might want to try his or her hand at DMing the game. One way to give this player a turn behind the screen is to treat him or her as a temporary "guest star" DM. You continue with the campaign that you have already established, allowing the other players to continue playing the characters they have created and advanced, while you step into the role of player for an adventure and another player takes over the DMing duties for a while. This gives you a chance to just play a single character and experience the fun of seeing the adventure unfold from the other side of the table. It gives the other player a chance to be the DM, and the game can never have too many DMs.

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

Shared-world campaign

In Wizards of the Coast's line of Forgotten Realms novels, many different authors tell their own stories within the context of a single campaign setting. Around the world, thousands and thousands of DMs tell their own stories in the same setting. If your game group has multiple people who want a regular turn behind the DM screen, a good way to make that happen is to use a shared world. If you can agree on a single setting for the campaign — whether it's a published setting like the Forgotten Realms or Eberron, a setting based on books you've all read, or something you create together — you can divide up the world and let each DM tell his or her own stories in a defined portion of the world. Characters can travel from region to region, so individual players

can use the same characters in adventures run by different DMs. Or you can have different sets of characters for each DM's part of the world.

The big advantage of a shared-world campaign is the potential for crossover. Even if you normally have different characters for each DM's adventures, you have the potential to mix them up once in a while. Events in one DM's adventures can have an impact in the other DMs' games. For a really special event, you can bring characters together, letting each player run two or three characters for a special adventure, perhaps the climax of a tier of play.

Multiple campaigns

Of course, you can also just let different DMs run their own campaigns, taking turns over the course of months or years to let each DM tell the stories that he or she wants to tell. This lets your game group not only experience different DMing styles, but also play in a variety of different campaign worlds. Each player makes a new character for use in each new campaign.

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

Chapter 6

Teaching the Game

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

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

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

1. Provide new players with a brief overview about what D&D is and the campaign world you run.

2. Give new players a lesson on using the core mechanic and what their characters can do in the game.

3. Walk them through the character sheet. This is necessary whether you're preparing the new players to create characters or to use ready-to-play characters that you provide.

4. Run through the key nongame aspects of your group's game, such as when you play, where, and what responsibilities the group shares.

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

TIP

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

At the end of this chapter, we also highlight some of the key changes that make the 4th Edition of the D&D game different from past editions. Whether you have a whole group of experienced players transitioning to 4th Edition, or you're just trying to help one such player get up to speed, this section can help with a quick summary of some of the biggest changes.
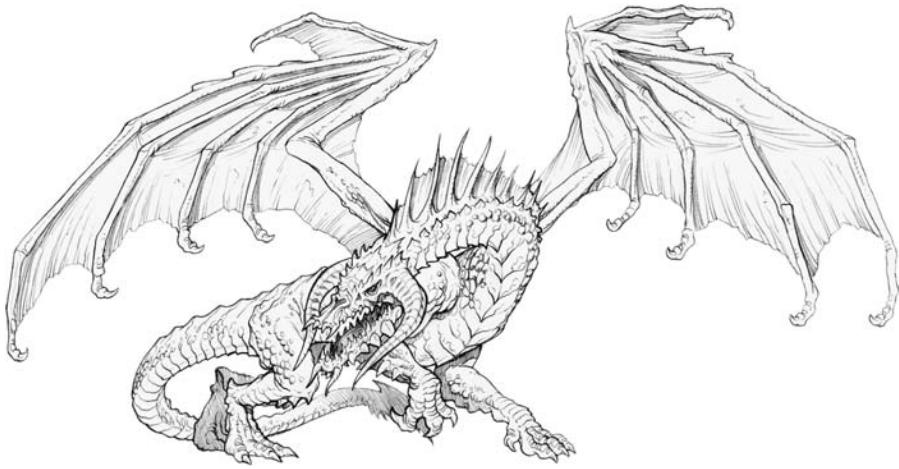
Dungeon Master as Teacher

No matter how clearly we write the rules of the game, how many DUNGEONS & DRAGONS *Roleplaying Game Starter Set* packages we create, how many *For Dummies* books we write, or how many online game demos we build, the fact of the matter is that the easiest way to learn a game like DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is to sit down with a group that already knows how and just play. The concepts and activities are just novel enough to make some people scratch their heads when they try to wrap their minds around it without actually seeing the game in action. The reality is that the game, at its core, isn't really that hard or that complex. Getting to that core, however, can sometimes be tricky.

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

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

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

Teaching the basic rules

To teach the game, you need to have a clear understanding of the basic rules of D&D. These key elements usually figure into the first things you teach a new player when explaining the game. We discuss these key elements in more detail later in this chapter (in the "Teaching Key Elements to New Players" section). The big thing to remember is that you shouldn't try to teach all the rules of the game at once. That's too much for you to do, too much for the new player to absorb, and frankly, nobody needs to know all those rules right off the bat.

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

Showing how to create a character

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

Sometimes providing a new player with a ready-to-play character (such as the ones in *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies*) works best for the

purposes of teaching the game. After the new player gets a feel for things, he or she will have a better sense of the kind of character he or she wants to create and play for the long haul.

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

Relaxing and having fun playing the game

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

A new player doesn't want to get bogged down in the rules and doesn't need to know what every number or statistic on his or her character sheet means. You can help keep things fun and relaxed for both you and the new player by saving the more intricate rules and statistics for when they come up in play.

Making Use of Helpful Aids

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

D&D Roleplaying Game Starter Set

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

Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies

The companion volume to this book, *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies*, explains the D&D game in simple, clear language. You can refer to it

for advice on how to present the game's concepts to new players, or to brush up on your own understanding of the game. It makes great reading for new players, and we suggest that you let the new players know that it can help them get up to speed very quickly. It also contains ready-to-play characters that new players can use, and it features an adventure that you can run, either as an introduction to the game or just as part of your ongoing campaign.

Keep on the Shadowfell

The first 4th Edition adventure, *Keep on the Shadowfell* provides a ready-to-play adventure and more. It also includes pregenerated characters, quick-start rules for both players and the DM, and wonderfully illustrated battle maps of fantastic locations in various parts of the adventure. The maps in particular can really help bring the adventure to life for new players.

Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures

Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures starter sets and booster packs provide colorful, plastic miniature figures depicting a huge variety of characters and monsters from the D&D world. Accessories such as battle maps and miniatures are especially helpful for new players because they give the game a more traditional look (board and pieces) and help players better visualize the situations you throw at them. The tactical elements of the D&D game are best served with some kind of visual representations, so you might as well use the coolest and best-looking visual representations you can find. Plus, players love to associate their characters with a special and specific miniature figure.

Teaching Key Elements to New Players

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

Explaining the premise of D&D

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

You might find that new players have experience with other kinds of games that are similar to D&D in some important ways. Anyone who has played a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (such as *World of Warcraft* or even *Dungeons & Dragons Online: Stormreach*) has a basic understanding of some key elements of the D&D game — you create a character, control that character through multiple adventures or quests, fight monsters, and advance in levels. Even someone who has played a *Pokémon* electronic game has some exposure to these basic concepts, as well as rules elements like hit points. Use the new player's knowledge and experience, whatever it is, to make the transition into D&D easier.

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

- ✔ **The player creates and plays a character.** In a D&D game, the player plays a character that he or she creates. This character improves over time, becoming more powerful and more famous in the imaginary world where your adventures take place. A character is defined by race (human, dwarf, or elf, for example); class (fighter, cleric, or wizard, for example); game statistics; and the personality the player develops for the character as he or she plays the game. This is similar to what you do in an online game, but D&D gives you much more freedom and flexibility to create the character you want to play.

- ✔ **Play continues.** When the player creates a character for a D&D game, he or she plays that character from one game session to the next. The adventures are kind of like an ongoing television series, and the player characters are the stars. With each adventure the player participates in, his or her character grows and develops, becomes more powerful, and generally takes on greater and greater challenges as the campaign unfolds. Again, this is similar to an online game — but in D&D, you don't do the same adventure more than once, and the things you do in one adventure can have important effects on later adventures.

- ✔ **Nothing limits the action.** Unlike board games or computer games, there are no limits to what a player character can do in a D&D game. Not only can the character attempt to do anything imaginable within the confines of the character's powers and abilities, the game also offers endless adventure possibilities and a multitude of choices for developing a character over time.

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

Describing the world of D&D

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

- **A medieval world:** A D&D world is modeled after a fantastic version of the medieval period of European history. It's an imaginary, magical version that comes out of story books and legends more than out of any actual history text. The technology of the world matches what you probably think of when you think of the world of King Arthur, Robin Hood, or *The Lord of the Rings* (books or movies). People travel on foot or on horseback, gunpowder doesn't exist, and most battles occur using handheld weapons such as clubs and maces and swords. The world contains castles and dark forests and knights and monsters, among other things.

- **A magical world:** Everything of fantasy exists in a D&D world, from fantastical creatures to magic spells to powerful arcane items. A forest might be an enchanted forest or a cursed forest. Good wizards and evil high priests abound. And player characters might find all kinds of magic items and artifacts — often as a result of a long and harrowing adventure or quest of some sort.

- **A world of monsters:** In addition to all kinds of magic, a D&D world is inhabited by monsters of every description and disposition. *Monster* is kind of a generic term, because monsters can be good or evil, helpful or harmful, depending on the situation and the adventure. From great dragons to small goblins, monsters come in all shapes and sizes.

Showing how to use the core mechanic

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

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

1. Roll a d20.

2. Add any relevant modifiers. You can explain to a new player that a modifier is a bonus or penalty that is added to the d20 die roll. Modifiers

come from a variety of game statistics, such as ability scores and skills, and always include one-half the character's level.

3. Compare the result to a target number.

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

Explaining what a character can do

The D&D game is played fairly loose until a tactical situation (such as a combat encounter or some skill challenge encounters) comes up. Then everyone plays the game in rounds. In a round, a character can try to do anything the player can imagine, but that's structured within the different types of actions. On a player's turn in combat, the character can take up to three actions:

- ✔ A standard action, which usually means using a power
- ✔ A move action, which almost always means moving one or more squares
- ✔ A minor action

Remember to explain that you can take a move or minor action instead of a standard action, or a minor action instead of a move action. Most often, characters do this in order to move twice, but occasionally characters attack and use two minor actions.

Explaining character role

Character classes in the D&D game put a character into one of four roles, which primarily determine the key functions that character performs in combat. The four roles are *defender, striker, leader,* and *controller.* When you're teaching a new player how to play the game, it's more important for the player to understand the character's role than to get how a class fills that role. The player of a fighter or paladin, for example, needs to know that the defender's job is to stand up in the front of the other characters and get attacked. The character roles are defined on page 16 of the *Player's Handbook*, but here's a quick pointer for new players:

✔ **Defender:** High defense means you can stand up to monster attacks and protect the other players. You stand toe-to-toe with monsters and pin them down so they don't go after the more vulnerable characters in the party.

✔ **Striker:** High offense makes you good at dishing out damage to one monster at a time. You move around a lot, either making ranged attacks or darting in and out of melee combat.

✔ **Controller:** You're all about controlling the field of battle, dishing out lots of damage to groups of monsters or restricting their actions. Low defenses and hit points mean you want to stay out of reach of monster attacks.

✔ **Leader:** You might not actually lead the party, but like the best leaders, you make everyone better at what they do. You're the primary healer for the group.

Explaining the most important parts of the character sheet

You need to walk a new player through the parts of the character sheet that come into play most often during the game. The sheet has a lot of stuff on it. Tell the player that the following bits are the most important parts and that you'll explain everything else when it comes up in the game:

✔ **Character class and level:** A character's class defines how he or she fills one of the roles — clerics and warlords are both leaders, for example, but they fill that role in different ways. Level is a relative measure of how powerful the character is.

✔ **HP:** This lists the character's *hit points.* When a monster or other opponent successfully attacks the character, the player subtracts the amount of damage from the character's current hit point total. When the character's hit points are reduced to 0 or less, he or she is defeated and out of the fight.

You can save the big discussion on the specifics of character death and dying for later in the game.

✔ **Healing surges:** A character can be healed only a certain number of times per day, which is the character's number of *healing surges.* Each time the character receives healing, he or she regains hit points equal to his or her *healing surge value,* which is one-quarter of the character's normal maximum hit points.

✔ **Defenses:** The character's *Armor Class* (AC), *Fortitude, Reflex,* and *Will.* These numbers represent how tough it is to hit the character with a variety of attacks in combat, serving as the target numbers that opponents need to achieve to damage the character with an attack.

✔ **Speed:** This is the distance (in squares) the character can move with a normal move action. If the character moves twice instead of moving and attacking, he or she can move up to twice the listed number in the round.

✔ **Initiative:** To decide who goes first in a combat round, each player makes an initiative check. The player rolls a d20 and adds his or her character's initiative modifier. That determines when the character can act in the round.

✔ **Powers:** Powers are a character's primary attacks and other special abilities usable in combat (and sometimes in other situations as well). Most powers include an attack (targeting a specific defense) and an effect, often including damage. Whenever a character uses an attack power, the player rolls a d20 and adds the attack bonus. If the result equals or exceeds the target's defense, the attack hits. If the attack roll succeeds, the player usually rolls damage, using the dice and adding the modifiers shown in this section on the character sheet.

For example, Regdar the fighter (one of the sample characters we provide in *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition For Dummies*) can use his *cleave* power to attack with his greatsword (+8 versus Armor Class); if he succeeds, he deals 1d10+4 damage, and an enemy who's adjacent to the fighter takes 4 damage.

One essential element to note about each power is whether the character can use it at will, once per encounter, or once per day.

✔ **Everything else:** Show the player where to look on the character sheet when those sections become pertinent during the game.

Making the Transition from the 3rd Edition to the 4th

If a new player has played a previous edition of the D&D game, there's less for him or her to learn in terms of the basics of the game. The player may have some questions about the new rules in the 4th Edition of D&D. You might also have a group of players who have experience with previous editions and who are making the transition to the new edition.

Bring returning players up to speed on the following important differences in the rules in the 4th Edition of the D&D game from previous editions:

✔ **Attacks and defenses:** In past editions, some attacks involved attack rolls against Armor Class, and others forced the target to roll Fortitude, Reflex, or Will saving throws to avoid the effects. Now, all attacks use attack rolls against one of four defenses: Armor Class, Fortitude, Reflex, or Will.

✔ **Actions in combat:** Actions are simplified in 4th Edition. Many actions that used to be standard or move actions are now minor actions. Standard actions are usually the most interesting things you want to do on your turn. Move actions are almost always some kind of movement. Minor actions cover everything else, from opening a door to drinking a potion. Minor actions also include key powers and class features like *healing word* for the cleric and warlord, *divine challenge* for the paladin, *hunter's quarry* for the ranger, and *warlock's curse* for the warlock.

✔ **Powers:** Powers are no longer the exclusive province of spellcasters such as clerics and wizards. All characters have a choice of exciting and interesting powers that can be used to attack in every round of combat. Every character also has a mix of at-will, encounter, and daily powers.

✔ **Healing:** Characters essentially have four ways to heal damage they've taken in the 4th Edition:

- *Second wind:* Once per encounter, a character can use a healing surge. This is a standard action, except for dwarves (who can use *second wind* as a minor action).

- *Healing word:* Clerics and warlords have a power called *healing word.* This is a minor action for the leader character, and it lets the target use a healing surge. Because the leader adds bonus healing on top of the target's healing surge value, this is a great deal, almost like getting two healing surges for the price of one.

- *Other powers:* Some other powers allow healing as well. Some of them use healing surges, some let one character spend a healing surge to heal another character (the paladin's *lay on hands,* for example), and some heal without using surges.

- *Short rest:* Between encounters, if characters spend a few minutes catching their breath, they can spend as many healing surges as they want, up to their daily limit, to heal up to as close to full as they want to be.

✔ **Opportunity attacks:** Opportunity attacks are a lot simpler than in 3rd Edition. When your PC is standing next to a monster, there are two things you can do that let it take an opportunity attack on your character: move, or make a ranged or area attack. The same simple rule applies to opportunity attacks your character takes against a monster. Most monsters can't make opportunity attacks against characters who aren't next to them, even if they have long reach. Casting a spell doesn't provoke opportunity attacks unless it's a ranged or area spell — a close or melee spell is safe. No other actions, such as standing up from prone, pulling something out of a backpack, or stabilizing a dying friend, provoke opportunity attacks. And more important, you never have to look at a table to figure out whether an action provokes an opportunity attack or not.

✔ **Critical hits:** When you roll a natural 20, you get a critical hit and deal maximum damage (plus some extra dice if you have a magic weapon). There's no confirmation roll and no double damage.

✔ **Saving throws:** You don't roll a saving throw to see whether something affects you — that's what your defenses are for. You roll a saving throw to see whether you can shake off an effect that's already taken hold. There are no types of saving throws, and very few modifiers. Whenever you make a saving throw, you just roll 1d20 and hope for a 10 or better.

Chapter 7

Your First Adventure: Kobold Hall

*W*e're taking all the advice we provide earlier in the book and using it to show you how to run your very first DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure, using the sample adventure in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* as a starting point. As we walk you through Kobold Hall, we provide plenty of advice and behind-the-scenes information to make your first experience as Dungeon Master run as smoothly as possible. This is the good stuff — go ahead and dig in!

This chapter is all about the adventure presented in Chapter 11 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, a short excursion into kobold-infested ruins called, aptly enough, Kobold Hall. This chapter will make more sense to you if you have the adventure in front of you as you read. You'll find it on pages 210–219 in the DMG.

Getting Started with the Adventure

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

Knowing the players

As we discuss in Chapters 5 and 9, you need to have a sense of the kind of game the players want to play in. This includes getting a sense of the kind of

characters they like to play, the way they approach the game, the kind of adventures they prefer, and the style of play they try to emulate.

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

For your first session, you basically just need to know how many players are coming to the game. The Kobold Hall adventure is designed to challenge a group of five 1st-level player characters. If you have more or fewer than five players, you should adjust the encounters so they remain challenging but not deadly for your group. We give some suggestions about how to do that in the later section, "Making Changes to the Adventure."

Knowing your adventure

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

1. Read through the adventure so you have a sense of the story and the pacing, as well as an understanding of the main villain and the encounters that the player characters will have to deal with. For your first session, preparation is easy — just review the adventure in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

2. Review the encounters in the adventure and identify the ones your group is most likely to get to in the course of your next session. Give the most likely encounters a careful look, making sure you understand the suggested monster tactics, the monsters' powers, and the features of the encounter areas.

    For Kobold Hall, it's a simple job — there are only five encounters. The characters will get through about one encounter an hour (perhaps fewer if you and the players are still learning the game). If you'll be playing for three hours, look at the first three encounters.

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

Understanding the adventure format

The format of a published D&D adventure is designed to make your job running the adventure as easy as possible. An adventure begins with some amount of introductory material that sets the stage for the action and explains how the encounters fit together. In Kobold Hall, that introduction is the first two pages. Page 210 provides a brief summary of the situation, three hooks you can use to get the players involved, a paragraph of read-aloud introduction for the players, a short introduction for the DM, and a note about treasure. Then page 211 shows a map of the whole dungeon.

After the introductory material, the encounters that make up the adventure appear on separate pages. Short encounters fit on a single page, and longer ones take up two facing pages. Each encounter entry includes setup information, read-aloud text to introduce the players to the encounter, statistics blocks for the monsters in the encounter, a close-up tactical map of the encounter area, descriptions of the features of the area, and notes about the monsters' preferred tactics in the encounter. The tactical map shows the positions where the monsters begin the encounter. Pages 212 through 219 of the Kobold Hall adventure contain these tactical encounter descriptions.

Making Changes to the Adventure

Using a published adventure makes it easy to get ready for a game with a minimum of preparation time. It can also be a great starting point for you to craft

encounters that are better suited to your own group of players than anything the adventure's author could create without spending time at your game table. Making changes to a published adventure might seem daunting — or maybe even a little presumptuous — but it's actually an easy way to make the game that much more fun for everyone. It'll also help you understand how encounters are put together.

Making encounters easier or harder

If your group of players has more or fewer than five players, you should adjust the encounters in a published adventure to account for that difference in group size.

There's an easy guideline for adjusting the difficulty of an encounter to account for extra or missing players: Find a monster whose level is the same as the encounter level. For each player more or less than five in your group, add or remove one of those monsters. It's a good idea to add soldiers or brutes first, and take away controllers or skirmishers first. You can also add or remove traps or hazards, following the same principle.

For example, the first encounter in Kobold Hall (Area 1: Sludge Pit, on page 212 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) is a level 1 encounter. It consists of five 1st-level monsters, so it's very easy to adjust for different group sizes:

- **Two players:** Use one of each kind of kobold.
- **Three players:** Remove one kobold slinger and one kobold skirmisher.
- **Four players:** Remove one kobold slinger.
- **Six players:** Add one kobold skirmisher.
- **Seven players:** Add one kobold skirmisher and one kobold slinger.
- **Eight players:** Add two kobold skirmishers and one kobold slinger.

The simple guideline works well for some encounters, but it doesn't work for every instance. If you run into trouble, the next approach is to figure out how many experience points you need to add or subtract from the encounter to make it an appropriate challenge for your group. You'll need to reference pages 56–57 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to do this.

The basic formula is simple: You want to build an encounter where the total XP reward is equal to the XP value of a single monster of the encounter's level multiplied by the number of characters in the party.

As an example, look at Area 4: The Big Boss (pages 216–217). This is a level 4 encounter for five player characters (worth a total of 850 XP), but there's no level 4 monster in the encounter. It's as challenging as it is primarily because of the number of monsters and traps involved. If your group is larger or smaller

than five players, you'll want to adjust the encounter so that it's still encounter level 4 for your group. That means the total XP value of all the monsters (and the trap) should be about equal to the XP value of a 4th-level monster (175 XP) times the number of players in your group. Here's how you might adjust it:

- ✔ **Two players:** Target 175 XP × 2 = 350 XP. Use the rolling boulder trap, one kobold dragonshield as the "big boss," and one kobold slinger.

- ✔ **Three players:** Target 175 XP × 3 = 525 XP. You can cut 325 XP by removing the spiretop drake, one of the kobold dragonshields, and one of the kobold slingers.

- ✔ **Four players:** Target 175 XP × 4 = 700 XP. You need to cut about 150 XP. You can cut one of the kobold slingers (100 XP) and still be in the right ballpark.

- ✔ **Six players:** Target 175 XP × 6 = 1,050 XP. You need to add 200 XP. Add a third dragonshield and another slinger.

- ✔ **Seven players:** Target 175 XP × 7 = 1,225 XP. You need 375 XP more than what's in the encounter now. Add two dragonshields and a spiretop drake.

- ✔ **Eight players:** Target 175 XP × 8 = 1,400 XP. You're adding 550 XP to the mix. At this point, you might decide that the Skull Kickers have a shared leadership structure with two kobold wyrmpriests as co-chieftains, plus two more dragonshields and a second rolling boulder trap!

Solo monsters, like the dragon in area 5 of Kobold Hall, can make these adjustments tricky, because there are no monsters to remove for a small group. Depending on the size of your group, you might want to replace the dragon with a different monster, adjust the monster's level, or add helper monsters to the encounter. The dragon encounter is a 3rd-level encounter, so your target XP value for this encounter is 150 XP (the value of a 3rd-level monster) times the number of players in your group. Here are some suggestions for that encounter:

- ✔ **Two players:** Target 150 × 2 = 300 XP. Replace the dragon with a guard drake (level 2 brute, 125 XP) and a kobold slyblade (level 4 lurker, 175 XP), or a rage drake (level 5 brute, 200 XP) and a spiretop drake (level 1 skirmisher, 100 XP).

- ✔ **Three players:** Target 150 × 3 = 450 XP. You could bring the dragon down two levels because a level 1 solo monster is worth 500 XP. Alternatively, you could replace it with a different monster or group of monsters. Two rage drakes (5th-level brutes worth 200 XP each), or perhaps a rage drake (200 XP), a spitting drake (3rd-level artillery, 150 XP), and a spiretop drake (1st-level skirmisher, 100 XP), would preserve the draconic theme of the encounter at a manageable level of difficulty.

- ✔ **Four players:** Target 150 XP × 4 = 600 XP. You could reduce the dragon's level by 1, since a level 2 solo monster is worth 625 XP. The dragon would take a –1 penalty on its attacks and defenses and lose 32 hit points. (See "Increasing or Decreasing Level" on page 174 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*)

- ✔ **Six players:** Target 150 XP × 6 = 900 XP. You could use a black dragon (level 4 solo lurker, 875 XP) instead of a white, or add a spitting drake (level 3 artillery, 150 XP). You could also advance the white dragon one level, giving it a +1 bonus to attacks and defenses and 32 extra hit points.

- ✔ **Seven players:** Target 150 XP × 7 = 1,050 XP. You could use a green dragon (level 5 solo skirmisher, 1,000 XP) instead of a white; add two spitting drakes; or advance the white dragon two levels (giving it a +1 damage bonus in addition to increasing its attacks, defenses, and hit points). You could also add either of the encounters designed for two players.

- ✔ **Eight players:** Target 150 XP × 8 = 1,200 XP. Add either of the three-player encounters.

Appealing to player motivations

Besides adjusting encounters to suit the size of your group, another way you can modify Kobold Hall is to tweak the adventure to suit the motivations of your players. Player motivations are discussed on pages 8–10 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and page 105 of that book includes some more discussion of how to appeal to different players. Here are some suggestions for how to modify Kobold Hall to suit the composition of your group:

- ✔ **Actors:** As written, Kobold Hall doesn't offer a lot of opportunity for the interaction encounters where actor players thrive. If you have actors in your group, it's worth spending a little more time with the adventure hooks to let the player characters interact with NPCs in town. Roleplay the kobolds before and during the combat encounters — the kobolds in area 3, for example, can taunt the player characters and berate them for interrupting the skull-skull game. You might also make the dragon talk before attacking, giving the characters a chance to plead for their lives and the actor players a chance to shine.

- ✔ **Explorers:** Kobold Hall used to be a walled keep for a minor human lord, but the adventure's introduction says that lord's name and history are long forgotten. You can engage explorer players by inventing some history for the place and providing some clues to the background you invent. Explorers will be intrigued to learn that the altar now dedicated to Tiamat (in area 2) used to be a shrine to Ioun, and that the stone coffins hold the remains of a long-lost noble line. What if the players find some heirloom of the family, spurring them to find any surviving heirs to the line?

- ✔ **Instigators:** Instigators don't need much help to enjoy the game, and Kobold Hall gives them plenty of what they like best — chances to make things happen. From the sludge pit in area 1 to the rolling boulder in area 4, the environment is interesting and dangerous enough to keep instigators happy.

- ✔ **Power gamers:** Kobold Hall already offers plenty to keep budding power gamers engaged: tough combat encounters with plentiful rewards. If your group includes any power gamers, make sure the magic items the characters find as treasure match up with the desires and specialties of the characters. You can replace the *+1 lifedrinker longsword* in the white dragon's hoard (in area 5) with whatever type of weapon is most appealing to a melee-oriented defender or striker character, for example.

- ✔ **Slayers:** Nothing to worry about here — slaying kobolds is all the reward these players need. Of course, slayers will also enjoy getting to prove their mettle against a dragon!

- ✔ **Storytellers:** It's important to help storyteller players understand that any adventure is both a story in its own right and part of the larger story of the campaign and its heroes. As with actor players, don't gloss over the adventure hooks and quests, which provide much of the story context for the characters' excursion into Kobold Hall. Storytellers will be eager to learn why these kobolds seem so well organized and aggressive, and you should make sure it's clear that the dragon's influence is to blame. Pay attention to the suggestions for further adventures (page 219 in the adventure), and think about how you can tie this adventure in with the next one you plan to run. Finally, look for ways you can make the adventure personal for the storytellers in your group, hooking them in with individual quests that relate to the background they create for their characters. For example, a friend or relative of one of the characters might have been injured or captured in a kobold raid on the King's Road.

- ✔ **Thinkers:** The tactical situations in the combat encounters of Kobold Hall should engage the thinkers in your group. You might also add puzzle elements to one or two areas of the dungeon. For example, the treasure in area 2 might be hidden in a secret compartment that requires either solving a riddle or manipulating a physical puzzle to open.

- ✔ **Watchers:** By definition, a watcher is hard to engage, and it's important to remember that it's okay — watchers have fun because of the company around the table, not because they're totally hooked by the game. Don't take it personally! Also, make sure that whenever any player comes up with an unexpected strategy or a cool idea, you reward it and run with it. That's the best way to show the watcher that players who are involved and engaged make the game more fun for everyone at the table.

Transforming the kobolds

Kobold Hall was designed, in part, to show off the variety that exists even among kobolds, which have always been among the weakest creatures in the D&D game. The adventure includes statistics for five different kinds of kobolds: level 1 skirmishers, level 1 artillery (slingers), level 1 minions, level 2 soldiers

(dragonshields), and the level 3 artillery leader, the wyrmpriest. You have a lot of variety there, and the traps and drakes in the encounters mix things up even more, but some players find the waves of kobolds a little repetitive.

You can inject some more variety into the adventure with some simple monster substitutions. You could replace a kobold skirmisher in area 1 with three kruthik hatchlings (level 2 minions), for example. The more *Monster Manual* volumes you have available, the more options you have for substitutions.
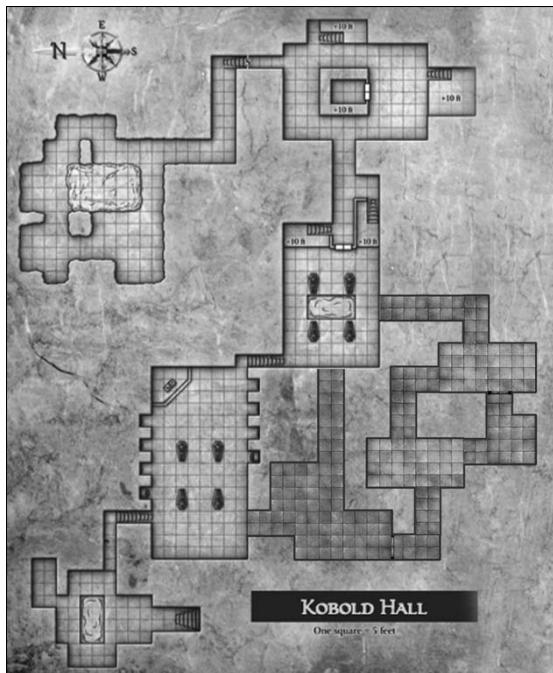
In theory, you could replace all the kobolds in the adventure with different monsters, dramatically altering the flavor of the adventure. Goblins could fill in for most of the kobolds, with goblin sharpshooters replacing kobold slingers, goblin warriors standing in for kobold skirmishers, goblin cutters in place of the kobold minions, hobgoblin soldiers instead of kobold dragon-shields, and a hobgoblin warcaster serving as the big boss instead of the wyrmpriest. There are only a few cases where the goblin levels are different from the kobold levels, and they're not so different that they'll make a huge change to the difficulty of the encounters. You might also decide to replace the drakes that appear in the adventure, using dire rats or kruthik young instead of guard drakes and a rat swarm instead of a spiretop drake.

Expanding the adventure

Another way to add some variety to the adventure and add hooks to engage your players is to simply add encounters. By simply adding doors, halls, and rooms to the dungeon map, you can add decision points to make the dungeon more interesting, and you can add encounters to expand the story you're telling with the adventure. If you're planning a marathon D&D session of eight to ten hours (hey, it happens!), adding three or four encounters will fill out the adventure to fit the time you have. Adding that many encounters will also expand the adventure enough that characters who complete the whole thing will probably reach 2nd level.

The easiest places in the dungeon to add rooms are south of areas 2 and 3, and north of area 3. The map shown in Figure 7-1 provides one way to add two encounter areas to the original map of Kobold Hall, adding a couple of decision points. A simple alternative, suggested in the original adventure, is to expand the dungeon with more tunnels and caves below the dragon's lair, but that means the dungeon remains very linear, offering no real choices to the players.

Chapter 23 provides ten examples of heroic-tier encounters that you can use to expand this adventure. The map in Figure 7-1 incorporates two of those encounters — Hobgoblin Guards (a level 3 encounter) and Goblin Lair (a level 1 encounter). It's up to you to decide how the goblins and kobolds get along: Are they working together under the dragon's leadership? Are the goblins trying to establish a lair here and drive the kobolds out? Explore some possibilities and see where your imagination takes you.

Figure 7-1:
You can expand Kobold Hall by adding rooms.

Running the Adventure

Kobold Hall is a simple adventure without much in the way of plot or decision-making, but it's a great introduction to the game for new players — or players who are new to 4th Edition. The rest of this chapter walks you through what you need to do to run the adventure for your players.

It's just a game

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

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

Grounding the characters

As the players are creating their characters, refer to the section "Involving the Players" on pages 208 and 209 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. For each character, find the character's race and class in that section and talk with the player about his or her place in the home base of Fallcrest.

For example, Amy is creating an eladrin wizard named Meriele. You might suggest that she traveled to Fallcrest for one of two reasons: to study with Nimozaran or to look into the state of her ancestral home in the Moon Hills. Maybe she came for both reasons, or one reason is just a pretext and the other is her true motivation: She could easily have found a wizard tutor among her own people, but seeking Nimozaran also gives her a convenient excuse to see whether her family's tales of owning land in the Moon Hills have any truth to them.

Meanwhile, Carter is creating a dragonborn warlord named Balarash. Looking at the dragonborn and the warlord entries, you see a name in common — House Azaer, the small, tiefling-owned trading company in town. Discussing it with Carter, you agree that Balarash has been working as a caravan guard for House Azaer, though he's seeking more fame and glory than that job is likely to provide.

Hooking the characters

When the characters are ready to go, it's time to start the adventure. Page 210 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* provides three hooks you can use to draw the characters into the action going on at Kobold Hall. One hook might be enough to bring the whole group on board, particularly if it's a close-knit group. The "Kobold Bounty" hook is a straightforward hook for characters who are looking for adventure — the Lord Warden makes a public announcement of a bounty on kobolds, and the characters just have to claim it.

If you've grounded the characters in the town already, it's easy to add hooks that appeal to specific characters (and their players). Perhaps the characters do hear about the kobold bounty. But Meriele also hears Nimozaran's concerns about how well the kobolds seem to be organized (the "Terrible Secret" hook). And it turns out that Balarash was guarding the caravan from Winterhaven when kobolds attacked it and stole Teldorthan's dragon hide, so he has a good reason to try to get the dwarf armorer's stolen goods back (the "Dragon Hide" hook). Just like that, the group has three good reasons to go to Kobold Hall.

It's okay to gloss over the interactions that lead to these hooks. Just make sure that the players have the chance to ask any questions they have, so you can move things along to get to the action. You can find more information about Teldorthan and his stolen dragon hide on page 204 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, more about Nimozaran on page 204 (Septarch's Tower), and more about the Lord Warden, Faren Markelhay, on page 201 (Moonstone Keep).

Getting to the action

Now it's time for the main event — the characters' excursion into Kobold Hall. Start by giving each player a moment to introduce his or her character to the other players, telling them the character's name, race, and class, and a brief description of what the other characters see when they look at the character. Then read the "Players' Introduction" on page 210 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide.* That read-aloud text brings the characters through a quick journey to the ruined manor and right up to a trapdoor leading to the dungeon. Next, ask the players what they want their characters to do.

The most straightforward thing they can do is open the trapdoor and head down the stairs to area 1. Here are a few other things they might try, with notes you can use to help narrate the action. If a player wants his or her character to try something different, go for it! Listen to what the character wants to do and then decide how best to adjudicate the action.

Examine the Trapdoor: Any characters that want to examine the trapdoor — perhaps looking for signs of passage, searching for a hint that it's trapped, or listening for signs of life below — should make a Perception check. Regardless of the results of the check, you can describe the trapdoor in a little more detail — it's old and worn, made of wood bound together with iron bars, with a heavy iron ring to lift it. If a character gets a 15 or better on a Perception check, give more information relevant to whatever the character's looking for:

- ✔ There are some footprints visible around the trapdoor, and enough scuffs and smears appear around the edge of it to suggest that it sees a fair amount of use. The footprints are small, animal-like prints with three clawed toes.
- ✔ There's no sign that the trapdoor is trapped.
- ✔ There's no sound behind the trapdoor.

Make Preparations: Characters might want to light torches, draw weapons, or otherwise get ready to descend into a dungeon. Listen to what the players describe their characters doing and take note of any significant preparations that could affect later encounters.

Open the Trapdoor: Any character can pull the trapdoor open without making a check. You might want to tell the players that it opens silently on well-oiled hinges, or that it creaks open loudly. Behind the trapdoor, the characters see stairs leading down into the darkness, with only a hint of an eerie green glow coming from somewhere inside.

Area 1: Sludge Pit

As soon as the characters open the trapdoor, it's time to start laying down a tactical map. (See Chapter 10 for advice about using tactical maps.) Start with the stairs and perhaps the 10 feet of hallway beyond. If you're using D&D *Dungeon Tiles,* you can put down a single 2x4 tile with stairs and a landing. Ask the players to position their miniatures on the stairs, showing you the order in which they make their way down.

Once the first characters start down the stairs, you can show the players the rest of the room and read them the read-aloud text at the start of the encounter. The kobold's shouted warning, "Intrudersss!" is a cue that combat is beginning, so you can go straight from read-aloud text to initiative rolls. Roll initiative once for the kobold skirmishers and a second time for the kobold slingers, record those numbers, and ask the players for their characters' initiative results as well. Then combat begins, with everyone acting in initiative order.

Using the Pit: Although the adventure text describes what happens when PCs fall into the pit, it's far more likely that kobolds will end up down there, caught in the goo. The kobolds don't have powers that can push or slide characters over the edge, and their low Strength scores mean they're not very good at using the bull rush action (see page 287 in the *Player's Handbook*). Player characters, on the other hand, have a wide selection of powers to move enemies around the battlefield, from the wizard's at-will *thunder wave* and the fighter's at-will *tide of iron* to the warlock's nasty 1st-level daily power, *curse of the dark dream*. The pit has the same effects on the kobolds as it does on PCs. Remember that characters and monsters can make a saving throw to avoid falling into the pit when a push or slide would otherwise send them tumbling.

Shifty Kobolds: Kobolds have a special racial ability to shift as a minor action. This means, among other things, that a kobold can shift (for example, to move next to a character), attack an adjacent enemy, and then shift again (so it doesn't end its turn next to a character). A kobold can also attack, shift away, and then move farther away from its target, without provoking opportunity attacks. Bear these two things in mind as you run the kobolds:

✔ **Player characters aren't shifty.** It's easy for players, especially new players (or players who are used to 3rd Edition rules), to see a kobold's shift as a minor action and assume that they can do the same, or forget that a shift normally requires a move action. Watch out for characters imitating the kobolds, and emphasize that the kobolds are using a special power that breaks the normal rules.

✔ **Kobolds aren't geniuses.** Let a player character fighter feel cool and special because a marked kobold tried to shift away from him or her, provoking an immediate attack because of the fighter's combat challenge class feature. Let the kobolds make this mistake once, but after that they should probably wise up around the fighter.

The Portcullis: For the characters to get deeper into the dungeon, they have to get past the portcullis on the east wall. If one of the characters is a halfling, he or she can slip through the portcullis as the kobolds do and pull the lever on the other side to open the gate. Otherwise, a character needs to make a successful Strength check (DC 15) to force the portcullis up. In the heat of battle, make the players roll checks if their characters try to lift the portcullis. When the fight is over, though, it's safe to assume that the characters will get the portcullis open through repeated tries.

Between Encounters: After the characters have defeated the kobolds, let the players know that you'll assume the characters take a short rest after every encounter unless they tell you otherwise. A short rest lets them spend healing surges and regain any encounter powers they spent during the encounter, so they can start the next encounter more or less fresh.

After the characters defeat the kobolds, take their short rest, and get the portcullis open, they can take the narrow staircase down to area 2.

Area 2: The Tomb

Once again, start the encounter by having the players arrange their miniatures or otherwise show you how they're going down the stairs — who's in front, and who's bringing up the rear. Because the staircase is only 5 feet wide, they have to go down these stairs in single file. (When the encounter begins, remember and remind the players that a character can move through an ally's square, so they can move past each other on the stairs.) After they're arranged on the stairs, read the read-aloud text to start the encounter.

Using Perception: At the start of the encounter, ask the players what their characters' passive Perception scores are and make a note of the numbers. (A character's passive Perception is equal to 10 + the character's Perception check bonus. It's as if the character rolled a 10 on a Perception check.)

Any character with a passive Perception of 20 or higher notices that there's some kind of mechanism in the helms set in the niches. A character with a passive Perception of 25 or higher (unlikely at 1st level) spots the trigger stone nearest the bottom of the stairs, and that character can see other trigger stones as he or she moves around the room.

Characters can also attempt Perception checks to find the trigger stones, particularly once they know there's a trap in the room. It's a standard action to look around for a trigger stone and make a Perception check. If the player rolls a 25 or better, you can point out the locations of any trigger stones in sight.

Keeping Track of the Trap: The trickiest thing about running this encounter is keeping track of where the trigger stones are. Keep the map in front of you as characters move around the room, and pay particular attention when they cross in front of the alcoves containing the trapped suits of armor.

On the kobolds' turn, keep an eye on the map as well. The kobolds shouldn't enter squares that trigger the traps. Have them try to end their turn in a square next to trigger stones, so that characters who move up to attack them will trigger the trap.

Resolving Creative Solutions: Inevitably, players will come up with creative solutions for dealing with the trap beyond the countermeasures listed in the book. Keep an open mind and try to reward clever thinking with good results. For example, characters might try to block the darts as they fire out from the trap, perhaps by holding a shield in front of the visor or throwing a cloak over the armor. You might decide that characters get cover against the trap's attack (a –2 penalty on the attack). Could a character turn the armor so the darts fire into the alcove, or turn the helmet so the darts can't go out the visor? You might ask the character to make one or two successful DC 20 Strength checks, sort of like a very simple skill challenge. If you can remain flexible and think on your feet, you'll go a long way toward teaching your players that D&D is a game about creative thinking and problem solving, encouraging them to try anything they can think of!

Describing the Altar: Tiamat's symbol, a star shape formed from five talons or teeth, appears on page 163 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. If the players want their characters to examine the altar, you can describe that symbol. They could also attempt Religion checks (DC 15 to 25) to learn more about the doctrine of Tiamat, which is described on the same page.

Area 3: Skull-Skull!

Once again, have the players arrange their miniatures on the stairs before you read them the read-aloud text. It can be fun to see how quickly your players figure out what's going on in this room. If they need a hint, angry kobolds might scream, "Big hairies interrupt our skull-skull game!" in their high-pitched voices.

Using the Pit: Turnabout, they say, is fair play. In area 1, the kobolds didn't have any way to push characters into the sludge pit. Here, the skull-skull stone can accomplish that while the kobolds keep a safe distance from the pit. The kobolds' goal is to keep the characters from getting through the door, and the pit can help them accomplish that goal.

Using Minions: This encounter illustrates a useful principle for designing encounters that include minions: Don't show all the minions to the player characters at once. This encounter begins with two minions up on the platforms in view of the characters, and two others behind the platforms. The two visible minions are also far enough apart that a single area attack is unlikely to affect them both. This arrangement covers the greatest weakness of minion monsters, which is their susceptibility to area attacks.

Area 4: The Big Boss

The start of this encounter assumes that the kobolds in this room heard the sounds of fighting from area 3, just down the hall, and are ready for the characters' arrival. The kobolds in this room didn't run to join the fight in the hall because their primary duty is to protect the chieftain. Here, they have a trap they can turn against the intruders to help keep their wyrmpriest safe.

Using the Boulder: The boulder rolls around the room at a speed of 8, which means it can actually move 16 squares each round, because it's not taking any other actions except opportunity actions to attack characters it rolls over.

The kobold slingers prefer to use their glue shot against characters who are in the path of the boulder.

Marking Characters: In another example of turnabout being fair play, the kobold dragonshields can mark player characters, just as paladins and fighters can mark monsters. The kobolds use this ability in the same way PC defenders do — they mark opponents that might otherwise attack the wyrmpriest. A simple mark, without the additional threat of a paladin's *divine challenge* or a fighter's combat challenge, might not be enough to keep characters from attacking the wyrmpriest, but it's much like giving the wyrmpriest a defense bonus.

Area 5: The True Threat

The map for this encounter doesn't quite agree with the read-aloud text, and we recommend that you go with the text in this case — give the players a sense that their characters are descending through natural caverns stretching deep below Kobold Hall.

Spotting the Dragon: Roll a Stealth check for Szartharaxx (using his Dexterity check, 1d20 + 1) and compare the result with the characters' passive Perception checks rather than asking them to roll Perception checks to begin the encounter. Any character whose passive Perception is lower than the dragon's Stealth check is surprised at the start of the encounter.

Troubleshooting: The trickiest thing about this encounter is the possibility that the dragon might kill one or more characters. If the characters are worn thin after fighting the kobolds in area 4, you can encourage them to take an extended rest before they venture down into the dragon's caves. If they get

into a fight with the dragon, make sure the players realize that their characters can run away. Szartharaxx is proud and won't follow them out of the cave, giving the characters the chance to escape, recover from the fight, and perhaps return better prepared.

Roleplaying the Dragon: Szartharaxx is a brutal opponent, but he's also reasonably intelligent. On his turn in combat, let the dragon talk with the characters. He could just taunt them — playing with his food, perhaps — or he could boast about some of the information that appears in the "Setup" section of the encounter (how he ate the rival kobold chieftains and collects tribute from the Skull Kickers, for example). If you're planning ahead, he could drop some hints that lead the characters to whatever adventure you plan to run next.

Ham it up! Find a voice you can do easily that suggests a dragon — it could be a fierce growl, a menacing hiss, or a low whisper. What word might a dragon use to refer to player characters? Bipeds? Mammals? Meat?

Dragons of myth and fantasy fiction are memorable opponents, and Szartharaxx should be the same. Make sure the characters know his name (at least how to pronounce it — SAR-tha-rax), and give them something to remember him by. Of course, a fight to the edge of death is usually pretty memorable, but it'll be even more so if you play the dragon as more than just his combat statistics.

Doling out the treasure from Kobold Hall

Page 126 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* shows ten treasure parcels that represent the total amount of treasure a party of five 1st-level characters should acquire before they reach 2nd level. The Kobold Hall adventure gives out five of those ten parcels:

- ✔ A bag containing 60 gp in area 2. This is parcel 9.

- ✔ Area 3 contains scattered treasure worth a total of 200 gp, which is parcel 5.

- ✔ A *+1 staff of the war mage* (a level 3 magic item) in area 4. This is parcel 3.

- ✔ The dragon's treasure in area 5, including 100 gp, a pearl worth 20 gp, and a *+1 lifedrinker longsword* (a level 5 magic item). The monetary treasure is parcel 7 or 8, and the sword is parcel 1.

If you use either of the story hooks to draw the characters in to the adventure, they'll earn more treasure as quest rewards:

- ✔ **If you use the Dragon Hide hook** for the adventure, Teldorthan's reward of 200 gp is parcel 6 plus an extra 20 gp (or half of parcel 10).

- ✔ **If you use the Kobold Bounty hook,** the total reward (assuming the characters kill all the kobolds) is 290 gp. That's parcel 6 plus parcel 7 or 8, but it comes up 10 gp short.
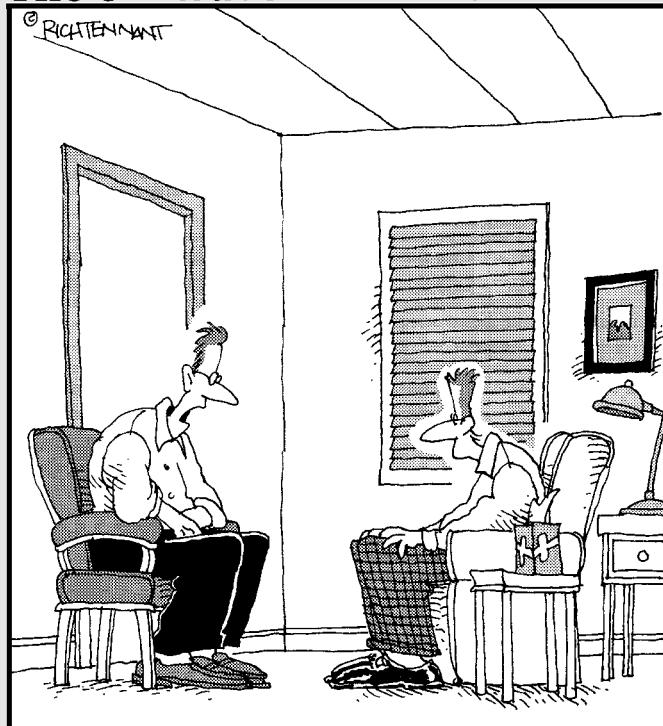
If you use both hooks, you should change the promised reward to make use of different treasure parcels. It would be perfectly reasonable for Teldorthan to promise a magic item (parcel 2 or 4) instead of monetary treasure if characters complete his quest, and Nimozaran could also give a magic item reward.

Depending on how many quests you gave the characters to hook them in to the adventure, they will have completed six to eight encounters' worth of XP. If they complete all three quests, they'll reach 2nd level, and in that case you should make sure they've acquired all ten treasure parcels for 1st level.
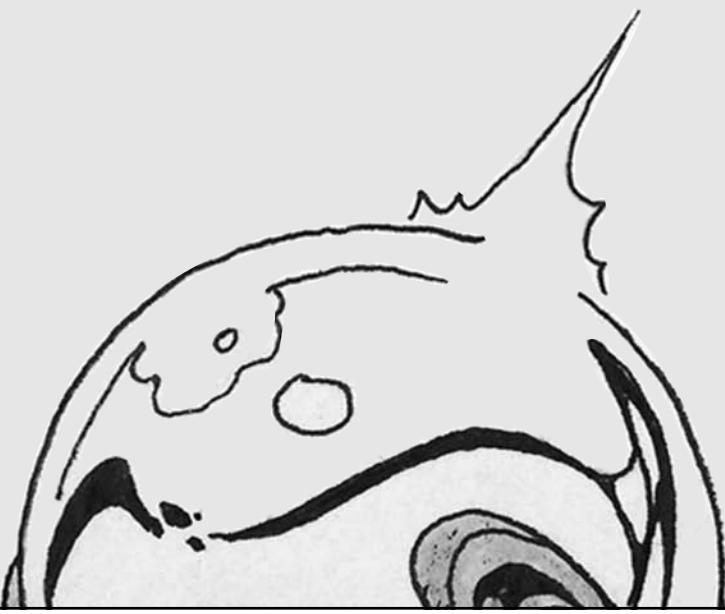
Part II

Advanced Dungeon Mastering

The 5th Wave   By Rich Tennant
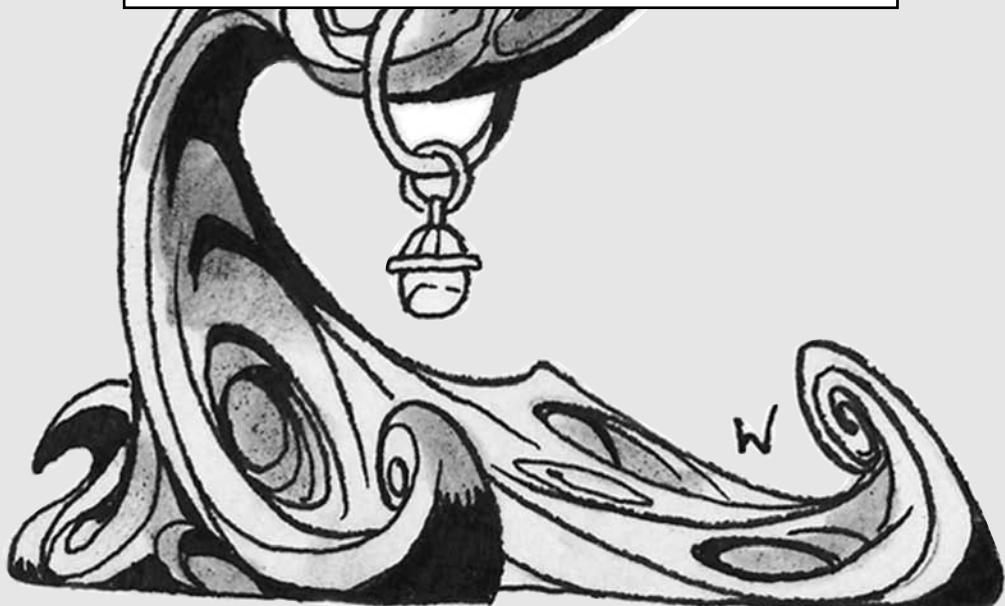
"As your therapist I'd advise past life regression therapy and a series of medications. As your Dungeon Master I'd tell you to go bash a bunch of Orcs until you feel better."

In this part . . .

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

Chapter 8

Running an Ongoing Game

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

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

✔ **The game has a chance to grow.** Most importantly, a recurring game gives you the opportunity to evolve the D&D game into a more rewarding experience than you can achieve with a single game session. You can tackle extended adventures that require multiple game sessions to finish and add broad storylines to the game, and the players can keep their characters and grow them over time by gaining experience points, acquiring magic items, and building their characters' personalities and backstories.

✔ **You've got players right where you want 'em.** You don't have to go searching for players every time you want to play D&D — you can stick with the players you already have.

✔ **Everyone knows the niceties.** You can easily establish some basic game etiquette and table manners for the game because the players are all regulars and they know how things are supposed to go.

Choosing the Right Format

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

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

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

The standalone session

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

The standalone session has some important advantages:

- ✔ **It's simple.** Because nothing continues to the next session, you have no record-keeping to speak of.

- ✔ **It gives you the opportunity to try very different styles or scenarios each time you play.** One week the players can be barbarians and outcasts hunting monsters in the arctic wastes, and the next week they can be urbane swashbucklers and nobles solving a murder mystery in a great medieval city. You can explore a tremendous variety of D&D adventures this way.

- ✔ **It's a great format for giving players the chance to try their hands at being the Dungeon Master.** It's only one game session, after all.

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

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

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

- ✔ Your D&D game sessions are infrequent or hard to schedule.

- ✔ The players don't invest in their characters and like making up new characters more than continuing to play old ones.

- ✔ The membership of your game group changes frequently.

The dungeon-of-the-week adventure

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

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

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

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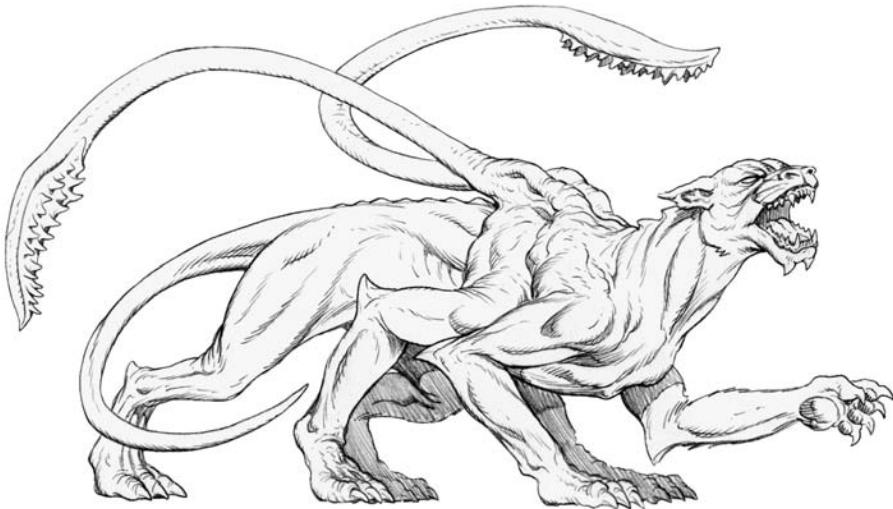
The *one-shot campaign* is one long adventure that spans many game sessions because exploring a deep dungeon isn't the work of just one evening. A D&D group can tackle about one encounter in an hour of gaming, so any adventure that features more than three to five distinct encounters might require multiple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

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

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

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

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

The continuing campaign

Many D&D players feel that the game is at its very best when they get to keep their same characters week after week. Over time, the players get to know their characters and watch them grow in power, experience, and heroic reputation. The adventuring party moves from one dungeon or adventure to the next, which often presents an entirely new threat unrelated to the challenge of the previous adventure. When you string two (or more) adventures together for the same group of characters, it's a *continuing campaign.* The players keep their characters, and you slowly build up a history of dungeons plundered and monsters defeated by the heroes.

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

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

✔ You have several adventures you'd like to run for your gaming group.

✔ You enjoy the process of world-building and want to show off your creativity.

✔ The players enjoy roleplaying and exploring their characters in depth.

✔ The membership of your game group tends to remain stable over time.

Building a Basic Campaign

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

Creating the home base

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

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

Home base NPCs

Unless the players like to roleplay complete misfits, every character in the party implies a network of NPC patrons, advisers, friends, and rivals. For example, if one of the player characters is a cleric of Erathis, it's natural to ask where other devotees of Erathis might be found. If another player character is a wizard, it's good to know whether the home base has any kind of organized wizards' guild or someone who might serve as a mentor and tutor.

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

- An authority figure, such as a mayor or lord, who can ask the PCs to help out the town by solving problems (and thus providing adventure opportunities)

- A sage, a counselor, or an adviser who can answer questions for the PCs

✔ A merchant who can buy loot and sell items and equipment the PCs are interested in

✔ A healer who can use rituals to fix injuries or curses that the PCs can't handle with their own rituals

✔ Innkeepers, bartenders, and other common folk as needed to make the home base feel like, well, home

Commerce

The player characters need access to people who will give them gold in exchange for valuables they recover from monster lairs. The PCs also need a place to commission rituals they can't do themselves and buy useful magic items such as potions, scrolls, and wands.

Give some thought to how you want to handle magic items in your campaign. Can the characters sell items they don't want at the home base? Can they buy items from someone in town? Or do they have to rely on rituals to enchant and disenchant items on their own?

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

✔ A temple or similar place where the PCs can obtain healing rituals (especially important for low-level characters who don't yet have access to the rituals needed to fix problems such as disease, curses, and death)

✔ An armorer's and weaponmaker's shop, selling most common weapons and armor

✔ A dealer in unusual adventuring gear (sunrods, lock picks, and other dungeoneering supplies) and minor magical items, such as potions or ritual scrolls

✔ A place to meet potential NPC contacts, hirelings, or allies

Story

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

✔ Where are the nearest dungeons, ruins, or monster lairs? How do the locals view these places?

✔ What does the place look like? Is it a mining town in the hills? A half-forgotten seaport on a fog-shrouded coast? A frontier outpost surrounded by vast forests?

Getting the players to help

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

✔ **Treasure recorder:** This player writes down every bit of loot the player characters recover, where they got it, which character is carrying it, and what the party ultimately does with it.

✔ **Journal keeper:** This player records the significant events and encounters of the evening's game session, including which NPCs the player characters meet, which monsters they fight, and any potential clues they discover.

✔ **Initiative organizer:** This player maintains the initiative order in combat. (This isn't really record-keeping, but having a player take over this job frees up the DM to concentrate on creating an exciting battle.)

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

The Internet is a great tool for tracking and sharing your group's journal and records. D&D Insider provides tools you can use to keep notes on your campaign and share records among your players. Alternatively, simply having the player who keeps the campaign journal post those notes on a blog makes them readily accessible to you and the other players.

✔ What do the residents do to feed themselves? To make money?

✔ Who's in charge?

✔ Who keeps order in the town?

✔ Are there any potential villains or opponents living in or near the town that the PCs will need to deal with?

Linking adventures together

A vital step in creating an ongoing campaign is to provide a link from one adventure to the next. For example, the player characters defeat the orc warchief of the Stonemarch and drive away the orcs that had been raiding Winterhaven. For your next adventure, you have a vampire-hunting expedition in the crypts beneath the dwarven halls of Hammerfast. How do you tie these adventures together into a continuing story?

The short answer is that you don't have to. After the player characters defeat the warchief of the Stonemarch, they return to their home base. You might start your next session like this:

> *You spend a few days resting and recuperating in Fallcrest, spending a bit of your hard-won treasure. You can do any shopping you want to do, or enchant magic items of your level or lower. When you've been back about three days, a dwarf messenger finds you and presents you with a letter from the High Master of Hammerfast, a strong and wealthy town to the east.*
>
> *The letter says that the High Master has heard of your success against the orcs, and she requests you to come to Hammerfast on urgent business. Something about an undead problem. What do you want to do?*

Do you see what happened there? You dropped the hook for the next adventure right in the players' laps. This technique might seem a little heavy handed, but most D&D players understand that you're just trying to get their characters to the adventure, and they'll forgive you for being so transparent about it.

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

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

Outlining a campaign arc

Like any good story, a campaign needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. You don't need to plan out every adventure the characters will have over the course of 30 levels, but sketching out a *campaign arc* is still a good idea. If you have at least a basic outline of what you want to accomplish over the course of the campaign, you'll have an easier time planning adventures as you go and tying those adventures together.

A good way to think about a campaign arc is in terms of an overarching theme or story. The story could be a struggle against a villain who grows in power alongside the player characters, or a long-term quest against increasingly powerful minions and servants of an epic threat like a demon prince or primordial. A campaign arc built around a theme might feature a lot of adventures involving particular types of creatures, such as aberrant monsters or dragons.

The simplest way to create a campaign arc is to select published adventures that suit your theme and arrange them in order from lowest-level to highest. You can fill in the gaps with adventures you create yourself, with published adventures that you alter to fit with the campaign theme, or with adventures that have nothing to do with the theme at all.

Next, think about story elements you can use to link the adventures together. That could be as simple as making the characters members of an organization dedicated to ridding the world of evil dragons, or bringing them into conflict with a group that reveres evil dragons. For a richer story, you could weave several different groups with different (sometimes conflicting) goals around the central theme of the campaign.

For example, say you want to build a campaign arc that brings the player characters into conflict with various cultists and minions of the demon prince Orcus over the course of their careers, culminating in a climactic battle with the demon prince himself when they're 30th level. A simple story explanation for this ongoing quest could be that the characters are all members of a crusading order of knights dedicated Pelor or Bahamut, who are opposed to Orcus in principle. The characters share a common goal and motivation, and that can be enough to drive the campaign.

Alternatively, the characters might come at the campaign from a number of different perspectives. Perhaps the cleric and the fighter are devoted to Pelor and seek to obliterate Orcus's evil from the world. But say the paladin serves the Raven Queen, who opposes Orcus because the demon prince seeks to usurp her control over death. The wizard, meanwhile, has a mysterious mentor who sends her on quests opposing Orcus for reasons that aren't quite clear — until later in the campaign, when the players learn that this mysterious mentor is actually an evil lich who worships Vecna!

Taking a cue from your TV

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

In an episodic series like *Star Trek,* each week's show (or adventure) presents a problem or challenge, which the heroes then tackle. At the end of the show, the problem's been solved. For the next show, the *Enterprise* goes to a new planet, encounters a new problem, and the characters have a new adventure. You don't have to spend a lot of time explaining how the *Enterprise* got to the new planet or why it was sent there; all that's really important is the fact that it's there now. Substitute *dungeon* for *planet* and swap a long ride or march for warp speed, and you have the makings of a D&D campaign.

Even a very episodic series like *Star Trek* does have some connections between episodes. Sometimes events or characters from earlier episodes resurface in later ones. When you use this technique in your game, it reminds the players that their characters' successes and failures might come back to haunt them at some future date.

By placing the characters in the context of organizations, religions, and relationships, you add story elements to your campaign arc that might suggest adventure ideas or minor quests along the way. The cleric's personal devotion to Pelor is sufficient motivation for early in the campaign, but at some later point you might want to involve NPC servants of Pelor who either support the cleric or take issue with his methods and become antagonists. The wizard's evil mentor could provide a significant subplot that actually distracts the characters from fighting Orcus for a while around the middle of the campaign.

Fundamentally, sketching out a campaign arc is about creating story elements and starting to brainstorm how they fit together. You'll figure out the details as the campaign progresses and as new ideas occur to you. But sketching out the basics ahead of time helps you move the story on toward the events you have in mind.

Using the Sample Base: Fallcrest

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

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

TIP

We think it's best to start the action of the campaign at the door of the dungeon, not at the home base. It's fine to talk with players about their characters' roots in town, their mentors or patrons, and the reasons they're at the dungeon. But give the players a good taste of heroic deeds and dark dangers before you show them a place where their characters do ordinary things like bartering for goods or talking to people who don't want to kill them. Fallcrest is the answer to the question, "So where do we go when we leave this dungeon?"

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

> *A pile of stone rubble alongside the old King's Road, ruins of a long-fallen watchtower, signals your arrival into the outskirts of Fallcrest. Soon the hills and forests give way to tended fields and orchards, then the walls of town come into view, gray and forbidding stone. The rush of the river greets your ears, along with the distant roar of the Nentir Falls.*

In Chapter 7, we discuss how to ground player characters in Fallcrest using the information on pages 208 and 209 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and from there how to draw them into an adventure in Kobold Hall. In the rest of this chapter, we talk a little about how to use the information in Chapter 11 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to turn your adventures in the surrounding area into a campaign.

Story elements and your campaign

The Fallcrest chapter (Chapter 11) in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is full of story elements that you can use in your campaign if you want to. These elements fall into three categories:

✔ **Player character backgrounds:** Part of giving your players roots in Fallcrest is tying them in to the story elements that exist in the town. When you connect a player character warlord to Nimozaran the Green, you're also connecting that character to the history of the town, to the wizard's halfling apprentice, and to Nimozaran's need for gold. Tying a warlord to House Azaer gives the character an interest in events across the Nentir Vale, and might bring the character into conflict with Barstomun Strongbeard as he tries to extend the influence of the porters' guild.

TIP

As you work with your players to establish their characters' backgrounds, be sure to pay attention to the elements of those backgrounds that interest the players the most. Those are elements you should make an effort to weave into your campaign arc.

✔ **DM interest:** As you read through the information about Fallcrest and the Nentir Vale, make notes about which story elements intrigue you. Paragraphs that begin with "**DM Tip:**" are pointers to adventure opportunities, but you don't have to use them all. Note the ones that appeal to you and look for ways to tie them to character backgrounds and other events. For example, perhaps two DM tips stir your interest: the note about the ancestral sword of the Markelhays (in the section "18. Wizard's Gate," page 203) and the description of Serim Selduzar (in the section "4. Nentir Inn," page 200). You could easily link these two story elements by having Serim concoct a plot to retrieve the Markelhay sword, using the PCs as his agents. Or he might seek to discredit the current Lord Warden by bringing Aranda Markelhay's cowardly flight to public attention.

✔ **Ignore the rest:** Just because the *Dungeon Master's Guide* says something about Fallcrest, that doesn't necessarily mean it's true in your campaign. If certain story elements in the chapter don't hold any appeal to you, ignore them. If you have no desire to send the player characters to fight bandits at Raven Roost, Grundelmar at the House of the Sun (area 10) doesn't need to have any interest in conditions on the Trade Road. The dwarf priest might point the characters in the direction of a different adventure, or he might not have anything interesting to contribute to their lives at all.

Adventures in and near Fallcrest

The Fallcrest chapter (Chapter 11 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) is full of adventure ideas. The description of the town itself mentions no less than three dungeons within and below the town:

✔ The Tower of Waiting (area 1)

✔ Ancient Crypts and Moonstone Caverns (area 9)

✔ The Catacombs (area 15)

Beyond the town itself, the rest of the Nentir Vale is equally rich in ancient ruins and haunted catacombs:

✔ Gardmore Abbey

✔ The Sword Barrow

✔ Kalton Manor

- ✔ Keep on the Shadowfell
- ✔ Kobold Hall (detailed in the same chapter)
- ✔ Raven Roost
- ✔ Ruins of Fastormel
- ✔ The Fanged Jaws of Kulkoszar (in the Stonemarch)
- ✔ Temple of Yellow Skulls
- ✔ Thunderspire

Most of these are just story ideas that you can flesh out into full dungeons for your campaign. And these are just the dungeons — you can also create urban adventures within Fallcrest or one of the other towns in the area, or outdoor adventures anywhere in the Nentir Vale. See Part III in this book for more information on designing your own adventures.

Three of these dungeons are already detailed in published D&D products. Kobold Hall, of course, is fleshed out in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, although there's plenty of room for you to expand it if you desire. The Nentir Vale was also designed as a springboard for the published D&D adventures *Keep on the Shadowfell* and *Thunderspire Labyrinth*. You can run your characters on these adventures and the third in the series, *Pyramid of Shadows*, and bring them all the way from 1st level to 10th level without using any of the other plots or story elements in the chapter. However, you can enrich your campaign by using these story elements as subplots and detours as the characters follow the main plots of the adventure series.

Chapter 9

Choosing Your Game Style

Everyone who sits down to play D&D as a player or a DM has a preferred style of game play. Some people are most comfortable with combat-heavy games that shy away from involved storylines or extended roleplaying. Others view combat as a means to an end and don't mind if some game sessions don't involve any kind of fight. As DM, you might decide to run your game with tight control over the rules, or you might prefer to let your players help you in your role as rules adjudicator so you can relax and focus on the story.

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

Pages 8–10 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* discuss player motivations, with an emphasis on what you can do to keep your players happy. Page 12 goes on to discuss some elements of DM style that we explore more in this chapter.

Analyzing the Players

If a D&D adventure is a movie or an episode of a TV series, the Dungeon Master is the scriptwriter, director, and supporting cast all rolled into one. Like any good moviemaker, you need to think about the audience you're trying to reach with your game — the players. If the players are interested in a fast-paced shoot-'em-up sort of game, they aren't going to be entertained by

exploring their emotional range with hours of free-form roleplaying. Similarly, if the players like to invest their characters with personalities and mannerisms that no one ever notices because they do nothing but fight, fight, fight, they aren't going to be as satisfied with the game you're running as they could be. To present a game that the players will want to come back to week after week, you need to figure out what they're looking for in a game and give it to them on a regular basis.

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

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* outlines eight motivations that tend to bring people to the game table:

- ✔ **Actor:** Enjoys playing a character to the hilt.
- ✔ **Explorer:** Wants to know all there is to know about the game world.
- ✔ **Instigator:** Wants to get right to the fun.
- ✔ **Power Gamer:** Enjoys getting more powerful.
- ✔ **Slayer:** Likes beating on monsters.
- ✔ **Storyteller:** Thrives on the narrative of the game.
- ✔ **Thinker:** Wants to figure things out.
- ✔ **Watcher:** Likes hanging out with friends.

Most people don't come to the table for just one reason or enjoy just one part of the game — fortunately, human beings are more complicated than that. This means that even the most serious slayer is capable of deriving some enjoyment from the parts of the game that involve roleplaying and interaction, and dyed-in-the-wool actors can have a good time with intense combat action as well.

Understanding these basic motivations is a start — you then need to put that knowledge to good use. Get a piece of paper and jot down the names of the players in your game, and then think of things each player seemed to especially like or dislike about your last session. What sort of character does each player play? Does the player try to speak in character, or is he or she more hands-off when it comes to roleplaying? What bores the player?

You don't have to do this in secret, by the way. Don't worry about skewing the results of the experiment by letting the subjects know that they're being observed. In fact, you'll probably get better and more accurate information if

you simply *ask* the players what they like best about D&D and what they hope to get out of the game. Here's a sample player survey you can use to figure out what the players like:

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

   Players who liked "talky" roleplaying encounters best might be explorers or actors; players who preferred a combat encounter are more likely slayers or power gamers; and players who enjoyed a puzzle or tricky challenge might be thinkers.

2. What was the part you liked the least?

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

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

   A player who is closely following the story of the adventure and thinking hard about what comes next is probably an explorer or actor. A player focused on the next big obstacle to defeat may be a power gamer or thinker, but a player who doesn't care what comes next might be an instigator or slayer.

4. How would you improve the game?

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

Balancing Play Styles

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

In general terms, you should adjust your own game style to reflect the tastes of the players. For example, say you have five players at the table: Two actors, one explorer, one slayer, and one thinker. For this group, most of the adventures should include an even split between combat encounters and opportunities for interaction and exploration. On the other hand, if the group is composed exclusively of power gamers and slayers, the vast majority of

your game should be spent in dungeons and battle scenes. The only reason to throw a noncombat encounter at this group is for the sake of pacing and variety.

DM Styles: Running the Game You Run Best

When you're thinking about DMing a game session or adventure, the first thing you should ask yourself is what sort of game you want to run. Do you want a game with plenty of fighting? A roleplaying-heavy game with lots of NPC interactions? A low-level game in the heroic tier or a game in the upper levels of paragon or epic play? Before you give any real thought to what the players might like best in the game, you need to decide what *you* would like best. If you try to run a game that you aren't really interested in running, it's going to show.

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

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

Take a look at the descriptions that follow and see whether you can recognize yourself. The player descriptions we use in the following sections refer to the player motivations (actor, explorer, instigator, power gamer, slayer, storyteller, thinker, and watcher) discussed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

Action movie director

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

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

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

Storyteller

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

You might be a storyteller if . . .

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

Worldbuilder

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

You might be a worldbuilder if . . .

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

Puzzlemaker

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

You might be a puzzlemaker if . . .

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

Connector

If you're a *connector* DM, you see your game as a set of evolving relationships between the player characters, their NPC allies, and the signature villains or monsters. Like the storyteller, you're mostly interested in telling a great story — but you see the story as something that spans multiple adventures.

The Big Story in your game is the story of the *characters,* and that story spans many adventures. If the storyteller's dream is to build an adventure that's as riveting and moving as J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, you want to build something as character-driven and engaging as George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Discovering the destiny of each character in your group is the ultimate goal.

You might be a connector if . . .

✔ Your favorite part of the game is when the players talk to each other in character.

✔ You design factions and foes that the player characters must deal with, and then you create adventures that serve to present them to the players.

✔ You allow the players to determine what adventure comes next by choosing for themselves the things their characters are interested in.

✔ Actors and explorers immerse themselves in your games, but power gamers and slayers wish you'd give them more combat.

Establishing Your Own Style

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

REMEMBER

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

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

Setting the Tone

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

The tone of a game is a pretty subjective standard. It combines particular mannerisms, philosophy, and game goals into a distinct flavor that's different for every DM. The best we can do here is present a handful of sliding scales for you to consider; set each pointer where you're comfortable.

Autocrat or facilitator?

Do you expect to be in charge of the game table, or are you comfortable sharing authority?

If you see the role of the DM as an *autocrat,* that means you take responsibility for adjudicating the rules and keeping the game moving. You're confident in your knowledge of the rules, and you'd prefer that the players not question your judgments. You keep track of initiative and all the conditions and other effects on monsters and characters. If you're running a game for less experienced players, this approach can help them enjoy the story of the game without the rules getting in the way. The drawback is that you're not giving your players any incentive to learn the rules or feel any ownership of the game.

Running the game as a *facilitator* means that you're there to help the story along, but your players are partners in the process. You don't have to be a rules expert — if a question comes up, your group will find an answer together. You're comfortable delegating the tasks that you find burdensome, which helps your players feel invested in the game. On the down side, finding consensus about the rules and sorting out who's doing what can sometimes take time — time where the game story isn't moving forward.

Arbiter or narrator?

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

An *arbiter* is content to let the players succeed or fail on their own, offering few (if any) hints to help them overcome difficult challenges or solve tricky puzzles. Running a game based on strict adjudication is easier in some ways

because you don't have to figure out how you're going to help the players through the tough spots. DMing as an arbiter is good for concentrating on the basics of the game (controlling monsters and evaluating player actions) instead of trying to juggle storyline elements at the same time you're trying to adjudicate the game. On the down side, it's hard to run a high-energy game if you maintain such a passive role.

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

On-task or player-paced?

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

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

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

Preparation or improvisation?

Do you like having every detail of your adventures planned out ahead of time, or are you happier winging it?

If you put a lot of emphasis on *preparation,* you carefully plan your adventures in advance. You read every page of a published adventure before bringing it to the game table, and if you create your own adventures, you write out the details of each encounter area in as much detail as a published adventure. You try to account for every possibility, and you have details of locations, encounters, and interactions ready at your fingertips. The good news is that you have a really good chance of having your game run smoothly, with everything going exactly as planned. The bad news is that players can be unpredictable, and if they decide to go in a different direction than you'd planned, you might get pushed out of your comfort zone. You'll have to fight the temptation to railroad the players down the paths you've prepared for them, but the reward of a well-planned, richly detailed adventure might make up for the feeling of being steered down paths the players might not have chosen for themselves.

If you're more comfortable with *improvisation* — or just don't have the time for all that preparation — you let the adventure go where the players' desires and your own sudden inspiration take it. Your prepared encounters might be notes scribbled on a map, pointing you to pages in the *Monster Manual,* or you might not even have a map. You never have to worry about being caught unprepared, and your players know that their decisions make a real difference in the course of their adventures. The risk is that your game might lose any real sense of a story that moves forward beyond the immediate whims of the characters. Make sure things happen to keep the game moving, and make sure those things point toward a story that ties all these encounters together into an adventure.

The key to successfully winging it is to give yourself a head start by building up a reserve of Interesting Things — monsters you'd like to try out, map sketches of rooms with interesting features or dangerous traps, villains that can make a sudden appearance to liven up a boring game, or quirky NPCs for the player characters to meet and interact with. You don't have to arrange these things in any particular order, but the technique of winging it works best when you don't have to stop and scrape together character stats or try to draw dungeons on the fly. You might find it useful to check out D&D Web sites, magazines such as *Dragon* or *Dungeon*, or even unused parts of sourcebooks and adventures you have on your shelf to build up your reserve of bits you might improvise with later. If you stock up a folder in your DM binder with emergency adventure material, you'll never have to worry about the player characters taking a wrong turn again.

Chapter 10

Creating Excitement at the Game Table

*T*he best DUNGEONS & DRAGONS games engage the players on several levels. A great game involves the players in a story that's dramatic, compelling, and masterfully paced. It creates a backdrop that includes fantastic landscapes, magical vistas, shadowy perils, and terrible monsters. A great game presents challenges that encourage players to use their characters' resources wisely, make good decisions, and work together so that everybody wins.

The point of including a compelling story, inspiring setting, and challenging situations in your D&D game is to make the game exciting. Exciting games entertain the players, and it's a lot easier to Dungeon Master for players who are having fun than players who are bored.

Maximizing Imagination

One of the unique characteristics of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game is that a lot of the game — most of it, really — takes place within the imagination of the participants. Much like reading a good book, playing the D&D game lets players create a continuous mental picture or visualization of the action. You can literally play a D&D game with your eyes closed, just opening them long enough every so often to roll some dice or jot down a note or two.

Narrating for all five senses

In most D&D games, you hit stretches where the Dungeon Master is narrating events, creating scenery, or describing creatures or obstacles for the players. In a published adventure, you'll see text set off as *read-aloud text,* printed in italic type, in boxes, or otherwise distinguished from text that's for the DM's eyes only. The idea is that the DM can read these passages aloud to set the scene for the players when the adventuring party reaches that point of the adventure.

When you're telling the players what's going on around their characters, don't limit yourself to just what they see. Tell them what their characters are perceiving with all their senses. Consider these two examples:

> Example 1: *You hiked up into the mountains to the abandoned dwarven citadel. You stand in front of the old gates, which lie in ruin. Yellowed skulls stuck on poles stand on either side of the path leading to the gate. They're marked with runes of some kind.*

> Example 2: *You hiked up into the mountains to the abandoned dwarven citadel. You're standing in front of the old gates, which lie in ruin. The air is cold and damp, and you're chilled to the bone. Yellowed skulls stuck on poles stand on either side of the path leading to the gate, each bearing a crudely painted rune in the Davek script. A thin haze of acrid smoke drifts out of the dark doorway, and from deep in the mountain comes the distant ringing of hammers on steel.*

The first example isn't bad, but the second provides a lot more sensory information. The characters hear hammers striking anvils. They smell smoke. They feel cold and wet. Although the players may or may not be able to readily imagine what the scene looks like, everybody knows what hammer strokes sound like, everybody knows what smoke smells like, and what it feels like to have cold, wet clothes. The listeners supply these details, making your description of the scene far more real and engaging than one that appeals only to visuals.

More evocative descriptions are great, but as a general rule, a DM monologue of any sort — adventure background, read-aloud text, villainous speeches, anything — shouldn't be more than about a minute long. That means keeping things you read to the players to 100 words or fewer. Give a good description and then get on to the action before the players get bored.

Mixing the mundane and fantastic

One of the reasons that the world of the D&D game is compelling is because players actively try to imagine what things look like, sound like, and feel like around their characters. It's part of the escapism of the game, and it allows

everyone to have fun roleplaying. Forming a clear mental picture of what's going on also helps players to figure out ways to overcome challenges and defeat monsters. The easier you make it for the players to immerse their imaginations in the game, the more compelling and interesting the game becomes.

Imagination is fabrication, and like any good fabrication, it should be grounded in truth. The more that things from the normal, mundane, everyday world are true in your game world, the easier it is for the players to imagine. Consider this example:

> **Example 1:** *Your trail leads into the Gresgil Forest. Anda, the great blue sun, is high in the sky. Ryth, the lesser red sun, hovers over the horizon, while Gel, the yellow sun, will not rise for some hours yet. The giant purple tree-ferns tower over your heads, weaving and sighing in the wind. The mewling cries of flerrbits drift hauntingly through the air. Suddenly, goblin warriors leap out of the shadows at you. It's an ambush!*

Chances are good that the players are straining mental muscles trying to picture what the heck this place looks like. Is this *normal* to people presumably born in this world? Or are the characters supposed to feel as weirded out as the players likely do? Are the giant purple ferns dangerous? What in the world is a flerrbit, and does it eat people? When the goblins jump out, the actual encounter is anticlimactic. "At last!" the players cry, "Something normal!"

Compare that with this example:

> **Example 2:** *Your trail leads into the Gresgil Forest. It's early afternoon, but underneath the trees the day seems gloomy, warm, and still. There isn't much undergrowth, but green curtains of moss hang from the branches of the gnarled oak trees. Distant birdsong drifts down from the canopy. Suddenly, goblin warriors leap out of the shadows, filling the air with war-cries! It's an ambush!*

Now you've given the players a setting that's accessible and believable. The players might not envision exactly what you had, but you can guess they're going to get pretty close.

In general, if you assume that a lot of things in the game are the way they are in the real world (or the real world of an imagined Middle Ages), you can spend more of your "imagination capital" on the exceptions. Save your most fantastic touches for things you want the players to pay attention to. Add interesting details if you like (rain, sunshine, cold or hot weather) and then get on to what you want the players to pay attention to — the goblin ambush.

Suspending disbelief

The whole point of a roleplaying game is to pretend for a bit. Everybody knows that people can't just chant a magic ritual and whisk themselves a hundred miles away in the blink of an eye, but for the purposes of the game, we pretend that some people are powerful wizards. Wizards can employ magic, and magic includes rituals, such as Linked Portal, which lets them do exactly that. In other words, players choose not to apply their natural skepticism or disbelief to the game.

The key to maintaining the players' suspension of disbelief is to meet their expectations about their characters, the world, and the game. Anything that doesn't fit expectations and forces the players to reevaluate what they know about the game — or the setting where the game takes place — drags the players out of active visualization and lets their natural disbelief come rushing back in. It's like hitting a giant Pause button on the game.

Failed expectations come in three basic flavors, as we describe in the following sections.

This world is a joke!

If you show the players that they're supposed to treat your game like a joke, that's what they're going to do. Sometimes that can be fun, but most D&D games work better if you play the world seriously and let the players find the humor for themselves. One of the most common tip-offs that your game isn't serious is a bad name. Names like Lord Binky, Tim the Wizard, or Castle Stupenderous tell the players "don't take this world seriously, and don't try to get invested in the game — it won't be worth your effort."

Capricious rules

The rules of the D&D game set a lot of boundaries on what exactly characters can and can't do. Arbitrarily changing the rules on the players is a sure way to jar them out of their suspension of disbelief, especially if doing so creates a negative result in the game.

For example, the *fly* spell (a 16th-level wizard utility power) lets a character fly — and a strong character can carry anything aloft he normally could carry while walking, so he can pick up a buddy and fly him across a chasm. If you suddenly inform the players, "Sorry, but the *fly* spell just doesn't work if you try to carry somebody else," you're asking for trouble. Despite the fact that you'd like to preserve that chasm as an obstacle in your game, nothing in the spell description implies that you can't carry your buddies if you're strong enough. In fact, you're inviting the players to go look at the description of the spell and the rules for carrying loads. Whatever you were trying to accomplish in the game grinds to a halt as the players try to figure out what works and what doesn't work in your particular D&D world.

Illogical consequences

Players expect that their actions in the world result in logical consequences. If the characters defend an elven village against a dragon's attack, the players expect gratitude from the elves. If a villain gets pushed off a cliff, the players expect that the bad guy falls and gets hurt or killed. If the characters purchase a scroll with the Passwall ritual so they can break into a vault where they know treasure is hidden, they expect to find the treasure when they finally get in — or at least find a reason as to why the treasure isn't there anymore.

REMEMBER

DMs sometimes fall into the illogical consequences trap by sticking too closely to the script. If the person who designed the adventure had no idea that the characters might figure out a way to get into the vault right at the beginning, it's tempting to just say "you can't get in," or "the treasure isn't here." But a better answer is to reward the players' ingenuity and resourcefulness with the success they earned, even if that "breaks" the adventure and causes you to do some fast thinking.

Setting the mood

What do you do if you're going to watch a scary movie? You turn down the lights. Similarly, you might find that you can help the players get in the right frame of mind for the game by using lighting, backdrops, and background music to create the right atmosphere.

Lighting

If you want to convey an atmosphere of mystery, fear, and suspense, consider keeping the lights low around the gaming table. Don't make it so dark that the players can't see what's written on their character sheets or read the results of their die rolls, but other than that, darker is usually better.

Music

Music is a pretty powerful tool for imagination, especially if it's appropriate for the current tempo of your game. Music is naturally a matter of taste, but whatever you and your friends prefer, you want to make sure it isn't too loud — you don't need to spend the whole game session trying to shout over your own background music.

The following genres of music make good background or mood music for D&D games:

✔ **Movie soundtracks:** Most soundtracks don't have much singing that might distract your listeners with lyrics, and they're created specifically for the purpose of evoking emotion from the listener at dramatically appropriate moments. Horror, fantasy, and science fiction movie soundtracks usually fit the mood and work best for D&D adventures.

> ✔ **Game soundtracks:** A small number of game soundtracks are available. They have the virtue of being created specifically for the purpose of providing background music for D&D games or other roleplaying games, but your mileage may vary.
>
> ✔ **Classical music, classic rock, or heavy metal:** These types of music can work for the game if you find the right piece or the right artist and album. But watch out for music that contains lyrics, which can be distracting to you and the players.

Don't be afraid to save background music for specific game events, especially combat encounters. If you have a pounding, heroic battle-theme playing when you'd really rather have an atmosphere of lurking dread, your music is getting in the way of imagination. Above all, don't get so caught up in fussing with the music that your attention is on changing tracks instead of on the players. If you use background music, get it ready before the players arrive so that all you have to do is push a button to get the selection you're after.

Consider using a computer or MP3 music player (such as an iPod or Zune) to create multiple playlists you can use for different parts of the game session. You might have a playlist full of creepy atmospheric music to use when the characters are exploring the catacombs, another playlist of dramatic soundtrack music for combat encounters, and a third playlist with more relaxed music for the times when characters are in town or traveling across the countryside. Make sure you can change the music easily when the mode of the game changes, and your players will notice the difference in mood.

Showing, not telling

One of the most powerful tools in the Dungeon Master's arsenal is the ability to show the players what's going on instead of just telling them how the action unfolds. You could take 10 minutes to describe a dungeon chamber in exacting detail . . . or you could simply draw a map that shows the players exactly how the room is laid out and where the monsters are standing.

Page 25 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* discusses props you can use to show your players exactly what you're talking about — such as miniatures, illustrations, and handouts. These props make visualizing what's going on a snap even for unimaginative players.

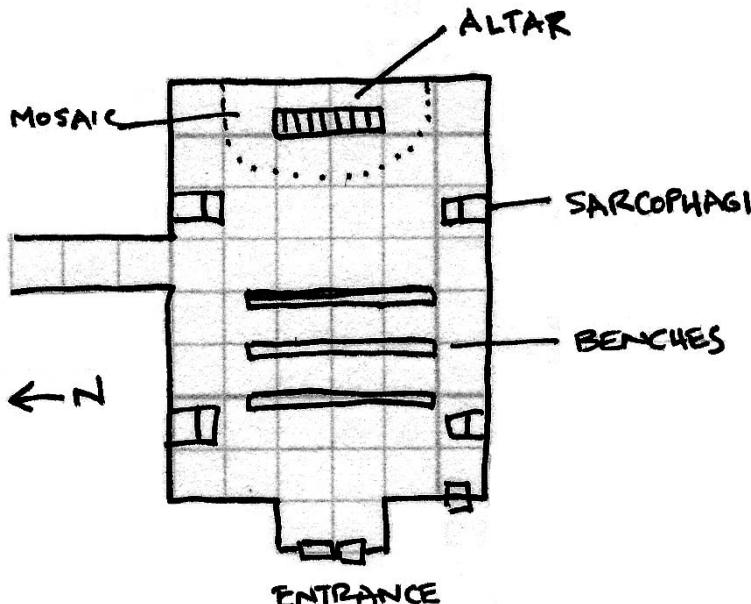### Telling — Descriptions without a visual aid

Say that one of the rooms in a dungeon you've created is an evil shrine. If the player characters approach the altar in the center of the shrine, mummies lurking in sarcophagi along the walls will burst out and attack. To describe the room in careful detail, you might have to say something like this:

The room beyond the door seems to be a shrine of some sort. A big altar of black stone stands at the far end of the room, about 40 feet from the door. You can see two other exits: a passage that leads off into darkness in the middle of the wall on your left, and an iron-plated door just to the right of the doorway you're standing in. The shrine is about 30 feet wide, and the ceiling is quite high, almost 20 feet tall. Four big stone sarcophagi line the walls; two on your left, two on your right. They're carved in the image of ancient warriors in armor. Above the altar hangs a twisted skeleton of bronzed bones — the bones of a dragon, it seems. Purple tiles cover the floor in a semicircle extending about 10 feet from the altar, and three rows of low stone benches run the width of the room, with narrow walkways on the outer edges.

Hopefully not every room in your dungeon gets this kind of over-precise boxed text. However, there isn't much here that the players won't need to know sooner or later. They need to know what features in the room might pose a threat (the skeleton, sarcophagi, and odd purple-tiled floor), and they need to know what in the room might invite a closer look (the altar). But how many people could sort out a good mental image of the room and its contents based solely on that verbal description? Which details would some listeners just miss entirely? Which details would they visualize incorrectly?

Showing — Descriptions using a visual aid

Imagine that instead of reading boxed text to the players, you draw a map for them or build one out of D&D *Dungeon Tiles.* Figure 10-1 shows what the room looks like.

Figure 10-1:
The altar room.

If you show the players the map while describing the room, you might say something like this instead. A word in bold type indicates that you would point to the relevant feature on the map.

> *The room beyond the door seems to be a shrine of some sort.* **Here** *at the far end of the room is a big altar of black stone. Above it, there's a twisted skeleton of bronzed bones hanging from the ceiling — the bones of a dragon, it seems.* **This semicircle** *is formed of purple tiles in the floor. You can see two other exits: a passage that leads off into darkness* **here,** *and an iron-plated door* **here. These** *are big stone sarcophagi carved in the image of ancient warriors in armor, and* **here** *are three rows of low stone benches. The ceiling is quite high, almost 20 feet above you.*

The second description is much like the first — but with a visual diagram of the room's layout in front of the players, most of the room's details are crystal clear. You have to explain this room only one time instead of answering question after question about what's where.

Maps you create for the players fall into two categories:

✔ **Map sketches:** When all you want to do is clarify your description of a room by providing a diagram, a map sketch is all you need. A map sketch is simply a way to convey information to the players in an efficient format. Figure 10-1 is an example of a map sketch. You can't set it on the table and use it as a board for your miniatures, because your miniatures are too big. But the map sketch shows players exactly where each feature in the room is located, and the map can certainly serve as a template or guide you can follow for drawing a tactical map of the same room.

Graph paper is the easiest way to present a map sketch to the players. However, it's a sketch — you don't need to be perfect. Any information you provide will be an improvement over verbal description alone.

✔ **Tactical maps:** A tactical map is a large map you create that serves as a board for everyone to play out a combat encounter on. A tactical map uses a scale of 1 inch = 5 feet. Each square on the map is therefore a 5-foot square. Miniatures (if you use them in the game) are in the same scale as your map, so you can actually set your miniatures on the tactical map to show exactly where each character or monster is during each round of the fight.

Several handy game products are available for use in creating tactical maps. Official D&D *Dungeon Tiles* are easy-to-use cardboard tiles that you can put on the table in any configuration. With beautiful art on every tile, depicting an enormous variety of terrain features and dungeon dressing, they can really bring a tactical map to life. The same kind of vivid art, in predesigned encounter areas, appears on the poster-size maps you can find in published D&D adventures, *D&D Miniatures* starter sets, *D&D Icons* miniatures sets, and some other products. Poster maps

are great for dramatic and climactic encounters, especially if there are large monsters or large numbers of monsters involved. Some poster maps also work well if you fold them in half, giving a smaller but still interesting area for an encounter.

Many people use a *battle map* for tactical maps — a vinyl mat covered in a 1-inch square grid. You can draw rooms on the battle map by using wet-erase markers, like those you would use with an overhead projector. You can also find flip chart pads marked in 1-inch grids at office supply stores. You can draw tactical maps on these, though they're hard to re-use.

Pacing the Game

Whether you're engaged in a scene that the players are visualizing entirely in their minds or one that they're experiencing in a more tactile, concrete presentation, we recommend actively managing the game's dramatic tension. In short, you don't want things to get boring.

The rules of dramatic tension are simple:

✔ Start small and work up to a climax.

✔ Don't waste time on challenges or scenes that don't threaten the characters or advance the plot in some way.

✔ Always leave 'em wanting more.

Cliffhangers

The oldest technique for dramatic tension in the book is the cliffhanger. Instead of playing out each game session to its absolute conclusion, look for an opportunity to stop a little short. If you do it right, the players will be positively chomping at the bit to find out what happens next. Instead of reaching a convenient stopping place and staying there, take the player characters right up into the beginning of the next big danger — and then call it a night. Let the players spend the rest of the week wondering how in the heck their characters are going to get out of whatever fix you dropped them in when you ended the last D&D session.

The cut-away scene

Imagine that your D&D game is a movie, and you're the director. You're shooting a scene where Lidda the Rogue is exploring a secret passage in an evil shrine, while her friends are waiting behind her. Suddenly, fiendish dire rats

set on Lidda in the dark passageway, while fanatical temple guards find her friends and attack. How would you shoot the scene? You could just run the combat one round at a time, letting the characters take their turns in order regardless of whether they're in the same fight. Alternatively, you might use the *cut-away scene* technique: You could play through several rounds of one fight scene and then cut away to the other scene. Your "camera" follows Lidda for a time as she explores the passage and encounters the dire rats, and then it jumps back to the rest of the characters when the temple guards burst into the room, and then jumps back to Lidda after the first round or two of the temple guard fight, in time to see how she's doing against the dire rats.

The cut-away scene works best when the player characters are divided. They might be only a few feet away in another room, or they might be engaged in completely different adventures that are only loosely linked to each other. Spend 5 to 10 minutes dealing with one discrete storyline in your adventure; then put that action on hold (usually at a dramatic moment, using the cliffhanger technique) while you switch over to DM one of the other players through whatever his or her character is doing; then switch away again when you're ready.

Cut-away scenes are incredibly effective in both books and movies — just as soon as something reaches a breaking point, the action jumps away to another character and follows him or her for a time. At the gaming table, keep your cut-away scenes short. Remember, while you're giving attention to one character or group of characters, other players at the table are sitting around doing nothing except watching and listening. Try to give each player at the table about the same amount of your time and energy.

Getting to the fun fast

Many D&D adventures contain a serious flaw: In one way or another, they make the players search for the fun. If the players can't figure out what their characters are supposed to be doing or just hit what seems to be a dead end, they get frustrated.

Obstacles that sometimes get in the way of finding the fun include

- **They didn't find the secret room.** If the characters have to find a well-hidden secret door in your dungeon in order to keep playing, you might be hiding the fun. Make sure that plenty of clues exist elsewhere in the dungeon to suggest how to find secret places.

- **They didn't talk to the right guy.** If the characters have a whole town full of people to interview in order to locate the one NPC who can tell them what they need to do next, you're hiding the fun for everybody except the most die-hard actor players. When you design your adventure, make

sure that multiple NPCs possess clues that can point the characters in the right direction. Some clues might be better than others, but at least the odds of figuring out someplace to go next are pretty good.

✔ **They didn't solve the puzzle.** Sometimes you might stump the characters with a riddle or physical puzzle. If they need to solve the puzzle of aligning the levers in the room the right way to open the otherwise impassable door and just can't do it, you stop the adventure dead. Make sure that clues are available if the players need the help.

✔ **They didn't bring the right magic.** Maybe the characters needed to have access to a specific spell or ritual (say, the Water Breathing ritual or the *fly* spell) to get past an obstacle. Provide clues ahead of time that suggest to the players what preparations they'll need to succeed, or make sure that a detour route is available. The detour can be difficult and dangerous, but that will just reward those characters who prepared for the challenge.

Making the players use their brains is perfectly okay. Every now and then, the players should hit challenges or obstacles that make them think hard about what to do next. You just need to make sure that they'll be able to come up with an answer when they have to stop and figure things out.

Keeping the Game Moving

Every good Dungeon Master has a set of techniques, tricks, and mannerisms that help keep the game in motion and help to keep it interesting. These tools are a part of your DMing style. When you don't know what exactly to do next, use the simple techniques in the following sections to think through to the answer.

What does the monster do?

The player characters are in the middle of a fierce battle against a bone devil, and the bone devil's turn comes up. What does it do? Which character does it attack? You have to make a decision, and while you're pondering the question, the game is frozen for the players.

The bone devil is smart, dangerous, and actually pretty straightforward. Although it has four special powers, one course of action is usually the clear best choice: Use *fiendish focus* as a minor action and then make a *double attack* against the same target. If it hits with both claw attacks, it can use its *poison sting* as well, dishing out a lot of damage to that one target.

Who does it attack? Answering the following questions is one way to think through that question pretty simply:

1. **Is it marked?**

   If the fighter or paladin (or another character) has marked the devil, it's usually a good idea for the devil to attack that character. You should always assume that monsters with more than a few points of intelligence know the consequences of any condition put on them, so the devil knows it'll take damage for attacking someone other than the paladin or take an attack if it ignores the fighter. It should have a pretty good reason to ignore a mark.

2. **Is there a clear threat?**

   If it's not marked, a monster should go after the character it perceives as most dangerous. In the same way that smart players concentrate their attacks on the most dangerous foe first, smart monsters try to take down the heaviest hitters before those characters kill them. A smart monster like a bone devil is probably good at figuring out who's a dangerous enemy, which might mean teleporting past the fighter and paladin to beat on the wizard or rogue. In the mind of a dumb monster, the most dangerous foe might be "the one who just hurt me."

3. **Who can it reach?**

   Other things being equal, a monster will attack whoever it can most easily get to. It's usually easiest to attack an adjacent foe rather than trying to move around, but a bone devil's ability to teleport means that it can easily get to any character within 8 squares.

4. **Does it have too many (or no) suitable targets?**

   When the monster has more than one logical choice of targets, or it isn't clear which character it would consider the biggest threat, let the dice decide. For example, if two characters are next to the devil, the devil's not marked, and neither one is clearly more dangerous than the other, pick up a d6 — if the result is 1–3, the bone devil attacks the character on its left; if the result is 4–6, it attacks the one on its right.

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

Here are two important caveats for letting the dice decide:

- **If an intelligent monster clearly has a best choice for its action, the monster should probably take it.** A mind flayer confronting several player characters at the same time will almost certainly use its *mind blast* attack. That's the smartest thing it could do, and mind flayers are cunning, intelligent monsters.

- **If an option or decision clearly makes for a more interesting or exciting adventure, don't let the dice screw it up.** You might have had no plans at all for allowing the heroes to bribe the orc guards, but it would be a shame to stomp on the players' creativity by refusing to allow the ploy a chance to work.

Can I try this?

Player characters have an array of exciting and interesting powers at their command, but sometimes the players want to try something different — something not covered by either their characters' powers or the basic rules of the game. Remember, this is a good thing. It's one of the things that makes playing D&D different (and, in our opinion, better) than playing a computer game — characters can try things the designers of the game or adventure never dreamed of. As the DM, it's your job to tell them what happens when they try.

When players want their characters to try something the rules don't seem to cover, the best answer you can give is, "Make a check." That could be a skill check, an ability check, an attack roll, or sometimes just a "luck check" that's akin to rolling to decide how bribable the orcs are — how lucky is the character at the moment?

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 42) gives some guidance on how to set the Difficulty Class (DC) for a check that's not covered by other rules, but it ultimately comes down to a judgment call. You have to decide on the following three factors:

- **What's reasonable?** Use your common sense. Sometimes, players will want to try things that shouldn't have a chance of succeeding, even in the fantastic world of D&D. If a character who has been polymorphed into a horse wants to climb a tree, no Athletics check he could possibly make will get him up those branches. The best Diplomacy check in the world won't let a character persuade an NPC to jump off a cliff. A rogue can't blow out a candle that's on the other side of a closed window. You get the idea.

On the other hand, the world of D&D is magical, and some things that aren't possible in the real world can happen in a fantasy world. A human could jump a 40-foot chasm . . . if he's an epic-level character with magical help and the dice fall just right. Don't shoot down an action that's clearly within the spirit of the rules.

✔ **How hard is it?** Use moderate DCs most of the time, but listen to your gut when the player tells you what he wants to do. If your first instinct is to say, "No way!" then use a hard DC. If your first reaction is more like, "Sure, you can do that," then use an easy DC. But bear in mind the level of the characters and the things the rules say they should be able to do. With a running start and an Athletics check result of 30, a character can break real-world long jump records. A DC 30 check is hard for characters at the top of the paragon tier, and it gets close to moderate for epic-level characters. Epic-level characters are supposed to be superheroic, so keep that sense of scale in mind when picking a difficulty.

✔ **What happens next?** Even if the character doesn't reach the DC you picked, or you think the task was just about impossible anyway, try to reward the player with interesting consequences. Sometimes that might mean leaping out of the frying pan and into the fire, but for a lot of players, that's reward enough. (It's often instigator players who try crazy things, and they're just as happy to land in a new mess as long as things are happening.) A minor combat benefit is an appropriate reward — perhaps the maneuver knocks a monster prone, pushes it one square, or grants the character combat advantage on his next attack against it.

REMEMBER

Powers exist to *let* the characters and monsters break the rules in cool ways. It's okay to let the characters do things that aren't covered by the rules, but watch out for two pitfalls:

✔ **Improvised actions shouldn't be better than a character's powers, except in a very specific, very narrow situation.** It's great for players to come up with cool ways to take advantage of the circumstances, but they shouldn't be designing their own powers that are better than the powers they get from their class. It's great to let a character kick over the brazier to burn the orc warchief, but don't make it work so well that they start carrying burning braziers around so they can do it in *every* fight.

✔ **Let powers be powers.** If the players see a monster do something cool and want to try it themselves, it's worth reminding them that monsters have powers, too. The kuo-toa harpooner in the *Monster Manual* can stab characters with its harpoon and reel them in. If the characters kill the kuo-toa and take its harpoon, can they do that? They can try, but they won't be as effective, because the characters don't have the power that the kuo-toa does.

Should you let a character die?

Sooner or later, it's going to happen: One of your monsters scores a critical hit, or a player fails a crucial saving throw, and before you know it, a player character meets an untimely end. Should you really go ahead and tell the player that the character is no more?

Killing off a character is a big deal. You're knocking one of the players out of the game for a time, likely for the rest of the session. Either he's waiting around for the other PCs to take his character back to someplace where a *raise dead* ritual can bring the hapless hero back, or he's sitting at the table busily making up a new character. Worse yet, a lot of players just hate to get a character killed. Nobody likes to lose, after all, and getting killed definitely feels like a form of losing.

On the other hand, not killing a character also poses problems. The risk of losing (getting a character killed) makes the game exciting. If the players come to realize that their characters aren't in any real danger because you won't allow a game result that causes a character death, what's the point of playing out the adventure? Success is assured, after all. There's no dramatic tension.

Our considered opinion is that the best games include the risk of character death but that characters should rarely if ever be killed in arbitrary, malicious, or meaningless ways. Although a ferocious orc warpriest might be inclined to murder a helpless character with a coup de grace in "real life," in your game you can choose for the orc warpriest to stay focused on the characters who are still fighting back. Instead of wasting a round to finish off a downed character, the monster keeps flailing away at the other characters. If a character fails an Acrobatics check while crossing a chasm on a narrow log, you might think about having the character hit a ledge 20 or 30 feet down and taking some damage instead of falling 1,000 feet to certain death. You might even fudge a combat result by announcing a missed attack, turning a critical hit into an ordinary hit, or deliberately understating damage dealt to a character, as long as the players can't see what your dice actually say. Just try not to make it obvious.

So when should you go ahead and let a character die in the game? We think there are only three good answers:

- ✔ When the party is facing a dramatically important battle

- ✔ When a character tries something that is obviously highly risky and exceedingly stupid

- ✔ When the players have developed a sense that their characters have nothing to fear in your game

Even then, don't be malicious about it. When the characters are in one of those situations, you can simply decide that you aren't going to work very hard to avoid killing a character if that's what the players' actions and the dice decide.

Should the DM cheat?

Dice are fun, but terrible things can happen to the game if the dice fall badly too many times in a row. Should you change the hit points or Armor Class of a monster? Should you fudge a die roll now and again? In short, should you cheat?

Well, the DM really can't cheat. In one sense, you're in charge, and what you say goes. It's certainly in your rights to sway the results one way or another to keep the game moving or to keep players happy. Still, many DMs like to follow the same rules that the players must abide by. That's perfectly acceptable, but it takes away some of the control you otherwise can exercise to make a fun and exciting game.

You might be tempted to cheat to spare a player character from a grisly and untimely death. We go into more detail about character death in the nearby sidebar, "Should you let a character die?"

Whatever way you decide to come down on this issue, never let the players know when you're bending the rules. The players need to be able to trust your die rolls so they know you're not playing favorites. It's important for them to believe their characters are always in danger, and they'll change their behavior if they suspect that you always fudge the action in their favor. With no element of risk, the reward will be less sweet. So, our advice is to play it straight, fudge when appropriate, and keep the players guessing.

Chapter 11

Growing Your Game

*M*ore than any other hobby you can name, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game inspires creativity. Power gamers and slayers seek out innovative ways to develop their characters through the clever use of new magic items, spells, and tactics. Storytellers and explorers gradually accumulate a library of stories about their characters' backgrounds, personalities, and accomplishments. Dungeon Masters constantly search for new adventure material to throw in front of the players, and many also take the time to create highly detailed settings for their games, complete with iconic villains, political maneuvering, living history, and ever-growing storylines for the players to interact with. There's really nothing else like it.

In this chapter, we take a look at ways to expand the scope and creativity of your regular D&D game. Growing your game keeps it fresh, interesting, and vital for the players.

Setting Your Game in a World

The first big questions to ask when you're thinking about trying to expand the scope of your game are, "Is there a world outside the adventure my players are currently involved in? Can they explore it? What will I tell them if they do?" In other words, does anything important happen to the player characters when they aren't in a dungeon?

Setting your D&D game in a living, changing game world is an excellent way to grow your game. All of a sudden, you have room for virtually endless creativity. If you're creative, energetic, and willing to pour a lot of time into your hobby, there's virtually no limit to the amount of world-building you can do.

We've seen Dungeon Masters who have built worlds of astounding scope and detail, with dozens of pages of maps, hundreds of NPCs, and thousands of words of history, culture, and arcane lore.

TIP

If you don't feel you have the time, energy, or native creativity to build your own game world, consider using a world somebody else has built for you. You can adapt the setting of almost any fantasy fiction to your D&D game with a little work. Or you can pick up an official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game setting such as FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON. If the players are already fans of the fantasy story or setting you select to build the campaign around, you have a great head start in getting them involved and interested in your game.

You can always settle on an approach that combines both of these elements. For example, you might use an established setting like the FORGOTTEN REALMS but drop in any dungeons, towns, characters, or monsters you create into the game setting whenever it's convenient for you. Or you can start with a world of your own creation but borrow elements of the FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON to flesh out the details. It's your game, after all.

TIP

It can be daunting to wrestle with a whole planet when you begin your D&D game. You might find it easier to think about starting with a microcosm instead of a macrocosm. Begin your campaign with the dungeon and a simple base town and then grow your game outward only when the player characters need to venture into some new domain or locate some new resource. Why bother to fill pages and pages with notes about the interesting folk of the Isles Beneath the Dawn when the player characters haven't ever gone more than 10 miles from the town they started in? Draw maps of far places and write descriptions of exotic towns and people whenever you like, but you don't *have* to do either until the player characters are ready to venture into that particular corner of your game world.

We take a longer look at building your own campaign in Part IV of this book.

Adding New Rules Elements

Most DUNGEONS & DRAGONS games begin with almost 1,000 pages of game material: the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. Although you can create a bewildering variety of characters and adventures with the rules and options in these three core rulebooks, you will find that an immense amount of additional game material is available if you want more choices. For example, there are eight character classes in the *Player's Handbook*, but future *Player's Handbook* volumes, campaign settings, and articles in *Dragon* magazine will provide plenty more, including classes such as the barbarian, swordmage, druid, artificer, and monk, to name just a few. Many players find that trying out a new class gives them a chance to do something in the game they haven't done before. The more options you allow into your game, the more ways your players have to create the characters they have in mind.

Where can I find all this stuff?

If you like a game with a broader selection of character options, monsters, magic treasure, and everything else, you're in luck — so do a lot of other DMs. You can find all sorts of additional D&D material in a number of places. Wizards of the Coast, Inc., publishes a variety of official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS sourcebooks and supplements, many of which include all sorts of new material you might want to incorporate in your game. A number of other game publishers publish D&D material through a free licensing agreement with Wizards of the Coast. *Dragon* magazine, now published online, is an excellent source of new material. You can find a tremendous amount of material on various Web sites, from the D&D Insider site (`www.dndinsider.com`) to any number of fan-created Web sites. (We take a longer look at sources for D&D material in Chapter 12.) Finally, you can create brand new monsters, classes, powers, and magic items for yourself.

Adding rules options to please the players is fine, but most DMs introduce new rules elements for their own benefit on a very regular basis. Naturally, you might want to create unique and memorable villains who make use of the same sort of extra options that are available to player characters. You'll also find that the game benefits from a regular infusion of new monsters and new magic items.

Not all rules elements are born equal. Some are very easy to implement in your game and have a relatively limited effect. Others might require you to really bone up on a complex new aspect of the game and will change everything you do at the game table. The following sections provide a quick look at the types of rules elements you might choose to include in your game, in ascending order of difficulty.

Monsters and magic items

Veteran D&D players have a pretty good idea of what's in the *Monster Manual*. They might not remember off the top of their heads how many hit points a troll has, but they do know that dealing fire or acid damage is the best way to finish off the regenerating monster. Using a monster that no player in the party has ever fought before makes jaded players sit up and take note because they realize that they don't know how much danger their characters are in. All of a sudden, it's like they're neophytes again, and they have to figure out the best way to beat the monster with no out-of-character rules mastery to help them along.

Adding a new monster to the game is about the easiest new thing you could possibly add. It's entirely in your control whether the players ever encounter the creature. If the monster proves troublesome (it isn't clear how its special abilities work, it seems too weak, or it seems too deadly), you never have to include it again — just make a point of not using it in any more encounters.

An easy way to add a new monster to an adventure is to pick up a *Dungeons & Dragons Miniatures Game* booster pack. Chances are good that you'll find a new monster (or a monster that you've rarely used before), along with its game statistics, that you can use on the spot in your adventure. This way, it's a surprise for you and the players.

Rituals and magic items

When you make a new ritual available in your game, a ritual caster can buy and master it the next time the adventurers happen to pass through a big town. Likewise, characters can buy or enchant new magic items pretty much as soon as they know the items exist. In other words, the players can put new rituals and magic items into play more quickly than almost any other rules element you add to your game.

New rituals are definitely cool. Players who have wizard characters or have invested in the Ritual Caster feat are often eager to find rituals beyond what's covered in the *Player's Handbook* to give their characters new and interesting capabilities. Similarly, players enjoy finding or creating magic items that complement their characters' abilities or cover their weaknesses in just the right way.

If a new ritual or magic item proves to be detrimental to your game, it's relatively easy to remove it, negotiating with the player to replace it with a similar item or ritual that's more balanced. That's easier than having to take back a paragon path choice or rework a set of feat selections.

Powers and feats

Making new powers and feats available in your game doesn't provide you with many new DMing possibilities, but it does provide players with the ability to explore new character abilities and archetypes. In general, these options help players to specialize their characters and develop signature combat tactics, combos, or strategies for besting the monsters.

Unlike monsters, you don't control these rules elements after you introduce them into your game — it's up to the players to decide whether they want to take advantage of them when they advance their characters over time. Along the same lines, it's a little tricky to remove these elements from your game after you make them available. If you find that a certain power or feat is causing trouble in your game, you have to convince the players to retrain their characters to get rid of the problem.

Character classes and races

Just like feats and powers, new character classes and races are primarily player options. These options tend to sit at the slow end of the "speed of introduction" scale, but they're also about the most exciting new options your players will come across.

You aren't likely to see much use of new character races unless a new player joins your group or an old player gets his or her character killed and decides to try something else. By far the best opportunity to introduce a new character race is when the players are first making up their characters for a brand-new game.

New classes are theoretically easier to introduce during a continuing campaign because any character might choose to dip into a new class through multiclass feats, but even then you'll see the full capabilities of a new class only when a player makes a new character of that class.

Additional character classes and races do provide a staggering wealth of new options for adventuresome players to try out. Consider this example: Say you decide to add the sorcerer character class from *Player's Handbook 2* to your game. You haven't added just one new character type — you've added dozens, because the existence of the sorcerer invites an experienced player to try building a human sorcerer, a dragonborn sorcerer, an eladrin sorcerer, or a tiefling sorcerer, or to try different character builds, such as a chaos sorcerer or a storm sorcerer, and so on.

Paths and destinies

Paragon paths and epic destinies are all about players choosing just the right game element to reflect the way they imagine their characters developing as they advance into the higher levels of the game. Both are decisions that players make only once, at specific points in their characters' career (11th level and 21st level), so the options that the players have available at those moments are pretty much the options they're stuck with.

That said, if a player with a 13th-level character comes to you with a new sourcebook, points to a paragon path in that book and explains that this new path perfectly exemplifies the way the player sees the character, you might want to let the character adopt that path. The retraining rules in the *Player's Handbook* don't allow retraining paragon paths, but you can certainly break that rule for good reason. And the appearance of a new path that perfectly expresses a player's character concept is a very good reason.

Getting Players Involved in the Game

New places to explore and new character-building options are all very good, but the single best way to grow your D&D game is to increase the players' investment in the continuing success of the game. If you can succeed in getting the players to *care* about your game, they'll drive your campaign's storyline, seek out new rules options, and build better, more interesting characters for the game — and that in turn will push you to present adventures and challenges that they're interested in tackling. You motivate the players; the players motivate you. Everybody wins!

Players are most likely to become deeply invested in games where their characters continue from week to week, so if you want to get them involved and keep them involved, you need to create a campaign (see Chapter 8). The following sections share tricks and techniques for getting players wrapped up in a campaign — and keeping them that way.

Crafting good backgrounds

The first step in encouraging players to care about your game is to encourage them to care about their characters. Challenge the players to create interesting and appropriate backgrounds for their characters. Even a few scribbled notes to record a player's creative thinking about who his or her character is and where he or she comes from is better than nothing.

When the players create new characters, ask them to think up answers to some or all of the following questions:

- Where was your character born? Where was he or she raised?
- Does he or she have a family? Why did your character leave them to take up a life of adventuring?
- How did your character learn to do whatever it is his or her character class does? How did your fighter learn to fight? How did your wizard learn to use magic?

✔ Who are your character's enemies? Are there any monsters that he or she particularly hates or fears?

✔ Does your character have any interesting mannerisms or characteristics? How did he or she come by them?

TIP

You might need to offer a concrete reward to the players for taking the time and trouble to craft a good back story for their characters. For example, you might give newly created characters a *potion of healing* if their players create good backgrounds for them. A consumable magic item such as that potion isn't going to unbalance the game, but it's a good incentive for even the power gamers in your group to create interesting back stories that help drive the campaign.

Using character goals

Just like real people, well-crafted characters change over time. They learn new things, they develop history with allies who aid them and with villains who oppose them, and they strive to make progress toward goals they deem desirable. Players naturally want to see their characters grow and change. Power gamers want to see their characters gain impressive new abilities and garner respect in the game world, and roleplayers want to see their characters make progress toward personal story goals — quite possibly goals they imagined when they first created their characters, however many levels ago that might be now.

TIP

So how do you figure out what the characters in your game want? You ask the players. It's that simple. You don't even need to spend time at the gaming table doing it — an e-mail, a hallway conversation, or a phone call between game sessions will do just fine.

REMEMBER

Keep in mind that character goals can change over time. Things that seem important to a player starting a 1st-level character might become passé when that same character hits 9th or 10th level. You should periodically check back with the players to find out whether their characters' goals have evolved since the last time you asked.

Character build goals

Gaining levels is a lot of fun, and each time a character gains a level, the player gets a chance to select new and exciting rules options — new powers, new feats, even paragon paths and epic destinies. Many players begin low-level characters with their eyes already set on a signature move, tactics, or capability they can't wait to get their hands on. For example, a player with a rogue character might look forward to the day he masters the *hide in plain sight* power (a 16th-level utility exploit); a warlock might anticipate the level at which she can enter the life-stealer paragon path and start collecting life sparks; or a paladin might dream of the day he finds a *holy avenger* sword.

TIP

When you find out what the players' character-building goals are, make a list of things you'll need to plan for future adventures. Some paragon paths and epic destinies suggest special adventures or quests; magic items are associated with particular levels. If you make notes of these things at the start of a campaign, you'll have an easier time shaping your campaign to include them later on.

Character build goals are easy on the DM because usually you don't have to do much more than provide the normal amount of character advancement in the game for the player to make progress toward the goal. Some build goals might require a little work — for example, if a player wants to see his or her character gain a particular magic item (that *holy avenger* sword, say), you will eventually need to place that item as treasure in an adventure or even design an adventure around the character's quest to find the desired item. The alternative is waiting until the character is at a high enough level to create or buy the item, which is a less satisfying way of achieving such an important goal.

Story goals

Character goals that don't involve gaining specific abilities or options are story goals. Story goals might be seeded all the way back in a character's background ("I'm hunting the six-fingered man who murdered my father so I can avenge my father's death") or be acquired during the course of a character's adventuring career ("the vampire Erissyl killed our brave comrade Jozan during our assault on the Ebon Tower; someday we will hunt her down and avenge Jozan's death").

Story goals are significantly more work for you because each story goal demands an adventure to resolve it. To help players achieve their story goals, you have to provide adventure content that refers to these hopes and aspirations. In the examples from the preceding paragraph, you'll eventually need to figure out how the player character can learn the identity of his or her father's killer, where that person or creature is now, and what he, she, or it will do when confronted by a vengeful hero. On the bright side, the story goals that the players share with you ought to provide a wealth of ideas for creating adventures the players will care about.

Chapter 12

Using Every Available Resource

*O*ne of the biggest challenges you face as a Dungeon Master is simply coming up with new material for each game session. Although there's no limit to the amount of adventures and encounters you can create with nothing more than a bit of graph paper and some scribbled notes to yourself, many DMs feel they can't afford the time to generate everything in their games from scratch. Learning how to acquire a steady stream of adventures, encounters, maps, storylines, and villains for use in your game without spending an inordinate amount of time doing so is just part of the fine art of DMing a regular game. So, if you're interested in presenting the best game you can with the least preparation possible, read on!

Buying Published Game Material

The most obvious way to get good gaming material without doing all the work yourself is to pay someone else for it. For this hobby, that means going down to the bookstore or game store and buying professionally published material for your game. If you've poked around the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS shelf at your bookstore or visited your Friendly Local Gaming Store, you've probably noticed that literally hundreds of game accessories, sourcebooks, adventures, and resources are all sitting on the shelves alongside the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*.

Most of these game books are designed, illustrated, and edited by professionals, so you might find that that they're as good as or better than adventure material you can create yourself. However, this isn't always true — quality can vary widely from publisher to publisher and sourcebook to sourcebook. Before you drop money on a new game sourcebook, take a few minutes to thumb through the book and see whether you like what's in there.

Understanding what's out there

Published material for the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game falls into four broad categories:

- ✔ **Print material from Wizards of the Coast, Inc.,** the company that publishes D&D. This includes the core rulebooks (*Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*); additional volumes in the core rulebook series (such as *Player's Handbook 2*); sourcebooks (such as *Martial Power* or *Manual of the Planes*); and print adventures (such as *Keep on the Shadowfell* and *Pyramid of Shadows*).

- ✔ **Online material on D&D Insider,** also from Wizards of the Coast. This includes the contents of two online magazines — called, aptly enough, *Dragon* and *Dungeon* — as well as electronic tools to enhance your game.

- ✔ **Print or PDF material from a number of other publishers** that produce d20 material. d20 sourcebooks and adventures make use of Wizards of the Coast's Game System License agreement to publish game material that's compatible with the D&D game.

- ✔ **Online, fan-created material** you find on D&D Insider or other Web sites.

Adventures

One type of game product you can find is a published adventure (sometimes referred to as *modules*) for the D&D game. A well-designed adventure includes an interesting storyline, challenging encounters and puzzles, cool maps, and a memorable collection of monsters and villains. More importantly, it saves you a lot of time and work. All you need to do is spend a couple hours reading through the adventure so you know what's going on and how to get the player characters involved in it. In a pinch, you can probably do without even that much preparation and just drop the PCs right in.

Official DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventures include the "H series" of adventures in the heroic tier: *Keep on the Shadowfell* (H1), *Thunderspire Labyrinth* (H2), and *Pyramid of Shadows* (H3). You can run these adventures independently or join them into a series that forms a connected storyline. That story continues with the "P series" of paragon-tier adventures and continues into the epic tier with the forthcoming "E series."

Dungeon magazine is another great source of adventures. It launched its own 30-level adventure path in issue #156 (July 2008), but every issue is chock-full of adventures you can drop into your campaign, making it easily the best buy in gaming, whether you subscribe to D&D Insider or purchase individual issues in PDF format. *Dungeon* also includes short features such as ready-to-use villains and campaign advice to enhance your game and make your job easier.

Wizards of the Coast also publishes a few adventures specific to campaign settings (such as *Scepter Tower of Spellgard* for the FORGOTTEN REALMS) and occasional super-adventures. Finally, several other companies publish some excellent D&D-compatible adventures under the d20 license agreement.

Adventures typically include

- ✔ A fully detailed dungeon, castle, temple, or similar site to explore
- ✔ Custom-built monsters or villains to fight
- ✔ A background and storyline that makes the adventure more three-dimensional than a simple dungeon crawl
- ✔ A couple new monsters or magic items, as necessary

Using a published adventure requires less creativity and preparation than creating your own adventure. Whether that's worth paying for depends on your own personal preferences and circumstances. Even if you don't use the whole adventure, however, you can usually use parts of it, such as maps or monsters, for your own campaign.

Player resource books

Sourcebooks that are devoted to exploring specific types of characters and introducing new character options fall into the player resource book category. Foremost among these are the volumes of the *Player's Handbook* series, but this category also includes power source books such as *Arcane Power*, books of equipment and magic items (such as the *Adventurer's Vault* series), and player's guides for specific campaign worlds.

Player resource books might include some or all of the following:

- ✔ New character races
- ✔ New character classes
- ✔ New powers and builds for existing classes
- ✔ New feats
- ✔ New paragon paths and epic destinies
- ✔ New magic items and rituals
- ✔ Organizations or sites relevant to the new material

In general, player resource books don't have much material you can use for generating adventures and encounters for the players. However, the players will find a lot of interesting new options for their characters.

DM resource books

Sourcebooks aimed at the Dungeon Master usually provide new threats, rewards, or storylines for use in the game, as well as more advice for DMs and more tools for your DM toolbox. Every book called a *Dungeon Master's Guide* or a *Monster Manual* is a book in this category, as are in-depth monster studies such as the *Draconomicon* series and *Open Grave*, planar sourcebooks such as *Manual of the Planes*, and campaign setting guides.

DM resource books typically include

- ✔ New monsters, traps, and hazards
- ✔ Storylines, themes, or adventure suggestions
- ✔ Ready-to-play encounter sites, monster lairs, or short adventures, including maps and monster or villain statistics
- ✔ Organizations, villains, and sites relevant to the new material

DM resource books naturally have more pages devoted to material you can use for creating adventures and encounters for the players, and fewer pages for new character options. Many also include chapters that have ready-to-play adventures, encounters you can drop into your game with no additional preparation, or keyed locales or sites you can easily borrow for use in your own game.

Don't overlook sourcebooks that are tied to particular game worlds. Each year, Wizards of the Coast publishes a campaign guide, a player's guide, and an adventure for a new world you and your players can explore, beginning with the FORGOTTEN REALMS in 2008 and EBERRON in 2009. A number of other companies produce their own game settings that are compatible with D&D. Even if you don't play in one of these game worlds, you might find that you can drop products such as these (or great portions of them) into your own game setting with a minimum of work. Of course, your mileage may vary.

Miniatures and game play accessories

Not every D&D accessory involves something you read. Most DMs discover that they need physical tools for their games as much as they need new adventures and additional source material. If you use miniatures at the gaming table, you'll find that you really can't ever have too many.

Figuring out what you need

It isn't unusual to find that you can't make use of everything in a particular sourcebook in your game. Maybe the players don't have the "right" mix of character races or classes, or maybe you find that some of the material just isn't appropriate for the setting of your campaign. Fortunately, most well-designed sourcebooks have plenty of material that you can pillage for almost any game.

The single most important guiding principle in evaluating published source-books and adventures is simply this: Does it strike you as cool? If the subject matter is interesting to you, you'll find a way to make it fit into your game, and your game will be the better for it. Conversely, if you think it just isn't that interesting, it doesn't matter how appropriate the sourcebook is for your game or the players — you won't have fun trying to build your game around your new purchase. Save your gaming dollars for things that really inspire you, and you'll be happier in the long run.

Assuming that you're going to stick to the cardinal rule and focus on things that strike you as interesting, what else should you look for in a sourcebook or adventure? The following sections pose questions that you should ask yourself when you're deciding whether to buy a particular new sourcebook.

Does it require a restart?

You might find that you really can't use a new sourcebook or adventure unless you're willing to restart your game with brand-new characters appropriate for the material you've just purchased. For example, if you buy the EBERRON *Campaign Guide* and decide that you really want to run a campaign set in the world of EBERRON, you're best off restarting your game with new characters at 1st level, facing new challenges and tying in to the themes you want to emphasize in your game.

It's up to you and your group to find a balance between playing a campaign that never ends and restarting your campaign every time the player characters reach 5th level. You might let every campaign run the full course from 1st level to 30th, restarting every year or so. You might start some campaigns at higher levels or end them at lower levels. But restarting your game every once in a while is a good thing — it gives both you and your players a chance to explore new ideas for characters and adventures.

One way to get the best of both worlds is to have two or more campaigns going at once. If you buy a new adventure you really want to run, but it's designed for characters of a level vastly different from the level of the characters in your present campaign, you could wait until the characters reach that

level, either in the current campaign or in the next one. But you could also put your campaign on hold for a little while, have the players make up new characters of the appropriate level, and run the new adventure as a brief sideline from your main campaign. If you or someone else in your group wants to start up a new EBERRON campaign while you're in the middle of your long-running FORGOTTEN REALMS game, why not try taking turns? You don't need to alternate sessions, but trade off every four sessions or so — let the players work their way through a short adventure or major chapter of a longer adventure and then change gears to play in a different world, with different characters, for a while.

Is it applicable to the player characters in this game?

Say you're running a game in which none of the player characters have classes that draw on the martial power source. You have a paladin and a swordmage (from the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Player's Guide*) as defenders, a warlock as a striker, a cleric as leader, and a wizard controller. Should you buy a copy of *Martial Power?* That sourcebook is aimed at players of fighters, rogues, rangers, and warlords, and by design you're not going to find much in that book to appeal to other characters. Similarly, a book all about elves is great, but if none of the players in the game has an elf character, it's hard to see why you would really need it.

Remember, if the topic of the adventure or sourcebook really catches your eye, you can always choose to make it a central theme in your game.

What can I pillage?

Even if you encounter difficulties when trying to incorporate all the new ideas or material from a sourcebook into your game, you can usually find *something* that you can use with little work. Most sourcebooks include a couple of maps, a few good adventure suggestions, or even just a monster or two you can drop into your game with no preparation.

You can usually pillage some or all of the following from almost any sourcebook:

- ✔ **Monsters:** Most D&D sourcebooks or adventures include at least one or two new monsters. Check to see whether the sourcebook includes unique monsters you can use somewhere else in your game.

- ✔ **Adventure hooks:** Many sourcebooks offer a number of adventure suggestions. Good ideas for adventures are invaluable.

- ✔ **Maps:** If you're cartographically challenged, you'll often find that the best way to map out your next dungeon is to simply use a map from one of your sourcebooks and create your own keyed encounters and challenges based on that map. Check out the sourcebook's maps and see whether they're interesting, well-rendered, and easily adaptable to multiple purposes.

Which edition?

Most of the time, you're better off spending your gaming dollars on material designed for the current, 4th Edition of the Dungeons & Dragons game. However, your hobby store might stock older 3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons supplements, or even older books from prior editions. Although they aren't compatible with the current edition, you might find these out-of-date sourcebooks have enough maps, adventure hooks, or story ideas to make them worth a second look, though you'll need to do some work to make them current with your game.

Some types of sourcebooks are more useful than others if the rules in them are obsolete. For example, books detailing campaign settings can be quite useful regardless of the edition of the game they're designed for. You might even find setting books for other game systems useful for inspiration for your campaign, in the same way you might draw on a fantasy novel to help flesh out your own setting. On the other hand, a book with a heavy emphasis on rules elements, such as a book full of 3rd Edition feats and classes, will be much harder to use in a 4th Edition game.

As always, your mileage may vary.

Using D&D Insider

D&D Insider is a subscription-based suite of tools and resources on the Internet, created by Wizards of the Coast and designed to enhance your game. Some elements of D&D Insider are similar to printed resources — the types of material in the online *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines are the same as what you'd find in printed sourcebooks and adventures. Other elements are unique to the digital environment. You can discover more about D&D Insider at www.dndinsider.com.

The D&D magazines

Prior to 2008, *Dragon* and *Dungeon* were printed magazines available on newsstands and by subscription. Now, they've moved online, where they provide the cornerstone of the D&D Insider suite. The two magazines combined contain roughly 180 pages of all-new content each month, which is like getting a new sourcebook chock-full of useful resources delivered to your computer each month. The content in *Dragon* is more player-focused, with articles that expand character options, explore elements of the D&D world, and preview material from upcoming Wizards of the Coast sourcebooks. *Dungeon,* though, is just for you, the Dungeon Master. Each issue includes several ready-to-play adventures, as well as regular columns full of advice to make your game better.

You can find *Dragon* magazine at www.wizards.com/dragon, and *Dungeon* at www.wizards.com/dungeon.

D&D Compendium

The D&D Compendium is a searchable database containing all the options that are an official part of the D&D game — every race, class, paragon path, epic destiny, skill, feat, power, item, and ritual that appears in a printed sourcebook or one of the online magazines. Even if you're not a D&D Insider subscriber, you can use the search function of the Compendium as a detailed index to your printed books. If you're a subscriber, the Compendium search will give you the full rules text of all these elements. It's a great way to pre-view what's in a new sourcebook before you decide to buy it or even to replace the physical books on your shelves.

The D&D Compendium is located at `www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/insider/compendium`.

The D&D Game Table

You can use the D&D Game Table to play a completely digital version of Dungeons & Dragons — sitting with your friends around a virtual table on the Internet, referencing the D&D Compendium instead of printed rule books, and using character sheets stored online. The D&D Game Table provides virtual *Dungeon Tiles* and miniatures, includes built-in voice chat, helps you track initiative in combat, and lets you share pictures and handouts with players online. The goal is to replicate the tabletop gaming experience as closely as possible, so it's still D&D and not a computer game. You're still interacting with other people in a game run by a Dungeon Master. But in other ways it's a lot like playing a multiplayer online game — you can play when it's conve-nient for you with friends who might be scattered across the globe, or with strangers you find in the lobby of the Game Table application.

TIP

The D&D Game Table can also be useful for a game you play at a physical table. With a computer connected to a large-screen TV or projector, you can display vivid 3D dungeons to your players and make use of all the helpful tools to make combat run more smoothly.

At the time of this writing, the D&D Game Table is still in development. Find out more at `www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/insider/gametable`.

The D&D Dungeon Builder

The D&D Dungeon Builder is a simple click-and-drag dungeon tile mapper you can use to create beautiful dungeon maps and tactical maps for your D&D game. Whether you're playing on a physical tabletop or the digital D&D Game Table, the D&D Dungeon Builder is an easy way to make great-looking maps.

Like the Game Table, the Dungeon Builder is still getting its final polish. Read all about it at `www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/insider/dungeonbuilder`.

Using the Rest of the Internet

Besides the ready-made tools available as part of D&D Insider, the Internet offers some great ways to keep track of the details of your regular D&D game. For example:

- ✔ **Web site:** You can create a Web site devoted to your game that your players can access anytime they want to read up on what's going on in the game world. Nobody has to carry around a big, disorganized notebook or misplace handouts you provided if an ongoing journal of your game is a persistent, ever-growing section of your Web page.

    A Web site is also a great place to keep information that's generally useful for your game. For example, if you have a set of rules or notes about which game sourcebooks you allow in your game and which ones you don't, you can build a Character Creation tab or page for your site. If you have extensive notes about the people or places in your game world that you think the player characters ought to be familiar with, write them up and post them on a World Atlas or Campaign Gazetteer page.

- ✔ **Blog:** *Blogs* (short for Web logs, which are online journals for those of you who haven't joined the 21st century yet) are excellent formats for maintaining a lasting journal of your game. Like with a Web site, you can use a blog to keep an online journal of your game that the players can access anytime they please.

    Most blog hosts allow users to leave comments on blog entries, so your players can easily add their own comments to an entry journaling the latest adventure.

You might also want to collect and maintain electronic versions of the players' character sheets and keep the updated files on your Web site. That way, if a player doesn't show up or forgets his or her character sheet, you can always hop on any Internet-connected computer and download the latest version of a character should you need it. Similarly, you can ask the players to contribute interesting content about their characters to your site.

One of the more interesting techniques DMs use to keep player interest in their campaigns bubbling is to use a Web site or blog to publish an in-world newsletter — articles, missives, correspondence, or similar documents written "in character" that show what's going on in the game world. Imagine what sort of flier or pamphlet a town crier might read from in a town where the player characters are involved in dangerous dealings, heroic rescues, and deadly monster hunts, and post that on your Web site or blog. Are the writers

of the pamphlet friends of the heroes, who celebrate their successes? Or are they suspicious, narrow-minded gossips who delight in passing along every petty rumor they can find? Creating the Web page or blog entries for the game world's newsletter takes a little work, but it's a great payoff for the players.

Finding Story Inspiration

Many Dungeon Masters choose to create their own adventures and campaigns out of nothing more than their imaginations. If you're one of those DMs, good for you! Devising exciting adventures and crafting a fantastic world for your D&D game are some of the most rewarding parts of being a Dungeon Master.

However, even the most creative DM can use a helping hand every now and then. For some people, it's a matter of time; depending on the amount of detail and contingency planning you deem necessary in preparing adventures for the players, designing a big dungeon might take up your hobby time for weeks and weeks. Other DMs have the time but find it hard to come up with original ideas on demand. When your creation well runs dry, try some of the options in the following sections.

The real world

The first place you can look for ideas is right in front of you. Between the Earth's astonishing variety of terrain and climate and the similarly broad canvas of human societies in different places and times, you can find zillions of ideas for interesting adventures. If you need a floor plan for a castle, why not base your map sketch on the plan of a real castle? You can find plenty of books about castles at your local library or bookstore, or you might do well to hop online and use your favorite search engine to see whether anybody's ever posted that sort of information to the Web.

Naturally, books on medieval life, history, or castles in general are useful to many D&D games. Encyclopedias often have interesting articles on a variety of these topics. In addition to references on medieval Europe, keep your eyes open for books or articles pertaining to other times — the Dark Ages or the Renaissance, for instance — and other cultures, such as the medieval Arabic, Byzantine, Malinese, or even Chinese or Japanese Empires. Even modern-day examples of exotic places and cultures might prove inspirational. *National Geographic* is a treasure trove of ideas for a D&D game. If you check out the interesting locales, maps, and portraits of societies and customs from all over the world, you can find something in every issue.

Fantasy fiction

Over the years, thousands of authors have created tens of thousands of fantasy stories. There's no reason you can't quietly borrow elements of a couple from your own favorites for use in your D&D game. As long as you're subtle about it (for example, don't create an adventure that's all about taking the Sole Ring of Ultimate Might to Mount Woe in order to destroy it in the volcanic fires where it was forged), the players might not even notice that your adventure was inspired by a book you read.

If you want to use your favorite fantasy story as inspiration for your game, here are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

- ✔ Short stories are better than novels; a short story can easily inspire a single adventure.

- ✔ Stories with lots of action make for better games than stories that are driven by the relationships of the characters.

- ✔ The more obscure, the better; try to avoid stories the players are intimately familiar with.

- ✔ Fantastic it up — most fantasy fiction is less fantastic than D&D, so consider changing human kingdoms or characters into creatures of a more fantastic nature.

- ✔ File off the serial numbers. Make sure you change names of places and characters enough so that the players won't recognize them.

TIP Robert E. Howard's Conan stories or Fritz Leiber's *The Adventures of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* tales are good examples of the sort of fiction that lends itself to conversion into D&D adventures. You could do worse than to model an adventure after Howard's *The Devil in Iron* or Leiber's *Swords of Lankhmar.*

Movies and TV

Imagine this scenario: An honest lawman is hired to clean up a rough-and-tumble mining town, but when he does his job too well, the corrupt mayor calls in the hired guns to kill the lawman and stop him from setting things right. It's a plot from a Western, right? Not exactly — this is from the Sean Connery movie *Outland,* which was really just a Western story with a science fiction setting. If the formula works for Hollywood, it can work for you, too. There's no reason you can't borrow the basic plot structure of almost any action movie, replace some of the thugs and villains with monsters, and present it as a D&D adventure for the players.

TV shows also have some lessons for a DM in search of creativity. Unlike a movie, which usually ends with the biggest and most satisfying resolution possible for the hero, a TV show is a serial. A single episode *can't* resolve every problem the hero faces, because if it does, the viewers have no reason to tune in next week. Your D&D game is more like a TV show than a movie; at the end of the adventure, you need plenty of reasons for the players to come back and see what happens next.

A well-written TV show commonly introduces an immediate problem that can be resolved with reasonable satisfaction in the single episode you're watching, but it also throws in elements of long-term plots and developments that might never be resolved. Think of *The X-Files*: In every episode, Mulder and Scully discover, investigate, and then deal with (or just survive) some immediate threat, but in the background, several important storylines and recurring figures keep the series-spanning meta-plot moving forward with appearances by characters such as Cancer Man and Deep Throat.

It's hard to imagine a better example of a serial adventure format for a D&D game. Replace Mulder and Scully with the player characters, the immediate problem of the episode with the dungeon they're currently exploring, and the meta-plot characters with long-term patrons or master villains appropriate to your campaign, and you have the ingredients of a great campaign.

The collision of ideas

Want to know one of the big secrets of the creative process? Here it is: Anybody can think up something new by taking two different things and mashing them together. When you're really stuck, try pairing up a couple ideas or notions that don't seem to have anything to do with each other, and see where it takes you.

For example, take pirates and a wizard's tower. How could you build an adventure around those components? Maybe the player characters want to explore the wizard's tower, but first they have to find the pirates who know where it is and infiltrate their operation. Maybe the player characters can find and explore the tower easily enough, but just when they think the adventure's over and they're about to leave with the loot, a band of pirates shows up to take the treasure away from them. Or maybe the wizard who dwells in the tower has hired a pirate band to comb the seas in search of a magic gem he needs for some special rite, and the player characters have to beat the pirates to the prize — and then survive the wizard's wrath. There are a dozen more adventure hooks where those came from, all based on the collision of two simple ideas.

Talking with Other Gamers

One final resource deserves mention in this chapter: the community of gamers that exists across the world. You aren't the only Dungeon Master out there looking for an adventure for your Friday night game. Kicking around the idea for an adventure with just one other DM can help you spot plot holes, work out refinements to your basic premise, and come up with a hundred other things you might not have thought of before. Other DMs might have advice on how to handle characters that seem to be causing trouble in your game, suggestions for challenges and traps the players would never expect from you, or even old adventures and encounters they'd be willing to swap in exchange for some of your own old game material.

Joining a game club

Depending on where you live and what you do, you might be closer to a network of other D&D fans than you think. Many high schools and colleges have gaming clubs for their students, which provide you with a supply of potential players as well as a chance to network with other DMs. Local gaming clubs often have arrangements with schools, libraries, or hobby stores for regular game nights, providing a safe and convenient place to play D&D.

If you don't have a gaming club close at hand (or if your school days are behind you), some of the better hobby stores around often sponsor their own game nights. Check with your Friendly Local Game Store to see whether it sponsors any D&D nights.

Finally, there's a worldwide network of D&D fans known as the RPGA (ROLEPLAYING GAMERS ASSOCIATION). You can find RPGA chapters all over the country. The RPGA sponsors several special programs that reward you for joining and DMing for other members. You can find out more at `www.rpga.com`.

Corresponding on the Web

If you don't happen to have a local gaming club available, the Internet offers the opportunity to communicate with countless other gamers. Message boards at several popular gaming-related sites offer you an excellent forum for seeking help with particular plot problems, difficult characters, purchasing decisions, or adventure design.

WARNING!

We're sure you've heard it before, but be careful about who you talk to online. If you're a minor, you should ask your parent or guardian before you visit any online forum, chat room, or bulletin board. And never, ever provide any personal information to anyone you don't know.

Wizards of the Coast Web site

`www.wizards.com`

The official Web site of Wizards of the Coast, Inc., provides support for all the games the company publishes, including the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. You can find previews of new and upcoming products, various articles and game content, message boards, and pointers to mailing lists.

EN World

`www.enworld.org`

The EN World Web site is about the busiest D&D and RPG site out there other than Wizards of the Coast itself. It's a great place to find out about d20 products not published by Wizards of the Coast, so if you want to hear what people are saying about other d20 companies, this is probably the place to start looking.

Candlekeep
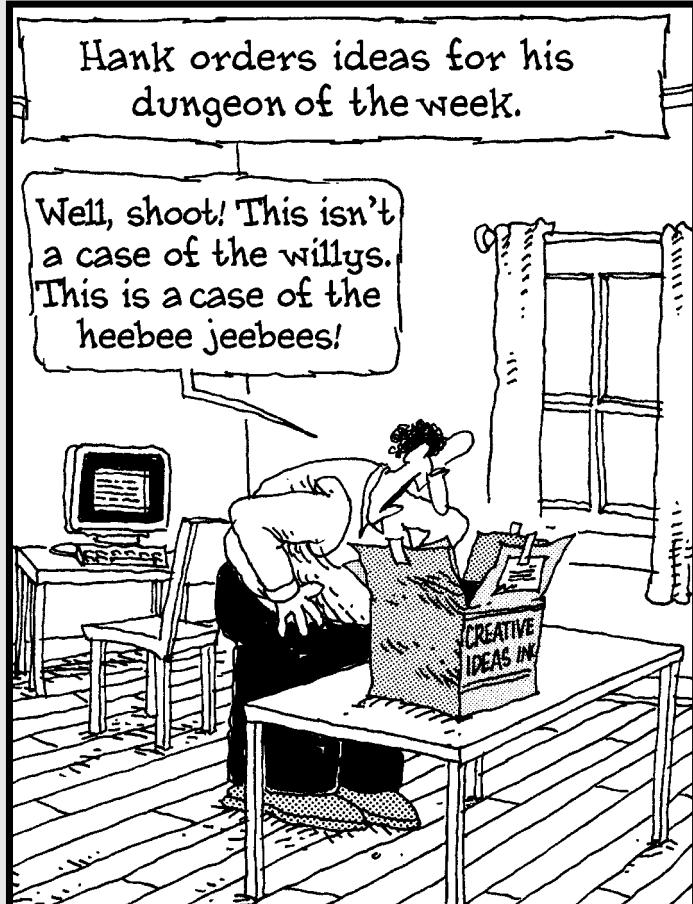
`www.candlekeep.com`
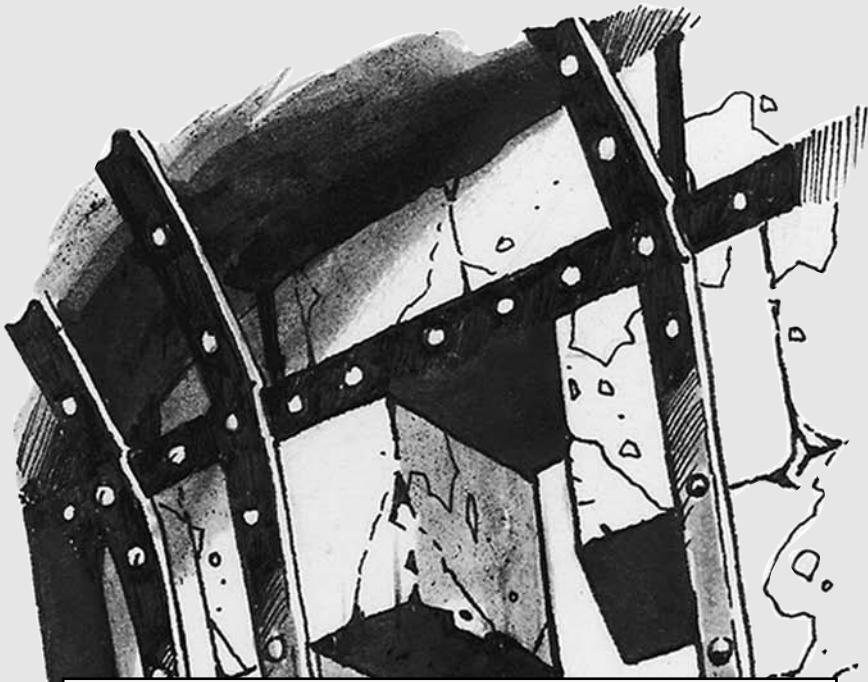
The Candlekeep Web site is devoted to the FORGOTTEN REALMS world. The discussion here tends to run more toward the details of the world (some might even say minutiae). A number of FORGOTTEN REALMS authors and designers keep half an eye on this site, as do many fellow fans who are real masters of Realmslore.

Part III

Creating Adventures

The 5th Wave   By Rich Tennant

Hank orders ideas for his dungeon of the week.

Well, shoot! This isn't a case of the willys. This is a case of the heebee jeebees!

CREATIVE IDEAS INC
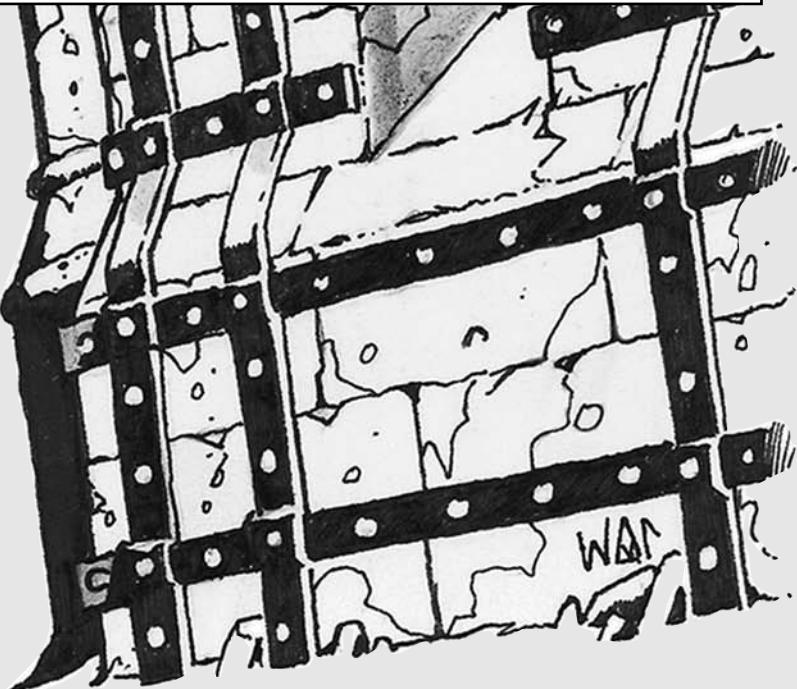
In this part . . .

Some of the biggest kicks for Dungeon Masters come from crafting adventures and then seeing them come alive as the group plays through them. In this part, we discuss the things that go into every DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure. Memorable adventures don't just happen — they're made with care and imagination. We show you how.

Chapter 13

Tools of the Trade

*A*dventures. You can't play the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game without them. Eventually, you're going to want to (or need to) create your own adventure. You'll need something for the next game session, and nothing you've found will quite fit the needs of your campaign. Or, the gaming group is getting together in a few hours, and you haven't had time to get over to your favorite game store to find an adventure. Or, you just want to flex your creative muscles and create your own adventure.

That's where this chapter comes in. We show you how to craft a solid adventure, even if you don't think you're up to the challenge. In this chapter, we examine the tools of adventure design and set the foundation for the rest of the chapters in Part III.

Breaking Down the Parts of a D&D Adventure

For the Dungeon Master, creating adventures can be a wonderful outlet for creative expression and imagination. Although not everyone can be a Tolkien or a Salvatore, every DM can craft solid, fun D&D adventures.

REMEMBER

Adventure design doesn't strive to craft a complete story. The DM provides only part of the story — the rest comes out through the game and the actions of the player characters. The DM sets up the basic plot and a rough structure for an adventure, leaving the conclusions to come when the game is played. This means that how things turn out will be a surprise to everyone, including the DM. That's part of the fun of the D&D game.

Like everything in life, adventure design becomes a lot easier when you break it down into parts. Deal with each part, and soon you have a complete and vibrant adventure. An *adventure* is a collection of related encounters that create a cogent storyline. An adventure promises a story, offers obstacles, provides opportunities for each player character to shine, and delivers a threat.

TIP

As you build your adventure, think in terms of setting scenes. You set up the beginning for each scene in the story, providing a place for the player characters to make a decision or select a course of action. Don't think about endings, because you want the adventure to play out through the actions and ideas of the players and their characters.

REMEMBER

Always ask the players "What do you want to do?" or "What do you do now?" End each part of your setup with one of these or a similar question, showing that it's always up to the players to decide the next course of action for their characters.

Adventures consist of the following parts:

✔ **The premise:** The hook you use to catch the players' interests and provide motivation for their characters.

✔ **Encounters:** The space for action and drama. This is where the game is played. Encounters come in two basic forms:

 • Combat encounters

 • Noncombat encounters, including skill challenges, trap encounters, puzzles, and interaction with nonplayer characters (NPCs)

✔ **The end:** The adventure usually winds up with a climactic encounter and provides a variety of options for moving on to the next adventure.

The rest of this chapter examines these parts, as well as the other tools you use to craft D&D adventures.

The premise

A *premise* sets up the promise of your adventure. It's an initial situation that gets the player characters involved. Some of the premise is background, the things that happened before the adventure begins. Some of the premise is the opening hook, the scene you use to start the adventure and get the player characters interested.

Where to start?

Sometimes you'll want to start an adventure right at the beginning. However, this means that a lot of the game is spent dealing with setup and motivations. Every once in awhile, for variety, try starting an adventure in the middle of the action. Come up with an opening scene that's reminiscent of action movies, something exciting and intriguing, with plenty of flair and style so that the players get caught up in the game. Start out with a call for action and let the players decide how and why their characters get involved. There's always a risk that the players will decide to turn the other way, but in the end, everyone is here to play D&D. Most of the time, if you dangle the action in front of them, the players will jump to get their characters involved. After all, that's where the fun is.

Using the example premises given in "The premise" section, here's how to start in the middle of the action:

✔ The player characters are on the road to the village of Welton when they come around a bend and spot an ancient and partially collapsed tower. The place looks abandoned and very gloomy in the twilight darkness of the forest. Suddenly, an eerie light flares in one of the tower windows, and the player characters notice something move in the shadows around them. Unearthly growls fill the woods, and the things in the shadows leap toward them. What do the player characters do?

✔ On the road to the City of Far Spires, the player characters come upon a richly appointed elven caravan. The caravan is being attacked by marauding bugbears, and already many of the elf guards have fallen. What do the player characters want to do?

✔ The player characters have been hired to guard the vaults of the dwarf lords. There are seven connected vaults, each containing something more valuable than the last. Over the past three weeks, the first three vaults have been robbed. Now the fourth vault is under the protection of the player characters. Suddenly, the vault falls into complete darkness, and the PCs hear a strange, twisted laugh. "So you think you can stop me?" the laughing voice calls from the darkness. "Then let the contest begin!" What do the player characters want to do?

The *background* is what has gone before, the lead up to the start of the adventure. It could be long and complex — the war between the dwarves and the giants has been going on for decades when one dwarf and one giant approach the player characters with a plan for ending the conflict. It could be brief and to the point — something has been killing town folk every night for the past month and now the town elders are seeking help.

Examples of adventure premises include

✔ Lights have been seen in the abandoned Tower of the Mad Wizard, and strange creatures have been spotted roaming just outside the village of Welton.

✔ An elf priest needs someone to guard her and the ancient Elrooven Cask that she seeks to transport to the City of Far Spires.

> ✔ A thief has been robbing the vaults of the dwarf lords, getting around every trap and ward the dwarves have put in place. The thief must be stopped before the next vault is plundered.

Encounters

Every Dungeons & Dragons adventure consists of encounters. *Encounters* are where the action takes place. Encounters can be broadly grouped into two categories: combat and noncombat encounters. With these basic building blocks, you can construct adventures.

Every encounter is kind of like a miniature, concentrated version of the entire adventure. An encounter has a premise and a setup. It has a location. It has a goal. And it has a connection to the next step in the adventure.

Encounter goals can be summed up by the verb that best describes the action required to complete the encounter — *capture, defeat, discover, destroy, escape, find, negotiate, obtain, protect, rescue,* and *survive* are a few examples. In an encounter, the player characters might have to *defeat* the gargoyle guarding the magic fountain, *destroy* the evil ring in the pool of molten lava, *find* the hidden tomb of Baranka the Vile, or *survive* the dangers of the Chamber of One Hundred Deaths.

The following subsections take a closer look at the types of encounters you can use to build your adventure.

Combat encounters

In most D&D adventures, the majority of encounters are *combat encounters.* When you think of the D&D game, combat encounters are the scenes you usually imagine.

In combat encounters, the player characters must face and defeat monsters or other DM-controlled opponents. Combat skills and spells see the most use in these encounters.

A combat encounter works best when it combines interesting monsters and other challenges with an interesting setting where movement and tactics can come into play. In the section on "Building Encounters" in this chapter, we discuss how to plan encounters that account for the characters' capabilities and challenge them accordingly.

Noncombat encounters

Noncombat encounters feature an obstacle of some kind — a hazard, a trap, a nonplayer character they don't want to fight, or a generally dangerous

situation — that the player characters must overcome to attain the goal of the encounter. These include scenes where PCs must talk to, convince, bluff, bribe, insult, persuade, negotiate, interrogate, beg, or otherwise interact with an NPC to advance the adventure. Skills are the primary tools characters use to complete these encounters, which is why they're called skill challenges. Characters can also use utility powers and ability checks, as well as ingenuity and quick thinking, to complete a challenge.

What makes an adventure exciting?

Remember that the players (or their characters) can't see the behind-the-scenes machinations of your villains or the clever plot twists that you have liberally sprinkled throughout the adventure. You want your adventures to have the feel of a great fantasy novel or movie, but you can't rely on the same tricks that those mediums use.

Don't just imagine your adventure as a series of fights occasionally interrupted by periods of talking. When you do, you shortchange one of the most compelling parts of the game — playing a role. Give some thought to the personalities, motivations, and goals of your non-player characters, especially the key villains and anyone you expect the player characters to deal with in noncombat encounters. In this way, even scenes where combat never breaks out can be memorable and exciting.

In addition to the goblins and orcs you use to provide the player characters with rows of bad guys to take down, you want to be sure to include competent adversaries for them to encounter. From common enemies to arch villains, make sure that these spotlight opponents can stack up against the player characters. This doesn't mean that all your villains must be super-powerful, but they shouldn't be too weak, either. Set up and play an intelligent villain, and that NPC can seem more powerful in the game than it does on paper. And when you create that villain for the climactic encounter, make sure the NPC can stand against the player characters for a few rounds, or that the NPC is supported by henchmen or bodyguards who can add weight to the scene.

Consider that the best fights take place in amazing places. Any combat encounter can be exciting, but a combat that involves deadly monsters *and* a dangerous or challenging location can be memorable. Imagine a fight in a huge cave full of pits, chasms, and ledges, where the terrain becomes both an ally and an enemy as the battle rages on. What if a fight takes place in dense fog that gives concealment to creatures 1 square away and makes it impossible to see anything beyond that? What about a chamber comprised of raising and lowering platforms that move at random and keep the opponents apart?

Remember: The players take their cues from you. Your descriptions of each action that occurs, the location of each important object and participant, and the general environment are crucial to letting players imagine the scene and make intelligent decisions for their characters. How you pass on information can help set the tone of a scene, as well. Speak quickly and intently to add intensity to the action. Be slow and deliberate when you want to build atmosphere or suspense. In this way, the players will (perhaps even unconsciously) pick up on your verbal cues and will become better at visualizing the scene and will make better decisions for their characters' actions with each game you play.

Situations where the characters interact with a helpful NPC — a character who sends them on a quest or gives them information, perhaps, or a prisoner they find and free along the way — aren't actually encounters. They can be great opportunities for roleplaying and move the story of the adventure ahead, but it's not an encounter unless there's some possibility of meaningful failure.

The end

Every adventure has an ending. Create a climactic encounter to end your adventure. It should involve elements that have been hinted at throughout earlier scenes, and it should provide the pay off that the player characters have been waiting for — they get to deal with the main villain or at least disrupt the main villain's plans and save the day, for the time being.

The climax is where all the answers wait to be discovered — the true plan, the true villain, the true evil behind it all. The climax is also where the main battle usually occurs — where the player characters face the boss monster and everything is on the line.

REMEMBER

Not every adventure needs to be earth-shattering or deal with huge stakes, but the end should still entail a payoff.

Sometimes your adventure is just one in a series that will take the player characters up in level and unveil greater and greater threats along the way. In these cases, you don't want to have your villain defeated at the end of the first adventure in the series. Instead, you should provide assistants and minions — some that are powerful in their own right — to give the player characters someone to defeat and some insidious plan to foil with each adventure, even if another plan is revealed right at the end.

Creating Dungeon Maps

Site-based adventures, which are usually dungeon crawls, are the easiest adventures to design and run. Site-based adventures use encounters keyed to a map, and the map provides a natural flow for the adventure.

Use graph paper when drawing your dungeon map. Each square equals 5 feet. Mark encounter areas with some kind of key (numbers or letters work best), and note any special features, such as doors, curtains, furniture, and traps. Later, when the player characters have moved through an area, make notes right on your map to remind you which doors they unlocked, which traps they set off, and which monsters they defeated.

It's usually a good idea to keep the key to your map on a separate sheet of paper from the map itself. If you marked an encounter area as 1 or A, use that same notation on your key page. On the key, make notes about each area on the map, including monsters, traps, and treasure. These notes should be as long or as short as you're comfortable with so that you can easily run your adventure from them.

If you're building a really simple dungeon, you can put the key right on the map, noting the monsters that appear in a room right in the room, or perhaps in the margin of the map, with a line drawn to the appropriate room. Just remember that the less detail you put into your dungeon key, the more you'll be called on to improvise with details as you run the adventure.

You can stay as simple or get as complex as you want with the details of your dungeon. A simple dungeon is often *static,* meaning that you set the monsters in place and that's where they stay until the player characters encounter them. A *dynamic* (and therefore more complex) dungeon features notes on contingency plans the monsters have in place and often sets conditional statements such as "if the PCs do this, then that occurs."

Use the various examples of maps shown throughout this book, such as the dungeon map in Chapter 19, as guidelines when creating your own maps. You can also refer to the maps in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or a published adventure, but remember that you don't have to be a professional cartographer to make a useful dungeon map!

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* has a lot of good advice about drawing maps that make for exciting combat encounters. In particular, look at the points on page 60 ("Interesting Areas"), the three approaches outlined on page 110 ("Setting Details"), and the mapping tips on pages 112–113 ("Mapping the Site").

One simple and fun way to create a map for your dungeon is to lay it out on a big table using D&D *Dungeon Tiles.* You might find that the art on the tiles inspires you to add interesting elements to your dungeon rooms, and if you build your dungeon this way, you'll be sure that when you're running the adventure you can construct the tactical map for each encounter using the tiles you own. You can also use the D&D Dungeon Builder, a component of D&D Insider, to build a map with *Dungeon Tiles* right on your computer screen. Chapter 12 discusses the Dungeon Builder and D&D Insider in more detail.

Building Encounters

In general, you populate a dungeon (or any kind of adventure) with opponents to challenge the player characters. Some of these opponents take the

form of traps or natural hazards, but the majority of the opponents appear in the form of monsters or villains.

You can take monsters right out of any one of a number of ready-to-use sources, including the D&D *Monster Manual* and sourcebooks such as *Draconomicon: Chromatic Dragons* or *Manual of the Planes*.

You can also craft a monster yourself by building an opponent from scratch, modifying an existing monster in some way, or creating an NPC with a character class. Chapter 10 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is full of advice on how to craft these opponents, including simple modifications to existing monsters (changing its appearance or adjusting its level), templates you can apply to expand a monster's capabilities, and rules for building NPCs.

A master villain is often an elite or even a solo monster, making it feel like a significant threat even if its level isn't any higher than the player characters' level. If you want a villain to be a persistent nemesis, you can advance the villain's level as the player characters gain levels, so the master villain remains a signature foe throughout the player characters' career.

What kind of monsters and villains are right for your dungeon adventure? That depends on the story you want to tell and the level and number of the player characters. As a general rule, a good challenge for a group of characters is a group of the same number of monsters of the same level as the characters.

Encounter level

Every monster in the game has a level, just as player characters have levels, and the two are meant to be directly comparable: a 5th-level character should spend a lot of time fighting 5th-level monsters. The concept of *encounter level* measures how tough a given encounter is for a specific group of PCs. It's relative to the number of characters in the party, and it serves as a quick measure of whether the encounter should be easy, tough, or darn near impossible for that group of player characters to deal with. A group of seven 5th-level monsters facing a group of five 5th-level characters is actually a fairly difficult 6th-level encounter for that party. Up against a group of seven 5th-level characters, though, it's a 5th-level encounter, a perfectly appropriate challenge.

When you craft each encounter in your adventure, assign monsters to hit the encounter level you want associated with the encounter.

You're going to want to review the information on pages 56–57 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. It tells you how to build encounters and determine their encounter level.

A lot of the time, you want the level of the party to match the level of the encounter. Some encounters should be easier than average; some should be harder. Table 13-1 describes the optimal mix of encounters to throw at the PCs over the course of an adventure. (This table is adapted from the table on page 104 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.)

Table 13-1	Encounter Difficulty	
% of Total Encounters	*Encounter Difficulty*	*Encounter Level*
10%	Moderately easy	Party level −1
40%	Moderate	Party level +0
40%	Challenging	Party level +1
10%	Very challenging	Party level +2 or +3

The percentages relate to the overall dungeon you design. For example, if you design a dungeon with ten combat or challenge encounters, one should be moderately easy, four should be moderate, four should be challenging, and one should be very challenging.

If you use this distribution of encounters, the characters will advance one level after they complete eight encounters and one major quest of their level (or a ninth encounter). Those eight encounters would consist of one moderately easy encounter, three each of moderate and challenging, and one very challenging encounter. If you use a ninth encounter instead of a major quest, it should be moderately difficult.

Monster roles

Just as player characters have roles, monsters also have roles, which are single-word summaries of the job they're expected to perform in combat encounters. A monster's role is a tool to help you build the monster into an encounter and run that encounter, sort of a shorthand description of the kinds of abilities it has.

These are the six main monster roles:

✔ **Artillery:** These monsters try to stay out of melee combat, using ranged and area attacks to hurt the characters from a distance.

✔ **Brute:** These monsters stand in melee and dish out lots of damage. They're pretty easy for characters to hit (they have low defense scores), but they have lots of hit points.

✔ **Controller:** These monsters don't mind getting up close and personal, using short-range attacks, close powers, and melee attacks to alter terrain, control their opponents' actions, or inflict penalties or negative conditions.

Remember that a monster controller, such as a mind flayer mastermind, isn't the same as a player character controller, such as a wizard. Player character controllers generally stay back out of hand-to-hand combat, using area and multiple-target ranged attacks to control the field of battle. Monster controllers are more like leader player characters, although with a greater focus on harming their foes than on helping their allies (unless they're also leader monsters).

✔ **Lurker:** These monsters tend to make very damaging attacks every couple of rounds, with some means of staying out of harm's way in the rounds between. Some lurkers use stealth or invisibility, while others turn to stone or become insubstantial so they're much harder to damage.

✔ **Skirmisher:** These monsters are all about mobility, moving rapidly around the encounter area, shifting a lot, and using powers like *mobile melee attack* or *flyby attack* to hit characters and run away.

✔ **Soldier:** Like brutes, soldiers stand up front in melee and beat on characters. They have normal hit points but high Armor Class, letting them take a lot of punishment before they drop. They also have abilities that help them pin characters down next to them, very similar to player character defenders.

Minion is sort of a role, but it also falls into the same category as words like elite and solo, which tell you how much of a threat a monster is compared with other monsters of its level. Minions count as fractions of monsters, elite monsters count double, and solo monsters are five monsters in one — a whole encounter wrapped up in a single hide.

The most straightforward way to build an encounter is to choose five monsters of the characters' level, using a mix of monster roles. Choose a melee-focused monster — a brute or soldier monster — and use two or three of them to stand toe-to-toe with the player character defenders and melee strikers. Choose an artillery monster to hang back and used ranged attacks against the characters, and use one or two of them. Then fill out the encounter with controllers, lurkers, or skirmishers.

Keep things simple by using only two or three different monsters and using one to three of each one. An encounter with three ghouls and two blazing skeletons is a interesting mix of two different monsters in two different roles (soldier and artillery). An encounter with a ghoul, a boneshard skeleton, a blazing skeleton, a wraith, and four vampire spawn fleshrippers presents the

same level of challenge to the player characters, but if Dungeon Masters earned experience, it would give you twice as much — it's that much harder to run. The logistical challenge alone, of keeping track of five different sets of monster statistics, is enough to make this encounter unnecessarily complicated. There are ways to manage that challenge, and this could be a successful encounter, but it presents a serious risk of making your head explode. Simpler is usually better.

The encounter templates presented on pages 58–59 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* offer quick and easy ways to build encounters using an interesting mix of monster roles. An encounter with three ghouls and two blazing skeletons is an example of the Double Line encounter template. Page 59 also offers a straightforward guide to modifying those templates by using minions, elite and solo monsters, traps, and hazards.

Terrain, hazards, and challenges

Every character's powers give that character interesting things to do in combat, interesting choices to make each round a fight goes on. Even a fight that's nothing more than a group of player characters facing a group of monsters in a bare room offers a lot of tactical opportunity, based purely on the powers of the characters and monsters involved. That said, good use of terrain, hazards, and challenges adds another dimension to a combat encounter.

Terrain and hazards make movement more important. In a featureless room, movement is unrestricted (unless it's affected by powers that limit movement). Characters and monsters can gain combat advantage by flanking their opponents, but otherwise movement isn't very important or interesting. Some kinds of terrain, though, slow or restrict movement or add skill checks to movement. Hazards make a character's or monster's precise position in the room significant because the position might open the creature or character up to damage or some other penalty. Monsters can position themselves so characters can't get into flanking positions without dealing with difficult terrain, or they can take cover to make themselves harder to hit. Characters can use powers that force movement to put monsters in danger from a hazard or to knock them over a cliff or down a pit.

Forced movement is a ready option for many characters and monsters in the game. That makes a fight in precipitous terrain potentially deadly. Heed the advice on page 44 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and don't use drops of such altitude that a fall would automatically kill a character or monster. Falling off a cliff or into a pit should hurt — in terms of both the damage it deals and the time it takes to get back up to where the fight is — but it shouldn't mean instant death.

Adding a skill challenge to a combat encounter gives the characters an additional threat to consider besides the immediate threat of the monsters, and it gives one or more characters in the party something else to do besides use attack powers to damage and hinder the monsters. It's a lot like adding another monster to an encounter, but a monster that the characters can't deal with using normal means.

The most common example of this kind of added complexity is a trap the characters trigger at the start of an encounter. While the rest of the party fights the monsters, a character trained in Thievery (often a rogue or warlock) uses that skill to shut down the trap. For this to work, the trap has to either make attacks every round, just like a monster, or it has to make progress each round toward its ultimate goal of killing or imprisoning the characters. The room might be slowly filling with water, the walls of the room might be closing in on the characters, or a portcullis might slowly lower across the only exit from the room. In any event, the trap presents an imminent threat, so the characters can't afford to simply ignore it until all the monsters are dead.

A skill challenge embedded in a combat encounter doesn't have to be a trap, though, and it doesn't have to distract only the character trained in Thievery. It could involve negotiation (using skills such as Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight, and Intimidate); physical feats (Acrobatics, Athletics, Endurance); or working out a puzzle (knowledge-based skills such as Arcana, Dungeoneering, or Religion). Perhaps while the characters fight shambling zombies in the ancient crypts, they have the opportunity to bargain with the spirits that haunt the crypts to prevent the spirits from re-animating the zombies the characters kill. Or while the party fights what seems to be a never-ending stream of rat swarms pouring into the storm sewers, one or more characters swim down into the raging waters and struggle to close the valve the rats are coming through. Or the characters must figure out how to close the demongate while more carnage demons spill through the gate each round.

In all these examples, the skill challenge involves an immediate threat. Dealing with the skill challenge doesn't end the combat encounter, but until the characters deal with it, the fight keeps getting harder. More monsters might join the fight every round on a certain initiative count, or each time the characters fail a skill check associated with the challenge.

Ideally, a challenge that you include as part of a combat encounter should offer the characters some choices: They might decide to let the rogue handle it while the rest of the party fights the monsters, or they might decide to let the fighter hold back the monsters while the rest of the party deals with the challenge. Any individual monster in a combat encounter offers the same decision to the player characters — "How much of our attention does this single threat deserve?"

Encounter scripts

As described on pages 62–64 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, an encounter script is a tool you can use to help you plan terrain, hazards, and other elements of a combat encounter. It's not a written script like the text of a play or movie, but just an outline in your mind of how you expect an encounter to play out. By taking the time to think through the way your players are likely to approach an encounter, you can anticipate problems that might come up and plan solutions to them.

TIP

Here's where you have an advantage over every professional adventure designer in the world: You know your players. When designers at Wizards of the Coast or another game publisher write an adventure for publication, they can anticipate only how a typical group of players, whatever that is, might approach an encounter. Your players might follow a similar script, but they might have nothing in common with that imagined "typical" group, which means they might take on an encounter in a completely different way. Because you know your players — at least after you've been playing together for a while — you can design better encounters for them.

Think about an encounter script in terms of the encounter's start, its goal, and how it unfolds.

Encounter start

Where are the characters and the monsters when the encounter starts? In a stereotypical dungeon, the characters break down a door and find monsters in a room beyond. That can work, but it often leads to a bottleneck in the doorway — a couple of characters and a couple of monsters stand toe-to-toe by the open door, and the rest of the combatants can have trouble getting into good positions. Think about how to draw all the characters farther into the room, even if that means that monsters hold back or pull away from melee.

You can also think about ways to start the encounter with the characters already smack in the middle. Maybe the characters enter a room and start to cross a bridge across a chasm when carrion crawlers start worming up from the chasm beneath them. Or archers start launching arrows at them from an overhead gallery. Or goblins swarm into the room ahead of them and behind them. Or all of the above! An encounter that begins with the characters facing threats coming at them from opposite directions — or even all sides — is going to be a lot more dynamic than one that starts with a simple faceoff.

TIP

If you're using minions in your encounter, make sure they're not all clumped together at the start of the encounter. A cluster of minions is just waiting for a large area attack from the wizard, rendering the minions quickly irrelevant.

Spread minions out. Reveal them in stages — maybe two are visible at the start of the encounter, two more run into view on their first turn, and the rest come up behind the characters in the second round. The party wizard should shine in any fight that includes minions, but that doesn't mean that he or she should wipe out all of the minions in the first round of combat!

Encounter goal

Every encounter has a goal, something the characters are trying to accomplish. Much of the time, it's an unstated goal, something along the lines of "kill these monsters and take any treasure they might be guarding." Often, though, other goals factor in to the encounter, from something as simple as "get to the door on the opposite side of the room" (presumably because it will bring the characters closer to the ultimate goal of the adventure) to a complex goal such as "use the magic torch of blue fire to ignite the braziers on all four altars (while fighting off the cultists), and then kill the demon that appears, dealing the final blow at the same moment as the full moon reaches its zenith, shining a beam of light down the shaft in the ceiling to reveal the mystic rune on the floor." The encounter's goal has a lot to do with how it actually plays out.

Structure your adventure for the players

You want to make sure that you create an adventure of the right length and complexity for your game group. A group that meets sporadically probably wants to play shorter, less complex adventures, and it would be difficult to build a continuous storyline from adventure to adventure. On the other hand, a group that meets frequently can handle the complexity of longer plots that continue on from adventure to adventure. Keep in mind that good adventures include things the players like to do — things they find fun.

Whether the adventure you're creating is a simple dungeon crawl or a part of a larger campaign, keep these tips in mind:

✔ Always include situations where players can make choices.

✔ Always vary the types of encounters you build into the adventure so at least one encounter will interest each player.

✔ Always think of encounters where each player character has a moment to shine.

✔ Avoid leading the player characters or railroading them just to get to what you've designed; players need to feel like they have a say in the direction of the adventure.

✔ Avoid creating encounters where the player characters are simply spectators — the PCs need to be in the thick of the action.

✔ Avoid creating encounters that continually nullify player character powers and abilities.

How the encounter unfolds

Think about how your players typically respond to the start of a combat encounter. Do your defenders charge the nearest opponent, move forward cautiously and ready an attack for the first creature that moves adjacent, or make their way toward the biggest perceived threat? Is your striker a melee-focused ranger or a rogue, or an archer ranger or a warlock? Does your group have a cleric or warlord who wades up beside the fighter, or a cleric who'd rather hang back away from the action?

Take what you know about the encounter and start imagining how it's likely to play out. Think about the strategy your players are likely to employ and consider ways for the monsters to foil those strategies. Your goal isn't to completely shut down the players' road to victory, but to put obstacles in the way so that it's an interesting fight, something that makes them break a sweat.

An encounter script is a tool for you to plan an encounter, not a prescription for how the characters must play it. Your goal is to make an interesting, challenging, and ultimately exciting encounter for your group of players, not to make them follow a predetermined (or optimal) sequence of actions to achieve a predictable result.

Rewards

The last piece of the adventure design puzzle revolves around rewards. *Rewards* include experience points and treasure, as well as the pure player satisfaction of solving a mystery or completing a goal. Rewards are the benchmark a DM uses to show the players how well they've played and how good their characters are, based on the challenges they overcome.

Experience points

Most players are as eager to find out how many experience points their characters earned for the adventure as they are to see what kind of treasure their characters found. After all, the experience point total a character has earned determines his or her level. Updating characters who have gone up a level is great fun for most players, and many will pore over the *Player's Handbook*, carefully reading the descriptions of feats and powers before choosing which ones are the coolest or most optimized for their characters.

Calculating how many experience points the PCs earned for the adventure is easy. Every monster and other challenge has a level that determines its XP reward value. Page 120 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* has a comprehensive table for determining XP awards by level.

Treasure

Treasure comes in a number of forms. Monetary treasure includes gold, as well as gems, jewels, and other things that the party can easily convert to cash. Then there're magic items, weapons, armor, and other items found in dungeons or on defeated monsters and other opponents.

Pages 124–129 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* provide guidelines for assigning treasure to the encounters in your dungeon. Try to include a mix of treasure types throughout your adventure. If you give just coins in one treasure parcel, give gems or art objects in the next.

Chapter 14

The Dungeon Adventure

*T*he original adventure structure for roleplaying games is the dungeon crawl. When you want to get started creating your own adventures, we recommend using the basic form. Dungeons, after all, are half of what the D&D game is all about!

What is a dungeon? The D&D game uses that term broadly to mean many different kinds of environments. A dungeon is usually underground, but it might also be an ancient ruin half-swallowed by the wilderness. A dungeon is almost always made up of interconnected rooms and corridors — a structured environment for the player characters to explore, with choices represented by branching corridors and rooms with multiple exits. Some dungeons are relatively small, such as a cluster of natural caves behind a waterfall. Others are sprawling complexes with many different levels, such as a series of tombs and catacombs beneath a city.

Some dungeons are places of legend in the D&D game, such as Castle Ravenloft, the Tomb of Horrors, and the Temple of Elemental Evil. For anyone who has played the game in the past, one or more of these legendary names will conjure images of danger, excitement, and thrilling fun. By using the advice and tips we provide in this chapter, your dungeons can accomplish the same thing for your fellow players.

Check out Chapter 17 for suggestions on how to build a dungeon adventure by using random elements. It's a fun and fast method for creating an adventure quickly or on the fly. At the very least, Chapter 17 should give you some ideas on what to put into the dungeon crawl that you design with the methods we describe in this chapter.

Designing Your First Dungeon

When you're creating a dungeon crawl (also called a *site-based adventure*), you need to prepare several elements to make a complete adventure:

- ✔ A story idea
- ✔ A map of the dungeon
- ✔ A key to the locations on the map

The key to the locations on the map describes encounter areas that are triggered when the player characters arrive there. You want to use all the tools and building blocks presented in Chapter 13, applying them to the map of the site that you create.

Plotting the dungeon's story

Dungeon crawls tend to be linear adventures where the encounter locations provide the impetus to move the plot forward. In other words, the dungeon map provides the structure and flow of the story. Depending on the complexity of the dungeon map that you create, the player characters can have a single path to follow or multiple ways to get to the goal of the adventure.

Here's that dragon and the egg conundrum: Which comes first, the dungeon map or the story idea? Our answer is that it doesn't matter because the creative process is different for everyone, so we don't stifle and muck with your creativity by telling you The One True Way to design a dungeon crawl adventure.

If you start out with a story idea, you draw a map to fit that story and fill it with encounters that help you develop the storyline. On the other hand, you might prefer to start out by drawing a cool map, and then crafting a story to take advantage of its pattern. There's no right way to approach this; over the years, we've used both approaches in our personal games as well as in professional projects.

However you approach the creation of your dungeon crawl adventure, remember that the main action and most of the story takes place in the dungeon itself. This doesn't mean that a dungeon crawl will limit your creativity, however, because dungeons can take a wide variety of forms. They can be carved corridors of stone or natural passages through caverns. Really, any confined place can be used as a dungeon, whether it's a cave complex, a wizard's stronghold, or a king's castle.

Drawing the map

You need graph paper to draw your map. You don't need to be an artist to make a useful map. Just make it as clear as you can and make notes about the encounter areas. If you can't draw a sarcophagus, for example, don't sweat it. Make a rectangle and write *sarcophagus* next to it (or just "S") so that you can remember what that rectangle represents.

Why use graph paper? There are a number of reasons. Almost everything in the game is expressed in terms of 5-foot squares. Those nice little squares on graph paper simplify your job of translating encounter areas into 5-foot squares. Plus, the grid pattern makes it easier to draw straight (or nearly straight) lines as you draw your map.

Here are some suggestions to make your dungeon map drawings better:

✔ **Larger areas are better than smaller areas when it comes to creating encounter zones.** Why? Because you want to have room for the player characters and monsters to move around. A dynamic battle that involves tactical movement is better than a static battle where everyone lines up and stands still until the fight ends.

On the other hand, don't make encounter areas so big that they won't work on the gaming table. Especially if you use miniatures and miniature-scale maps at the table, you want your encounter areas to fit within the space you can depict for play. A room more than 100 feet (or 20 squares) across is difficult to transfer to a tabletop battle grid.

A good way to think about the size of an encounter area is in terms of *Dungeon Tiles.* An area consisting of two or three 4x8 tiles, connected by smaller tiles, is a good size for most encounters.

✔ **Wider corridors are better than narrow corridors.** In general, you should make the corridors in your dungeon two squares (10 feet) wide. This allows player characters to walk side-by-side as they explore the dungeon, and it provides room for Large-sized creatures to move around freely. If you plan an encounter with multiple Large-sized creatures, you want to give them room to move and position themselves easily. If they have to line up, one behind the other, the PCs aren't dealing with multiple monsters — they're fighting them one at a time. Neither the monsters nor the PCs can move around much, and that makes for a boring fight.

If you plan to use Huge-sized creatures for encounters, consider making your corridors at least three squares (15 feet) wide to accommodate these monsters. Encounter areas should be sized accordingly, as well.

✔ **Think about circular paths.** We don't mean round rooms and arcing hallways, which are difficult to draw on a grid. Rather, as you think about encounter areas, consider placing combat encounters in areas that suggest a continuous path of movement. That might be a pair of

rooms connected by two different hallways, a room split by a chasm spanned by two bridges, or a twisting maze of goblin warrens that are all interconnected. Circular paths allow for combat to unfold on multiple fronts — the characters start fighting in one area but then have to change their tactics as new monsters appear to one side or even behind them. You can expand this concept to think about figure-eights, which are best if the encounter begins with the characters smack in the middle.

The sample dungeon in Chapter 19 includes a good example of a figure-eight in play. Take a look at encounter area 11 in Figure 19-2. The three distinct rooms are each connected to an adjacent area by two separate paths, giving characters and monsters in this area lots of interesting ways to move around.

Marking the encounter areas

Corridors connect to rooms and chambers in your dungeon, but you can craft encounter areas so that encounters take place either in the corridors or in the rooms. You don't want the players to come to expect that combat or challenges will occur only in rooms, and that nothing much will happen in the hallways of the dungeon. The best dungeons mix it up so that some encounters occur in corridors and some rooms are empty. If you mix it up, the players will always be guessing about when the next encounter is going to spring out at them.

Mark your encounter areas on your dungeon map with numbers or letters. You'll use these same numbers or letters when you fill in your map key (see the "Making a key" section, later in this chapter). Feel free to make short notes on the map itself, next to encounter areas, if you want to jot down details such as what the symbols you've created are or other notes to aid your memory. For example, you might want to note such things as fountains, statues, pillars, pits, gates, steps, and other dungeon contents.

Consider which encounter areas will work best for the different encounter types we describe in Chapter 13. You want to make sure to include a mix of encounter types as you design your dungeon. Note that dungeons don't have to be huge, with dozens of encounters, to be satisfying and fun. For your first couple dungeon designs especially, keep it short and to the point, with about eight to ten encounters of various types.

Also consider the placement of encounter areas and how that might affect the flow of the adventure. Encounter areas that are few and far between make for lulls in the action. Encounter areas that are close to each other might escalate into large running battles due to proximity and monster mix. And you want to decide whether to include alternative routes through the dungeon, or whether to create a single path for the adventure.

Look to the book!

We include good examples of maps and dungeon adventures in various places in this book. Refer to them for inspiration and to see how to design them as you read through this chapter. Chapter 19, for example, features a full-length dungeon crawl. Chapters 23 and 24 feature encounters and maps that you can use to round out your dungeon design. (Bonus Chapter 3, available in PDF format at `www.dummies.com/go/dungeonmaster4e`, features epic-level encounters and maps.) Use the examples we've provided to make your own dungeon designs better. That's why we wrote them!

Making a key

You've marked the encounter areas on your map with a number or a letter code. Maybe you even used both to better represent the expected flow of the adventure. You might have made some notes on the map, but you need to make a full-fledged key to best run your dungeon crawl as an adventure. What goes on the key?

Set up your key in sequential order so that you can find things quickly. If your map is labeled 1, 2, 3, and so on, then make the key in the same fashion: Describe encounter area 1, then 2, then 3, and so on.

Each keyed encounter should get some attention. You can make these encounter notes as detailed or as brief as you want, as long as you can work with them in the heat of the game session. Nothing is more embarrassing than finding yourself trying to interpret your own obscure notes in the middle of a dramatic encounter. So, our advice is to be as clear and as complete as you need to be for your own use.

Each entry in your key should include the setup for the encounter, a description of the encounter area, the scene, monsters, tactics, and rewards.

Setup

The setup portion of each encounter entry in your key includes what's in the encounter area, what's going on before the player characters arrive, and what the goal of the encounter is.

Description

The description part of a key entry takes three forms:

- ✔ What the player characters can see and otherwise notice as they arrive

> ✔ What player characters can see and otherwise notice with skill checks (such as Perception or Insight)
>
> ✔ What's behind the scenes that only the DM knows

In a published adventure, the first part is covered by a "read aloud" section. You don't need to write read aloud text, but you do have to improvise a description when the PCs enter the area. Whether you improvise or write out a read aloud paragraph or two ahead of time, make sure that your description of the encounter area provides enough information and clues so the players can visualize the scene and determine whether they need to have their characters perform some action (such as making a Perception check to find a secret door).

Scene

The scene portion of a key entry describes the action you expect to happen in the encounter. Now, player characters have a way of doing the unexpected and making the scene play out completely different from what you had imagined, but that's okay. You still want to have a general idea of what you think is going to happen in the encounter.

Monsters or NPCs

You need a list of the monsters or NPCs involved in the encounter. (This mostly applies to combat encounters, but it could apply to interaction encounters, as well.) This can be as simple as recording a name and noting a page number in the *Monster Manual* for you to refer to during the game session, or as complex as creating an NPC or unique monster with a character class.

You can jot down any stats on your key that you think you'll need to reference quickly (such as defenses, hp, attack bonus, damage), but it's usually okay to go to the *Monster Manual* or other source when the encounter starts. Try to have the correct pages flagged for easy access if you can.

Tactics

Tactics can apply to either combat or noncombat encounters, and they detail the behavior of the monsters or NPCs. If the PCs do *this,* the monsters or NPCs do *that.* You don't have to come up with every contingency; just plan out a primary action for the monster and a backup response if the PCs do something unexpected.

In general, monsters of low intelligence don't have any tactics more sophisticated than "leap at the nearest character and try to kill or eat him or her." On the other hand, a clever villain with a number of options at his disposal (for example, an evil NPC wizard) should begin a battle with a plan — an idea of which characters he wants to take out of the fight first and a plan for getting away or summoning reinforcements if a fight goes poorly.

Rewards

When the encounter ends, what rewards do you have waiting for the player characters? In addition to experience for defeating the monsters or accomplishing the goal of the encounter, you might include some kind of treasure. Follow the guidelines presented in Chapter 13 (or page 125 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) for creating appropriate rewards.

Adding Depth to Dungeon Crawls

Most dungeon crawls are designed with *static* encounters — encounters that don't affect each other. This means that Encounter 2 begins when the player characters reach that spot on the map, with no regard as to what happened in Encounter 1 or what might happen in Encounter 3. The player characters can arrive at any encounter location whenever they want, stay for as long as they want, and come back later to find the site just as they left it.

Static adventure design is easy and straightforward. You don't have to put too much thought into how the occupants of the encounter areas relate to each other or interact. All you need to figure out is what's in the encounter area and what happens when the player characters arrive there.

You can add more depth and realism to your dungeon crawl by designing *dynamic encounters.* Dynamic environments include evidence of intelligent organization and cooperation between monsters in different encounter areas. As the player characters move through the dungeon, the occupants take actions to respond to the invaders. Perhaps patrols become more frequent if the player characters leave evidence of their arrival behind them or if they allow a monster to escape from an encounter area. Traps are reset, areas are restocked with defenders, treasures are moved, and paths are blocked off as the monsters work to defend the dungeon.

You can start small, just making a few encounters dynamic. Or you can go all out and develop the whole dungeon as a dynamic environment. Dynamic encounters are more challenging to create than static encounters, but the reward in game play is worth it. In addition to a map and a key, you need to work out a plan for the dynamic portions of the dungeon. In general, consider these factors in your design for a dynamic dungeon:

✔ **Defensive plans:** Whether it's the plans formulated by monsters in two adjoining encounter areas, in a section of the dungeon, or across the entire dungeon, you need to think about how the monsters react to the threat posed by the player characters after that threat becomes obvious. Do they increase patrols and create more opportunities for wandering monsters to encounter the PCs? Do they increase defenses by setting

(or resetting) traps, locking doors, and taking other protective measures? Do they increase the number of guards at particular encounter sites, leaving less important or valuable areas less defended?

✔ **Conditional requirements:** Encounter areas need *conditional requirements,* which are events or situations that trigger escalated responses from the monsters. A monster escaping to warn the rest of the complex, for example, can be a conditional requirement. Examples of subtler conditions include the PCs moving a statue, taking an item, springing a trap, or opening a specific door. What do you want the player characters to have to do to put the dungeon inhabitants on higher alert status? That's what goes into this section of your dungeon notes.

✔ **Time frame:** Make time a factor for your dynamic dungeon. Time pressure can add tension and suspense to an adventure. And if the dungeon changes depending on the time, it comes more alive. Are more or fewer guards on duty at night? Do patrols move around according to a strict schedule? Is something terrible going to happen at the stroke of midnight unless the player characters accomplish something? Use time to make your dungeon dynamic.

✔ **Long-term plans:** To better understand how the inhabitants of the dungeon react in a dynamic situation, you need to have a grasp of their long-term plans. What does your boss monster hope to accomplish? Does the boss monster or villain NPC plan to send minions to raid the nearby town three nights from now? Are the monsters cooperating to build a powerful golem to unleash on the village? Is the villain NPC using the orcs to collect the components he or she needs to cast a spell to release a demon from captivity? Whatever the long-term plans, if you know what they are, you can use them to determine dynamic actions in your dungeon adventure.

Chapter 15

The Wilderness Adventure

In This Chapter

▶ Designing outdoor adventures and encounters

▶ Taking a look at the wilderness adventure structure

▶ Understanding how wilderness adventures differ from dungeon crawls

*P*layer characters do not live in dungeons alone! Every once in a while, you have to let them get out of the deep darkness and into the sunshine.

That's where wilderness adventures come in. However, the entire adventure doesn't have to take place in the great outdoors. You can develop specific encounters that take advantage of the wilderness and what it has to offer, making them portions of a larger adventure. The sample adventure presented in Chapter 19 handles wilderness areas in this manner, for example.

As with the dungeon, you can get as complex or keep it as simple as you like with wilderness adventures. It all depends on your tastes and the need of the story you want the adventure to tell. In this chapter, we examine the wilderness as a full adventure and as specific encounters. We discuss how this type of adventure is and isn't like a dungeon crawl, and we give you some suggestions about how to get the most out of the wilderness in your D&D campaign.

Designing a Wilderness Adventure

You can make a very satisfying D&D game experience by starting and ending every adventure you run in the dungeon. But there's so much more to the world than the dark and secret places that never see the light of the sun. Player characters need to get out more. That's where the wilderness adventure (or encounter) comes in.

TIP

Do you want to know what the big secret to designing a wilderness adventure is? Treat it like a dungeon! Outside areas can be handled just like any other site-based adventure. Sites for the wilderness include the road (or path, or trail), clearing, hill, forest, lake, garden, graveyard, and swamp. Map the site, add monsters, and you have an encounter. String encounters together, and you have an adventure.

What is the wilderness?

For the purposes of creating a D&D adventure, the wilderness is any outdoor environment beyond the confines of the dungeon. When player characters leave the safety and relative comfort of the town, village, or city, they enter the wilderness. In the wilderness, the wild things roam. The maps are incomplete, and they say things like "Here Be Dragons" in the large open spaces to signify — quite literally — that dragons and other monsters are present.

The trick to designing wilderness site-based encounters and adventures is to treat them like dungeons. Never try to block out an entire trek through the wilderness — instead, you want to map out and play only the exciting parts of the trip. For long periods of travel, it's okay to fade from one action scene to the next with just a little narration to help progress the story and give a sense of the passage of time.

REMEMBER

To make an ordinary wilderness into a D&D wilderness, you want to add some elements of fantasy. Obviously, adding D&D monsters provides a fantastic element, but you can take it further. Trees whose leaves sparkle in the night, waterfalls that are miles high and drop between colossal sculptures of ancient kings, and forests of ambulant plants are all examples of natural environments that have had an infusion of the magical and fantastic.

GO TO THE BOOK

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* discusses wilderness adventuring on pages 66 ("Outdoor Terrain"), 107 ("Wilderness"), 114 ("Outdoor Settings"), and 158–159 ("The Wild").

In the following sections, we discuss some of the basic types of outdoor environments that you can use in your wilderness adventures.

Deserts

Deserts are dry wastes. They can be hot and sandy or cold and ice-covered. They are desolate regions where food and water are hard to find and survival requires supplies, equipment, magic, skill, and more than a little luck.

Deserts often feature sporadic oases, extreme climates that might require Endurance checks, harsh weather, sand (or snow) storms, sink holes, and other hazards.

Forests

Forests make up much of the wilderness we imagine when we think of the typical D&D world. Forests usually feature paths or roads, rivers, lakes, thick clusters of trees and other vegetation, and the occasional clearing. A temperate forest is one example of this type of environment. Others include arctic conifer forests, rainforests, and jungles.

Finding food and water usually isn't a problem in a forest, and except for the occasional storm, the weather and climate generally don't present a danger to the player characters. What makes the forest dangerous are the animals and creatures that roam the dark, dense places covered by the canopy of leaves.

Hills

Hills tend to provide topography more than environment, as forests and deserts can both be hilly. From gently rolling mounds to craggy piles of rock, hills provide an interesting environment to travel through or engage in a deadly ambush. Hills are also good places to put entrances to dungeons and monster lairs.

Mountains

When you think mountains, think about areas of jagged, barren rock that rise above the tree line. Travel is difficult, requiring characters to climb or find irregular paths up and down the rocky surfaces. Water is usually plentiful (unless the mountains are in a desert), but food might be hard to come by, especially in winter. Hazards include avalanches (which might be falling rocks or sliding snow and ice), crumbling surfaces, and various monsters (which might be dragons and other flying creatures that tend to like to lair high in the mountains). Mountains are good places to put entrances to dungeons and monster lairs.

Plains

Plains can be any of a number of flat terrain types, including savannas, prairies, grasslands, tundra, and farmlands of all descriptions. Rolling hills and bluffs sometimes break the monotony of these regions. Food and water, although not as abundant as in the forest, are relatively easy to come by. Although player characters can see a long way across the flat expanses in the plains, they can, in turn, be seen from a far distance — in the daytime, at least, or if they light a fire at night. On the other hand, even an open plain might contain high grass that can conceal dangerous predators or gnolls lying in ambush.

Swamps

Swamps, wetlands, and marshes are wet and teeming with life. Set at low elevations and usually along the edge of a lake or river, there's almost no way to cross a swamp and remain dry. The ground might be spongy in places, muddy

in others, and completely under murky water everywhere else. Although water is everywhere, it might not be safe to drink (see "Disease," on page 49 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). Food in the form of fish and game is reasonably plentiful. Deep in the swamp, player characters might encounter the lair of a witch or a shaman, the hiding place of a dark shrine, or the ruins of some ancient tower.

Oceans

The first requirement of an ocean adventure is a means of transportation. A number of rituals and magic items allow the player characters to venture into or onto the water for a short time (for example, a Water Breathing ritual or a *feather boat*), but if they expect to travel more than a couple miles from shore or remain at sea for more than a few hours, they need to purchase, hire, or confiscate a ship for their use. Assuming their vessel is well-provisioned, food and water aren't really a problem. Adventurers sometimes find themselves undertaking epic voyages to visit haunted islands, search out pirate lairs, hunt sea monsters, or descend below the waves to explore the ruins of sunken cities.

Underdark

The vastest and most perilous wilderness in many D&D settings is the Underdark — a boundless realm of interconnecting caverns, rifts, vaults, and dungeons far below the surface. Many dungeons at their lowest levels lead into the Underdark. The Underdark is the domain of terrible monsters, such as aboleths and mind flayers, and it's home to the sinister and cruel *drow,* or dark elves. Most of the Underdark consists of natural caverns, some so large that whole cities lie within, so the landscape is similar to a conventional dungeon environment in many ways. Water and food can be hard to find, but a more pressing concern to the traveler is the presence of all sorts of malevolent and hungry monsters. In the depths of the Underdark, the heroes might visit a cavern-castle of the drow, venture into the twisted maze of a fell lich, or blunder into a watery shrine of the insane kuo-toa.

How to use the wilderness

Often, you will use wilderness encounters as framing sequences for your adventures. Do the player characters need to get to the Pyramid of Bala-Tuum? First, they need to cross the Desert of One Thousand Dangers! Do they need to find the Cave of the Lost Clan? Then they have to explore the terrible Storm Mountain to find it. These present *travel* encounters for you to use. Sure, you could say, *"You travel for 30 days and 30 nights across the burning desert until you see the ancient pyramid rising out of the sand ahead of you."* But a better, more exciting option is to have a few encounters in the wilderness as the player characters make the journey.

You can even set an entire adventure in the great outdoors. For example, you might send the player characters into the Whispering Swamp to discover what has turned the murky water into blood. Or you might have them hired on as guards for a caravan intent on crossing the Zarven Plains.

In all cases, treat each encounter as a site or location, even if the area continues beyond the scope of your graph paper. Use clusters of trees, rocky formations, water, and other natural boundaries as the "walls" of your outdoor dungeon. Then populate each encounter, as we discuss in Chapters 13 and 14.

Another way to deal with wilderness travel is to structure the travel itself as an encounter, by building it as a skill challenge. The "Lost in the Wilderness" sample skill challenge on page 79 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is a good example, but you can also design a skill challenge where the characters are searching through the wilderness for a hidden temple, following the trail of some fleeing bandits, or simply trying to survive the hazards of the Blistering Fen. They might use Perception to find signs of a trail, plenty of Nature checks to follow the lay of the land, Endurance to survive the hazardous conditions of the environment, Athletics to navigate challenging terrain along the way, and any other skill you (or your players) can imagine being useful. It's still a good idea to spruce up the skill challenge with an occasional combat encounter (you might consider linking combat encounters to failed checks in the skill challenge), but using the travel as a skill challenge makes getting across the wilderness more than just a backdrop for random encounters on the way to a "real" adventure.

One encounter a day

One thing to bear in mind as you plan encounters for characters on a long overland trek is that characters are tougher if they know they don't have to hoard their resources. If they know they're going to have only one encounter over the course of a day's travel, they'll go into that encounter loaded for bear — they'll spend every daily power at their disposal, they'll spend their action points in every fight, and they won't have to worry about running out of healing surges. As a result, you can make these encounters considerably more difficult. An encounter whose level is lower than the characters' level is just a speed bump in a wilderness adventure. If every encounter is 2 or 3 levels above the player characters' level, the players will hardly bat an eye.

On the other hand, you can also set up a wilderness journey so that the characters *can't* stop to take an extended rest every night. If the bandits they're following don't stop to rest, the player characters can't afford to either. If a pack of gnolls is hot on their heels, they have to keep moving. In situations like these, you can throw encounters at the characters on successive days, knowing not only that they're running out of daily powers and healing surges, but they might also be exhausted from traveling for days without rest.

TIP

Putting the wilderness in your dungeon

Another option for using wilderness encounters is to just put them in your dungeon. For example, create an ice cavern, a chamber filled with a subterranean swamp, or an underground forest of mushrooms as tall as trees. The world of D&D is permeated with magic, after all, and you have every right to put a blazing hot desert in one dungeon room and a lake as deep as the ocean in another. That way, even if you and the other players never want to leave the comfortable confines of the dungeon, you can present different climates and environmental hazards for the player characters to overcome.

Wilderness Adventure Outline

The following list provides an example outline for a wilderness adventure. Use it as a guide when you create your own wilderness encounters and adventures. In this example, the player characters begin a trip to reach the city of Paragon on the Jagged Coast.

✔ **Encounter 1: The Silver Hills.** On the third day into the trip, the PCs are ambushed by ogres where the road cuts through the Silver Hills. Map: ambush site, road, hills, and hidden ogre bands.

✔ **Encounter 2: The Forest Shrine.** On the fifth day of the trip, the road enters the Dark Woods, a dangerous forest avoided by most travelers. Within the forest, in a clearing, the Shrine of the Unicorn has been corrupted by a howling hag. The hag decides to lure the PCs to the shrine so that she can sacrifice them to her dark god. Map: forest trail, clearing, corrupted shrine, and the hag's lair.

✔ **Encounter 3: The Lonely Swamp.** On the eighth day of the trip, the road winds around the Lonely Swamp. The PCs come across the remains of a merchant caravan that appears to have been attacked on its way from Paragon to Griffonford. A badly wounded caravan guard tells the PCs what happened and asks them to enter the swamp to recover the parcel they were carrying and the sorcerer who was protecting it. *"She is the daughter of the lord of Paragon,"* he gasps, *"and the item must be recovered at all costs."* Map: swamp, shambling mound encounter areas, and the mad wizard's lair.

TIP

This is just an example of how to structure a wilderness adventure. Don't try to play out every second of travel. Get to the action and run those encounters, but don't try to narrate every step along the way.

Chapter 16

The Event-Based Adventure

*A*ll adventures have a story. Some stories are implied by the encounters; others are central to the adventure. In this chapter, we examine the event-based adventure and talk about how you can set up adventures that are more complex than simple dungeon crawls. By using events and the actions of the player characters to drive the plot forward, you can create surprisingly rich stories that play out through your adventures.

Designing Event-Based Adventures

What do we mean by an *event-based adventure?* Instead of letting encounter areas on a map drive the adventure (and thus build the story), specific events drive the progress of these types of adventures. Events can be *off stage* (the player characters might have no way to influence them) or *on stage* (the events are specifically triggered by the actions of the player characters). And in all cases, later parts of the story are "unlocked" or "opened" by the actions the player characters perform.

For example, perhaps the player characters are in a major city on the eve of the coronation of a new king. At first, it seems like little more than an excuse for a great deal of celebration, but several events draw them into an adventure and keep the adventure moving along at a breakneck pace. First, wererats erupt from the city sewers during the great feast the night before the coronation. Next, a mysterious stranger approaches the characters and tells them that a conspiracy is afoot to murder the new king before he is crowned. He knows the plans of the conspirators intricately because he was one of them until he turned traitor. Then the informant turns up dead — murdered by wererats. Can the characters take the incomplete information they received from their

informant and clues left by the attacking wererats and piece together the entire nefarious plot before the coronation?

The reactions of the player characters change the events that can occur, or the order in which things happen, or both. Event-based adventures focus on trying to accomplish a specific quest or mission, and the encounters build upon that effort. There's usually more to an event-based adventure than "explore the dungeon" or "kill all the monsters." These adventures are sometimes called story-based adventures because the structure is more like a book or movie than an exploration of a site.

The basic difference between a dungeon crawl and an event-based adventure is that you build an event-based adventure with encounters keyed to *events* instead of to *locations.* The two best methods for plotting and organizing an event-based adventure are the *flowchart* and the *timeline.* We discuss both of these methods in the following sections.

The flowchart
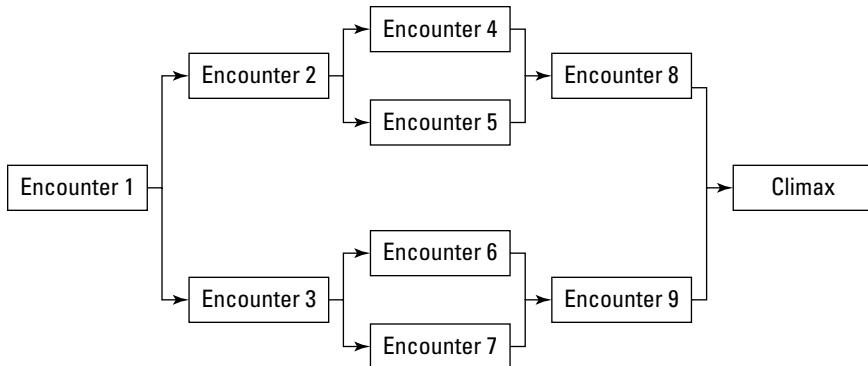
When you create an event-based adventure, one way to organize your encounters is by using a flowchart. You want to create at least a few paths through the adventure so that the players don't feel that their characters are being railroaded through events to the conclusion you want to happen. You can accomplish this in many ways, but we show you one method that doesn't take a lot of work and sets up an adventure that feels wide open from the players' point of view.

Imagine the flowchart as if/then statements that lead from one encounter or event to the next. The branches that flow from each encounter can be as few as one or two, or as many as you're comfortable handling. Certainly, you don't want to design such a complex flowchart that many portions of the adventure you've prepared will never get used. But you do want to present at least the illusion of choice for the player characters.

Think of a flowchart as a dungeon. The player characters explore each encounter in the flowchart, just as they explore each chamber in the dungeon. They might take the left-hand path, or they might decide to forge straight ahead.

A simple flowchart presents an encounter with two choices that each lead to another encounter with two choices. Then paths lead to one of two encounters that lead to the climactic encounter. Figure 16-1 shows this basic encounter flowchart.

Figure 16-1:
You can plot out the different possibilities for an event-based adventure with a flowchart.

So, using an example of "murder as event" to build this adventure, here's how the key to the first encounter in this flowchart might look.

Encounter 1: The player characters, while walking through the town of Blue Oaks late at night, hear some kind of commotion coming from a nearby alley. It sounds like a struggle of some sort is taking place. A terrible scream marks the end of the struggle, and the PCs and the night watch arrive in the alley from different directions at almost the same moment. A body is sprawled across the alley floor, and blood is splattered everywhere. An examination of the area shows no sign of the murderer, but the body — that of a barkeep who was well known in town — has been slashed with what appears to have been vicious claws. The man's left arm was ripped off and is nowhere to be seen.

The watch officer says that this is the fifth such murder in as many nights. Each victim was missing different body parts: the right leg was taken from the first victim, the right arm from the second victim, the torso from the third victim, and the left leg from the fourth victim. Each victim seemed to have been attacked after leaving the Open Door Inn, the same establishment where the latest victim worked. He also explains that the watch is at a loss as to what to do. If the player characters can help, the town would appreciate it. The town scholar, a wizard named Avolid, examined all the bodies and may know more. The hour is late, but perhaps some sense of this violence can be made in the morning.

If the PCs want to investigate the Open Door Inn, *then* go to Encounter 2.

If the PCs want to talk to the town scholar, *then* go to Encounter 3.

Fill in each encounter area with a skill challenge or combat encounter, leaving clues that provide paths to the next encounters shown on the flowchart. One

way this adventure might turn out is that the player characters keep being led back to Avolid, the town scholar. This unassuming wizard has turned to necromancy and the dark arts and is using a troll to murder town folk and collect body parts for his dark project — he's building a flesh golem! The climax encounter occurs after the flesh golem is animated — the player characters must defeat it and its dark master before it rampages through the town.

The timeline

Another method for setting up an event-based adventure is the timeline. When you build an adventure around a timeline, things happen despite the actions of the player characters, and there is often a sense of tension and pressure created by the advancing clock. The adventure kicks off with an event that clearly appears to be the first step in an unfolding plot. Time (or at least, the illusion of time) becomes as much an opponent and obstacle as the villains and monsters you use to populate the adventure.

What do we mean? Well, there really isn't a ticking clock counting down to some terrible explosion, but you certainly want the player characters to feel that way. The truth is that although you have outlined a timeline for events in the adventure, you as the Dungeon Master get to decide when to advance the adventure along the timeline. As long as the players are having fun and accomplishing things, hold off unveiling the next event in the timeline. When the players get bogged down, lose their way, or become bored, that's the time to advance to the next event.

The timeline lays out how and when events in the story take place. Sometimes the player characters can do things to delay or speed up the occurrence of these events, and sometimes they can alter events or unlock new paths through the timeline, depending on the adventure you've created.

A typical timeline can be simple and straightforward, describing events that will happen at specific moments in the adventure. One way to do this is with simple descriptions:

1. **The first night, 2 a.m.:** A man is attacked and murdered about two blocks from the Open Door Inn. His right leg is removed by the murderer and taken away.

2. **The second night, 1 a.m.:** The next murder takes place, near the stables. The victim is found with the right arm missing.

3. **The third, fourth, and fifth nights:** Another murder happens on each subsequent night, and each time, another part of the victim's body is

removed. The murderer has now collected a right leg, right arm, torso, left leg, and left arm.

4. **The sixth night, 3 a.m.:** The last murder takes place in the town square. This time the murderer needs the victim's head and the brain housed inside it.

Another way to set up a timeline adventure is by setting the events for specific times, but building an *open-exploration area* where the player characters can investigate as they see fit until the next event takes place. You might set up a timeline with open-exploration areas between events as follows:

1. **Event 1, 2 a.m.:** The PCs hear the struggle and screams as the fifth murder occurs. The PCs may investigate any or all of the following before Event 2 occurs:

   • The murder site (skill challenge encounter)

   • Avolid's magic shop (skill challenge encounter)

   • The victim's residence (skill challenge encounter)

   • The sewer network (skill challenge or combat encounter)

   • The old warehouse (skill challenge or combat encounter)

2. **Event 2, 3 a.m. the next night:** The sixth and last murder takes place.

In this model, you set up the parts of the town that the player characters can explore and the people they can meet to ask questions of. The player characters can visit these sites in any order, providing the illusion of a wide-open story and player control. You need to prepare skill challenges and combat encounters (for explanations of the different kinds of encounters, see Chapter 3). When they have almost run out of things to do, the next event occurs. This opens up new parts of the town to explore, new suspects and witnesses to talk to, and new dangers as the PCs get that much closer to solving the mystery.

You can even combine a flowchart and a timeline to make a more integrated and complex adventure. It all depends on the story you want to set up.

Using Flowcharts and Timelines in Dungeons

There's no reason not to try to design a dungeon crawl adventure that also uses a flowchart or a timeline. These can add greater depth to the story and

a touch of drama and realism not necessarily available in a typical dungeon crawl.

When you're designing a dungeon, you can use a flowchart to determine how the dungeon denizens react to the actions of the player characters. For example, *if* the player characters defeat Palehorn the minotaur, *then* Tusenmaug the black dragon puts the guards in rooms 7, 8, 9, and 10 on high alert. A flowchart can also be useful for tracking the main villain. *If* the player characters disarm the trap in room 13, *then* Vlanis the Vile moves to room 16 to unleash the hell hounds.

A timeline provides the same tension and time pressure in a dungeon environment as it does in any adventure setting. Perhaps the dungeon is slowly filling with water, flooding rooms and corridors at a predefined pace. Or an earthquake threatens to destroy the entire dungeon complex, with parts collapsing as time passes. The time pressure can also be more subtle, as in these examples:

- ✔ The number of guards and patrols increase as time passes.

- ✔ More monsters arrive in response to a summons by the dungeon's arch villain.

- ✔ The arch villain is getting closer and closer to completing the evil ceremony with each passing hour the player characters spend lost or exploring the complex.

Try any or all of these options as you create adventures for your game group. If something doesn't work, improvise your way through the current adventure and try again the next time. Remember that the players don't know what you've planned, so if you need to make adjustments behind the screen, go ahead and do it. Nothing in your adventure notes really happens until it takes place in the game.

If the PCs get stuck and aren't sure what to do next, you can keep the adventure from coming to a halt by having a monster or NPC show up, kick in the proverbial door, and attack the PCs on the spot. The sudden appearance of a new threat injects some tension into the adventure and gives the players a chance to refocus. The seemingly random encounter also allows you to plant a clue on the assailant that will help the PCs get on the right track about what to do next.

Chapter 17

The Randomly Generated Adventure

Sometimes, you just don't have enough time beforehand to prepare an adventure for a D&D game. Maybe you and your friends spontaneously decided to play some D&D, and you need to come up with something fast. Maybe you found yourself with time to kill, but you need a little help to start your creative juices flowing. Whatever the reason, you might find that randomly generating a dungeon full of monsters is the best way to start playing fast.

Chapter 10 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* includes tables you can use to generate a random dungeon map, and you can find suggestions about how to randomly build encounters. In this chapter, we expand that material with more advice about how to use the random dungeon tables, example encounter decks, and suggestions for including random treasure in the mix. With this information and the tables in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, you can quickly and easily create and populate a fun dungeon with hardly any prep time at all.

Using the Random Dungeon Tables

The tables in Chapter 10 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (pages 191–192) provide you with all you need to randomly generate a complete dungeon.

REMEMBER

Note that random generation can have some strange results. Feel free to modify, ignore, or roll again if you wind up with results that don't make sense to you.

Getting started

If you don't create the whole map ahead of time, you need to pick a starting point for your randomly generated map. All of the starting areas in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* begin with a stairway descending from some feature on the surface down into a first room — the place where the player characters enter the dungeon for the first time. To determine what lies above the dungeon, roll a d20 and look up the result on Table 17-1 or choose a result that strikes you as interesting.

Table 17-1	Surface Setting
d20 Roll	*Dungeon Lies Beneath . . .*
1–2	Ruined watchtower in a wild forest
3–5	Old castle, long abandoned
6	Ruins of a once-prosperous city
7–9	Destroyed temple, shrine, or monastery devoted to an evil deity
10–12	Cellar of a ruined noble's manor, villa, or palace
13	Desolate cemetery or forgotten mausoleum
14–19	Road, trail, or path with no other noteworthy structures
20	None; the dungeon was built as a concealed stronghold underground

When you know what's above the dungeon, you can choose an appropriate length for the stairs leading from the surface feature down into the labyrinth below. In general, the stairs descend from 10 to 40 feet; longer stairways usually consist of several shorter flights.

Now choose one of the room designs shown in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and draw it in the center of the graph paper you're going to use for your dungeon map. Each of these configurations offers several exits leading in different directions, so you can't be sure where the randomly generated map might lead. The stairway leads back up to the surface and is the place where the player characters begin their adventure.

Using D&D Dungeon Tiles to lay out a random dungeon

The tables for chambers, corridors, and even chamber features are designed with *D&D Dungeon Tiles* in mind. This section describes how to use tiles with the random generation tables in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Corridors table (page 191): Use 2 x 4 tiles for most corridors. If you roll a 2 on the table ("Straight 8 squares"), put down a 2 x 8 tile and roll again. Otherwise, put down a 2 x 4 tile for the corridor and then a door tile or another 2 x 4 tile for a branch or turn in the corridor. Use a 2 x 8 tile for the crossing corridor in a three- or four-way intersection. Use 2 x 4 stairs tiles for stairs branching off from the corridor.

If you plan to have encounters with a lot of very large monsters, consider using wider corridors. Use 4 x 4 and 4 x 8 tiles instead.

Chamber Size and Shape table (page 191): The square, rectangle, and octagon chambers are easy to build with *D&D Dungeon Tiles:*

- ✔ **Square, 8 x 8:** One 8 x 8 tile, or two 4 x 8 tiles
- ✔ **Square, 10 x 10:** One 8 x 10 tile, one 2 x 8 tile, and one 2 x 2 tile
- ✔ **Rectangle, 6 x 8:** One 4 x 8 tile and one 2 x 8 tile
- ✔ **Rectangle, 8 x 10:** One 8 x 10 tile, or one 8 x 8 tile and one 2 x 8 tile
- ✔ **Rectangle, 10 x 16:** Two 8 x 10 tiles
- ✔ **Octagon, 8 x 8:** Four 4 x 4 tiles with diagonal cuts
- ✔ **Octagon, 8 x 12:** Four 4 x 4 tiles with diagonal cuts and one 4 x 8 tile
- ✔ **Octagon, 12 x 12:** Four 4 x 4 tiles with diagonal cuts, three 4 x 4 tiles, and one 4 x 8 tile

For irregular chambers, you can use tiles that depict caverns, or simply lay 4 x 4 and 2 x 4 tiles in an asymmetrical arrangement to make a room of roughly the right size. Area 1 in Kobold Hall (page 212 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) is a good example of an irregular chamber of about 8 squares by 10 squares.

Random dungeon tips

As your randomly generated dungeon map expands, corridors or rooms might hit the edge of your piece of graph paper. You can address this in one of two ways:

- ✔ Exercise some discretion and alter the random results to produce a dungeon that fits on the piece of graph paper.

- ✔ Simply continue your dungeon onto another piece of paper.

Depending on the twists and turns your dice generate, a corridor might double back and run into a part of the dungeon that's already been mapped. You can choose to make your current corridor into a dead end so that it won't disrupt what you've already mapped. Or you can have your corridor meet the already-mapped corridor or chamber. If you're creating the dungeon as the players go through it, have the corridor end in a secret door — clearly, the player characters missed it when they were exploring the area on the other side.

At your discretion, chasms might lead to other levels of the dungeon. You can treat a chasm as a stairway that eventually leads down to a new starting area for a dungeon. It's up to you to determine how deep the chasm is, but bear in mind the guidelines on page 44 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* so low-level characters don't plummet to their deaths.

When you use a stairway to descend to a new level of the dungeon, you can either treat it as a corridor and roll on the corridor table to continue your map on the next level, or you can choose a new starting configuration from the samples in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

Door Types table (page 191) and Chamber Exits table (page 192): Most dungeon chambers should have walls at least 5 feet thick separating them from neighboring rooms or corridors. When a door leads from a corridor to a chamber, or from one chamber to another, use a 1 x 2 door tile as a spacer between the two areas. Even if there's no door, you can use a blank 1 x 2 tile to create that space.

Chamber Features table (page 192): All of the features mentioned on this table appear in various *D&D Dungeon Tiles* sets. Most of them are on 2 x 2, 2 x 4, or 4 x 4 tiles. If you want, you can replace this table with a simple d6 roll: 1–2 means use a 2 x 2 tile, 3–4 means a 2 x 4 tile, and 5–6 means a 4 x 4 tile. Then pull a tile at random from a stack of the tiles you own and use whatever feature is on it.

Random Encounters

Player characters exploring a dungeon might encounter wandering monsters as they traverse the various corridors and passages, and of course they're bound to face monsters guarding treasure in various chambers. To determine what monster(s) the player characters face when roaming corridors or when they kick in the door in a random dungeon, you can consult Tables 17-2 through 17-4, as appropriate for their level.

These tables present simple encounter groups assembled using monsters from the *Monster Manual.* Each encounter is made up of five monsters of the appropriate level (or the equivalent, using minion, elite, and solo monsters), making it appropriate for a party of five characters of the same level. This simple encounter construction makes it easy to adjust for more or fewer characters — simply add or subtract monsters until you have the same number of monsters as the number of characters in the group.

We include the page number where the monster can be found in the *Monster Manual* (in parentheses) in the tables.

Table 17-2	1st-Level Dungeon Encounters
d10 Roll	*Monsters*
1–2	2 stormclaw scorpions (229), 2 halfling slingers (152), 1 stirge (248)
3–4	8 goblin cutters (136), 2 goblin warriors (137), 1 goblin blackblade (136)

(continued)

Table 17-2 *(continued)*

d10 Roll	Monsters
5–6	4 kobold minions (167), 2 kobold skirmishers (167), 1 kobold slinger (168), 1 spiretop drake (90)
7–8	3 fire beetles (30), 8 decrepit skeletons (234)
9–10	3 dire rats (219), 8 giant rats (219)

Table 17-3	2nd-Level Dungeon Encounters
d10 Roll	**Monsters**
1–2	3 elf scouts (106), 2 elf archers (106)
3–4	1 guard drake (90), 4 human rabble (162), 3 human bandits (162)
5–6	2 kobold dragonshields (168), 2 hyenas (166), 1 goblin sharpshooter (137)
7–8	3 kruthik young (170), 8 kruthik hatchlings (170)
9–10	3 zombies (274), 2 rat swarms (219)

Table 17-4	3rd-Level Dungeon Encounters
d12 Roll	**Monsters**
1–3	4 hobgoblin grunts (138), 2 hobgoblin soldiers (139), 1 hobgoblin archer (139), 1 hobgoblin warcaster (140)
4–5	3 orc raiders (203), 2 iron defenders (156)
6–7	1 ochre jelly (202), 3 wererats (180)
8–9	4 zombie rotters (274), 2 gravehounds (274), 2 skeletons (234)
10–11	3 human guards (162), 1 gnome arcanist (134), 1 spitting drake (91)
12	1 young white dragon (84)

You can design your own tables for higher-level dungeons by using these as examples.

Using a Random Encounter Deck

A *random encounter deck* is a great way of preparing to improvise. With a deck of *D&D Miniatures* statistics cards (or index cards with monster statistics from the *Monster Manual*), a small box of miniatures, and a selection of either poster maps or *D&D Dungeon Tiles,* you can be ready to run a simple D&D adventure at a moment's notice — which can be a great thing at a gaming convention, on a rainy afternoon, or in the waning hours of just the right party.

Pages 194–195 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* describe how to build and use an encounter deck.

In the following sections, we offer some additional tricks to make a random dungeon more interesting, and then we offer a sample encounter deck designed for 1st-level characters.

Special cards

Special cards liven up a random encounter deck by creating minor story elements within an encounter. The boss monster described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 195) is an example of a special card you can include in

an encounter deck, but it's not the only possibility. To add some variety to an encounter deck, consider some of the following options.

Enemy: The monster represented by this card is the lone survivor of an evil group that fought and was defeated by the other monsters in this encounter. It could be part of an evil adventuring party or just a member of a monster pack that ran afoul of the other monsters in the dungeon. The survivor fights both the monsters and the player characters in this encounter.

When you draw an enemy, set it aside. Draw an additional card to replace it, and then build the encounter as normal. The enemy appears in the room with the other creatures, but it isn't on those creatures' side.

An enemy can be a monster or an evil nonplayer character (NPC), but it should be the only creature of its kind in your encounter deck. (That's why it's the lone survivor.) Its level can be anywhere from the same level as the party to about three levels higher. The tougher it is, the more damage it can do to the other monsters in the encounter, but it'll also be that much harder for the player characters to defeat.

Friend: The monster represented by a friend card is the lone survivor of a good adventuring party, and the other monsters in the encounter have just finished off the rest of that party. The survivor joins the player characters in fighting the monsters.

When you draw a friend, set it aside. Draw two additional cards and then build the encounter as normal. The friend appears in the room with the other creatures, but fights on the side of the player characters. After the fight, the grateful friend heads for the surface, unless you have other plans for the creature.

Various humanoid monsters or NPCs can appear as friends. Its level should be one or two levels lower than the player characters' level.

Lock and Key: The adventurers find a locked door and a key to that door, not necessarily in that order. This option uses two cards: a Lock card and a Key card.

When you draw a Lock card or a Key card, set it aside. Draw an additional card to replace it, and then build the encounter as normal. (If you draw both cards, set aside only the first one you draw. Shuffle the other back into the deck and draw a card to replace it.) After the encounter is complete, the characters find the lock or the key.

The Lock card represents a locked secret door hiding a treasure cache. The lock on the door is beyond the capabilities of the characters to open with Thievery. The Key card is the key to that lock. If the characters find it, they can take it with them in order to open the lock.

If you use this option, set aside three treasure parcels to go inside the secret treasure cache (see the later section, "Generating Random Treasure").

Sample encounter deck

Table 17-5 provides an example of an encounter deck suitable for a party of 5th-level characters. Following the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, it contains monsters from level 3 to level 10, with a mix of roles.

The monsters in the deck mostly fall into two categories or themes: undead and orcs. The undead also include cultists of Orcus, and the orc faction has a couple of allied demons. These themes begin to suggest the outline of a story that holds this random encounter deck together. Perhaps the rampaging orcs serve Baphomet, Demogorgon, or another demon prince who's opposed to Orcus, and the two factions are actually enemies within the dungeon. (That would suggest that you shouldn't build encounters using monsters from both factions, unless you intend them to be fighting each other as well as the player characters.)

Three monsters don't fit these categories. A carrion crawler is marked as an enemy, so it will be fighting whatever creature it appears with, but it has apparently been drawn to the dungeon by the scent of all these undead. A dwarf, marked as a friend, could end up providing important information about the activities of the cult of Orcus amidst all these undead. Finally, a young black dragon provides a nasty distraction from all the orcs and undead.

Table 17-5	Sample Encounter Deck
# of Cards	**Monster**
1	Gravehound (level 3 brute, page 274)
2	Skeleton (level 3 soldier, page 234)
1	Zombie rotter (level 3 minion, page 274)
1	Corruption corpse (level 4 artillery, page 274)
1	Deathlock wight (level 4 controller, page 262)
1	Phantom warrior (level 4 soldier, page 116)
2	Rotwing zombie (level 4 skirmisher, page 274)
1	Specter (level 4 lurker, page 244)
2	Blazing skeleton (level 5 artillery, page 234)
2	Boneshard skeleton (level 5 brute, page 235)
2	Ghoul (level 5 soldier, page 118)
1	Vampire spawn fleshripper (level 5 minion, page 259)

(continued)

Table 17-5 *(continued)*

# of Cards	Monster
2	Wight (level 5 skirmisher, page 262)
2	Wraith (level 5 lurker, page 266)
1	Chillborn zombie (level 6 soldier, page 275)
1	Mad wraith (level 6 controller, page 266)
1	Shadow hound (level 6 skirmisher, page 160)
1	Crimson acolyte (level 7 skirmisher, page 210)
1	Flameskull (level 8 artillery, page 109)
1	Trap haunt (level 8 lurker, page 116)
2	Zombie hulk (level 8 brute, page 275)
1	Battle wight (level 9 soldier, page 262)
1	Skeletal tomb guardian (level 10 brute, page 235)
1	Deathpriest of Orcus (level 9 controller leader, page 210) — **boss**
2	Orc raider (level 3 skirmisher, page 203)
2	Orc berserker (level 4 brute, page 203)
2	Orc drudge (level 4 minion, page 203)
1	Orc eye of Gruumsh (level 5 controller leader, page 204)
2	Rage drake (level 5 brute, page 92)
1	Evistro (level 6 brute, page 54)
2	Orc bloodrager (level 7 elite brute, page 204)
1	Barlgura (level 8 brute, page 53)
1	Ogre skirmisher (level 8 skirmisher, page 199)
1	Orc warrior (level 9 minion, page 203)
1	Dwarf bolter (level 4 artillery, page 97) — **friend**
1	Carrion crawler (level 7 controller, page 40) — **enemy**
1	Young black dragon (level 4 solo lurker, page 75)

Generating Random Treasure

What's the point of risking life and limb in some dismal, monster-infested dungeon if the player characters don't come home with a king's ransom in gold, gems, and wondrous magic items?

You can generate random treasure simply by rolling a d10 and choosing the treasure parcel for the player characters' level that corresponds to the roll. After you've given out a parcel, don't give it out again — either reroll that result if it comes up again or treat that result as meaning "no treasure here."

If you're using an encounter deck to generate encounters, you can include one card for each treasure parcel of the characters' level. (Treasure parcels appear on pages 126–129 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*) When you draw one or more treasure parcel cards, set them aside and draw new cards to replace them. If the characters defeat the monsters in the encounter, they find the treasure as a reward.

You can choose the specific form that a treasure parcel takes — the particular magic item the characters find and whether a monetary parcel is gold, gems, or art objects — ahead of time or on the spur of the moment.

In a really random dungeon, one way to handle magic item parcels is to have the characters roll to see who gets each parcel that contains a magic item. Each player rolls a d20, and the player with the highest result claims the item. That player can then choose any item of the specified level.

The characters shouldn't always find treasure lying in tidy piles on the dungeon floor. When you create a random dungeon treasure, you might want to add a little detail by finding an appropriate container or containers for the treasure, as determined by Table 17-6.

Table 17-6	Treasure Container
d10 Roll	*Treasure Contained In . . .*
1–4	No container (heaped or piled on floor)
5	Bags or sacks
6	Wooden cases or caskets
7	Wooden chests or trunks, locked (Thievery DC 10 + ½ party level)
8	Iron coffers or strongboxes, locked (Thievery DC 15 + ½ party level)

(continued)

Table 17-6 *(continued)*	
d10 Roll	*Treasure Contained In . . .*
9	Clay urns
10	In a secret room (5 x 5 ft.) nearby (Perception DC 15 + $\frac{1}{2}$ level to locate)

Even if a monster doesn't have a chest for its treasure, intelligent monsters usually look for some way to conceal their hoards, stashing them out of sight. Player characters who defeat the monsters and traps guarding a room would be well advised to look around and search in likely places, just in case the monster has a hoard hidden somewhere nearby.

Chapter 18

Paragon and Epic Adventures

. . . .

. . . .

*G*aining levels is one of the best parts of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game. Players are rewarded for their time, effort, and cleverness with new, interesting character abilities; mighty magic items; great honor and responsibility within the game world; and more sheer power to overcome the challenges they face. Adversaries such as goblins, orcs, and zombies no longer pose a significant threat to the player characters — instead, they face more awesome and deadly foes such as dragons, demons, or giants.

The 30 levels of the D&D experience are divided into three *tiers* to help define this changing experience. Beginning characters are *heroic* adventurers — they're already a cut above the average person in terms of their capabilities and their potential, but this is just the start of their rise to power. When they reach 11th level, they enter the *paragon* tier, becoming everything that word suggests — perfect examples of excellence, embodying a specialization within their chosen classes reflected in their paragon paths. At 21st level, characters cross the threshold into the *epic* tier, where they become truly superheroic, wielding the power of archmages or demigods.

Creating adventures to challenge paragon- or epic-tier characters can be tricky, but it's still possible. This chapter helps you design adventures that take the player characters' fantastic high-level capabilities — from flying and invisibility to scrying and bringing back the dead — into account.

Understanding the Paragon Tier

When characters reach 11th level and choose their paragon paths, you'll begin to see the game change in these general areas:

✔ **Action point effects:** Characters choose their paragon paths when they reach 11th level. The attack power they gain at that level might not be

dramatically different from what they've had before, but right away, paragon paths give characters new special effects that take place when they spend action points, as well as other class-like features. Suddenly, characters are doing new things — using at-will powers when they charge, regaining expended powers when they use action points, and so on.

✓ **Utility powers:** Utility powers begin to give characters new capabilities both in and out of combat. Wizards fly and become invisible. Paladins teleport next to threatened allies. Rogues bypass locks — and also become invisible. Heightened mobility is the most significant effect in these utility powers — see the later section, "High mobility," for more on handling this challenge.

✓ **Rituals:** Characters gain access to rituals that can significantly alter the course of adventures. Passwall lets them bypass solid obstacles, and Shadow Walk gives them a quick way to cross long overland distances. Consult Mystic Sages increases the knowledge available to them, and View Location opens the door to sophisticated scrying and spying techniques. (See the later section, "Divination and scrying," for more discussion.) Raise Dead and Remove Affliction are almost routine at this point (though the component cost for Raise Dead jumps dramatically when the characters enter the paragon tier, to ensure that it remains relevant).

✓ **Magic items:** Characters have a greater number of more powerful magic items. They can use more item powers in a day, and they gain access to the impressive powers and properties of magic rings. *Winged boots,* a *ring of flight,* or a *flying carpet* can allow characters to fly short distances. Characters can have increasing amounts of resistance to specific damage types.

✓ **Access to powers:** When a character reaches 11th level, he or she has as many encounter powers as a 30th-level character — four — and three daily powers (where an epic character has four). Paragon-tier characters also have more ways to recover expended encounter or daily powers and more access to the powers of magic items than characters in the heroic tier. On top of all that, magic rings give characters an added incentive to push on to finish more encounters in a day, because their powers have better effects for characters who have already completed milestones. Characters also have more access to healing powers that don't rely on healing surges. Combined, these factors mean that paragon characters tend to push through more encounters in a day before stopping for an extended rest.

Understanding the Epic Tier

The epic tier takes the heroic fantasy of the earlier tiers and ratchets it up a notch to become truly superheroic. Epic characters don't dress in spandex and fly through the streets of a fantastic metropolis, of course, but their powers are appropriate for the challenges they're facing: They might confront

the oldest dragons, most terrible demons (including demon princes), and potentially even gods such as Tiamat or Vecna at the pinnacle of their careers. Epic characters are godlike, and they might carry titles like demigod or Chosen as part of their epic destinies.

The changes you'll see in the epic tier are similar to what happens at paragon levels, but they're taken to the logical extreme:

- ✔ **Die hard characters:** When characters choose their epic destinies, they immediately gain some feature that sets them apart from lesser mortals. From the demigod's additional ability score increase to the archmage's ability to use one daily spell twice every day, epic characters have subtle but game-changing features. As they advance toward their final destinies, epic characters become highly resistant to death, with powers that begin, "Once per day, when you die . . ." At least once a day, some epic characters can treat death as just another temporary condition they suffer through and recover from in the course of a few rounds of combat.

- ✔ **Utility powers:** Epic utility powers have even more dramatic effects. *Fly* gives way to *mass fly,* which can allow the whole party to fly for the duration of an encounter. The cleric's *purify* wipes away conditions and ongoing damage, again affecting the whole party. The paladin's *gift of life* gets a dead ally up and fighting again. Rogues and rangers gain some incredible mobility with powers such as *dazzling acrobatics* and *safe stride.*

- ✔ **Rituals:** Epic rituals continue the same themes found in rituals at paragon levels. True Portal is the ultimate transportation ritual, letting characters instantly reach any place they can define sufficiently. Loremaster's Bargain and Voice of Fate are powerful divinations, and Observe Creature makes life very difficult for your major recurring villains. Raise Dead becomes more expensive again, but many characters have other ways to recover from death.

- ✔ **Magic items:** The magic items of epic characters are more powerful still, and characters have more access to their powers. Even potions, such as the 30th-level *potion of life,* get significantly more powerful, offering another way for characters to cheat death. Flight and damage resistance are more common and more effective.

Understanding Specific Challenges for DMing High-Level Characters

Two categories of changes in high-level play can have dramatic effects on the way you design adventures: the increased mobility that characters in these tiers enjoy and their access to more information through divination and scrying rituals.

High mobility

When characters in a party can fly or teleport routinely, vertical obstacles such as chasms, cliffs, or pits become much less important. Instead of channeling the player characters into exploring in a different direction, a chasm now becomes a road, offering the player characters the ability to travel throughout its length and depth. For that matter, many horizontal obstacles — cavern lakes, gardens full of carnivorous plants, lava rivers, and so on — can be crossed with impunity.

Watch out for monsters that just can't keep up with mobile characters at high level. Many paragon and epic monsters have ranged attacks, even if they're not artillery monsters, or can fly themselves, to ensure that they can still affect characters who are flying out of melee reach. But keep an eye on encounters where the characters might be able to exploit their superior mobility, and include artillery monsters or more mobile skirmishers to cover the other monsters' weakness.

Even at epic levels, it's hard for a whole party of characters to fly for more than a single encounter in a day, but that can be enough for them to bypass the most dramatic obstacles of your carefully constructed dungeon. If nothing else, though, those dizzying chasms and foreboding mountain ranges make for interesting scenery for your epic-level party!

Divination and scrying

Just as mobility magic helps characters bypass physical obstacles, divination and scrying rituals defeat *information obstacles* — situations where a lack of some necessary piece of information prevents the player characters from advancing through the adventure. For example, if the PCs don't know where the evil high priest's hidden shrine is located, they can't go confront him. Before they can defeat their enemy and conclude the adventure, they have to find out where his stronghold is by piecing together clues, interrogating minions, searching likely spots, or generally going to some effort to figure it out. But high-level characters have access to rituals that can defeat impediments of this sort just as easily as a *mass fly* spell defeats a chasm.

The divination and scrying rituals most often used to bust through information obstacles include Consult Mystic Sages and View Location in the paragon tier, and Loremaster's Bargain, Voice of Fate, and Observe Creature in the epic tier.

Fortunately, the game includes a key defense against hostile scrying. The Forbiddance ritual is the best defense against both scrying and teleportation, so consider warding your high-level villain's private sanctum with this ritual.

Making the Experience Match the Level

By the time the player characters reach 11th level, they've saved plenty of villages. They've beaten plenty of marauding monsters. They've rooted out plenty of sinister cults and broken up plenty of slaver gangs. Moving into paragon and epic play means that the characters should begin to take on quests and tasks that *feel* like they're worthy of a high-level party's time and attention.

Raising the stakes

The first thing you can do to make high-level characters feel like they're becoming more important in the game world is raise the stakes of whatever adventure they take on. Instead of adventuring to save a village, paragon characters now deal with threats to great cities, burgeoning kingdoms, or even the world. Epic characters can save the world multiple times over and confront forces that threaten the fabric of the entire universe — demon princes who seek to overthrow the gods or primordials who want to return the world and the Astral Sea into the swirling tempest of the Elemental Chaos.

A low-level party dealing with a bloodthirsty cult of Orcus, demon prince of the undead, might face a single cult leader in one isolated shrine. At paragon levels, the cult of Orcus might be a society of assassins who hold an entire realm in terror, with the assistance of powerful demons. High nobles and great merchants are secret members of the cult, and they work to shield the cult from any organized efforts to stamp it out. When the heroes take on the adventure, they're facing a secret society with hundreds of members. At epic levels, they might work up to an adventure where they face the demon prince himself. The basic idea of the adventure is the same, but the stakes are a dozen times higher.

Wowing the players with the setting

Early in their player characters' careers, players expect to fight in modest, mundane locales such as caves, crypts, ruined castles, and lonely wilderness clearings. As the characters transition into high level, make the scenery around the adventure more and more spectacular. Instead of grubbing around in a dirty little cave only a few hundred feet from daylight, send the PCs 20 miles down into the awesome black vault of the Underdark. Locate your secret strongholds of evil atop awesome mountain peaks, in the fuming calderas of volcanoes, or in the icebound ruins of a city of giants ringed by colossal statues hundreds of feet high. The more remote, the better — if the PCs have to make use of their prodigious magical gifts just to get to the adventure, the players will understand why this was an adventure no ordinary dungeon-delvers dared take on.

Other planes of existence, from the Elemental Chaos to the dominions of the Astral Sea, make great settings for high-level adventures. The tumult of the Elemental Chaos, the darkest reaches of the Shadowfell, noble eladrin courts in the Feywild, and the bleak despair of the Nine Hells are breathtaking adventure locales beyond anything the characters can experience within the confines of the natural world.

When paragon characters start to feel like really hot stuff, parading through the largest city in your world to the acclaim of all, a trip to the streets of the City of Brass can bring them back down to earth, so to speak. When the local nobility consists of efreets that are higher level than the paragon PCs, the characters sit up and take notice. You can achieve the same effect at epic levels by bringing characters to the Bright City of Hestavar, where Erathis, Ioun, and Pelor don't just have big temples — they make their homes there.

Providing benchmark encounters

Once every adventure or two, it's a good idea to remind the players of how much tougher their characters are now compared to where they were a few levels ago. Look for opportunities to throw the occasional weak encounter into a high-level adventure. If you can find a benchmark monster or former enemy who once seemed tough to the players, so much the better. For example, if the player characters almost got wiped out by a pair of trolls when they were 4th level, an encounter with five trolls when they're 11th or 12th level will show off just how far they've come since that one hard fight.

Chapter 19

Sample Dungeon: The Necromancer's Apprentice

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In This Chapter

▶ Preparing for this adventure

▶ Running "The Necromancer's Apprentice," an adventure for five 2nd-level characters

▶ Adjusting the adventure to suit your group

● ●

*T*he earlier chapters in this book bury you under an avalanche of helpful advice and suggestions. In this chapter, we give you something concrete and immediately useful — a second sample dungeon that you can use in your D&D game. This one is a little longer and more involved than the sample dungeon presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and it might take you two or three game sessions to complete.

Dungeon Master Preparation

To run your best game, make sure that you know the adventure, the monsters, and the key rules for obstacles, challenges, and special attacks the player characters are likely to run into during the adventure. You certainly don't need to commit everything to memory, but the game will run smoother if you're familiar with the adventure and its features before you begin your game session.

Before you intend to play, read or review the following:

▶ The adventure contained in this chapter (naturally).

▶ The following monster descriptions from the *Monster Manual* (if you own it): cave bear, choker, kruthik hatchling, kruthik young, orc berserker, orc raider, skeleton, blazing skeleton, deathlock wight, wraith, and zombie. You don't need the *Monster Manual* to run the adventure, because we include all the relevant statistics, but the *Monster Manual* includes more thorough descriptions of these creatures.

> ✔ The description of Fallcrest and its surroundings in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, Chapter 11. This adventure is set in Fallcrest, but you can easily change the name or key personalities of the town to suit your own campaign if you would prefer to use a different setting.

TIP

You might want to use sticky notes, paper clips, or some other handy method to mark the pages in your rulebooks that you intend to refer to later. It will save you time and page-flipping during your game session.

The Necromancer's Apprentice

When the folk of Fallcrest's outlying farmsteads report livestock killed, sinister creatures prowling around their homes by night, and evil whispers in the wild woods, the player characters are called in to investigate and set matters right. Their investigation leads them into a monster-haunted forest and the long-abandoned home of a notorious necromancer . . . now occupied by a new master.

This adventure is designed for five player characters of 2nd level. If your group includes more (or fewer) than five players or the characters are higher than 2nd level, you can adjust the adventure to compensate; see the section, "Adapting the Adventure," at the end of this chapter.

The material in this chapter is divided into two sections: Dungeon Master information and information to be shared with the players. The material you can read aloud to the players is marked "Read Aloud" and is set in italics.

Adventure premise

In the Cloak Wood a few miles west of the small town of Fallcrest stands the lonely house of the infamous necromancer, Roburn. Years ago, Roburn attracted the attention of the young Vesgin Markelhay, younger brother of Faren Markelhay, lord of the town. Vesgin aspired to the magical arts, and Roburn taught the ambitious young nobleman many secrets of dark magic. Vesgin grew proud and cruel under Roburn's tutelage, and he began to plot the murder of his older brother so that he could take his "rightful" place as lord of Fallcrest.

Vesgin's attempt to assassinate Faren failed. When the depth of his brother's evil came to light, Faren threw Vesgin out. Then he set out after Roburn, intending to drive off the necromancer who had poisoned his younger brother with cruelty and ambition. But Roburn was gone. He apparently left his lonely house to the birds and the beasts and has not been seen or heard from since.

It has been a number of years since Roburn and Vesgin studied together in the sinister house in the woods. Vesgin grew in his knowledge of the necromantic arts and took an apprentice of his own, Nathar. Finally, Vesgin decided to return to Fallcrest and exact vengeance for all the injustices he suffered — and the first step was to send Nathar to prepare his way.

At his master's order, the young necromancer Nathar crept into the Nentir Vale and took up residence in Roburn's old house. Nathar intends to thoroughly spy out Fallcrest and the lands nearby, gather a warband of evil creatures suitable for Vesgin's work, and sow what chaos and fear he can in preparation for Vesgin's return. Vesgin told Nathar several of the secrets of Roburn's old abode, and the younger apprentice is eagerly searching out every scrap of arcane lore remaining in the various tomes and books Roburn left behind when he abandoned his home.

Nathar's servants include a gang of orcs and a number of skeletons that Roburn created, which now answer to the new wizard of the house. Roaming the Vale by night, Nathar's minions have started killing livestock, terrorizing the outlying farms, and waylaying travelers in the wild and at lonely spots outside of town. The folk of Fallcrest suspect that some sinister new denizen might now inhabit Roburn's house, but the last guardsmen who went to investigate were attacked by a vicious bear in the woods and never made it to the old necromancer's home.

Starting the adventure

When you're ready to start playing, read the text below to the players. The text assumes that the characters have already completed the Kobold Hall adventure from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. You can alter the text as you feel the need.

Read Aloud: *One evening, as you're celebrating your victory over the kobolds, a dour-looking old swordsman approaches you. He wears the silver cloak clasp of the town watch. "I'm Gerdrand, sergeant of the watch," he rasps. "You did well against those kobolds up in the old manor, or so I've heard. There's some folks in town who could use more of your help. Are you willing?"*

Give the players a moment to think up appropriate responses. Gerdrand is here to point the characters toward the adventure, so the sergeant takes anything short of outright hostility as an indication to explain more.

Sergeant Gerdrand's request

This is a simple conversation, an opportunity for roleplaying as the characters get the information they need out of the sergeant. It's not a skill challenge encounter, because the characters don't need to make any checks and they can't really "fail" this interaction.

Gerdrand wants the player characters to go out to Roburn's old home and see what exactly is going on out there. He's a little suspicious of wandering adventurers, but he thinks the player characters are probably better able to handle any trouble they might run into than his own guards or any kind of town militia.

Read Aloud: *Gerdrand glances up and down the street — none of the other townsfolk are nearby. He lowers his voice. "The farmsteaders who live on the outskirts of town are worried. Strange things have been happening lately — livestock missing, sinister faces peering into windows, and some sightings of orcs in the Cloak Wood. Early this morning, old Arim sent one of his boys into town to tell me that someone or something killed half a dozen of his sheep west of town. There's an old wizard's cottage, known as Roburn's house, not far from Arim's place, and I'm worried that some new evil is hiding out there. Do you think you could look into this?"*

Naturally, the players might have some questions. Sergeant Gerdrand answers the PCs questions to the best of his ability:

- Who's Arim? *"A shepherd who lives with his sons a couple miles west of town, just on this side of the Cloak Wood. He's a steady man, and I've never known him to scare easily. Follow the river southwest, then strike west where the river bends. You can't miss his place."*

- Who lives in the wizard's cottage? *"No one now, but it used to be Roburn's house. He was a brooding, unfriendly sort who lived up in the Cloak Wood for many years, keeping to himself. He abandoned the place about ten years ago, and hasn't been seen or heard from since. Good riddance to him."*

- How do we find Roburn's house? *"There's a trail leading into the forest near Arim's pasture. It's about three miles from the pasture to Roburn's house."*

- Why don't you look into it for yourself? *"We did, but the Cloak Wood is a dangerous place. A couple of my men were attacked by a vicious black bear near Roburn's house a few days ago. I'm afraid that this might be more than the town watch can handle."*

- What's in it for us? *"If you can drive off whoever or whatever is skulking around up there and put an end to these troubles, we'll pay you 150 gold pieces."*

Quest: Gerdrand presents the characters with a 2nd-level major quest: Investigate Roburn's old house and deal with whatever trouble is brewing there. When they complete the quest, they'll receive 125 XP each, and Gerdrand's promised reward of 150 gold pieces (for the group, not per character). That reward is most of treasure parcel 8 for a group of 2nd-level characters. (The rest is made up in the final room of the dungeon.)
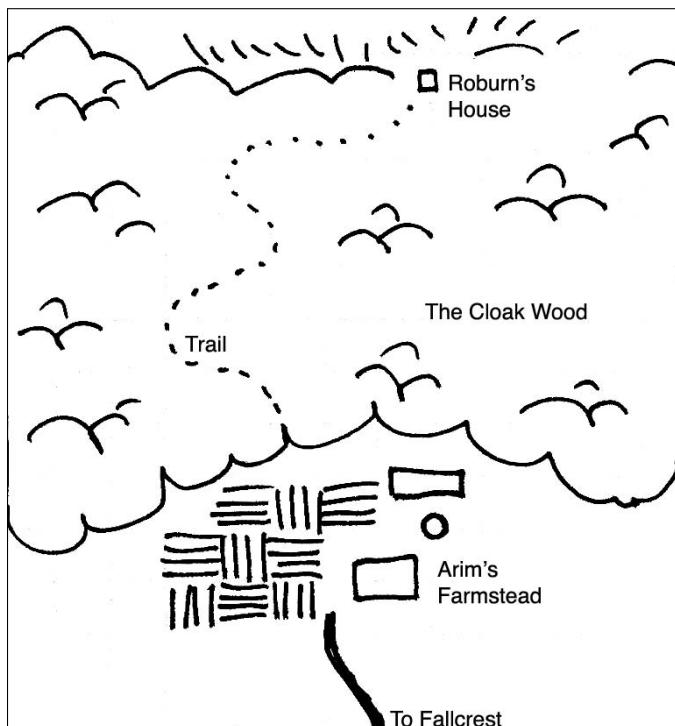
When the players are done talking with Gerdrand, the watch sergeant points them toward Arim's house and wishes them luck.

Ask the players whether they'd like their characters to do anything else while they're in town. For example, the players might want their characters to stock up on arrows, buy a potion, or pick up special gear such as sunrods if they have any money to spend. When the PCs are ready to continue, go on to the section, "Arim's pasture."

Arim's pasture

This is the scene of the most recent attack and the setting-out point for the adventure. Figure 19-1 shows a map of the area. When the players tell you that their characters are ready to begin, read the following text:

Read Aloud: *You follow the river south from Fallcrest, then take a wagon track west where the river bends. The track runs past several outlying farmsteads and herdsmen's cottages and then ends near a large cottage of fieldstone and turf, surrounded by broad green pastures. You can see that one of the farther pastures is a scene of slaughter. The carcasses of half a dozen sheep lie strewn about, and the smell of blood hangs heavily in the air. None of the dead animals appear to have been eaten. Just beyond the low stone wall broods the Cloak Wood, shadows thick and dark under the gnarled branches. An overgrown footpath leads into the woods.*

Figure 19-1: A map of Arim's farmstead and the path through the woods.

DM Secret: The livestock were killed during the night by the orcs who serve Nathar, who were scrounging around Arim's farm looking for something worth stealing. They carried off two of the smaller animals and killed the rest out of sheer brutality.

Arim and his sons

If the player characters stop at the cottage, they make the acquaintance of the old shepherd Arim and his two strapping young sons. Arim is a lean, gray-bearded fellow with a sturdy wooden quarterstaff and a leather sling at his belt. He walks with a bad limp, the result of an old injury, and he never uses two words when one will do. If the player characters question him about the night's events, he can't add much more to the story.

- ✔ Did you see or hear anything last night? "*No. The wind was up all night. I didn't notice anything until sunrise, when I got up.*"

- ✔ Are the woods dangerous? "*Never used to be. I've taught the predators to stay away from my flock. But there's some new beast out in the woods that has no fear. I won't let my boys go in there alone.*"

- ✔ Where does the path lead? "*To Roburn's house, about three miles in. I don't go near it.*"

Examining the scene

The players may have their characters take a closer look at the dead live-stock. It's gruesome work, but the player characters might learn something for their effort. Ask the players which skills their characters are using when they study the scene. Skills that might be relevant include Heal, Nature, or Perception, but if your players come up with clever ways they might use other skills, you can give them the same kind of information.

- ✔ **Heal or Nature:** A character who succeeds on a DC 12 Heal or Nature skill check can determine that the dead livestock were killed by heavy edged weapons, likely axes.

- ✔ **Perception:** A character who studies the ground around the dead animals can attempt a Perception check. If the character succeeds on a DC 14 check, he or she finds tracks around the slaughtered animals. The prints of booted feet lead west into the woods.

What next?

When the players tell you that they're ready to strike off in search of Roburn's house or choose to follow the tracks leading into the woods, move on to the section, "The Cloak Wood."

The Cloak Wood

The footpath winds through the woods toward the necromancer's old home (refer to the map shown in Figure 19-1). It's a few miles from the pasture, so it takes the characters about an hour of marching to get there. Along the way, they encounter some trouble. To set the mood for the players, use the following to describe the march:

Read Aloud: *The forest is dense and dark. Twisted trees with black trunks and heavy overhanging branches make the footpath seem more like a tunnel than trail. The air is warm, still, and gloomy, and there doesn't seem to be a breath of wind in here. You don't even hear any birdsong.*

Bear Attack

Encounter Level 1 (500 XP): About halfway to Roburn's house, the player characters run into the creature that attacked the town watch — a vicious, bloodthirsty cave bear. The creature has noticed Nathar's servants making use of the footpath leading through its territory, and it's waiting to ambush the next person who comes up or down the path.

Setting up the Ambush: To set up this encounter, draw a winding path about 1 square wide along your battle grid or play surface, if you have one. All squares off the path are considered difficult terrain — a creature must pay 2 squares of movement to enter each square of forest. Ask the players to arrange their miniatures on the battle grid in the order in which their characters are marching. You can assume that the player characters are on the path.

Spotting the Ambush: Next, roll a Stealth check for the bear (d20+4). Compare the result to the player characters' passive Perception checks (10 plus their Perception check modifiers). Any character whose passive Perception check equals or beats the bear's Stealth check result notices the monster.

If nobody notices the bear, it gets a surprise round to act. It charges 4 squares to attack the character in the back of the party. The characters are surprised, so the bear has combat advantage (a +2 bonus on its attack roll) against them.

If one or more of the characters notices the bear, roll initiative. The bear and any character who noticed it can act in the surprise round, taking a single action before the surprised characters can roll initiative and join in the fight.

When you place the bear on the battle grid, read the following:

Read Aloud: *Lurking in the shadows of the forest is a big bear with a black pelt and wide, slavering jaws. It hurls itself at you with a terrible roar, its eyes ablaze with bloodlust!*

The Bear's Tactics: The aggressive bear assumes that after it downs a victim, the rest of the party is likely to run off. (That's how the fighting went with the town watch, after all.) It bounds straight at the last character in line and attacks.

On its first turn, the bear charges the party, so it can make only a melee basic attack (with a +1 bonus for charging) at the end of the charge. On its next turn, it uses its *cave bear frenzy* power to attack every adjacent character. At the start of each turn after that, roll a d6 to see whether it can use *cave bear frenzy* again. If it can, it does. Otherwise, its tactics are simple — it tries to claw one character to death, focusing its attacks on its initial target.

After the Battle: If the bear is reduced to 10 hit points or less and two characters or more are still on their feet and fighting, it tries to run away — it's over-confident, but that doesn't mean it doesn't know when to call it a day. For purposes of awarding experience points, this counts as defeating the monster.

Tell the players that you're going to assume that the characters stop for a short rest after each encounter unless they tell you otherwise. Remind them, if you need to, that they can spend healing surges as they wish, and they regain the use of any encounter powers they used during the fight with the bear.

Cave Bear

A cave bear is a savage predator, much more aggressive than even the most territorial bears in the real world. Its fur is banded with black and dark brown, and its yellow eyes seem to glow with malice.

Cave Bear   **Level 6 Elite Brute**
Medium natural beast   XP: 500
Initiative: +4   **Senses:** Perception +5; darkvision
HP: 170   **Bloodied:** 85
AC: 20; **Fortitude:** 21; **Reflex:** 17; **Will:** 18
Speed: 8

       Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will):
       +10 versus AC; 1d8 + 5 damage
       Cave bear frenzy (standard action, recharge 5 6):
       close burst 1; +10 versus AC; 1d8 + 5 damage

Elite: As an elite monster, the cave bear gets a +2 bonus on saving throws and has 1 action point that it can spend during the encounter.

Skills: Stealth +4

See the cave bear's complete statistics on page 29 of the *Monster Manual.*

From the site of the bear's ambush, it's about another half-mile or so to the necromancer's cottage. Continue the adventure with the section, "House of Roburn."

Experience Points Award: If the player characters defeat the bear, the party earns 500 XP.

House of Roburn

At the end of the footpath lies the house built by the necromancer Roburn. A map of the house and the surrounding area is shown in Figure 19-2. The player characters reach the place about an hour after setting out from Arim's farmstead. When you're ready to move on to this part of the adventure, begin with the following description:

Read Aloud: *The footpath ends in a sizable clearing at the base of a bramble-covered hillside. A large, rambling house of fieldstone squats at the bottom of the hill. Moss grows over the wooden shakes of its roof, and its small round windows are dark and dusty. A thin stream runs out from a crevice in the hillside near the house; the crevice is loosely covered by an iron gate. Smoke drifts skyward from the ramshackle chimney atop the house, and an old oxcart leans against one wall. The house seems to have only one door, which is fashioned in a curious oval shape.*

We describe the areas numbered on the map in the following sections.

Encounter Area 1: The Clearing
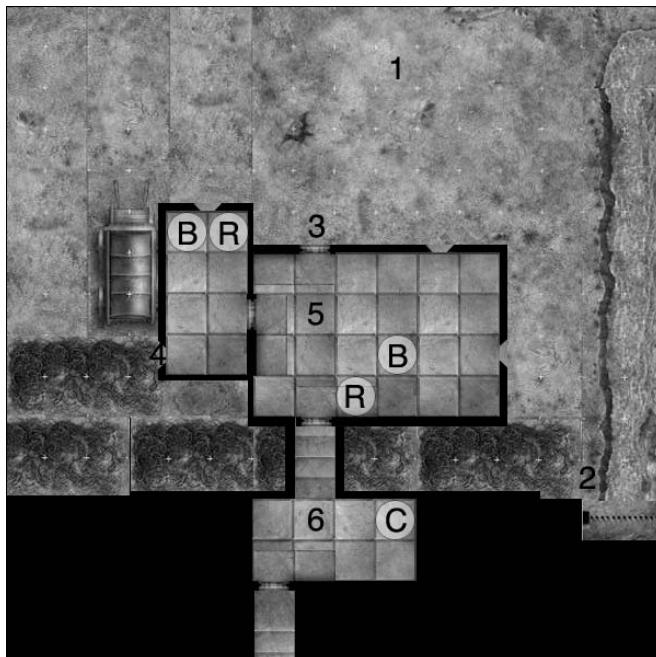
None of the house's denizens spend much time outside by daylight, so the clearing is almost always empty.

Read Aloud: *The clearing around the house is covered with tall, dry grass and bramble-bushes. There is a dusty yard immediately before the front door. The oxcart leaning against the house is old but sturdy.*

The players might fear that their characters will be seen from the house if they enter the clearing, but in truth the house's windows are so dark and dusty that no one inside can really see out at all. As long as the player characters stay reasonably quiet, the orcs in the house (area 5) won't know they're out here. However, if the player characters make any loud noises — shouting or smashing things — the orcs hear them and get ready for a fight.

If the player characters wait and observe the cottage, no one comes out until nightfall, when the orcs in area 5 emerge to begin another evening of marauding and troublemaking. If the player characters fight them here, use the statistics provided in "Encounter Area 5: Orcs in the House" (and remember that orcs defeated here won't be waiting for the player characters inside the house).

Figure 19-2:
The clearing
and the
cottage.

Encounter Area 2: The Spring and Gate

A spring rises deep in the crevice and serves as the house's well.

Read Aloud: *The cleft in the hillside goes back a good ways into the gloom. A small trickle of a stream not more than a foot across spills out and passes under the thickets nearby. The iron grate across the mouth of the cleft is hinged and is secured by a rusty old padlock.*

The padlock isn't a very good one, but it is rusty and difficult to operate (DC 18 Thievery check). It can also be smashed off the grate by a couple solid hammer blows, but that makes enough noise to alert the orcs in area 5. A character could also force his or her way in by wrenching the grate loose, which requires a DC 16 Strength check.

Inside, the cleft goes back about 20 feet, narrowing until it becomes a tight squeeze for almost anyone. Hidden around a bend in the crevice is an old wooden trap door that leads down to area 8 in the dungeon level.

Encounter Area 3: The Front Door

Roburn gave his house only one entrance. However, one of the windows on the west side of the house, leading into the bedchamber, is broken and has become a makeshift entrance for the orcs. (See "Encounter Area 4: The Broken Window.")

Read Aloud: *The cottage door is made of fitted wooden planks, still streaked by peeling yellow paint. In the center of the door is a keyhole that sits in a plate worked in the shape of a grinning devil's face.*

The lock looks formidable, but the door is unlocked because the key is long gone. Nathar's servants simply use an iron latch on the inside, and they secure it with a stout wooden peg if they remember to do so. The PCs can lift the latch with a thin blade or a thief's pick (Thievery DC 15) or force the whole door with a good enough kick (Strength check DC 18). They can use the oxcart in the clearing as an improvised battering ram (+2 bonus on Strength checks to open the door) if any player thinks to try it.

If someone tries to open the latch and fails, the orcs in area 5 don't notice anything. However, if someone tries to break down the door and fails the Strength check, the orcs definitely take note. They get ready for a fight.

If the player characters don't seem to be able to get through the door, remember that they can make multiple tries to break down the door with Strength checks. Also, characters can use the Aid Another action to add a +2 bonus to another character's Strength check, so multiple characters cooperating should open the door, especially if they think of using the oxcart to batter it down — but that will certainly give the orcs in area 5 plenty of warning that trouble's about to show up.

Listening at the Door: If any character decides to listen by the door, allow a Perception check (DC 7). On a successful check, a character can make out a low, growling conversation between two creatures (the orcs in the larger room in area 5). Unless the character knows the Giant language, he or she can't make out what they're saying. A character who speaks Giant can quickly make out that a couple of orcs are arguing about which farmstead to loot tonight. One wants to go back to the same place they went last night, and the other wants to try someplace new.

Looking in the Windows: Peering in a window doesn't do much good — they're small, dark, and so dirty inside and out that nothing can be seen in either direction. A character could easily break a window in order to see into area 5, but the orcs inside notice (and likely stab or shoot at any character's face they see peering in at them). However, one of the windows leading into the bedchamber is broken and actually large enough for a character to climb through. See "Encounter Area 4: The Broken Window."

Getting on the Roof: Characters inclined to scramble on or around the house can scale the walls with a DC 18 Athletics check. However, the noise of someone walking around on the roof certainly alerts the orcs in area 5 to expect trouble.

Encounter Area 4: The Broken Window

Characters who examine the perimeter of the house can make a Perception check (DC 12) to notice the broken window. If they notice it, read this text aloud:

Read Aloud: *One of the windows near the back of the house is broken. You see shards of grimy glass on the ground outside, and the frame stands empty. It's big enough and low enough that you could probably climb through without much trouble.*

The orcs use this window as an emergency exit or entrance. A character (or an orc) must use an entire move action to pass through the window, but it doesn't require a skill check. Characters who enter quietly through the window can surprise the orcs inside, if their Stealth checks beat the orcs' passive Perception check of 11. Characters must enter the window one at a time, and the orcs are alerted as soon as one character rolls a Stealth check below their passive Perception.

Encounter Area 5: Orcs in the House

Encounter Level 3: Four of Nathar's orcs use the main room of the old cottage as their guardpost and sleep in the old bedchamber. If the player characters enter through the front door, here's what they see:

Read Aloud: *The front of the house is a dark, cluttered room filled with a thick, acrid odor. There are two doors on the other side of the room. Old furnishings lie heaped up against the walls. A pair of tall, ugly humanoids wearing ragged leather jerkins stand near a cookfire in the hearth, growling defiantly at you. "Ah, fresh meat," one snarls.*

If the characters enter through the broken window (area 4), they have a different view — they see what used to be Roburn's bedchamber:

Read Aloud: *This room looks like it was once a comfortable bedchamber, but it is dark and dank now — it seems that a badly leaking roof overhead has allowed years of rain and wind to ruin the furnishings and the plaster. The floor is littered with the bones of small animals, and the room smells of mildew and old, rotten meat. There are two creatures lying in tattered bedrolls at the far end of the room, and two empty bedrolls nearby.*

When the characters enter either room, they see one orc raider and one orc berserker, with the other two orcs in the other room. The orcs have no interest in talking with the player characters and do their best to kill the PCs.

Besides the door that connects the two rooms of the house, another door leads down to the cellar (area 6), shown on the map in Figure 19-2. Neither door is locked.

Surprise: If the characters come in through the broken window without making too much noise (making a Stealth check that beats the orcs' passive Perception check of 11), the orcs are surprised and don't get to act in the surprise round. Otherwise, neither the orcs nor the characters are surprised, so you can start the combat encounter with initiative rolls for both sides.

Orc Tactics: If the orcs had a chance to get ready for the fight (because the characters made a lot of noise at the door), the orc raider waits at the far side of the room with its handaxes ready. It throws its handaxes at the characters until it uses all four, and then it rushes up to attack with its greataxe. The orc berserker, meanwhile, waits with its greataxe ready by the front door.

If the orcs weren't ready for a fight, they're at the position shown on the map. The berserker moves up to engage the characters right away, while the raider hangs back and throws handaxes.

As soon as a fight breaks out in either room, the orcs from the other room come to join the fight, but they don't necessarily take the fastest route to where the action is. If the characters entered through the broken window (area 4), one of the orcs in the main room runs out the front door and comes up behind the characters in order to cut off their path to retreat. Similarly, if the characters entered through the front door, one of the orcs in the side room exits through the broken window and comes behind them.

Choker Add-On: In the second round of combat, a cavern choker creeps up from the cellar and joins the fray. Nathar and his orcs found this creature lairing in the house when they moved in, and they've taken to calling it "the Sneak." The monster isn't fond of its new neighbors, but it fears them too much to strike directly at them, so it spends a lot of time skulking about spying on Nathar and his orcs. Nathar allows it to stay, hoping that he can use the small monster as a spy and an assassin in Fallcrest. It takes the opportunity of a fight breaking out to demonstrate its willingness to work for Nathar by fighting the PCs.

Orc Raiders (2)

Orcs are savage, bloodthirsty marauders that can be coerced or bullied into serving a more powerful master. They stand well over 6 feet tall and wear dirty leather armor. These orcs carry a greataxe and four handaxes.

Orc Raider   **Level 3 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 150
Initiative: +5   **Senses:** Perception +1, low-light vision
HP: 46; **Bloodied:** 23
AC: 17; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 14; **Will:** 12
Speed: 6 (8 while charging)
         Greataxe (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
         +8 versus AC; 1d12 + 3 damage (or 1d12 + 15 on a critical hit)
         Handaxe (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
         Ranged 5/10; +7 versus AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.

(continued)

The orc raider ignores cover and concealment (but not total concealment) when making a ranged attack against a target within 5 squares of it.

Warrior's Surge (standard action, usable only while bloodied, encounter) ♦ **Healing, Weapon**

The orc raider makes a melee basic attack and regains 11 hit points.

Skills: Endurance +8, Intimidate +5, Perception +1

See the orc raider's complete statistics on page 203 of the *Monster Manual.*

Make a Stealth check for the choker when it emerges from the cellar (d20+10). Compare the result to the passive Perception checks of the player characters. If it remains unnoticed, it attacks with combat advantage, choosing a character that's not already engaged in melee as its target.

Defeating the Orcs: The orcs fight until two of them drop. Then the other two try to make a fighting retreat out of the room, heading for the door that leads down to area 6. Remember, it takes a minor action to open a door. Any surviving orcs that make it out join Nathar in area 11 and fight the player characters again when they reach that room.

When the orcs retreat, the choker disappears. It hides and tries to remain out of sight, following the characters down into the dungeon below and attacking again the next time they get into a fight.

Orc Berserkers (2)

These orcs carry only a greataxe.

Orc Berserkers   **Level 4 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 175
Initiative: +3   **Senses:** Perception +2, low-light vision
HP: 66; **Bloodied:** 33
AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 17; **Reflex:** 13; **Will:** 12
Speed: 6 (8 while charging)

Greataxe (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+8 versus AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (or 1d12 + 17 on a critical hit)

Warrior's Surge (standard action, usable only while bloodied, encounter) ♦ **Healing, Weapon**

The orc raider makes a melee basic attack and regains 16 hit points.

Skills: Endurance +10, Intimidate +6, Perception +2

See the orc berserker's complete statistics on page 203 of the *Monster Manual.*

Treasure: Most of the clutter in the room isn't very valuable — mildewed old chairs, well-worn tables, and several barrels and crates of goods such as flour, molasses, sour ale, and other such staples (which Nathar and his orcs brought with them when they moved in). Hidden under a loose stone by the hearth (Search DC 15) is a leather pouch containing 60 gold pieces. (This is treasure parcel 10 for a party of 2nd-level characters.)

Experience Points Award: If the player characters defeat the orcs — which might mean that they kill all four, or it might mean that they kill two and the others retreat — the party earns 650 XP. If they kill the choker as well, they receive an additional 175 XP.

Encounter Area 6: The Cellar

The cellar seems to be a typical cellar — dank, dusty, and lined with wooden shelves on the brick walls for the storage of food.

Read Aloud: *A flight of narrow wooden stairs descends from the front room of the cottage to a small cellar below the house. The cellar is floored and walled with brick, and it's filled with the usual clutter of dusty wooden shelves and old crates. You can see that part of the wall opposite the foot of the stairs is actually a concealed door, its surface plastered and painted to match the surrounding brick. It's standing ajar, and flickering green light leaks out from around the edges. Beyond is another set of stairs continuing down.*

Cavern Choker

The choker is a small, rubbery creature about 3 feet tall. Its flesh is a mottled gray-green, and it has long, spindly, boneless arms and legs. It's a vicious, clever ambusher that hides in the shadows, reaching out to seize unwary characters in its deadly grip.

Cavern Choker   Level 4 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 175
Initiative: +9   **Senses:** Perception +3, darkvision
HP: 42; **Bloodied:** 21
AC: 17 (see also *chameleon hide*); **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 15; **Will:** 13
Speed: 6, climb 6 (spider climb)
   Tentacle Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
   Reach 2; +9 versus AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape). A target trying to escape the grab takes a –4 penalty to the check.
   Choke (standard action, at-will)
   Grabbed target only; +9 versus Fortitude; 1d8 + 3 damage.
   Body Shield (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee or ranged attack against Reflex or AC; recharges when the choker makes a successful *tentacle claw* or *choke* attack)

(continued)

> The cavern choker makes its grabbed victim the target instead. The choker cannot use this power to redirect attacks made by a creature it is currently grabbing.
>
> **Chameleon Hide** (minor, at-will)
>
> The cavern choker gains concealment until the start of its next turn. It can't use this power while grabbing a creature or while grabbed.
>
> **Skills:** Perception +3, Stealth +10
>
> See the cavern choker's complete statistics on page 42 of the *Monster Manual.*
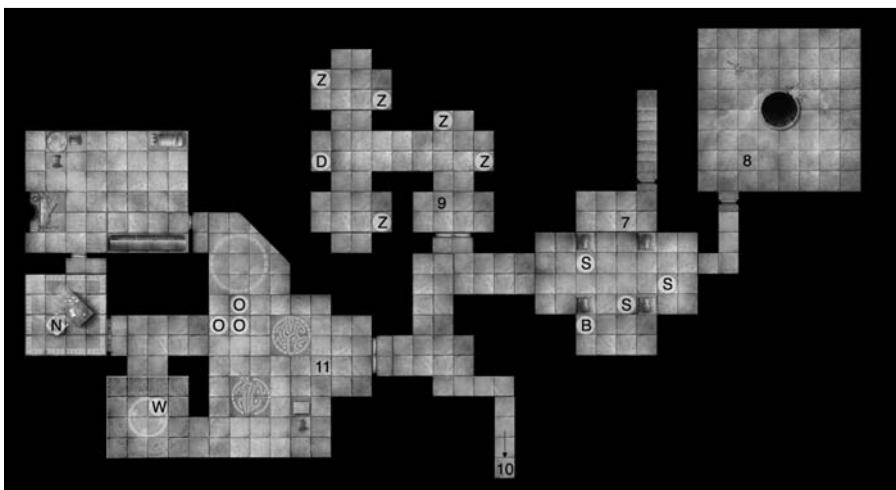
The orcs are supposed to shut the concealed door when they come or go, but they're lazy and don't often do so. If the door is actually closed, it requires a DC 20 Perception check for someone who doesn't know it's there to locate it. The stairs lead down to the dungeon level (see the section "The dungeon below").

The dungeon below

The biggest secret of Roburn's house is that the cottage in the clearing was only a small part of the necromancer's lair. Beneath the hill behind the house, Roburn excavated a small dungeon where he kept his valuables and performed his sinister rites and experiments. A map of the dungeon under Roburn's house is shown in Figure 19-3.

Figure 19-3: The dungeon below.

The floors in the dungeon level are made of smooth, well-worn flagstones, and the walls are dressed masonry. Everburning torches illuminate most of the rooms.

Encounter Area 7: Roburn's Sleepless Warriors

Encounter Level 2: The door leading to this room from the stairs is made of iron, but it isn't locked. The chamber beyond holds four undead skeletons under Nathar's command.

Read Aloud: *Two torches burning with eerie green flames illuminate this large chamber. The room consists of two intersecting vaults, with four stone statues in its center. Glimmers of light show two passageways leading into the gloom. Standing in a ragged arc across the room are three skeletons, each draped in tattered chainmail and carrying a sword and shield. With the clicking and rasping of old bones, the skeletons turn toward you and advance with swords raised. At the same time, one more skeleton — this one made of blackened bones engulfed in flame — peers around the corner and prepares to hurl a ball of fire at you!*

The undead monsters have been directed to attack any living creature that enters the room without giving a special pass-sign (a clenched fist, held across the chest). Nathar has taught the orcs in his service the pass-sign, so orcs coming and going through this room aren't attacked by the skeletons. Roll initiative for the player characters and the skeletons when the player characters enter the room.

Skeletons (3)

A skeleton is the magically animated bones of a human warrior, draped in tattered chainmail armor and carrying a large steel shield and a longsword. It strictly follows the orders given to it by its creator.

Skeleton　　　　**Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (undead)　　　XP: 150

Initiative: +6　　　**Senses:** Perception +3, darkvision
HP: 45; **Bloodied:** 22
AC: 18; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 16; **Will:** 15
Immune: disease, poison; **Resist:** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable:** 5 radiant
Speed: 5

　　　　　　Longsword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
　　　　　　+10 versus AC; 1d8 + 2 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the skeleton's next turn. (A marked creature takes a −2 penalty on its attack roll if it makes an attack that doesn't include the skeleton as a target.)
　　　　　　Speed of the Dead
　　　　　　When making an opportunity attack, the skeleton gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals an extra 1d6 damage.
Skills: Perception +3

See the skeleton's complete statistics on page 234 of the *Monster Manual*.

If the player characters forced one of the orcs in area 5 to retreat and pursue the monster closely, the orc gives the pass-sign as it runs through this room. Characters who are within 6 squares of the orc when it does so can make out the sign with a DC 10 Perception check. Realizing that the fist-to-chest motion instructs the skeletons not to attack requires a DC 15 Insight check (or a good guess on the part of an observant player).

Skeleton Attack: Skeletons are automatons that attack with relentless determination if ordered to do so. The skeletons simply move toward the nearest character and attack. They continue until destroyed, or until the player characters are all dead or retreat from the room.

The blazing skeleton is only marginally more intelligent than its cohorts. It avoids melee combat as long as possible, hurling its *flame orb* at the nearest character each round.

DM Secret: Nathar didn't animate these skeletons, and he can command the undead warriors only because long ago Roburn, their original creator, ordered them to follow the commands of anyone displaying a brooch in the shape of a silver skull. Vesgin gave this brooch to Nathar when he sent him back to Fallcrest.

Blazing Skeleton

The fire-blackened bones of this skeleton are never burned, despite the raging fire that surrounds its body and licks out to burn anyone that gets too close. It doesn't wear or carry any gear, but it forms its flames into fiery balls to hurl at its foes.

Blazing Skeleton   Level 5 Artillery
Medium natural animate (undead)   XP: 200
Initiative: +6   **Senses:** Perception +4, darkvision
HP: 53; **Bloodied:** 26
AC: 19; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 18; **Will:** 16
Immune: Disease, poison; **Resist:** 10 fire, 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable:** 5 radiant
Speed: 6

       Fiery Aura ◆ Fire
       Aura 1; any creature that starts its turn in the aura takes 5 fire damage.
       Blazing Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire**
       +8 versus AC; 1d4 + 1 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
       Flame Orb (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire**
       +8 versus Reflex; 2d4 + 4 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
Skills: Perception +4

See the blazing skeleton's complete statistics on page 234 of the *Monster Manual*.

Kruthik Young (4)

Kruthiks are weird reptilian hunters that burrow through the ground and attack anything that might turn out to be food. The young are about the size of large dogs.

Kruthik Young　　　**Level 2 Brute**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP: 125

Initiative: +4　　　**Senses:** Perception +1, low-light vision, tremorsense 10

HP: 43; **Bloodied:** 21

AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 14; **Will:** 11

Speed: 8, burrow 2, climb 8

　　　Gnashing Horde
　　　Aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
　　　Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
　　　+5 versus AC; 1d8 + 2 damage

Skills: Perception +1

See the kruthik young's complete statistics on page 170 of the *Monster Manual.*

Treasure: No treasure is hidden in this room, but Nathar and his minions use two of the wings of the room to store more supplies, including a couple of water casks, several sacks of flour, small barrels of dried apples and smoked meat, and other useful stores.

Experience Points Award: If the player characters defeat the skeletons, the party earns 650 XP.

Encounter Area 8: The Cistern Room

Encounter Level 3: The door to this room is made of wood. It's damp and sticks a little (DC 8 Strength check to open), but it isn't locked. Nathar and his orcs don't come in here, because the room is infested with kruthiks.

Read Aloud: *A round hole in the middle of the floor smells of stagnant water, and the floor around it is wet with water and brownish scum. On the far side of the room, an old wooden ladder leads up into a shaft about 3 feet wide and disappears into the shadows overhead. The whole room is dank and smells faintly rotten, and the masonry is in bad repair — tree roots pierce the ceiling and walls, and earth spills through the holes. You can hear a faint rustling sound somewhere above.*

The spring in the hillside beside the cottage lies almost directly over this chamber and feeds the cistern below this room through a hidden pipe. With this supply of water, Roburn could have hidden out beneath his own cottage for weeks had he needed to. The wooden ladder leads about 15 feet up to the

trapdoor hidden in the back of the spring's cleft (area 2). Roburn had the shaft built to provide a secret escape route from the dungeon.

The kruthiks lurk in the tree roots and crevices in the walls. When suitable prey (such as the player characters) enters the room, the burrowing monsters scuttle out and attack. Roll initiative.

The kruthiks are quite hungry and don't give up until they're dead or they've managed to down a character — at which point all the remaining kruthiks swarm the character on the floor and begin feeding. Characters who choose to retreat can shut the door on the kruthiks, trapping them in the cistern room; the kruthiks can't get through the door when it's closed.

When Nathar or his servants need water, the necromancer's apprentice orders skeletons from area 7 to fetch water. The kruthiks ignore the skeletons because animated bones don't have enough meat on them to be food.

Cistern: The hole in the floor is a shaft that drops 50 feet into deep water, which cushions the fall but presents the risk of drowning. A character that falls into the cistern takes 1d10 damage from the fall and plunges 10 feet down into the water. On that character's turn, he or she can swim to the surface with a DC 10 Athletics check and climb the shaft with a series of DC 15 Athletics checks (moving at half normal speed up the shaft).

Experience Points Award: If the player characters defeat the kruthiks, the party earns 750 XP.

Kruthik Hatchling (4)

These hatchlings are minions, and they're about the size of housecats.

Kruthik Hatchling Level 2 Minion
Small natural beast (reptile) XP: 31
Initiative: +3   **Senses:** Perception +0, low-light vision, tremorsense 10
HP: 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 15; **Will:** 12
Speed: 8, burrow 2, climb 8

> **Gnashing Horde**
> Aura 1; an enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 2 damage.
> **Claw** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
> +5 versus AC; 4 damage

Skills: Perception +0

See the kruthik hatchling's complete statistics on page 170 of the *Monster Manual.*

Encounter Area 9: The Crypt

Encounter Level (EL) 3: The door leading to this room is a locked door of iron plate (Thievery DC 18, or Strength DC 22 to force open). Nathar found the key during his explorations of the dungeon and carries it on his belt.

Read Aloud: *A large crypt lies on the far side of the iron door. A number of alcoves cut into the walls hold moldering bones, some still dressed in the rotting remains of their funereal finery. As if awakened by your light, two decaying corpses stagger to their feet, their eyes glowing red as they start toward you.*

Vesgin warned Nathar to never open the crypt, and so far the necromancer's apprentice has avoided the temptation — even though he strongly suspects that some desirable treasure must be hidden within. It's lucky for Nathar that he hasn't looked in here yet, because the stout iron door of the crypt imprisons a very dangerous monster — a hateful, murderous type of undead known as a deathlock wight. The deathlock wight has been trapped in the crypt for many years, and it furiously attacks any living creature that enters the crypt.

The crypt extends away from the door and then turns, leading to more graves around the corner. The deathlock wight awakens as the characters enter, seeing a glimmer of hope for escape from the crypt where it has been trapped for so long. Read this text to the players when the deathlock wight comes into view:

Read Aloud: *Hunched by the floor, a gaunt, pale figure clad in the shredded remains of black robes crouches. An evil light flickers in its eyes. "At last," it rasps in a cold voice. "At last!"*

Zombie Tactics: The zombies mindlessly throw themselves at the nearest characters, trying to bludgeon them to pulp.

The Deathlock Wight's Tactics: The deathlock wight keeps its distance from melee, hurling *grave bolts* at characters locked in combat with the zombies. If characters get too close, it uses *horrific visage* to drive them back. The first time a zombie falls, the deathlock uses *reanimate* to get it back on its feet, but it can use this trick only once.

DM Secret: The deathlock wight is none other than Roburn himself. His apprentice Vesgin betrayed the old necromancer before fleeing Fallcrest. Vesgin imprisoned his former master alive in the crypt. Roburn died a few days later, so consumed with hate for his former apprentice that he awoke into undeath as a deathlock wight — still imprisoned in his own dungeon. Vesgin has no idea that Roburn "survived" his experience, but he warned Nathar to stay out of the crypt anyway, simply because Vesgin doesn't want his own apprentice to figure out how he repaid his former master.

Deathlock Wight

This undead creature possesses a semblance of life through the sheer force of its own hate and violence. It resembles a desiccated human corpse, with tight, leathery skin; needle-like teeth; and eyes aglow with evil.

Deathlock Wight   Level 4 Controller

Medium natural humanoid (undead)   XP: 175

Initiative: +4   **Senses:** Perception +1, darkvision

HP: 54; **Bloodied:** 27

AC: 18; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 16, **Will:** 17

Immune: Disease, poison; **Resist:** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable:** 5 radiant

Speed: 6

      Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Necrotic**

      +9 versus AC; 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target loses 1 healing surge.

      Grave Bolt (standard action, at-will) ◆ **Necrotic**

      Ranged 20; +6 versus Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

      Reanimate (minor action, encounter) ◆ **Healing, Necrotic**

      Ranged 10; one destroyed zombie stands as a free action with 10 hit points.

      Horrific Visage (standard action, recharge 4 5 6) ◆ **Fear**

      Close blast 5; +7 versus Will; 1d6 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.

Skills: Arcana +10, Perception +1, Religion +10

See the deathlock wight's complete statistics on page 262 of the *Monster Manual.*

Treasure: None of the bodies entombed here have any funerary wealth worth stealing, but Roburn himself carries several valuables that he has long since forgotten about. Around his neck is a fine silver chain set with moonstones (worth 140 gp) and a *+2 amulet of protection*. He also still wears a gold ring with an emerald and the signet of Roburn's house (worth 150 gp and identifying him as the ancient master of the place). (This is treasure parcels 1 and 5 for a party of 2nd-level characters.)

Experience Points Award: If the player characters defeat the deathlock wight and the zombies, the party earns 800 XP.

Encounter Area 10: The Secret Passage

This passageway continues on for more than 200 feet, eventually ending in a thick wooden door on the other side of the hill. Roburn built this as yet another secret escape route.

Zombies (5)

A zombie is a corpse brought to a semblance of life through vile necromancy. It obeys the commands of its creator and fights to the death.

Zombie **Level 2 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP: 125

Initiative: –1 **Senses:** Perception +0, darkvision

HP: 40; **Bloodied:** 20

AC: 13; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 9; **Will:** 10

Immune: Disease, poison; **Resist:** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable:** 5 radiant

Speed: 4

　　　Slam (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
　　　+6 versus AC; 2d6 + 2 damage.
　　　Zombie Grab (standard action, at-will)
　　　+4 versus Reflex; the target is grabbed (until escape). Checks made to escape the zombie's grab take a –5 penalty.
　　　Zombie Weakness
　　　Any critical hit to the zombie reduces it to 0 hit points immediately.

Skills: Perception +0

See the zombie's complete statistics on page 274 of the *Monster Manual.*

Read Aloud: *The ceiling of this narrow passage is only about 5 feet high. The passage runs straight for a couple hundred feet with very little change, although you pass several spots where roots have grown through the ceiling. It ends at a stoutly built wooden door, secured on your side by a thick iron bar. A small glimmer of daylight peeks around the edges.*

If the player characters open the door (it takes a DC 15 Strength check), they find that it opens into a dense thicket on the far side of the hill from where Roburn's cottage stands. The surrounding foliage is so thick that the door can't be seen by anyone more than 10 or 15 feet away, and there are no trails or sites of interest beyond — only more of the rugged hills and tangled trees of the Cloak Wood.

Encounter Area 11: Nathar's Workroom

Encounter Level 5: Nathar spends most of his time puttering around in this spacious workroom, engaged in various experiments and studies. Three orcs wait here (more if an orc from area 5 escaped), ready to answer any commands Nathar issues. There's also a wraith haunting the place, a somewhat annoying ally to Nathar. Begin with this description:

Read Aloud: *A piece of parchment is stuck on this door by a nail. It reads "Stay Out!" in Common.*

The door leading to this room is closed but not locked. If any character tries to listen at the door, have the player make a Perception check. On a result of 7 or better, he or she can discern the low rumbling of a furnace at work, sounds of bubbling, and low rasping voices conversing with each other. (The orcs are muttering to each other in Giant, arguing about what's for dinner.)

This encounter area actually includes four distinct chambers — the main, outer chamber, a teleportation circle in the lower left, a workroom in the middle left, and a bedchamber in the upper left. When the characters open the door, they can see only the outer chamber. Read this text aloud:

Read Aloud: *This chamber is clearly a magician's workshop. Three circles in the floor are lined with glowing script, and power crackles in the air within them. A small work table and chair stand off to the left. A passage straight ahead ends in a black velvet curtain, green light glows from another passage to the left, and to the right a short passage ends in a door. Three savage-looking humanoids crouch on the floor near the center passage, looking up in surprise as the door swings open.*

This is a tough fight for a party of four 2nd-level characters. If the player characters are already beaten up by the time they get to this room, this encounter might finish them off. The warning sign posted on the door should be a cue to the characters that they might want to consider resting up before they barge in to face the necromancer's apprentice in his lair.

When the characters enter the other rooms in the area, either during or after the fight, read these descriptions:

Teleportation Circle Read Aloud: *An intricate pattern of magical circles is carved into the floor of this room. They glow faintly green, and wisps of glowing green dust blow across the floor in eddies of air.*

Workroom Read Aloud: *A large work table and an ornate chair made of bones stand within a square chamber. A box of glowing script runs along the floor at the base of the walls.*

Bedchamber Read Aloud: *A large bed covered in sleeping furs sits in this room, alongside a small writing desk covered with parchment, a low bookshelf loaded with jumbled tomes and scrolls, and a large trunk. A fireplace blazes in one wall, and two tapestries hang from the other walls. One depicts a sage in his tower, and the other shows a starry night.*

Starting the Fight: The orcs are engaged in conversation, but they're ready for a fight. They shout a warning to Nathar as soon as they see the characters. Roll initiative for everyone in the encounter normally, without a surprise round, but Nathar and the wraith spend their first actions getting to the fight.

The orcs are standing in the squares marked "O" when the fight begins; the wraith is in the square marked "W" (in the chamber on the lower left); and Nathar is in the square marked "N" (in his study, in the center left).

Tactics: The orcs stay in the front chamber and try to keep the player characters hemmed in this side of the room. They fight with their axes, and unlike the orcs up in area 5, all three fight to the death — Nathar is watching them, after all.

Nathar throws aside the velvet curtain when the orcs shout their alarm and scowls with rage and frustration at what he considers a petty interruption. He throws spells from the doorway until he is seriously threatened, and then he ducks back behind the curtain and retreats to his bedchamber in the upper left. He drinks his *potion of healing* in the safety of that chamber and then returns to the battle through either door. Nathar is quite proud and arrogant and won't consider surrender — he fears the revenge that his master Vesgin might exact if he gives up too easily.

The wraith is the hollow remnant of Roburn's first apprentice, a man named Therun. Vesgin killed Therun to secure his place as Roburn's favored apprentice, and Therun's spirit has haunted the house since. First Roburn, then Vesgin, and now Nathar have tried to tame the wraith and bring it under control, with limited success. It fights the player characters, but when it's in the same room as Nathar, it mocks the necromancer's apprentice, its hollow voice whispering about how it will one day attack him just as it is attacking the characters. When it's bloodied, it starts describing how the characters will kill Nathar as they are killing it.

Magic Circles: A creature standing inside any of the three magic circles in the outer chamber gains a +1 bonus to all its defenses while it remains in the circle.

The teleportation circle in the lower-left chamber has no effect on creatures within it. It's used for rituals such as Linked Portal, which allow higher-level casters to teleport from one such circle to another. A character trained in Arcana can transcribe the sigils from this circle that would allow him or her to teleport back to this circle from another location, but Linked Portal is an 8th-level ritual, so this circle is unlikely to be much use to the characters.

The runes in the workroom give a character inside the room a +2 bonus on any Arcana check made while in the room. It's useful for research and performing rituals, but not much else.

Treasure: The trunk in the bedchamber contains an assortment of traveling clothes and other elements of a well-to-do wizard's wardrobe. None are particularly valuable. However, the trunk has a secret compartment (Perception DC 15) that conceals a pouch with 140 gold pieces.

Orc Berserkers (3)

Orcs are savage, bloodthirsty marauders that can be coerced or bullied into serving a more powerful master. They stand well over 6 feet tall and wear dirty leather armor. These orcs carry a greataxe.

Orc Berserker   Level 4 Brute
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 175
Initiative: +3   **Senses:** Perception +2, low-light vision
HP: 66; **Bloodied:** 33
AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 17; **Reflex:** 13; **Will:** 12
Speed: 6 (8 while charging)
        Greataxe (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
        +8 versus AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (or 1d12 + 17 on a critical hit)
        Warrior's Surge (standard action, usable only while bloodied, encounter) ◆ **Healing,**
Weapon
        The orc raider makes a melee basic attack and regains 16 hit points.
Skills: Endurance +10, Intimidate +6, Perception +2

See the orc berserker's complete statistics on page 203 of the *Monster Manual.*

In the middle of the writing desk is a letter from Nathar to Vesgin, which reads:

> *Master Vesgin:*
>
> *As you have instructed, I have established myself in the house of your one-time mentor, Roburn. I discovered several interesting texts in the secret workshop below the house and have found them quite elucidating. In the meantime, I have made a small beginning toward gathering about me such servants as you may find useful when you make your return to Fallcrest. The orcs are filthy savages, but they are hungry for the chance to fall on the town. I think they will do nicely.*
>
> *I trust you received Roburn's map to the Temple of Yellow Skulls? I made a copy for myself in case some misfortune befell your messenger. I shall forward it at once if you did not receive the original.*
>
> *Eagerly awaiting your next instructions,*
>
> *Your obedient servant,*
>
> *Nathar*

Wraith

A wraith is an undead spirit infused with the essence of the Shadowfell. Its touch causes weakness, and a creature it kills rises as a new wraith.

Wraith   **Level 5 Lurker**

Medium shadow humanoid (undead)   XP: 200

Initiative: +10   **Senses:** Perception +2, darkvision

HP: 37; **Bloodied:** 18

Regeneration 5 (if the wraith takes radiant damage, regeneration is negated until the end of its next turn)

AC: 16; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 16; **Will:** 14

Immune: Disease, poison; **Resist:** 10 necrotic, insubstantial (half damage from all attacks); **Vulnerable:** 5 radiant (see also *regeneration*)

Speed: fly 6 (hover), phasing; see also *shadow glide.* Phasing means that the wraith can move through obstacles and even creatures (provoking opportunity attacks as normal), but it must end its movement in an unoccupied space.

  Shadow Touch (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Necrotic**

  +8 versus Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends). (A weakened character deals half damage with all attacks.)

Combat Advantage: The wraith deals an extra 1d6 necrotic damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

  Shadow Glide (move action, encounter)

  The wraith shifts 6 squares.

Spawn Wraith: Any humanoid killed by a wraith rises as a free-willed wraith at the start of its creator's next turn, appearing in the space where it died (or in the nearest unoccupied space). Raising the slain creature (using the Raise Dead ritual) does not destroy the spawned wraith.

Skills: Perception +2, Stealth +11

See the wraith's complete statistics on page 266 of the *Monster Manual.*

Below the letter is a hand-drawn map, which shows the location of a place marked "Temple of Yellow Skulls." The map, and the evil shrine whose location it reveals, are not described in this sample adventure. Feel free to use this as a stepping-stone to an adventure you design yourself, which may or may not involve more of Vesgin's minions, or perhaps even the original necromancer's apprentice himself.

Most of the books on the bookshelf deal with magical theory and necromantic studies, and a few actually contain rituals. Characters who search the books carefully (over the course of an extended rest) find the Brew Potion, Magic Circle, and Silence rituals.

Nathar, Apprentice to Vesgin

Nathar is a short, saturnine fellow with a swarthy complexion, a short stiff beard, and a perpetually sour look to his face. He wears robes of black and carries a large, wavy-bladed dagger at his belt. He is impatient, domineering, and short-tempered.

Human Necromancer   **Level 7 Artillery**

Medium natural humanoid   XP: 300

Initiative: +8   **Senses:** Perception +6

HP: 66; **Bloodied:** 33

AC: 21; **Fortitude:** 18; **Reflex:** 19; **Will:** 19

Speed: 6

> **Dagger** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
>
> +11 versus AC; 1d4 + 2 damage.
>
> **Rotfire** (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Necrotic, Fire**
>
> Ranged 10; +10 versus Reflex; 1d8 +5 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).
>
> **Death's Clutch** (standard action, encounter) ♦ **Necrotic**
>
> Ranged 10; +10 versus Will; 1d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage and target is immobilized (save ends both).
>
> **Cloak of Escape** (immediate reaction, when Nathar is hit by a melee attack, at-will) ♦ **Teleportation**
>
> Nathar teleports 5 squares.
>
> **Fireburst Armor** (minor action, daily) ♦ **Fire**
>
> Until the end of Nathar's next turn, any creature that hits him with a melee attack takes 1d8 + 5 fire damage.

Skills: Arcana +9, Insight +11, Perception +6

Possessions: Nathar wears *+1 fireburst cloth armor* and has a *potion of healing*. His magic armor's property makes him always succeed on saving throws against ongoing fire damage, and its power is the *fireburst armor* power detailed above. When he drinks his *potion of healing,* he spends his one healing surge and regains 10 hit points.

TIP

Nathar's magic armor is treasure parcel 4 for a 2nd-level party. The gold in the trunk and the three rituals in the books (using their market price) constitute treasure parcels 6, 7, and 9. The total value of the gold and rituals is 540 gp — 140 gp in coins, 75 gp each for the Brew Potion and Silence rituals, and 250 gp for the Magic Circle ritual — which is a little more than the total value of those three parcels. (The extra 20 gp makes up the shortfall in Sergeant Gerdrand's promised quest reward.) It's perfectly fine, in your own dungeons, to add the value of different parcels together like this and split it up however

you want. And don't be afraid to use rituals and other valuable goods as treasure, as long as they're things that the characters will either want to keep or easily be able to sell.

Experience Points Award: If the player characters defeat Nathar, the wraith, and the three orcs, the party earns 1,025 XP. Add another 175 XP for each orc berserker or 150 XP for each orc raider from area 5 that is present for the battle.

Concluding the adventure

After the player characters defeat Nathar and his orcs, the mischief around Fallcrest's western farmsteads comes to an end — for now. Sergeant Gerdrand of the town watch makes good on his promised payment of 150 gp. The characters receive experience points (125 XP each) for completing their major quest. Moreover, Gerdrand assembles a large company of townsfolk and militia to march up to Roburn's house, block up the entrance to the cellar dungeon with rubble, and then burn the house down over the place, just to make sure that no other evil creature finds a lair there.

If the player characters show Gerdrand the letter from Nathar to Vesgin, the sergeant immediately recognizes the name of Lord Markelhay's sinister younger brother. He arranges an interview for the player characters with Lord Faren, who questions them closely about everything they found in and around Roburn's house. (This is a great opportunity for the players to have some fun relating the tales of their own cleverness, bravery, and luck, if they're so inclined.) In return, Lord Faren fills in the players on the story of Roburn, Vesgin's fall into evil, and his brother's flight from justice — so feel free to sum up the back story outlined in the "Adventure premise" section for the players.

As for what comes next, that's up to you. You can use the map that the player characters find in area 11 to point the players toward a new adventure of your own devising; feel free to change the Temple of Yellow Skulls into anything else you need to describe the dungeon you'd like the player characters to explore.

Adapting the Adventure

In Chapter 7, we discuss some ways to make changes to a published adventure to make it a better fit for your group of players and their characters. You can certainly apply those principles to this adventure. The following sections provide a few suggestions.

Adjusting for group size and level

"The Necromancer's Apprentice" adventure should be reasonably challenging for a party of five 2nd-level characters. Some encounters will be easier than others, but they should all present a good challenge. However, if you have more or fewer than five player characters in the party or if the characters aren't 2nd level, you can scale the encounters accordingly:

- ✔ **Bear Attack:** You can replace the bear with a pack of gray wolves to make adjusting the encounter easier. Four gray wolves is worth the same amount of experience points as the cave bear, and you can use more or fewer wolves to suit your group. For a higher-level party (at least 6th level), you could use a dire bear instead of a cave bear.

- ✔ **Encounter Area 5: Orcs in the House:** You can add or subtract orcs to scale the encounter for a different party. You could replace the orcs with gnolls for a higher-level party.

- ✔ **Encounter Area 7: Roburn's Sleepless Warriors:** Add or remove skeletons to adjust the encounter difficulty. For a smaller group, you could use decrepit skeleton minions in place of the normal skeletons, keeping the blazing skeleton in place. For a higher-level group, use boneshard skeletons.

- ✔ **Encounter Area 8: Cistern Room:** Add or remove kruthiks, or change hatchlings to young or young to adults.

- ✔ **Encounter Area 9: The Crypt:** Add or remove zombies, use zombie minions instead of regular zombies, or use chillborn zombies or even zombie hulks to challenge more powerful characters. The deathlock wight could become a battle wight or a flameskull in a tougher encounter.

- ✔ **Encounter Area 11: Nathar's Workroom:** Add or remove orcs. You can adjust Nathar's level up or down, giving him +1 or –1 to his attack rolls and defenses for each level, plus or minus 6 hit points per level, and plus or minus 1 damage for each two levels. (See page 174 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more on altering a monster's level.)

Adjusting for player motivations

Unlike "Kobold Hall" in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, "The Necromancer's Apprentice" is designed to include elements that will appeal to a variety of players with different motivations. Even so, if your group has strong preferences toward certain styles of play, you could make some adjustments to account for them.

✔ **Actors:** The characters have a chance to interact with Sergeant Gerdrand at the beginning and end of the adventure, and with Arim the farmer near the beginning as well, but when they reach Roburn's house, it's pretty much hacking and slashing from that point on. Add some appeal to actors by roleplaying the orcs as less than perfectly loyal minions. Maybe the player characters can talk their way past the orcs in Encounter Area 5, or persuade the orcs in Encounter Area 11 to desert Nathar and leave the area for good. Better still, you could make the wraith in area 11 a skill challenge rather than a combat challenge. With four successful skill checks (using skills such as Diplomacy, Bluff, Intimidate, Religion, or History against a baseline DC of 12), the characters might persuade the wraith to help them kill Nathar instead of fighting them.

✔ **Explorers:** There's a pretty interesting story behind Roburn's house, but it's mostly invisible to the characters until they find Nathar's letter in what could very well be the last encounter of the adventure. You could offer more to engage explorer players by dropping more hints about this story earlier in the adventure. Gerdrand reveals a bit about Roburn; Arim could reveal a little more. The orcs could drop hints about their master's identity, even if it's just his name.

✔ **Instigators:** Be ready to think on your feet when you have instigators in your group. They'll want to know details of the furnishings in Roburn's old house, particularly anything they might be able to throw at the orcs or use to create difficult terrain. They'll want to know what happens when they push Nathar into his fireplace (suggestion: he takes 1d10 fire damage, plus 1d10 fire damage when he starts his turn in the fireplace).

✔ **Power gamers:** There should be plenty of combat in this adventure to engage the power gamers in your group. You might want to step up the rewards slightly — this adventure doesn't give out treasure parcels 2 or 3 for 2nd-level characters, which are both magic items that power gamers will miss. See the later section, "Adding encounters and treasure," for more advice.

✔ **Slayers:** Plenty of tough combat encounters already make this adventure appealing to slayers. You might want to pick up the pace through the party's interactions with Gerdrand and Arim at the start of the adventure if your group is anxious to get to the slaying.

✔ **Storytellers:** Look for ways to hook your storyteller players directly into the plot of this adventure. Gerdrand doesn't have to be the party's only source of information about the events leading to the adventure. One or more of the characters might have personal connections to the events leading up to Vesgin's departure from the area, including his attack on his brother and his murder of Roburn's other apprentice, Therun. One of the characters might even be one of Arim's sons, or the child of a neighboring farmer. You might introduce minor quests to give these characters concrete goals parallel to the main plot of the adventure.

✔ **Thinkers:** The magic circles in Encounter Area 11 are practically begging for a puzzle element to appeal to thinker players. It could be a puzzle that they work out after they've defeated Nathar and the other dangers, or maybe it's an in-combat puzzle that changes the effects of standing in the circles depending on how many circles are occupied, by whom, and perhaps in what order.

✔ **Watchers:** Our advice from Chapter 7 applies here as well: Remember that it's okay to let the watcher watch, but reward all the players when they're actively and creatively engaged with the game.

Adding encounters and treasure

As it stands, if the characters start this adventure with 1,000 XP (just enough to be 2nd level), they won't earn quite enough to reach 3rd level. The combination of all the encounter XP rewards and the major quest Gerdrand gave them comes to 5,075 XP, or 1,015 XP per character, which is a bit shy of the 1,250 XP they need to gain a new level. If you want to expand the adventure a bit, you can use encounters from Chapter 23 or create your own encounters, setting them in or near Roburn's old house. Perhaps Nathar has a few more orc servants that the characters meet on the road, or a pack of wolves afflicted by the same madness that drove the bear to attack the town watch assaults the PCs as they leave the house.

Whether you add encounters to the adventure or not, keep an eye on the characters' XP total. If they reach 3rd level before the end of this adventure, you might want to add the two missing treasure parcels (parcels 2 and 3) somewhere in the adventure to make sure that the characters keep up with the magic items they should get. Of course, you can always add those in to later adventures — better late than never!

Part IV

Building a
Campaign

The 5th Wave · By Rich Tennant

I think you guys are taking your D&D game a little too seriously...

In this part . . .

Okay, you've made your own adventure. The next step for the renaissance Dungeon Master is to turn his or her game into a campaign. In this section, we discuss how to build a campaign, how to move from unrelated adventures into a campaign format with ease and elegance, and how to slowly grow the scope of your campaign. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither should your campaign be built in one session!

Chapter 20

Building a Continuous Story

*M*aybe you've run a few games of D&D for your game group. Now you want to start shaping those early sessions into the beginning of an ongoing campaign. Sure, you could start over and plan the campaign from the beginning, but why go to that trouble if you've been having fun and the players have grown fond of their characters? Those early adventures could have been unrelated to the Big Story you want to start building, or you can find dangling plot threads (such as an escaped villain) that you can weave into the Big Story.

Suppose a goblin warrior escaped in one of your first adventures. The player characters probably were bummed by the fact that one of the monsters got away, but more than likely they didn't give it a second thought after the next encounter or adventure began. What if that goblin warrior makes a deal with an evil wizard or a demon, or what if he just happened to be the son of the goblin chieftain? When he shows up again, more powerful, better equipped, and leading a war band of dangerous goblins, the player characters are going to be shocked, amazed, and sure that you planned the whole thing from the beginning. In their eyes, you're the best Dungeon Master ever! And that's just the way it should be.

But how do you build a continuous story for your D&D campaign? Really, you do it by adding recurring elements one adventure at a time. You might have the exact picture in your head of where you want the campaign to go, or you might decide to figure it out along the way, but if you take it one step at a time, before you know it, you'll have a campaign developing that keeps the players guessing and coming back each session to see what happens next.

Building a Campaign

The term *campaign* refers to the ongoing game created by the Dungeon Master and his or her fellow players. It follows the linked adventures of a group of player characters. A campaign can have a single ongoing storyline, such as the quest to overthrow an evil kingdom, to save the peaceful lands from the ravages of an escalating war, or to destroy a terrible artifact from another realm. Then again, a campaign might follow several shorter plots, as long as the setting and player characters remain more or less the same.

A good campaign requires a bit more than simply stringing adventures together. The following sections examine some of the details you should consider as you plan out your D&D campaign.

Creating a world

The core rulebooks for the D&D game suggest a world set in an era of medieval technology, where magic works and monsters are real. As you create your own campaign world, you'll add details to this world. Whether you create everything yourself, use an existing campaign setting (such as FORGOTTEN REALMS or EBERRON), or mix and match between the two, a campaign is more than a backdrop or a series of related adventures. It's everything in your world except for the player characters. A well-run campaign seems to unfold around the player characters, making them feel a part of something real and exciting.

REMEMBER

Consistency is the key to a good campaign. When the player characters return to a town for supplies and to rest, they should recognize the place and the people that inhabit it. After you've established a level of consistency, making occasional changes keeps the campaign vibrant and alive. If the player characters come back to find that their favorite inn is now being run by the daughter of their old friend the innkeeper, they experience a change that doesn't really affect them directly but makes them feel as though their characters exist in a living world.

Using context

You need to decide the context in which the player characters are placed. The context doesn't need to be obvious right from the beginning (and if you're approaching this after a few sessions, it probably isn't), but after you figure it out, you can more easily design adventures and set goals for the campaign. What's the setting of your campaign? Will your adventures center around a frontier town surrounded by monster-infested wilderness? Is there

one gigantic dungeon that the player characters will explore for the first five or ten levels of their adventuring careers? Or do you expect to present the heroes with a campaign that features mystery, intrigue, and skullduggery in a great, decadent city oppressed by evil wizards?

Context might relate to the player characters. Are they mercenaries, or do they work for a patron? Are they freelance adventurers in it for the gold and excitement, or do they have a larger sense of purpose that sends them into the dungeon every week? The initial context you create might have to evolve based on the decisions the players make when roleplaying their characters. (See the section, "Building on What the Players Give You," later in this chapter.)

REMEMBER

The best way to maintain the context and build upon it is to be consistent. To keep your campaign consistent, you need to take notes. Be consistent on names, places, and details — both large and small. If the barmaid the PCs meet at the Open Door Inn is Lani one week and Kati the next, the illusion of a consistent and real world is broken. If the bell over the door to the general store jingles when the PCs enter the first time, it should jingle every time — unless you have a reason for making a change.

Another way to give your campaign a sense of reality is by keeping track of time. Track the passing of seasons, the change in the weather, the coming and going of holidays, the schedule of caravans — building a calendar for your campaign helps the players feel like their characters are adventuring in a world that could be real.

Along with the passage of time, use change to show that your campaign is alive. Events occur all the time in the real world, and they should take place in your campaign world, as well. Prices rise and fall. New characters come and go. Dry spells lead to drought. Long periods of rain or snow lead to floods. Leaders change. New shops open. Not every event needs to lead to an adventure or be campaign-shattering in nature. They just need to happen to show that the campaign is alive and things happen regardless of the actions of the player characters.

On the other hand, the actions of the player characters should also have an effect on the campaign. If the PCs break the law, they become unwelcome in the town. If they cause trouble for the local crime lord, they run the risk of becoming a target of the underworld. If they save the town from a terrible evil, the town reacts in a positive fashion. Your campaign should be a reactive environment, allowing the actions of the PCs to be catalysts for change as well as magnets for adventures.

Building on past events

Use events from previous adventures to provide motivation, drama, and consistency. If you use what has gone before to prepare for what is still to come,

you create a campaign that is more than just a series of unrelated adventures. Here are some of the best way to build on past events to create a richer D&D experience:

- ✔ **Using recurring NPCs:** Recurring nonplayer characters provide a powerful tool for bringing the past back into the present. These can be helpful or ambivalent NPCs, such as various town folk who trade with the player characters or provide news and information on a regular basis. They can also be opponents and villains who keep coming back to challenge the player characters. Don't overuse this technique; when you use recurring characters with care and precision, you create a more realistic campaign that remembers its past and the past of the player characters.

- ✔ **Developing relationships between PCs and NPCs:** Allow the player characters to develop relationships that go beyond the adventures they participate in. Friendships and rivalries, love interests, mentors and patrons, helpful informants — all these relationships and more should be available to the player characters in your campaign. Let them develop naturally over time as recurring characters come into and out of the lives of the PCs.

  When the player characters develop relationships, you can use these to motivate them and spin off adventures. A trusted merchant needs the PCs to protect a shipment, a friend is kidnapped, or a helpful monastery becomes the target of an evil enemy. Don't overuse this technique or the player characters will never make any attachments, but every so often you can hit them where it hurts and spur the campaign in a new direction.

- ✔ **Changing it up:** Allow for change in the campaign. As the player characters get to know the campaign world and become comfortable, change things. If the leader of the night watch has become a trusted and too-often-relied-upon friend to the PCs, have him disappear in the line of duty. If the King's Road was once peaceful and well protected, make it become increasingly dangerous to travel. Such changes intrigue players and make them anxious to find out the reasons behind them.

- ✔ **Foreshadowing events:** Always look for ways to foreshadow future events in current adventures. And with a little cleverness, you can look for opportunities to turn previous events into hints of upcoming plots even when you didn't plan it that way.

Finding inspiration

Depending on whom you ask, there are anywhere from one to a dozen or more basic stories. Certainly, many D&D adventures follow one of several very common plot structures — plot structures shared by any number of novels,

comic book storylines, or action movies. For the purposes of having fun in your D&D game, feel free to borrow from your favorite sources as you work on building adventures and campaigns. Obviously, you have to watch out that you don't use something that the players will recognize and figure out immediately, but you can alleviate that by changing and adding details.

Where should you look for inspiration? Start with fantasy novels and movies. A villain, a plot, a monster, a kingdom — something in your favorite fantasy novel or movie is just itching to get into your D&D campaign. Change a name, alter an appearance, give a character a different race or class, and soon the inspiration begins to morph into something that is almost completely your own.

Don't stop at the fantasy section, though. You can do the same thing with almost any genre and any medium. That new techno-thriller you just read? That would make a great D&D adventure! You just need to "fantasy" it up so that it fits into your campaign. Turn a terrorist cell into a demonic cult, make a main bad guy a vampire, and change a real city's name to Waterdeep (for example), and you have the makings of an exciting series of D&D adventures.

Other sources of inspiration include comic books, movies and television series of all types, computer games, and any idea-generating activities you participate in. You can basically take the story you want to borrow and perform only the changes necessary to make it into a D&D story, or you can simply use it as inspiration for storylines of your own creation. A few stories, endless variation. That's the secret.

Choosing themes for adventures and campaigns

Themes help you and the players approach the game. You can have an overarching theme for the whole campaign, or you can vary the theme from adventure to adventure. Remember the original *Star Trek* television series? The overarching theme of the series was action and adventure with moral overtones as Captain Kirk and his crew explored the vast reaches of space. Every so often, however, the theme varied in individual episodes. The usual serious episodes ("The City on the Edge of Forever," for example) sometimes gave way to lighter fare (such as "A Piece of the Action" or "The Trouble with Tribbles"). Even so, it still remained *Star Trek*. You can do the same thing in your campaign.

In the following sections, we discuss some themes you might want to base individual adventures on or perhaps use for your entire campaign.

Action and adventure

Most D&D adventures and campaigns fall under this theme, where characters have a task to accomplish and obstacles to overcome. Such adventures are full of . . . well, action and adventure! It's the stuff that D&D is made of. Exploring dungeons, visiting fantastic locations, battling terrible monsters — that's D&D!

We suggest that you use action and adventure as the overall theme of your campaign, and then vary the themes of individual adventures every so often for a change of pace and to keep the players guessing.

Comedy

Comedy is hard. It's hard to do humor well, hard to maintain through an entire adventure (let alone an entire campaign), and it often causes game groups to fall apart because no one takes the game seriously when everything is presented as a joke.

Don't present *every single thing* as a joke in a comedic adventure — doing so makes it very difficult for the players to take the game seriously and could cause the game group to fall apart. Remember, many great comedies use a conventional, ostensibly serious storyline as a place for the gags, wisecracks, and caricatures to shine.

That said, as a change of pace, a good humorous D&D adventure can energize a campaign. When it works, it's memorable. When it falls flat, it has the potential to cause irreparable harm to your campaign. The purpose of a comedy-themed adventure is fun for fun's sake, setting up humorous situations that have little or no actual danger or tragedy associated with them. Plans (both villains' and player characters') go awry, amusing NPCs are commonplace, and encounters tend to be strange and peculiar. Imagine using *A Fish Called Wanda* or *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* as the inspiration for a D&D adventure, and you can begin to see what a comedy-themed session could look like.

What might work best for your campaign is to limit the comedic element to one or two NPCs who occasionally provide comic relief. Interaction with these NPCs is best handled in small doses.

Espionage

Active and grim, the espionage theme involves political intrigue, spying, assassination, sabotage, and other cloak-and-dagger activities that usually require intricate planning, stealth, and roleplaying. This theme is hard to maintain over the course of an entire campaign, but it makes for powerful adventures when used sparingly.

Exploration

Similar to action/adventure, the difference here is that the search and discovery of new places tends to be the point of each adventure and perhaps the entire campaign. An exploration-themed campaign works if you set up a strange new land for the player characters to explore and that becomes the driving force of all your adventures. Although exploration is another example of a theme that's hard to sustain over an entire campaign, such adventures form the basis of some of the most memorable game sessions that we've ever Dungeon Mastered.

Horror

Horror-themed adventures or campaigns require the players and their characters to be scared. This is almost impossible to accomplish unless the players are willing to get into the mindset and treat the situations you present as though they were participating in a horror movie.

When it works, horror and D&D make for a powerful combination. For horror to work, it has to be intense and potentially overwhelming. Because the player characters face monsters on a regular basis, you have to alter your approach to the monsters in a horror-themed adventure. Keep the monsters out of sight until the attack comes. Alter the powers and appearances of familiar monsters or use new monsters for the first time to surprise and terrify the player characters. Make your descriptions dark, creepy, and menacing. (If the *Alien* movies were a D&D campaign, *Alien* would be a horror-themed adventure and *Aliens* would be an action/adventure-themed adventure.)

Mystery

This is another theme that's hard to maintain for an entire campaign but can be used very effectively in specific adventures. A mystery is something to solve, whether it's a murder or a robbery or something else. One way to use mystery as the theme of a campaign is to set up a Big Mystery that the player characters must solve over the course of many adventures. Who killed the player characters' mentor and set them on the path of adventuring? Where are the strange draconic monsters coming from? Who really controls the Cult of the Red Hand? If clues to the Big Mystery are revealed every few adventures, and some adventures relate directly to the Big Mystery, you're using mystery as the theme of your campaign. You can see examples of this theme over the course of a campaign in television series such as *Twin Peaks, 24, The X-Files,* and *Supernatural.*

Revenge

Revenge works as the theme of a campaign as long as not every adventure in the campaign focuses on it. When the player characters must hunt down the one-armed mind flayer that murdered their mentor or work to undermine the

evil king who ordered the destruction of their village, revenge is the motivation for their adventuring and the theme of your campaign. The same holds true when you use it as the theme for specific adventures.

As with any long-term theme, revenge works best if you provide ways for the player characters to have small victories along the way. If after a hundred adventures the player characters are no closer to finding the one-armed mind flayer, the players will feel very frustrated. (Revenge is best served cold, not frozen solid.) The payoff has to come sometime, and then maybe it's time to end the campaign and start something new or to spin off the campaign in a new direction with a new theme.

The Dungeon-of-the-Week Campaign Model

You're building a campaign. You've selected a theme. How do you get it to roll out from game session to game session? Use the tried and true television series model — the dungeon-of-the-week campaign! Your campaign is just like your favorite ongoing television series, and the player characters are the stars in the show. Like the crew of the *Enterprise* (pick your favorite model and era), they set off on an exploration mission — but the PCs explore the depths of the dungeon instead of the depths of space. Like the characters from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel,* they fight monsters every week, often saving the world (literally) through their efforts.

If you imagine that your campaign is a television series, you can follow the same rules that are used for any ongoing story. You want to establish certain ground rules. For example, almost anything can happen between the start and end of any particular episode or game session, just so long as things are put back mostly as they were by the climax. Sure, you can and should allow for major changes to occur, but you can control those changes and what they mean for your campaign. You want to treat each adventure as the next episode in your ongoing storyline. Some relate directly to the overall theme of your campaign, and some are side treks that explore a different theme and show off a different aspect of your world.

The easiest campaign to build uses the dungeon-of-the-week model (even though some dungeons might take more than one session to complete). Each time you need a new adventure, you create a new dungeon. Populate it with encounters worthy of the level of the player characters, and create a memorable villain to serve as the main antagonist or boss monster (see Chapter 21 for more on creating villains). Just as the two brothers in the TV show *Supernatural* go to a new town each episode to deal with a new monster, so too do the player characters in your campaign go to a new dungeon each adventure.

Building on What the Players Give You

Our last bit of advice about campaign building is simple: Use what the players give you. It's their story, too. Many players like to create interesting back stories for their characters or think up long-term story goals and aspirations. For example, a player might decide that her wizard character hopes to learn the secrets of a long-forgotten tradition of elven high magic someday, or maybe another player says that his barbarian character is the last survivor of a tribe massacred by undead giants. Look for opportunities to incorporate these player-invented plots into adventures from time to time. Not only does it give you grist for your creative mill, but you're guaranteed to provide an adventure that is immediately compelling to at least one of the players.

Keep your ears open when the players are discussing the events of the adventure — you'll often hear them make suggestions that you never thought of but you just have to use. So use them! Later, the players will think they were clever for having figured it out, and you never have to let them know that they actually came up with the idea.

That's why we love to make the players recap the previous game session at the start of the current one. Let the players tell you what they think happened. This often leads them to speculate, toss around ideas, and come up with something you never thought of. Why should you do all the work? If the players want to give you ideas (even if they don't realize it), be willing to take them. Take inspiration for your campaign from all sources, including the players. If anyone is thinking about the campaign anywhere near as much as you are, it's them. Let them help you. The campaign will be stronger because of it.

Converting an Old Campaign to the 4th Edition

If you played previous editions of D&D, the new 4th Edition offers both challenges and opportunities. Maybe you have a long-running campaign that you want to continue while using the rules of the new edition, or at least a richly detailed world you want to keep using as the setting for your adventures. How do you convert the campaign and your world to 4th Edition? On the other hand, a new edition is a good excuse (if you need one) to bring an old campaign to a climactic ending and start over with something new, which can be refreshing.

Basically, there are three ways to handle the transition from a previous edition of D&D to a new 4th edition campaign:

✔ You can gloss over the transition, mid-campaign or even mid-adventure, making as few and as minor changes as possible.

✔ You can introduce a dramatic catastrophe, an excuse to change your world to account for changes in the new edition of the game.

✔ You can end your campaign and start fresh with a new campaign set in a new world.

In the following sections, we look at each of those possibilities in more depth.

Glossing over the transition

In the right circumstances, it can be really easy to transition your campaign to use 4th Edition rules without even taking a break from the action. We recommend offering your players a choice of either creating 4th Edition versions of the their characters or making entirely new characters. Ideally, enough players will convert their characters that the party retains some continuity and you can continue the adventures.

A few things might make this kind of transition a little more difficult:

✔ **If you have created a detailed world already,** you might feel the need to explain the addition of new character races such as dragonborn. (Tieflings and eladrin have roots in past editions of the game but have new prominence in 4th Edition, so you might need to explain their new roles, too.) You could just prohibit players from making characters of these races, but it's more interesting if you let these new races expand your campaign.

✔ **If everyone in your campaign is playing characters that are hard to convert,** you might lose all continuity in your player character group. If your players played enough 3rd Edition that they grew tired of standard options, they might all be playing classes like swordsage (from *Tome of Battle: The Book of Nine Swords*) or spellthief (from *Complete Adventurer*), which don't have direct analogues in the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook*. You can look for conversion advice on D&D Insider (www.dndinsider.com) and give your players plenty of creative license. With creative conversion, using multiclass feats and perhaps some judicious reflavoring of powers, your players might find that they can create exciting new incarnations of their favorite characters.

✔ **If everyone decides to make new characters even if they could easily convert,** your players might be telling you that they're ready to start fresh. Talk to them, but this could be a sign that you should explore another option for transitioning your campaign.

After your players have converted their characters or created new ones, you can pick up right where your campaign left off. Get the players to help you explain where their old characters went and where their new ones came from. Ease them into their new adventures while they get used to their characters' new capabilities.

One key question you should think about is what level the 4th Edition characters should be. You can leave them at the same level they were in the previous edition, as long as they weren't above 30th level. But you might want to look at the adventures you've been running and see whether the characters should be higher level. For example, if your 3rd Edition player characters were 7th level and fighting a lot of yuan-ti (which were appropriate challenges for 7th-level characters in 3rd Edition), you might consider having your players re-create their characters at around 14th level, since yuan-ti in 4th Edition range in level between 13th and 17th. That's a big jump, but it will help you maintain a sense of continuity in the campaign.

Blowing up the world

In its 4th Edition incarnation, the world of the FORGOTTEN REALMS is undergoing a major transition, which includes a hundred-year jump into the future. The change to the 4th Edition rules is only one small reason for making such significant alterations to the world, but if you want to bring cataclysmic change to your campaign world, the new edition can be a convenient excuse.

The best way to blow up your world (in order to rebuild it again, of course) is in the course of your campaign. Let the high-level characters of your past campaign do what they can to fight the cataclysm, or at least minimize the damage inflicted on innocent bystanders. Let them play a significant role in rebuilding the world.

You might take a page from the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting and let a magical catastrophe sweep across your world, similar to the Spellplague. You could set up a war among the gods that leaves the old player characters of the campaign as the new gods of the world. Or perhaps a gateway to the Far Realm springs open, unleashing aberrant terrors across the world, leading the player characters into a climactic battle with a terror from beyond the stars that resembles something out of the stories of H. P. Lovecraft.

The new face of your world is up to you, of course, but you might consider reshaping your world more in the image of the default D&D world described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 150). If your old campaign featured a mighty empire whose influence reached to every corner of the world, a new campaign featuring characters a thousand years after that empire's fall who explore its ruins can be very satisfying for you and your players. Moving your campaign into the future of your world gives you opportunities to tie adventures to events that your players remember from the previous campaign.

You don't need a terrible cataclysm to adapt your game to the 4th Edition rules. The rules are meant to model the things that characters do in the world, not define them according to the laws of some magical physics. Different rules offer a different model, but the fictional "reality" of your world doesn't need to alter in any significant way. You can use a big change in your world to explain what are fundamentally story changes — the appearance of the dragonborn race, for example, or a change to the way the planes are arranged in your universe. But less dramatic changes, or even a hand-waving, "it's always been this way" approach, can also do the trick. See what works best for your world and your players and run with that.

Starting fresh

Many DMs (ourselves included) get very attached to the campaigns they run and the worlds those campaigns are set in. Even so, it's not a bad idea to start over from scratch once in a while, and a new edition of the rules is a perfect opportunity. Maybe there are stories you've been wanting to tell that just don't fit in your current campaign. Maybe your players are itching to play a different class or race. Maybe it would be good to take a break from your campaign's epic, world-shaking adventures and return to the days when young heroes set out to fight nasty kobolds.

If nothing else, starting fresh is a good way to get used to the new rules. You could use "Kobold Hall" in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, "The Necromancer's Apprentice" in Chapter 19 of this book, and perhaps *The Keep on the Shadowfell* to play beginning characters through a few levels of adventure. When you have the hang of the new edition, you can come back to your old campaign and transition it to the new rules, either smoothly or dramatically. Or you might just decide to stick with the new campaign!

Whatever you decide to do with your campaign, make sure to listen to your players and find a solution that's fun for everyone.

Chapter 21

Creating Memorable Villains

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*V*illains come in all shapes and sizes. From master villains to minor villains, evil overlords to minions and lackeys, every heroic player character needs a villain to battle and defeat.

In this chapter, we look at villains and how to turn them into memorable parts of your D&D game.

What Is a Villain?

Player characters can have lots of foes, but they should have only a few villains. When we talk about *villains,* we mean the main antagonists, the boss NPCs or monsters and their chief lieutenants in an adventure, not the many minions and monsters that populate the bulk of a dungeon. A villain is more than a random monster or enemy (though every dungeon and adventure needs those, too). A villain is the evil behind the adventure, the catalyst that sends the player characters into action (whether they realize the connection or not).

For an NPC or monster to be a villain, he or she (or it) must possess most or all of the following qualities:

- ✔ **Villains (directly or indirectly) oppose the player characters.** Villains force the PCs to take action and make decisions.

- ✔ **Villains are powerful adversaries, commanding great resources.** Villains might not be able to defeat the player characters in direct melee

combat, but with the resources at their command, they will have many guards and should be able to give the PCs a run for their money.

✔ **Villains should be, for the most part, unsympathetic.** Most villains should be despised and hated by the player characters.

✔ **Villains want to do the wrong thing.** Their motives and goals should be excessive, selfish, and to the detriment of others. Evil is what villains do.

✔ **Villains need to be hated, but in a good way.** You've done your job if you've created a villain that engages the emotions of the players and makes them love to hate the character.

You might be tempted to create villains with complex and "realistic" motives, but here's the deal: You don't have to work very hard to make a villain make sense. In the fantastic world of D&D, villains can be starkly, irredeemably evil. Crazed cultists and bloodthirsty orcs don't turn to evil because of traumatic events in their past, social alienation, psychological disorders, or bad choices. They can just be *evil,* pure and simple. Keeping things "black and white" rather than drawn in shades of gray is good because you're letting the players know that their characters can concentrate on defeating evil, not understanding it or redeeming it. Morally ambiguous villains should definitely be the exception in most campaigns, and not the rule.

Every Hero Needs a Good Villain

Heroes have always been defined by the villains that oppose them. Peter Pan and Captain Hook. Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty. Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. These heroes are tied to their villains in ways that go beyond simple storytelling. The villains are the heroes' mirror images, potential selves, and polar opposites all at the same time.

When you consider villains for player characters, remember that the villain might have a particular hatred for a specific character but usually serves as the nemesis for the entire party. Because of the ongoing nature of a D&D campaign, you might want to think of villains in the same way that comic book superheroes have rogues' galleries. Batman can't fight the Joker every issue, so the writers and artists invented Penguin, Two-Face, and Riddler. In the same way, the player characters in your campaign shouldn't have to battle the same orc leader every adventure. Although not every adventure needs an arch villain that will hound the heroes across multiple story arcs, you do need to populate most adventures with a master villain and a few minor villains, in addition to the various monsters and obstacles that pop up along the way.

Good villains take work

What makes a good villain? You want the villains you create (or at least the majority of them) to be plausible. Flesh them out. Give some thought as to why a villain is doing what it is he or she is doing. How does a villain interact with the rest of your adventure story? With the other denizens of a dungeon? If you think that your villains are just bad guys for the player characters to defeat, so will the players.

Villains don't have to be stupid. Make your villains, or at least the majority of them, smart. Some can be evil geniuses, some can just be savvy, and once in a while a few can be powerful and dumb. Play them as smart as you want them to be, but no more or less than that. A bugbear chieftain might not be a brilliant strategist, but he can still be cagey and wily and able to match wits with the player characters. A mind flayer master villain, on the other hand, might be so intelligent as to have an amazing number of contingency plans and multiple schemes within schemes unfolding at any given time.

Don't be afraid to make some of your villains truly evil. Betrayal, devious lies, and hideous acts of evil for evil's sake allow you to paint compelling pictures of your villains. And when the player characters see them for the evil creatures they are, the feeling of success for defeating them will be that much sweeter.

TIP On the other hand, not all antagonists need to be evil. Sometimes rivals will appear to challenge the player characters, and these rivals can be good-meaning nonplayer characters or even monsters with their own agendas. Setting up an opponent who the player characters can't or don't want to fight directly can make for an interesting change of pace.

Give villains every chance to succeed

The diabolical dragon lord, the evil royal wizard, the murderous bounty hunter with a taste for blood — the range of intelligent villains is endless. Make your villains memorable, and they will become the hated foes of the player characters without any special effort on your part. Some villains can be recurring antagonists that appear from time to time to harass the player characters; others can be designed to serve that purpose for only the span of a single adventure.

Carefully crafting your villain is only half the battle. To make your villain truly effective, follow these tips for playing your villain:

- ✔ **Don't let a major villain confront the player characters too early in the adventure.** Use lackeys and other minions to fight for the villain whenever possible. Eventually, you want to give the player characters the satisfaction of confronting and defeating the villain, but not until the time is right. The right time is usually at the climax of the adventure.

- ✔ **Use every available resource to foil the player characters.** Villains should be sneaky and resourceful. Some villains can hide in plain sight, and others have vast wealth and power at their command. The villain's tactics depend on the role you want the villain to play in the adventure and campaign. Keep in mind that for every ability that the player characters have, there is usually a way for a villain to counter it.

- ✔ **Sometimes, give a villain the opportunity to confront the player characters and get away.** Use this technique if you want the villain to meet the PCs early in an adventure or if you want the villain to become a recurring character. Create escape plans for some of your villains. Through misdirection, disguises, secret passages, magic, and swarms of minions, you can give a villain a chance to get away. Don't force the issue, though. If the player characters come up with a way to circumvent the plan, let them. You can always create a new villain as a replacement.

- ✔ **Don't let the player characters fight on their terms.** A smart villain fights the player characters from a place of strength and only when he or she is well and truly prepared. Confronting villains in their strongholds isn't the smartest thing for the player characters to do, but it should be the only place major villains are willing to put their own lives on the line.

Villain Archetypes

Villains come in two basic forms: master villain and minor villain. An adventure or even an entire campaign should have a single master villain, but it can have as many minor villains as you feel comfortable including. Minor villains allow the player characters to gain small victories along the way without confronting the master villain too early.

If you ask seven different creative people to define archetypes for master and minor villains, you'll get seven similar but different answers. In the following sections, we provide our version of the master and minor villain archetypes most appropriate for use in a D&D game.

Master villains

The master villain stands at the center of the evil plot, working to achieve some evil goal through the use of evil means. We're talking *evil* villains here, not adversaries who might be good but oppose the player characters as rivals.

The following list describes archetypes that would fit as master villains into most D&D campaigns:

- ✔ **Agent provocateur:** This is the clever spy who infiltrates an organization and works to destroy it from the inside. For example, how better to bring down a church devoted to law and order than to place a hidden agent of evil high within its ranks? The identity of this master villain usually remains a closely guarded secret until the end of the adventure or series of adventures that he or she is associated with, and he or she strews lots of deception and false trails along the way.

- ✔ **Avenger:** This is the villain who seeks to right a real or imagined wrong, but in the most heinous way possible. He or she seeks to ruin and ultimately destroy the object of the seething anger, perhaps in one-on-one battle, by destroying wealth and reputation, or by using a death trap of some sort.

- ✔ **Conqueror:** The conqueror wants to seize control. He or she could be a warlord leading a vast army or could be after control of an organization, a place, or a person. This villain wants to be the center of attention, the

leader, and wants to gain this position by the force of his or her own will and the strengths that make him or her stand out from the common folk.

✔ **Corruptor:** The corruptor seeks to change the pure into impure, the holy into blasphemy. On a small scale, the corruptor seeks to darkly influence a single character or group of characters, such as a king, priest, or town council. On a large scale, the corruptor seeks to alter an organization, city, or nation, turning it from a thing of law and order to a thing of oppression and violence. In D&D campaigns, the corruptor can be an evil god or an archdevil as often as a human or a monster.

✔ **Destroyer:** The destroyer has one goal — to cause destruction. Instead of conquering or corrupting a nation or an organization, he or she wants to destroy it. Destroyers might have a reason for wanting to cause death and destruction, but they might also simply want to cause destruction for destruction's sake. (Villains don't need to be complex!) Demon princes are the ultimate destroyers, but plenty of monsters can fill this role at any level.

✔ **Master thief:** The master thief wants the prize and usually has a grand plan for getting it. Gold, jewels, artifacts, ancient tomes . . . if it has worth, value, and a hint of power, the master thief can't wait to lay hands upon it. No challenge is too great, no vault secure enough to stop master thieves from plying their trade.

✔ **Organizer:** Some villains control vast syndicates, such as a guild of thieves or a slaver ring. Using brains, influence, and an army of under-lings, the organizer sits at the center of a web of intrigue to control crim-inal activities of one sort or another.

✔ **Ravager:** Another version of the destroyer, the ravager uses terror as a means of operation. Why just destroy a village if you can terrorize (and have fun with) the villagers first? Such is the method used by this vile villain.

✔ **Zealot:** The zealot follows a cause to the detriment of everything else, seeking to re-create the world (or a portion thereof) in the image of his or her beliefs. These beliefs can be philosophical, political, or religious in nature, and the zealot can work alone or as the head of a widespread organization.

Minor villains

Minor villains are the trusted lieutenants of the boss monsters, servants of the master villains but on a level above the typical minions and lackeys most often employed to trouble the player characters.

The following archetypes work well as minor villains in most D&D campaigns:

- ✔ **Advance agent:** This is the vanguard for some sort of invasion, whether of an enemy army or of supernatural forces from another plane of existence. The advance agent sets the stage and hints of greater threats to come, all the while accomplishing things that make it easier for the next part of the invasion to take place.

- ✔ **Assassin:** This is the favorite killing tool of the master villain, a powerful and deadly enemy in his or her own right who has no regard for life and is totally loyal to his or her master.

- ✔ **Corrupted hero:** What master villain doesn't have an ex-hero in his or her employ? This character shows the dark side of the player characters and shows what happens when a hero falls to evil. A corrupted hero usually has a player character class, such as fighter or ranger or wizard. The most effective corrupted heroes are often former servants of good deities, clerics or paladins who have turned to the worship of evil gods.

- ✔ **Inquisitor:** When master villains needs answers, they turn to the inquisitor. The inquisitor is trained in torture and intimidation, and he or she enjoys inflicting pain and suffering on others to do the job.

- ✔ **Soldier:** Many lieutenants serving master villains fall into this category. Trained in battle and tempered by past campaigns, the soldier is experienced, competent, and persistent in the execution of his or her task.

- ✔ **Thug:** A thug has a single job in any master villain's organization — to fight as told and without thinking. The thug is more powerful than the typical minions serving the master villain and is often used to fill key encounters in an adventure.

Chapter 22

Bringing the World to Life

You're an expert at crafting fun and exciting adventures. You've taken a shot at making memorable master villains to plague the player characters. You've begun to link the adventures together to start building your campaign. Now you have to put everything in context and start fleshing out the world beyond the dungeons and other specific locations the player characters have visited.

TIP

When it comes to world building, you can get as complex as you want or keep it simple. For examples of fully detailed worlds, take a look at published campaign setting books such as FORGOTTEN REALMS *Campaign Guide* and EBERRON *Campaign Guide* (releasing in 2009).

We advise you to keep things simple to start out with for your home-brewed world, but you can take the tips we provide in this chapter and make your world as simple or as complex and detailed as you like. You can create whatever details you want to craft a living, breathing campaign world.

The World in a Nutshell: The DM's Notebook

When you're ready to go beyond one-time adventures and start building a world for your campaign, you need to get organized. Even if you keep your world relatively simple and small, you have a lot more maps, notes, timelines, and all other sorts of details to keep track of for a world than you do for a dungeon or one-time adventure.

A really helpful tool when it comes to developing your campaign world is the DM's notebook. All you need for a DM notebook are some folders or a binder in which you collect the following items, adding pieces as you build your world:

✔ **Maps:** You should have maps for your world, from large-scale maps that depict the entire world, down to maps of regions or countries, to maps of towns and dungeons. You don't have to create all of these maps until you need them, of course, but make sure that your DM's notebook contains all the maps you've drawn for previous and current adventures in your world.

✔ **Notes:** You should keep the notes for your world in your DM notebook. You might find it helpful to organize your notes into the following categories and place them in separate folders in your DM notebook:

  • Notes about the various places of interest in your world, such as dungeons, castles, towns, and so on, including any historical or background information you've created for those areas

  • A calendar and/or timeline for the campaign's world

  • Character sheets for major and minor villains and other important NPCs

  • Notes on minor NPCs

  • Notes on past adventures, including treasure collected, monsters defeated, and plot developments you want to remember

  • Up-to-date copies of each of the players' character sheets

  • Notes about the player characters' long-term goals

  • Notes regarding any house rules you're using

Your DM notebook can be a physical binder full of paper, of course, but it can also be a series of files on your computer or a bunch of hyperlinked Web pages. The important thing is that it's organized in a way that works for you, so you can find and remember the information you need when you need it.

Building a World from the Inside Out: Start Small and Add Details

What do you need in order to establish the basis of your campaign? You've already begun if you've gathered a team of players and run through a couple adventures. If you've followed the guidelines in Chapter 8, you've set up a base for the player characters, a place where they can rest, train, obtain healing, buy equipment, and get missions.

Take a look at the maps of Fallcrest and its environs presented in Chapter 11 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Those are good examples of maps of a town and its surrounding area. You can always add detail and new locations as you need them. The trick is not to worry about the parts of the world that the player characters aren't going to see right away. Leave the kingdom and the world map for later. Just concentrate on your town or village and the adventuring sites that are nearby.

As the player characters gain levels, you can start expanding your world outward in a circle from the starting areas, so that you have ready locations for whichever direction the PCs decide to follow. Sooner rather than later, your campaign world — or at least the parts of it that you're using — starts to take shape. Keep the details simple until you know where the player characters want to go next, and then you can develop the next portion of your world map, complete with environmental notes, adventuring sites, and the next community where the PCs can get training, equipment, and rumors of adventure.

Don't do more than you need to. When filmmakers build movie sets, they make only the portions that they need for the scene. Walls and rooms are half built, and doors lead to nowhere. Follow the same approach as you develop your campaign world: Determine where things are only as you need them. If the player characters aren't going to cross the mountains until they reach 10th level, you don't need to do the work necessary to populate that region until they get close to that point in their adventuring careers.

Conversely, don't feel constrained to creating only the areas the PCs are about to explore. Keep it simple, but if you really enjoy the process of creating the world, do whatever you feel like. Just don't spend so much time creating the unexplored continent that you don't put enough detail in the secret valley that the player characters will explore in the next game session.

Putting the World Together

You're ready to start piecing your campaign world together. We advise you to start small, detailing and nailing down only what you absolutely have to.

But what do you really need? You need to fix any locations already encountered in any adventures you have run to date. Begin by marking down on your setting map or recording in your notes the sites of dungeons, towns, ruins, and other such features the PCs have already explored. In addition to these locales, consider what else might be necessary to sustain the illusion of reality for your imaginary campaign setting.

Player characters need a base of operations, a place where they can return after an adventure to rest, purchase supplies, and train. From 1st to 3rd level or so, a small town works best for this, though a village can suffice in a pinch. You certainly don't have to figure out who all the 2,000 people living in the small town are, but you do need to put some thought into the places the player characters are likely to visit. These places include the inn or tavern, the general store, the magic shop, the weapons shop, the local church or temple, the local keepers of the peace and other authority figures, and anyone who can serve as trainers for the characters.

Climate and geography

You need to decide on the climate and geography for the area around your starting village or town. A temperate climate probably works best and usually presents the easiest solution. Geography should be a mix of terrain types, such as forest, hills, and plains to start. Make a simple map that shows the relative locations and shape of the land, using the map of the area around Fallcrest as a guide (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 206). Then you need to add other locations of interest, including encounter sites from previous adventures you have run for this group of player characters.

The great thing about a fantasy setting is that you can just make things up. Still, you want to apply some level of logic to the world you build. Don't put a scorched desert next to an arctic plain, for example, unless you come up with a fantastical reason for such a juxtaposition to exist.

You really need to consider only three basic climate types when building a D&D campaign world:

✔ **Cold climates** resemble arctic and subarctic regions on Earth and usu-ally feature wintry conditions throughout most of the year. Portions of your world can have a cold climate, or you can make the climate persis-tent throughout much of the land.

✔ **Temperate climates** enjoy approximately equal periods of warm and cold seasons throughout the year.

   If you set up a campaign that takes place mostly in a temperate climate, remember to keep a calendar so that you can make the seasons pass as the game progresses.

✔ **Warm climates** range from subtropical to tropical environments, featur-ing summer (or hotter) conditions for most of the year. In extremely warm regions, adventurers might suffer adverse conditions for wearing a lot of armor and carrying a load of equipment.

Likewise, you can keep it simple for the geography of your world. A fantasy setting doesn't need to have complex geology, ecosystems, and environ-ments. Con-sider eight basic geographic types as you construct your D&D campaign world:

✔ **Aquatic** geography consists mainly of salt or fresh water, such as lakes, oceans, rivers, and inland seas.

✔ **Desert** describes any dry area that has little to no vegetation. Warm deserts resemble places like Death Valley and the Sahara, and cold deserts appear much like Antarctica. Player characters need to deal with survival issues in this kind of terrain, not the least of which is acquiring food and water (though magic can help in this).

✔ **Forest** terrain features large tracts of tree-covered land. Food and water are usually plentiful, and animal life is abundant.

✔ **Hills** describe rugged, raised terrain that doesn't reach the level of mountains.

✔ **Marsh** terrain features low, flat, waterlogged areas, such as what is usually found in swamps and bogs. Travel through marshes can be difficult if not treacherous.

✔ **Mountains** feature high elevation, little level ground, and decreasing sources of food and water the higher you ascend. Travel is difficult and often requires special equipment.

✔ **Plains** describe any relatively flat area that isn't also one of the other ter-rain types covered. Food and water are usually plentiful in a plains region.

✔ **Underground** describes subterranean passages and caverns. The D&D game assumes that there is a vast expanse of underground areas (whether they're naturally occurring, made by people or monsters, or both) where many adventures take place.

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* features a good discussion on what the assumed D&D world is like, including population centers (pages 152–157), wilderness areas (pages 158–159), and the various planes of existence (pages 160–161).

Sites of interest

By *sites of interest,* we mean the places you expect the PCs to explore and adventure in. These sites should be scattered across your world map, and you can add new ones whenever you see fit.

You want to create enough sites of interest in the region to sustain the PCs' adventure needs at least through the level to which the PCs' home base can support their needs. When the PCs can no longer get the weapons, armor, magical supplies, and other equipment appropriate for their levels in the local settlement or town, they should move on to a larger, more populated area.

The following subsections describe some of the sites of interest that you should add to your world's map as places the PCs will eventually explore.

Castles

Castles and other kinds of keeps and strongholds guard the land, providing places of protection for the population, barracks for soldiers, and supply centers for armies. Your starting area should have a few of these structures, though perhaps not immediately near your starting village or town. Of course, larger and more important centers of civilization should get larger castles, but small towns and villages might have only a keep to protect them. Evil warlords and rival baronies also maintain castles, and you can use these as adventure sites for when the player characters are ready to take on such a challenge.

Ruins

No campaign is complete without several crumbling towers, abandoned temples, ruined castles, or forgotten cities hidden in the swamps and forests of your world. Ruins can reveal historical secrets about your campaign, and most serve as great adventure sites due to the large concentration of monsters that often make ruins into lairs. Ruins can be obvious and known or hidden and yet to be discovered. They can exist in the wilderness, away from settlements, or they can serve as the foundation upon which current settlements have been constructed.

Dungeons

You can place dungeons wherever you need them to be. They take the form of carefully constructed complexes or natural caverns that snake through hillsides and underground. Sewer networks, basements, and actual dungeons

fall into the category of man-made (or monster-made) dungeons, and extensive cavern systems can link caves that are dozens or hundreds of miles apart, forming regions of sunless expanse often referred to as the Underdark. All these places usually hold terrors and treasures beyond imagining, waiting for player characters to explore.

Monster lairs

When you consider placing monster lairs, don't worry about every cave or crack or crevice that hides a monster. Concentrate on the places where the unusually tough or intelligent creatures live, or focus on the areas occupied by large congregations of monsters. The bandits hiding in the old mine, the medusa's macabre garden of victims turned to stone, a dragon's treasure cave, and the cemetery haunted by wights or wraiths all come to mind as places worthy of entries on your constantly growing campaign map. Side treks, filler encounters, and adventures on the fly can all be thrown together quickly if you have a handful of monster lairs ready in your notebook.

Not all monster lairs need to focus on dangerous creatures or threats to the player characters. A grove of friendly treants, the grazing grounds of a herd of unicorns, and a druid's circle are all examples of friendly to neutral monster lairs that the player characters might have reason to visit from time to time. You can even set up special arrangements where monsters that are usually considered to be enemies have worked out a deal with a nearby settlement that allows each side to exist more or less in peace.

Even though a D&D world is imaginary and fantastic, you want to put just a little consideration into the ecology of your campaign. For example, when you place a settlement, you should also consider how that settlement feeds itself. Do its citizens hunt and gather from a large forest, fish from a river or lake, or support themselves with vast tracts of farmland? Consider these kinds of questions when choosing locations for monster lairs. Are there enough prey animals available in the area for a large, predatory monster? How do nearby monsters interact with each other? Do they assist each other, ignore each other, or fight each other at every opportunity? You don't need to get too technical, because it's just a game and a fantasy, but some amount of forethought can help add a touch of realism to your campaign. Check out a monster's entry in the *Monster Manual* for some ecological information and then use your own imagination to make it fit into your campaign.

Unusual phenomena

To accentuate the fantastic nature of your D&D world, be sure to judiciously include a few places that just couldn't exist in the real world. Nothing says you're in a place of magic more than areas that inspire awe, wonder, and even fear.

> # Steal this campaign setting!
>
> You can certainly do all the work of world building yourself, but you have other options. Wizards of the Coast regularly publishes campaign setting material, both in print and online through D&D Insider (`www.dndinsider.com`). The two flagship settings of the D&D universe are the FORGOTTEN REALMS and EBERRON. The *FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Guide* book presents a world that is very much a traditional D&D setting and is easy to use as is or to borrow elements from to create your own campaign world. In the *EBERRON Campaign Guide* book, on the other hand, you can find a world that has more of an attitude and an air of action that harkens back to pulp adventures. Both of these settings are fully DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. You can play them straight up as written, modify them, or steal from them to make your own world. However you use them and other settings like them, they make great resources for content-hungry campaigns like yours.

A waterfall of lava, a forest of wild magic, a lake of glowing liquid that heals whoever bathes in it, and a blasted patch of badlands where magic doesn't work are all example of sites of unusual phenomena. Let your imagination go wild. How about a village where the fog never dissipates? Or a range of hills where spectacular and deadly fountains of fire erupt without warning? Or an ancient cliffside where a deep crack in the rock echoes with the warnings of tragedies to come? Make these sites strange and spectacular and a little otherworldly, and the player characters will certainly want to investigate them and find out more about them.

REMEMBER

Don't go overboard with unusual phenomena and create dozens or hundreds of them throughout your world. If you overuse this element, each one will feel commonplace and less fantastic.

Other settlements
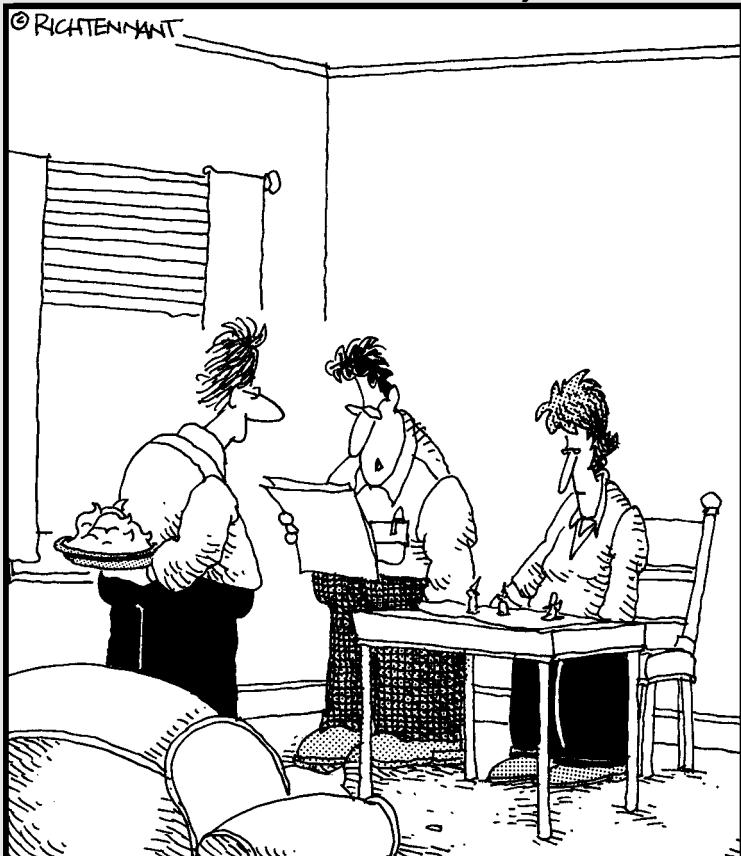
As the player characters strike out deeper into your world, they should encounter other settlements of intelligent beings. Some of these should be human, elf, or dwarf settlements or even places where the common races mix and meet. Others can be settlements of monsters, such as places where goblins or orcs gather. Vary the size and wealth of these settlements. Include more humble villages across the landscape than sprawling cities. Check out the discussion on towns and communities in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, starting on page 152, for a detailed look at this topic.

Part V
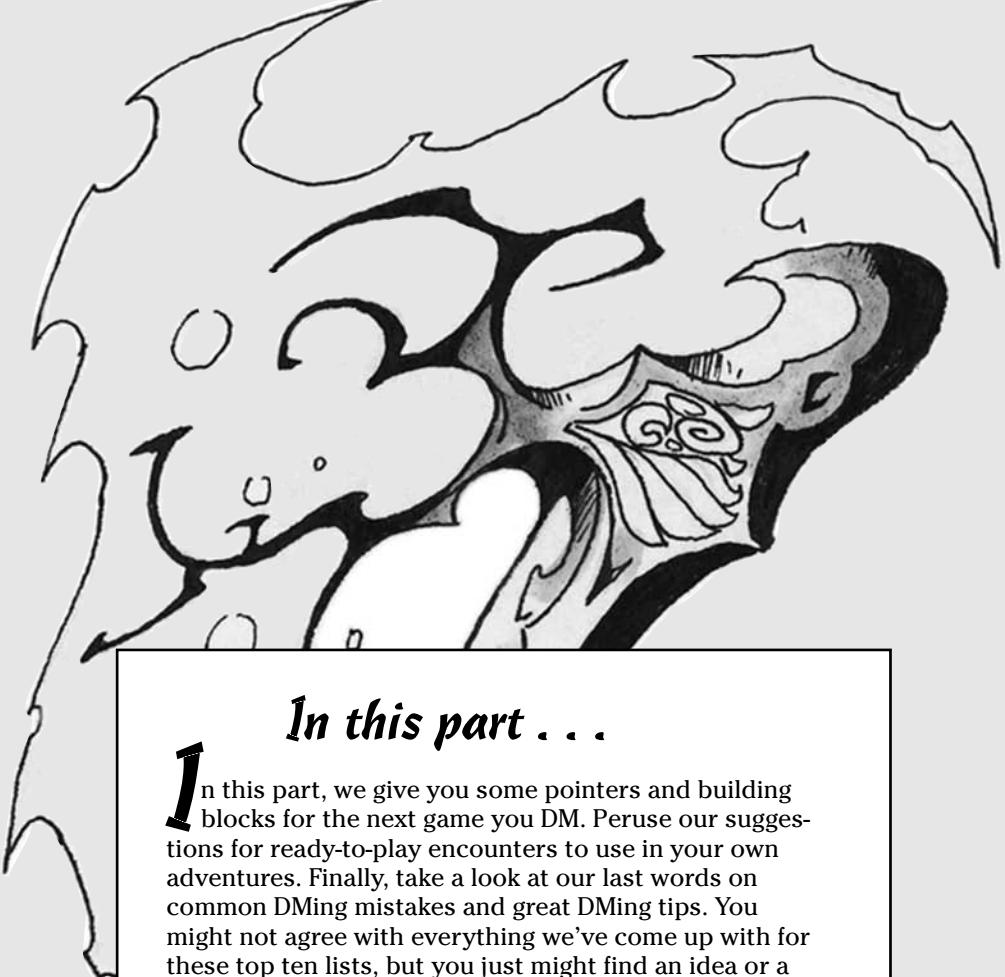
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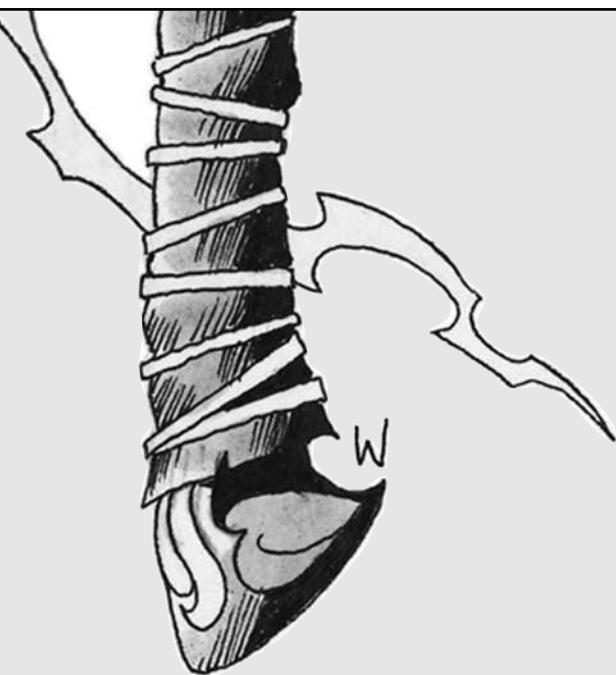
"So, tell me about this new refinement to your encounter power."

In this part . . .

In this part, we give you some pointers and building blocks for the next game you DM. Peruse our suggestions for ready-to-play encounters to use in your own adventures. Finally, take a look at our last words on common DMing mistakes and great DMing tips. You might not agree with everything we've come up with for these top ten lists, but you just might find an idea or a suggestion that will make your next game the best one you've ever run.

Chapter 23

Ten Heroic Encounters

. . . .

Memorable encounters are the building-blocks of great adventures. In this chapter, we present ten heroic-tier encounters you can drop into your own adventure, use as the basis to build an entire adventure around, or throw at the players when you need something in a hurry — like when the player characters go right and all you've prepared is the left side of the dungeon!

The encounters presented in this chapter feature a map, monsters and traps, some details to set the scene, and a level. As DM, you get to decide when, how, and where to use these encounters. You can easily customize them by changing the monster selection, omitting some of the special terrain features or traps, or redrawing the maps to fit into your dungeon. All of the maps included are designed to be easy to make with *D&D Dungeon Tiles*, but of course you can use whatever battle grid works best for you.

Each map includes arrows that indicate the expected direction of travel for the characters — they arrive at the arrow pointing into the dungeon rooms and leave by one of the arrows pointing away. The descriptions of monster tactics in these encounters assume this direction of travel, so you might need to mix things up a little, including altering the starting positions of monsters, if the characters come at the encounters from a different direction.
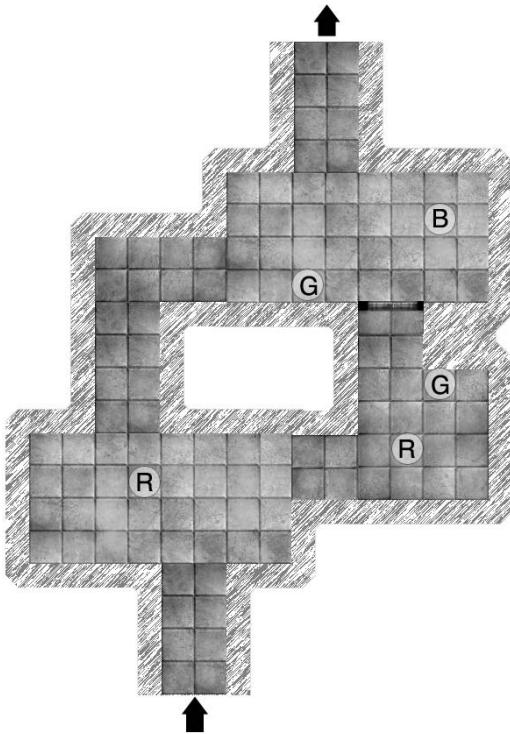
The encounters in this chapter are designed to challenge heroic-tier characters (characters of level 10 or below). Chapter 24 presents ten paragon-tier encounters (level 11 through 20), and Bonus Chapter 3 (available at `www.dummies.com/go/dungeonmaster4e`) includes ten epic-tier encounters for level 21 to 30.

Goblin Lair

Level 1 Encounter (500 XP)

> ✔ 2 dire rats (R)
> ✔ 2 goblin warriors (G)
> ✔ 1 goblin blackblade (B)

Set Up: To get from point A to point B in the dungeon, the characters have to get past these goblins and their pet rats. Figure 23-1 shows a map of the little complex of rooms the goblins have claimed as their lair.

Figure 23-1: Goblins live in tunnels, like rats. And with rats.

Read Aloud: *The passage opens into a wide hall dimly lit with flickering lamps. Two more passages lead off to either side, but an enormous rat scurries toward you out of the shadows!*

Goblin and Rat Tactics: The goblin warriors focus on ranged attacks while the rats engage characters in melee. The goblins try to use *great position* to deal extra damage with their ranged attacks every round, and *goblin tactics* to duck away from melee. If it starts its turn adjacent to an enemy, a goblin warrior can shift away (a move action) and then use *mobile ranged attack* (a standard action that includes both 3 squares of movement and a ranged attack) to put some distance between itself and its attacker while still making an attack. The goblin blackblade tries to find positions where it and a rat flank a character in order to gain combat advantage.

Dire Rats (2)

A dire rat is an enormous rat the size of a large dog. Strange bony growths protrude from its back and shoulders, and its teeth are more like fangs than the sharp incisors of a normal rodent.

Dire Rat   **Level 1 Brute**
Medium natural beast   XP: 100
Initiative: +2   **Senses:** Perception +5; low-light vision
HP: 38; **Bloodied:** 19
AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 13; **Will:** 11
Speed: 6, climb 3

> **Bite** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Disease**
> +4 versus AC; 1d6 + 2 damage, and the target contracts the filth fever disease (see *Monster Manual,* page 219).

Skills: Stealth +7

See the dire rats' complete statistics on page 219 of the *Monster Manual.*

Goblin Warriors (2)

Goblins are small, wicked humanoids that delight in plunder and cruelty. They're the smallest of the goblin race, but some would say that just makes them the meanest. They're the size of halflings but have green skin; deep-set, yellow eyes; and mouths full of jagged teeth. These goblins wear leather armor and carry spears and javelins. Each warrior has 5 javelins it can throw before resorting to melee attacks with its spear.

Goblin Warrior   **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid   XP: 100
Initiative: +5   **Senses:** Perception +1; low-light vision
HP: 29; **Bloodied:** 14
AC: 17; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 15; **Will:** 12
Speed: 6

> **Spear** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> +6 versus AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.
> **Javelin** (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> Ranged 10/20; +6 versus AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.
> **Mobile Ranged Attack** (standard action, at-will)
> The goblin warrior can move up to half its speed; at any point during that movement, it makes one ranged attack without provoking an opportunity attack.

(continued)

> **Great Position:** If, on its turn, the goblin warrior ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals an extra 1d6 damage on its ranged attacks until the start of its next turn.
> **Goblin Tactics** (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
> The goblin shifts 1 square.
>
> **Skills:** Stealth +10, Thievery +10
>
> See the goblin warriors' complete statistics on page 137 of the *Monster Manual*.

Goblin Blackblade

A goblin blackblade is named for the short sword it carries instead of spears. The sword is forged from dark iron, which makes it both heavy and jagged.

Goblin Blackblade	**Level 1 Lurker**
Small natural humanoid	XP: 100

Initiative: +7 **Senses:** Perception +1; low-light vision
HP: 25; **Bloodied:** 12
AC: 16; **Fortitude:** 12; **Reflex:** 14; **Will:** 11
Speed: 6

> **Short Sword** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> +5 versus AC; 1d6 + 2 damage.
> **Combat Advantage:** The goblin blackblade deals an extra 1d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.
> **Goblin Tactics** (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)
> The goblin shifts 1 square.
> **Sneaky:** When shifting, a goblin blackblade can move into a space occupied by an ally of its level or lower. The ally shifts into the blackblade's previous space as a free action.

Skills: Stealth +10, Thievery +10

See the goblin blackblade's complete statistics on page 136 of the *Monster Manual*.

Elf Raiders

Level 2 Encounter (625 XP)

- ✔ 2 guard drakes (D)
- ✔ 2 elf scouts (S)
- ✔ 1 elf archer (A)

Set Up: Many players are accustomed to thinking of elves as friendly humanoids or even potential allies, but these elves and their drake pets are out for blood. They view natural humanoids as savage monsters, and even fey player characters (such as elves or eladrin) as corrupted by their association with other races. They're not interested in conversation and attack without warning. Figure 23-2 shows a map of the ambush they set up for the characters.

Read Aloud: *The hall opens into a wide, long room with a high ceiling, like a grand temple now in ruins. The room narrows at the far end, where a door leads out. Two toothy reptiles hiss at you nearby, while a few stealthy humanoids crouch in and near two piles of rubble across the room. They look like elves, but their drawn bows reveal their hostile intent.*

Elf and Drake Tactics: The drakes stay near their beginning positions, readying charges if necessary to make sure the characters get far enough into the room to give the archer and scouts clear shots. They engage characters in melee, trying to keep the characters away from the elves as much as possible.

The elf scouts move more cautiously up into melee, attacking and then shifting away. They try to engage the characters in or near areas of difficult terrain to take advantage of their *wild step* abilities.

The elf archer tries to stay out of melee combat, attacking with her bow and using *not so close* to shift away from characters who get adjacent.

Guard Drakes (2)

These small reptiles are about the size of a dog, and are equally fierce and protective of their masters. They walk upright on their hind legs. They're covered with green scales but have bright red and yellow crests extending from their heads down their backs.

Guard Drake   **Level 2 Brute**
Small natural beast (reptile) XP: 125

Initiative: +3   **Senses:** Perception +7

HP: 48; **Bloodied:** 24

AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 13; **Will:** 12
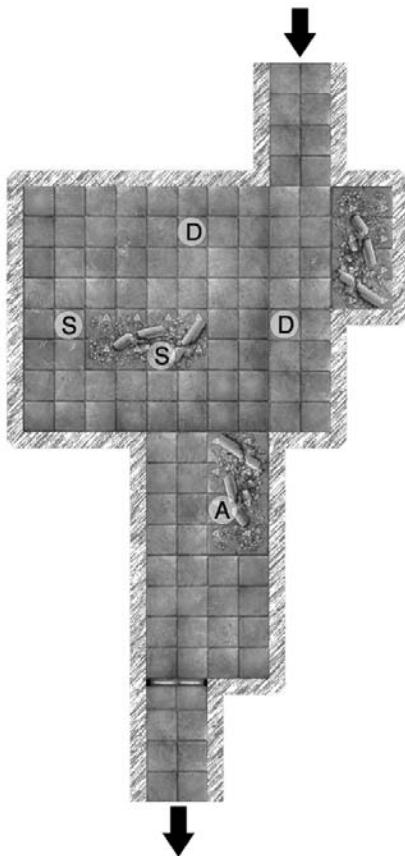
Speed: 6

       Bite (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

       +6 versus AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, or 1d10 + 9 damage while within 2 squares of an ally.

Skills: Perception +7 (+8 if it's within 5 squares of an elf scout)

See the guard drakes' complete statistics on page 90 of the *Monster Manual*.

Elf Scouts (2)

Elves originated in the Feywild but now live in the wild forests of the world. Some are civilized and live near human communities, maintaining friendly relations with other races, but other elves are more wild and hostile. These elves are civilized enough to wear metal chainmail armor and wield dual swords, but they're hostile to the humanoid races of the world.

Elf Scout — **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid — XP: 125
Initiative: +7 — **Senses:** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP: 39; **Bloodied:** 19
AC: 16; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 15; **Will:** 13

Speed: 6

    Longsword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**

+7 versus AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

    Short Sword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**

+7 versus AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

    Two-Weapon Rend (melee attack, standard action, encounter) ◆ **Weapon**

The elf scout makes a longsword attack and a short sword attack against the same target. If both attacks hit, the elf scout deals an additional 4 damage.

    Elven Accuracy (free action, encounter)

The elf can reroll an attack roll. He must use the second roll, even if it's lower.

    Combat Advantage: An elf scout that has combat advantage deals an extra 1d6 damage on its attacks.

    Wild Step: The elf ignores difficult terrain when he shifts.

Skills: Nature +10, Perception +10, Stealth +9

See the elf scouts' complete statistics on page 106 of the *Monster Manual.*

Elf Archer

This elf wears leather armor and wields a longbow and short sword. A quiver of 30 arrows is slung on her back.

Elf Archer   **Level 2 Artillery**

Medium fey humanoid   **XP:** 125

Initiative: +5   **Senses:** Perception +11; low-light vision

HP: 32; **Bloodied:** 16

AC: 15; **Fortitude:** 11; **Reflex:** 13; **Will:** 12

Speed: 7

    Short Sword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**

+5 versus AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

    Longbow (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**

Ranged 20/40; +7 versus AC; 1d10 + 4 damage.

    Archer's Mobility: If the elf archer moves at least 4 squares from her original position, she gains a +2 bonus to ranged attack rolls until the start of her next turn.

    Elven Accuracy (free action, encounter)

The elf can reroll an attack roll. She must use the second roll, even if it's lower.

(continued)

> **Not So Close** (immediate reaction, when an enemy makes a melee attack against the elf archer, encounter)
> The elf archer shifts 1 square and makes a ranged attack against the enemy.
> **Wild Step:** The elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.
> **Skills:** Nature +11, Perception +11, Stealth +10
>
> See the elf archer's complete statistics on page 106 of the *Monster Manual.*

Hobgoblin Guards

Level 3 Encounter (750 XP)

- ✔ 2 hobgoblin soldiers (S)
- ✔ 2 hobgoblin archers (A)
- ✔ flame jet trap

Set Up: Four hobgoblins guard this key intersection in the dungeon, aided by a deadly trap that sprays jets of flame across the room. Figure 23-3 shows a map of the room and the trap.

Read Aloud: *You come to a junction, with one passage leading off to your left and a door ahead and to the right. Four fierce-looking humanoids in heavy armor stand ready as you approach, baring sharp teeth in their reddish faces.*

Perception DC 18: *You notice nozzles in the wall to your left, and scorch marks on the floor.*

Hobgoblin Tactics: The hobgoblins know the workings of the trap and do not willingly enter squares the flame jets can reach. The soldiers move to take up a position adjacent to each other as soon as possible, to benefit from their *phalanx soldier* ability. Likewise, the archers try to remain within 5 squares of each other in order to benefit from the attack bonuses they grant each other. One archer uses his first standard action to activate the flame jet trap.

Hobgoblin Soldiers (2)

Hobgoblins are larger cousins to ordinary goblins. They're disciplined, fearless soldiers who work best as a team. These burly warriors wear scale armor, carry heavy shields, and wield flails that they use to hobble their foes.
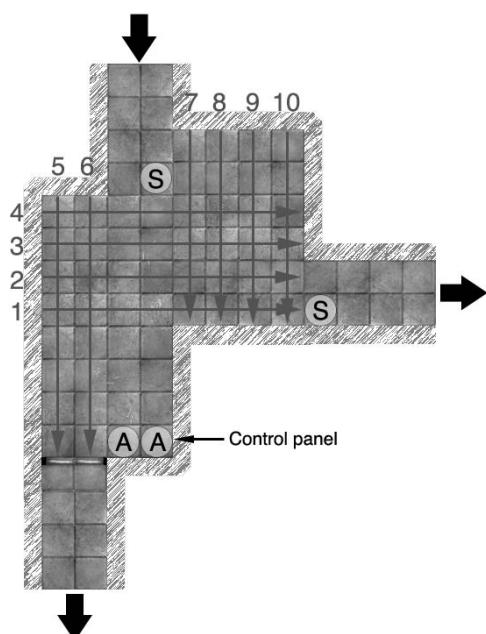
Hobgoblin Soldier **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP: 150
Initiative: +7 **Senses:** Perception +3; low-light vision
HP: 47; **Bloodied:** 23
AC: 20 (22 with *phalanx soldier*); **Fortitude:** 18; **Reflex:** 16; **Will:** 16
Speed: 5

> **Flail** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
>
> +7 versus AC; 1d10 + 4 damage, and the target is marked and slowed until the end of the hobgoblin soldier's next turn.
>
> **Formation Strike** (standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
>
> +7 versus AC; 1d10 + 4 damage, and the hobgoblin soldier shifts 1 square provided it ends in a space adjacent to another hobgoblin.
>
> **Hobgoblin Resilience** (immediate reaction, when the hobgoblin soldier suffers an effect that a save can end, encounter): The hobgoblin soldier rolls a saving throw against the effect.
>
> **Phalanx Soldier:** The hobgoblin soldier gains a +2 bonus to AC while at least one hobgoblin ally is adjacent to it.

Skills: Athletics +10, History +8, Perception +3

See the hobgoblin soldiers' complete statistics on page 139 of the *Monster Manual.*

Figure 23-3:
Hobgoblins like putting things to the torch.

Hobgoblin Archers (2)

These hobgoblins wear only leather armor. They have longswords at their belts, but their primary weapon is the longbow. Each hobgoblin has a quiver of 30 arrows.

Hobgoblin Archer   **Level 3 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 150
Initiative: +7   **Senses:** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP: 39; **Bloodied:** 19
AC: 17; **Fortitude:** 13; **Reflex:** 15; **Will:** 13
Speed: 6

> **Longsword** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> +6 versus AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.
> **Longbow** (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> Ranged 20/40; +9 versus AC; 1d10 + 4 damage, and the hobgoblin archer grants an ally within 5 squares of it a +2 bonus to its next ranged attack roll against the same target.
> **Hobgoblin Resilience** (immediate reaction, when the hobgoblin soldier suffers an effect that a save can end, encounter): The hobgoblin soldier rolls a saving throw against the effect.

Skills: Athletics +5, History +6, Perception +8

See the hobgoblin archers' complete statistics on page 139 of the *Monster Manual.*

Flame Jet Trap

Ten large nozzles are set into the walls of this chamber. Each one spews a jet of flame 6 or 8 squares long and 1 square wide, in a random sequence when the trap is activated.

Level 4 Lurker Trap   XP: 175
Initiative: +6. The trap rolls initiative when a hobgoblin uses a standard action to activate the trap at the control panel near the door.

> **Flame Jet** (close attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire**
> Each round, on the fire trap's turn, roll 1d10. The nozzle corresponding to that number erupts in a blast of flame that fills an entire row or column of squares and attacks every creature in those squares: +7 versus Reflex, 1d8 + 4 fire damage and ongoing 5 fire damage.

Countermeasures: A character adjacent to one of the nozzles can disable it with a DC 14 Thievery check. If the random die roll indicates that a disabled nozzle should fire, the trap doesn't attack that round. If the character's Thievery check fails by 5 or more, the nozzle fires immediately.
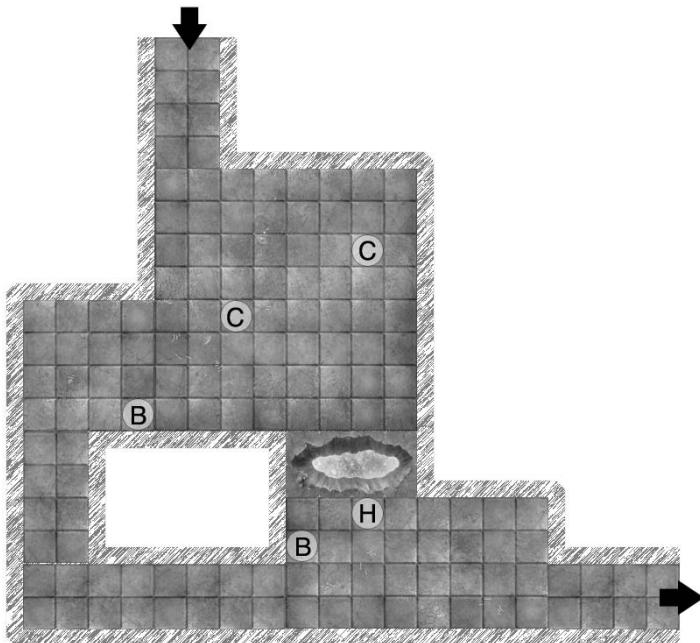
A character adjacent to the control panel can deactivate the trap with a DC 9 Thievery check, or completely disable it with three successful DC 14 Thievery checks. If the character fails any check by 5 or more, one random nozzle fires immediately.

Fiery Doom

Level 4 Encounter (925 XP)

- ✔ 2 magma claws (C)
- ✔ 1 magma hurler (H)
- ✔ 2 fire bats (B)

Set Up: The obvious path through this area of the dungeon is blocked by a chasm filled with bubbling lava. Worse still are the fiery creatures that are drawn to this manifestation of elemental power. Perhaps the lava represents a place where the Elemental Chaos is seeping into the world, and these creatures have passed from that plane to the mortal realm. Or maybe a villainous mage used the lava's heat to summon these monsters to guard the deepest parts of the dungeon. Figure 23-4 shows a map of the room where the fiery monsters lair.

Figure 23-4:
The room is only a little fiery. Its inhabitants, though, are *hot*.

Read Aloud: *Hot air blows gently in your faces as you follow this hallway. Up ahead, you can see the dim red glow of molten rock as the passage opens into a large room. Some of that glow comes from a spot on the floor near the far side of the room, but some comes from strange, rocky outcroppings closer at hand. . . .*

The Chasm: The fiery chasm is a 5-foot drop into a shallow pool of lava. A character can jump the chasm with a DC 11 Athletics check (or DC 21 with no running start). A character who falls in takes 3d10 fire damage. A creature that starts its turn in the chasm takes another 3d10 fire damage. A creature in the chasm can climb out with a DC 10 Athletics check.

Elemental Tactics: The five creatures in this room are all elementals, native inhabitants of the Elemental Chaos. The magma claws keep to the large chamber, engaging characters in melee and using their *spew lava* ability to hold down any character who tries to head down the side passage. The fire bats and the magma hurler concentrate their attacks on characters who get past the magma claws. The fire bats use *fiery swoop* as often as possible, whenever two or more characters are close enough together for the bats to use their power. All of the elementals avoid using their attacks that deal ongoing fire damage against characters who are already taking ongoing damage, instead spreading that damage around as much as possible.

Magma Claws (2)

These elemental creatures are made of earth and fire, assembled in a form that looks a bit like an earthly scorpion, though without the tail. When they're still, they resemble volcanic rock, and they lie still until enemies get close enough to charge.

Magma Claw   **Level 4 Brute**
Medium elemental magical beast (earth, fire)   XP: 175

Initiative: +3   **Senses:** Perception +7

HP: 64; **Bloodied:** 32

AC: 16; **Fortitude:** 16; **Reflex:** 14; **Will:** 13

Immune: petrification, **Resist:** 10 fire, **Vulnerable:** cold (slowed until the end of the magma claw's next turn)

Speed: 4 (8 while charging)

> **Claw** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Fire**
> +7 versus AC; 1d6 + 4 damage plus 1d6 fire damage.

> **Spew Lava** (melee attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Fire**
> +5 versus Reflex; the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and is immobilized (save ends both).

Skills: Endurance +9, Perception +7, Stealth +8

See the magma claws' complete statistics on page 182 of the *Monster Manual.*

Magma Hurler

This elemental creature has a vaguely humanoid form, at least as far as having two arms that end in scoop-like claws and something like a discernable head. It attacks by disgorging lava from its mouth into its claws and throwing the great viscous globs at its enemies.

Magma Hurler   Level 4 Artillery
Medium elemental humanoid (earth, fire)   XP: 175
Initiative: +8   **Senses:** Perception +4
HP: 41; **Bloodied:** 20
AC: 18; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 17; **Will:** 13
Immune: petrification, **Resist:** 10 fire, **Vulnerable:** cold (slowed until the end of the magma claw's next turn)
Speed: 4
    Slam (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
    +8 versus AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.
    Magma Ball (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire**
    Ranged 15; +7 versus Reflex; 1d6 + 6 fire damage. *Miss:* Creatures adjacent to the target take 1d6 fire damage.
Skills: Endurance +7, Perception +4

See the magma hurler's complete statistics on page 182 of the *Monster Manual.*

Fire Bats (2)

These elemental creatures are bat-shaped forms of pure flame. They dart and swoop around in combat, engulfing their foes in the flames of their bodies.

Fire Bat   Level 5 Skirmisher
Medium elemental beast (fire)   XP: 200
Initiative: +8   **Senses:** Perception +8
HP: 60; **Bloodied:** 30
AC: 20; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 20; **Will:** 13
Resist: 10 fire
Speed: 2 (clumsy), fly 8
    Fiery Touch (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire**
    +6 versus Reflex; 1d6 + 4 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

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Fiery Swoop (melee attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Fire**
The fire bat shifts up to 4 squares and can move through occupied squares as it moves. It makes a melee basic attack against any creature whose space it enters. The fire bat can't attack a target more than once in this fashion, and it must end its movement in an unoccupied square.

Skills: Perception +8

See the fire bats' complete statistics on page 27 of the *Monster Manual.*

Orc Reavers

Level 5 Encounter (1,226 XP)

- ✔ 2 rage drakes (RD)
- ✔ 3 orc raiders (R)
- ✔ 4 orc drudges (D)
- ✔ 1 orc eye of Gruumsh (E)

Set Up: Orcs are savage and bloodthirsty, but a strong leader can force them into service, even service as boring as guard duty. These orcs occupy an inner and outer chamber that might stand between the characters and the villain's inner sanctum, or might be the first guard post in an orc-filled dungeon. Figure 23-5 shows the chambers and a sample set of starting positions for the orcs and their rage drake pets.
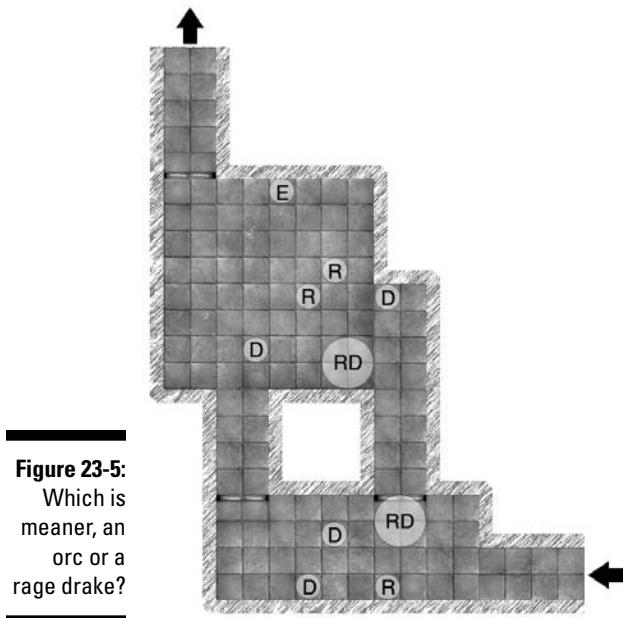
This encounter pushes the limit of experience points for a 5th-level encounter, which is normally worth 1,000 XP. A 6th-level encounter is worth 1,250 XP, so at 1,226, this one only barely counts as 5th level. You don't need to do anything differently based on this information; just be aware that it might be slightly tougher than you would expect a 5th-level encounter to be — although the minions should keep it from being overpowering.

Read Aloud: *A red-scaled lizard the size of a horse blocks the nearer of two doorways on the right-hand side of this room, the only exits. Three gray-skinned humanoids stand ready at your approach.*

Orc and Rage Drake Tactics: The orcs and rage drake in the outer room try to hold the characters back from the doors, but one orc drudge shouts a warning and tries to run out through the farther door leading to the back room.

The monsters in the back room hold their positions in that room until the characters enter the room. At that point, the raiders try to use the twin hallways to move around the party of characters, charging at strikers and controllers who don't wear heavy armor.

The eye of Gruumsh is the orcs' leader. He avoids melee as long as possible, using *eye of wrath* and *swift arm of destruction* to help his allies until an enemy comes within reach of his spear. He saves *chaos hammer* for when he has at least three targets close enough together to get caught in the burst.

Figure 23-5: Which is meaner, an orc or a rage drake?

Rage Drakes (2)

These horse-sized draconic reptiles are ferocious in battle, and only a creature as mean as they are can hope to control them as mounts or pets.

Rage Drake   **Level 5 Brute**

Large natural beast (mount, reptile)   XP: 200

Initiative: +3   **Senses:** Perception +3

HP: 77; **Bloodied:** 38

AC: 17; **Fortitude:** 17; **Reflex:** 15; **Will:** 15

Immune: fear (while bloodied only)

Speed: 8

       Bite (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

       +9 versus AC; 1d10 + 4 damage.

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Claw (melee attack, standard action, at-will)

+8 versus AC; 1d6 + 4 damage.

Raking Charge (melee attack, standard action, at-will)

When the rage drake charges, it makes two claw attacks against a single target.

Bloodied Rage (while bloodied)

The rage drake gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and deals an extra 5 damage per attack.

Skills: Perception +3

See the rage drakes' complete statistics on page 92 of the *Monster Manual.*

Orc Raiders (3)

These gray-skinned humanoids are savage and fearless. They wear leather armor and carry axes — a greataxe for melee combat, and four handaxes to throw.

Orc Raider   **Level 3 Skirmisher**

Medium natural humanoid   XP: 150

Initiative: +5   **Senses:** Perception +3; low-light vision

HP: 46; **Bloodied:** 23

AC: 17; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 14; **Will:** 12

Speed: 6 (8 while charging)

Greataxe (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**

+8 versus AC; 1d12 + 3 damage (crit 1d12 + 15).

Handaxe (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**

Ranged 5/10; +7 versus AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.

Warrior's Surge (melee attack, standard action, usable only while bloodied, encounter): The orc raider makes a melee basic attack and regains 11 hit points.

Killer's Eye: When making a ranged attack, the orc raider ignores cover and concealment (but not total concealment) if the target is within 5 squares of it.

Skills: Endurance +8, Intimidate +5, Perception +1

See the orc raiders' complete statistics on page 203 of the *Monster Manual.*

Orc Drudges (4)

These orcs are clearly smaller and weaker than the raiders — it's okay to tell the players that they're facing minions. They wear hide armor and swing clubs.

Orc Drudge   **Level 4 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 44
Initiative: +2   **Senses:** Perception +0; low-light vision
HP: 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC: 16; **Fortitude:** 15; **Reflex:** 12; **Will:** 12
Speed: 6 (8 while charging)
 Club (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
 +9 versus AC; 5 damage.
Skills: Perception +2

See the orc drudges' complete statistics on page 203 of the *Monster Manual.*

Orc Eye of Gruumsh

This ferocious orc leader has taken out one of his own eyes as a sign of his devotion to the one-eyed god Gruumsh, savage lord of destruction and war. He wears a heavy fur cloak over his leather armor as a badge of office and wields a viciously barbed spear.

Orc Eye of Gruumsh   **Level 5 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 200
Initiative: +6   **Senses:** Perception +3; low-light vision
HP: 64; **Bloodied:** 32
AC: 19; **Fortitude:** 17; **Reflex:** 14; **Will:** 15
Speed: 6 (8 while charging)
 Spear (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
 +10 versus AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.
 Warrior's Surge (melee attack, standard action, usable only while bloodied, encounter): The eye of Gruumsh makes a melee basic attack and regains 11 hit points.
 Death Strike (when reduced to 0 hit points): The eye of Gruumsh makes a melee basic attack. The eye of Gruumsh also has an aura that allows orcs within 10 squares to use this ability.
 Eye of Wrath (ranged attack, minor action, at-will) ◆ **Fear**
 Ranged 5; +8 versus Will; the target takes a –4 penalty to AC (save ends).

(continued)

(continued)

Swift Arm of Destruction (ranged attack, standard action, recharge 5 6) ♦ **Healing**

Ranged 5; one orc within range makes a melee basic attack (as a free action) and regains 15 hit points on a hit or 5 hit points on a miss.

Chaos Hammer (area attack, standard action, encounter) ♦ **Force**

Area burst 1 within 10; +8 versus Reflex, 2d6 + 3 force damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not knocked prone.

Skills: Endurance +10, Intimidate +10, Perception +3, Religion +7
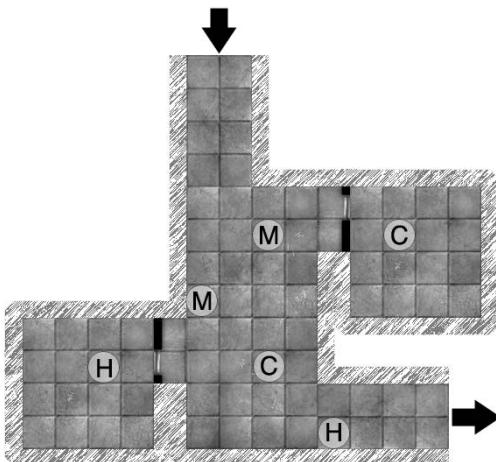
See the orc eye of Gruumsh's complete statistics on page 204 of the *Monster Manual.*

Gnoll Marauders

Level 6 Encounter (1,400 XP)

- ✔ 2 gnoll marauders (M)
- ✔ 2 gnoll claw fighters (C)
- ✔ 2 gnoll huntmasters (H)

Set Up: This pack of gnolls might live in the dungeon, or they might be roving through it looking for something to kill. Either way, they attack the characters with brutal delight. Figure 23-6 shows a dungeon junction where the gnolls are rummaging for food or treasure.

Figure 23-6:
If you've got it, these gnolls want it. Whatever it is.

Read Aloud: *You hear the sound of growling speech from up ahead, answered by something almost like a bark. In the flickering light of a torch, you see a humanoid figure with a head like a wolf or hyena, its eyes glowing green in the shadows. A chorus of high-pitched cackling or barking erupts behind that nearest figure.*

Gnoll Tactics: The gnolls choose a single target, probably a player character defender, and concentrate their attacks on that character. The marauders flank their chosen prey and stay adjacent to that character so the claw fighters and huntmasters benefit from their *pack attack* ability when attacking that character. If their chosen target falls, they select another character and repeat the same approach.

Gnoll Marauders (2)

These bestial humanoids stand over seven feet tall. Their heads resemble those of hyenas, and their bodies are covered with dirty, matted fur. These marauders wear leather armor and carry spears and light shields.

Gnoll Marauder   **Level 6 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 250
Initiative: +5   **Senses:** Perception +7; low-light vision
HP: 84; **Bloodied:** 42
AC: 18; **Fortitude:** 18, **Reflex:** 15, **Will:** 15
Speed: 7

Spear (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
+10 versus AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, or 1d8 + 8 while bloodied.

Quick Bite (melee attack, free action, when the gnoll marauder hits a bloodied enemy with a melee attack, at-will)

The gnoll marauder makes a bite attack against the same target: +7 versus AC, 1d6 + 2 damage, or 1d6 + 4 damage while bloodied.

Pack Attack: The gnoll marauder deals an extra 5 damage on melee attacks against an enemy that has two or more of the marauder's allies adjacent to it.

Skills: Intimidate +8, Perception +7, Stealth +10

See the gnoll marauders' complete statistics on page 132 of the *Monster Manual.*

Gnoll Claw Fighters (2)

These gnolls disdain the use of weapons, fighting instead with their sharpened claws. They wear leather armor for protection.

(continued)

Gnoll Claw Fighter   **Level 6 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 250
Initiative: +7   **Senses:** Perception +6; low-light vision
HP: 70; **Bloodied:** 35
AC: 20; **Fortitude:** 18; **Reflex:** 16; **Will:** 15
Speed: 8

> **Claw** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
> +11 versus AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, or 1d6 + 6 while bloodied.
> **Clawing Charge** (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
> The gnoll claw fighter charges and makes two claw attacks against a single target instead of one melee basic attack.
> **Mobile Melee Attack** (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
> The gnoll claw fighter can move up to 4 squares and make one melee basic attack at any point during that movement. The gnoll doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of its attack.
> **Pack Attack:** The gnoll claw fighter deals an extra 5 damage on melee attacks against an enemy that has two or more of the claw fighter's allies adjacent to it.

Skills: Intimidate +8, Perception +6

See the gnoll claw fighters' complete statistics on page 132 of the *Monster Manual.*

Gnoll Huntmasters (2)

These gnolls, the nominal leaders of this hunting pack, wear leather armor and carry handaxes and longbows. Each gnoll huntmaster has 30 arrows in a quiver at its side.

Gnoll Huntmaster   **Level 5 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 200
Initiative: +6   **Senses:** Perception +11; low-light vision
HP: 50; **Bloodied:** 25
AC: 19; **Fortitude:** 16; **Reflex:** 17; **Will:** 14
Speed: 7

> **Handaxe** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
> +9 versus AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, or 1d6 + 5 while bloodied.
> **Longbow** (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
> Ranged 20/40, +10 versus AC, 1d10 + 4 damage, or 1d10 + 6 while bloodied.
> **Pack Attack:** The gnoll huntmaster deals an extra 5 damage on melee and ranged attacks against an enemy that has two or more of the huntmaster's allies adjacent to it.

Skills: Intimidate +7, Perception +11, Stealth +11

See the gnoll huntmasters' complete statistics on page 132 of the *Monster Manual.*

Forest Hunters

Level 7 Encounter (1,500 XP)
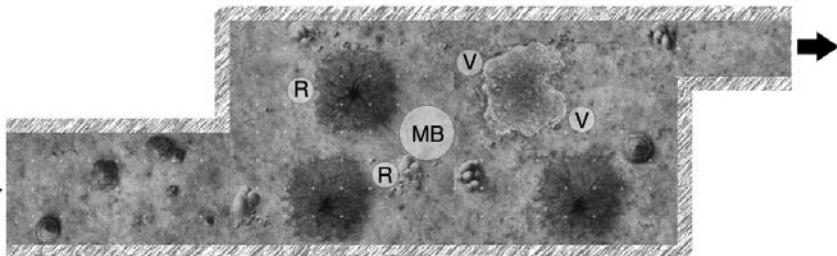
> ✔ 1 macetail behemoth (MB)
> ✔ 2 razorclaw stalkers (R)
> ✔ 2 vine horror spellfiends (V)

Set Up: This encounter takes place outdoors, but the map in Figure 23-7 assumes that the characters' path is narrowly defined. They might be walking up a narrow gorge, following a trail along the side of a cliff, or traversing a narrow band of clear terrain between a river and the thick forest. You can decide what the walls on the map represent, or just place more Dungeon Tiles if the characters move off the edge of the map.

The monsters in this encounter are a diverse bunch, but they share a connection to the natural world. Perhaps they're agents of a forest cult that has been kidnapping villagers for blood sacrifices to the hungry spirit of the corrupted forest. Or they might be champions of a group that views the civilized races as interlopers in the wilderness and seeks to purge their cities and towns from the landscape. They might just be hunters who find sport in hunting intelligent game such as the player characters.

It's a good idea to start the encounter with the characters at the edge of the first large tile, already about 40 feet past the left entrance of the map. This gives them a little room to maneuver backward if they want to.

Figure 23-7:
Ah, the great outdoors! What's so great about it, anyway?

Read Aloud: *A few trees cluster around a small pond up ahead, and you see a large shape thrashing around in the grass near the water. Its back is covered with a hard, plated shell, and its head is studded with sharp horns. A tail tipped with a heavy club swishes back and forth behind it. As it turns its massive head toward you, two humanoids come into view near the closest trees. Back near the pool, two masses of vines congeal into forms that vaguely resemble human shape.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

✔ *Trees:* The three large tree trunks each fill one square, blocking movement through those squares and providing cover to characters behind them. A character can climb a tree with a DC 12 Athletics check.

✔ *Shrubs:* Smaller trees and shrubs in the area are difficult terrain. Tiny plants that don't fill a whole square have no effect on movement.

✔ *Rocks:* Squares full of large rocks block normal movement, but a character can scramble over them at half speed with a DC 10 Athletics check.

✔ *Pool:* The shallow pool is difficult terrain.

Monster Tactics: The macetail behemoth is well-trained to pin characters down in melee combat. It uses *tail sweep* the first time at least two characters are adjacent to it on its turn, and again as often as it recharges. The vine horrors use *lashing vine of dread* to push characters into positions near the behemoth, and *caustic cloud* against characters who are keeping their distance from the beast. The razorclaw stalkers stay in constant motion to benefit from their *skirmish* ability, even if it means spreading their attacks across multiple characters.

Macetail Behemoth

This enormous reptile, the size of a small elephant, has an armored back and clubbed tail like an ankylosaur. Its plating is studded with sharp spikes to match its aggressive temperament.

Macetail Behemoth   **Level 7 Soldier**

Large natural beast (reptile) XP: 300

Initiative: +8   **Sense:** Perception +5

HP: 82; **Bloodied:** 41

AC: 23; **Fortitude:** 23; **Reflex:** 18; **Will:** 18

Speed: 5

    Tail Bludgeon (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

    Reach 2, +14 versus AC; 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the macetail behemoth's next turn.

    Tail Sweep (close attack, standard action, recharge 4 5 6)

    Close burst 1, +12 versus Reflex, 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is knocked prone if it is Medium size or smaller.

Skills: Perception +5

See the macetail behemoth's complete statistics on page 31 of the *Monster Manual*.

Razorclaw Stalkers (2)

With facial features and a crouching posture that suggests a hunting cat, these humanoids are the descendants of true lycanthropes such as weretigers. When they're bloodied, they become even more tigerlike, moving with supernatural speed and agility. They wear leather armor and fight with short swords.

Razorclaw Stalker   **Level 7 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, shifter   XP: 300
Initiative: +7   **Senses:** Perception +9; low-light vision
HP: 79; **Bloodied:** 39
AC: 21; **Fortitude:** 20; **Reflex:** 20; **Will:** 18
Speed: 6

Short Sword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
+13 versus AC, 1d6 + 4 damage.

Short Sword Riposte (melee attack, free action, when an enemy makes an opportunity attack against the razorclaw stalker, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
The razorclaw stalker makes a short sword attack against the enemy.

Skirmish +1d6: If, on its turn, the razorclaw stalker ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals an extra 1d6 damage on its attacks until the start of its next turn.

Razorclaw Shifting (minor action, usable only while bloodied, encounter): For the rest of the encounter or until rendered unconscious, the razorclaw stalker gains +2 speed and a +1 bonus to AC and Reflex defense.

Skills: Acrobatics +12, Perception +9, Stealth +12, Streetwise +8

See the razorclaw stalkers' complete statistics on page 233 of the *Monster Manual.*

Vine Horror Spellfiends (2)

These plant creatures are created when humanoid spellcasters die in forests touched by the energies of the Shadowfell. They look like walking masses of vines, tendrils, leaves, and thorny claws.

Vine Horror Spellfiend   **Level 7 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (plant)   XP: 300
Initiative: +7   **Senses:** Perception +10; blindsight 10
HP: 65; **Bloodied:** 32
AC: 19; **Fortitude:** 18; **Reflex:** 17; **Will:** 15

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> **Speed:** 6 (forest walk, swamp walk), swim 6
> **Claw** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
> +10 versus AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.
> **Shock Orb** (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Lightning**
> Ranged 10, +12 versus AC, 1d8 + 4 lightning damage.
> **Lashing Vine of Dread** (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fear**
> Ranged 5, +10 versus Reflex, 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares. This is a fear effect.
> **Caustic Cloud** (area attack, standard action, recharge 4 5 6) ◆ **Acid**
> Area burst 1 within 10, +10 versus Fortitude, 1d6 + 3 acid damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 acid damage and is blinded (save ends both).
> **Skills:** Perception +10, Stealth +12
>
> See the vine horror spellfiends' complete statistics on page 260 of the *Monster Manual.*

Stalking Shadows

Level 8 Encounter (1,750 XP)

> ✔ 3 shadar-kai warriors (R)
>
> ✔ 1 shadar-kai witch (W)
>
> ✔ 1 spectral panther (P)
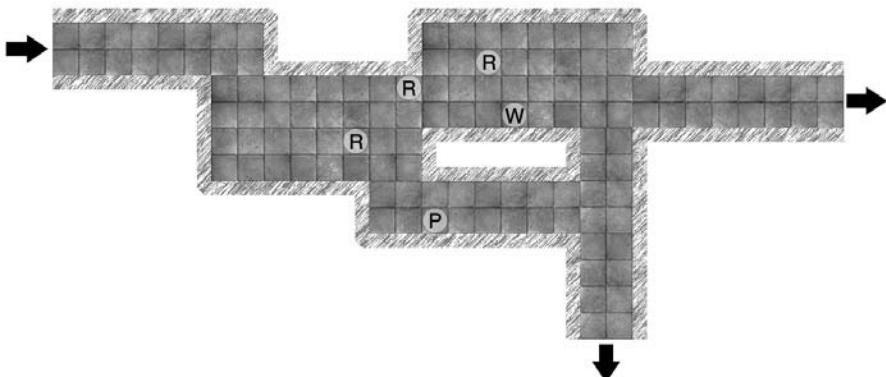
Set Up: Figure 23-8 shows a network of natural tunnels where dangerous denizens of the Shadowfell hunt in the darkness. Four shadar-kai and their spectral panther pet lurk in the perpetual gloom of these caves. They might be guards protecting something beyond, a patrol through the territory of a shadar-kai ruler, or even potential allies the PCs might be able to persuade to help them defeat a cult of Orcus in the area. (In that case, you could structure this encounter as a skill challenge where the characters must use Diplomacy, Arcana, and Religion to convince the shadar-kai to help them.)

Read Aloud: *The walls of these stone tunnels seem to absorb all light, shrouding the area in shadow.*

Perception DC 25: *Stealthy figures lurk in the shadows ahead, holding blades at the ready.*

Dim Light: Because of this area's ties to the Shadowfell, no light source can create bright light here. Creatures in the dim light have concealment to any character that doesn't have low-light vision or darkvision. (The shadar-kai and spectral panther all have low-light vision.) Concealment imposes a –2 penalty on melee and ranged attacks against that creature.

Figure 23-8: The brightest torch can't light the shadows in these tunnels.

Shadar-Kai and Panther Tactics: The shadar-kai warriors engage three different targets, locking them in melee and using *cage of gloom* to literally hold them in place. The spectral panther moves among the engaged characters, taking advantage of flanking positions whenever possible, and using *spectral form* and *invisibility* to avoid attacks and gain combat advantage against targets it can't flank. If a character engages the witch, the panther focuses its attacks on that character.

Shadar-Kai Warriors (3)

Shadar-kai are pale humanoids that live in the Shadowfell and serve the Raven Queen, the goddess of death and fate. They're a bleak and grim race that ornament their skin with tattoos and piercings. These warriors wield katars and wear chainmail.

Shadar-Kai Warrior   **Level 8 Soldier**

Medium shadow humanoid   XP: 350

Initiative: +11   **Senses:** Perception +6; low-light vision

HP: 86; **Bloodied:** 43

AC: 24; **Fortitude:** 19; **Reflex:** 20; **Will:** 17

Speed: 5

    Katar (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**

+13 versus AC; 1d6 + 3 damage (crit 1d6 + 9).

    Double Attack (melee attack, standard action, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**

The shadar-kai warrior makes two katar attacks.

    Cage of Gloom (melee attack, standard action, recharge 5 6)

The shadar-kai warrior makes a katar attack. If the attack hits, the shadar-kai warrior makes a secondary attack as strands of shadow coil around the target. *Secondary Attack:* +11 versus Reflex, the target is restrained (save ends).

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Shadow Jaunt (move action, encounter) ♦ **Teleportation**

The shadar-kai warrior teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of its next turn. While insubstantial, the shadar-kai warrior takes half damage from all attacks.

Skills: Acrobatics +15, Perception +6, Stealth +15

See the shadar-kai warriors' complete statistics on page 231 of the *Monster Manual.*

Shadar-Kai Witch

Witches are the oracles and spiritual leaders of the shadar-kai. This witch wears a billowing robe of midnight blue and disdains the use of any weapon except the *blackfire* she conjures to wreathe her hands.

Shadar-Kai Witch	**Level 7 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid	XP: 300
Initiative: +6	**Senses:** Perception +4; low-light vision

HP: 77; **Bloodied:** 38
AC: 21; **Fortitude:** 18; **Reflex:** 19; **Will:** 19
Speed: 6

Blackfire Touch (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Fire, Necrotic**

+11 versus Reflex; 2d6 + 4 fire and necrotic damage.

Beshadowed Mind (ranged attack, standard action, recharge 4 5 6) ♦ **Necrotic**

Ranged 10, +11 versus Will, 2d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target has no line of sight to anything more than 2 squares from it (save ends).

Deep Shadow (close attack, standard action, encounter) ♦ **Necrotic**

This power creates an aura of thick, writhing shadows that extends 2 squares around the witch. The witch and any other shadow creatures in the aura gain concealment. In addition, enemies that enter or start their turns in the aura take 5 necrotic damage, and enemies (including flying ones) also treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain. The shadar-kai witch can sustain the aura as a minor action. However, the effect ends if she uses *shadow jaunt* or moves more than half her speed on her turn.

Shadow Jaunt (move action, encounter) ♦ **Teleportation**

The shadar-kai witch teleports 3 squares and becomes insubstantial until the start of her next turn. While insubstantial, the shadar-kai witch takes half damage from all attacks.

Skills: Acrobatics +8, Arcana +12, Perception +4, Religion +12, Stealth +13

See the shadar-kai witch's complete statistics on page 231 of the *Monster Manual.*

Spectral Panther

A spectral panther is a shadowy feline native to the Shadowfell. It's invisible most of the time as it hunts through the darkness, becoming visible only when it attacks.

Spectral Panther   Level 9 Lurker

Medium shadow beast   XP: 400

Initiative: +13   **Senses:** Perception +10; low-light vision

HP: 76; **Bloodied:** 38

AC: 23; **Fortitude:** 22; **Reflex:** 24; **Will:** 20

Speed: 7

Claws (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

+14 versus AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.

Tail Spike (melee attack, immediate reaction, when an enemy moves or shifts into a square adjacent to the spectral panther, at-will)

+14 versus AC, 1d6 + 2 damage.

Combat Advantage: The spectral panther deals an extra 2d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Invisibility (standard action, usable only while in *spectral form,* at-will) ♦ **Illusion**

The spectral panther is invisible until it makes an attack. It can end this effect on its turn as a free action.

Spectral Form (standard action, at-will): The spectral panther becomes insubstantial. While insubstantial, it takes half damage from all attacks. It gains a +5 power bonus to Stealth checks but deals only half damage with its attacks. It can end this effect on its turn as a free action.

Skills: Perception +10, Stealth +14 (+19 in *spectral form*)

See the spectral panther's complete statistics on page 213 of the *Monster Manual.*

Big Trouble

Level 9 Encounter (2,200 XP)
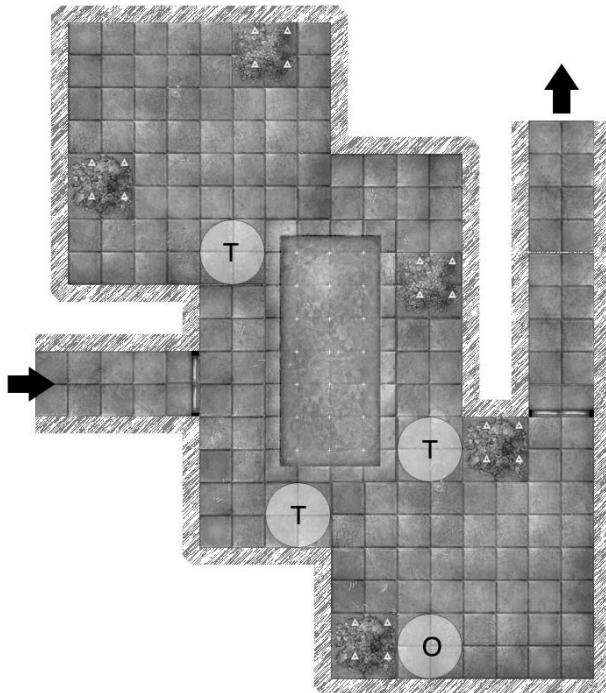
    ✔ 3 trolls (T)

    ✔ 1 oni mage (O)

Set Up: Wicked and stupid, trolls are easily bent to the will of a strong, smart leader, such as the oni mage in the large room shown in Figure 23-9. This could be a climactic encounter, the antechamber to the big villain's hideout with the trolls and oni as guards, or a side lair in a larger dungeon complex where the trolls hunt, bringing the treasure they find to the oni mage.

The doors leading in and out of this room are large and heavy, requiring a DC 15 Strength to open. (The trolls have a +10 Strength check modifier, and the oni mage has a +11. Outside of combat, they can open the doors easily, assuming an average roll of 10 on their checks. In combat, it's almost trivially easy.)

At the start of the encounter, the oni mage is disguised as troll using its *deceptive veil* power. Its greatsword is hidden in the rubbish beside its starting position.

Figure 23-9: Sometimes deadly things come in really big packages.

Read Aloud: *The heavy door creaks open, revealing an enormous room beyond. A large pool of foul-smelling brown water dominates the center of the room, and piles of filth and rubbish are heaped against the walls. Three warty green humanoids squat at the pool's edge, looking up dimly at the noise of the door. A fourth troll huddles against the right-hand wall.*

Insight DC 25: *There's something different about the troll near the wall. Its face is more expressive, its movements more calculated. You'd guess that it's some other creature disguised as a troll.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

- ✔ *Pool:* The noxious pool is 10 feet deep. A character who falls into the pool can swim out with a DC 10 Athletics check, but the vile stuff deals ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). The trolls and oni are effectively immune to the poison because of their regeneration.
- ✔ *Rubbish:* The heaps of rubbish along the walls are difficult terrain.

Troll and Oni Tactics: The stupid trolls wade into melee with little concern for their safety. They're smart enough to avoid characters wielding fire or acid, but otherwise display no tactical understanding or strategy. The oni mage, on the other hand, fights much more intelligently. It turns invisible and uses its *freezing blast* and *lightning storm* powers, then grabs its greatsword from the rubbish pile and drops its disguise. It moves into flanking positions with the trolls to gain combat advantage against the characters and uses its magical abilities as soon as they recharge.

Trolls (3)

Trolls are large, ugly brutes with warty green skin and enormous jaws filled with jagged teeth. They stand about 12 feet tall and have no need for armor or weapons.

Troll	**Level 9 Brute**
Large natural humanoid   XP: 400

Initiative: +7   **Senses:** Perception +11

HP: 100; **Bloodied:** 50

Regeneration: 10 (The troll regains 10 hit points at the start of each of its turns. If the troll takes acid or fire damage, regeneration doesn't function until the end of its next turn.)

AC: 20; **Fortitude:** 21; **Reflex:** 18; **Will:** 17

Speed: 8

> **Claw** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
> Reach 2, +13 versus AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.
> **Frenzied Strike** (melee attack, free action, when the troll's attack bloodies an enemy, at-will)
> The troll makes a claw attack.
> **Troll Healing ◆ Healing**
> If the troll is reduced to 0 hit points by an attack that does not deal acid or fire damage, it rises on its next turn (as a move action) with 10 hit points.

Skills: Athletics +15, Endurance +14, Perception +11

See the trolls' complete statistics on page 254 of the *Monster Manual.*

Oni Mage

Despite its brutish appearance, an oni mage is a clever schemer. It leads the trolls by cunning manipulation and bullying. It wears chainmail (initially hidden by its *deceptive veil*) and wields a greatsword in melee combat.

Oni Mage **Level 10 Elite Lurker**

Large natural humanoid XP: 1,000

Initiative: +10 **Senses:** Perception +7; darkvision

HP: 172; **Bloodied:** 86

Regeneration: 5

AC: 26; **Fortitude:** 25; **Reflex:** 24; **Will:** 24

Speed: 7, fly 8 (clumsy)

> **Greatsword** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> Reach 2, +15 versus AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.
>
> **Freezing Blast** (close attack, standard action, recharge 6) ◆ **Cold**
> Close blast 5, +15 versus Fortitude, 1d8 + 6 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
>
> **Lightning Storm** (area attack, standard action, recharge 5 6) ◆ **Lightning**
> Area burst 2 within 10, +15 versus Reflex, 2d6 + 4 lightning damage.
>
> **Combat Advantage:** The oni mage deals an extra 1d6 damage on melee attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.
>
> **Deceptive Veil** (minor action, at-will) ◆ **Illusion**
> The oni mage can disguise itself to appear as any Medium or Large humanoid. A successful Insight check (opposed by the oni's Bluff check) pierces the disguise.
>
> **Invisibility** (standard action, at-will) ◆ **Illusion**
> The oni turns invisible until it attacks.

Elite: As an elite monster, the oni mage gets a +2 bonus on saving throws and has 1 action point that it can spend during the encounter.

Skills: Arcana +14, Bluff +15, Insight +12, Perception +7

See the oni mage's complete statistics on page 201 of the *Monster Manual.*

Swamp Terrors

Level 10 Encounter (2,500 XP)
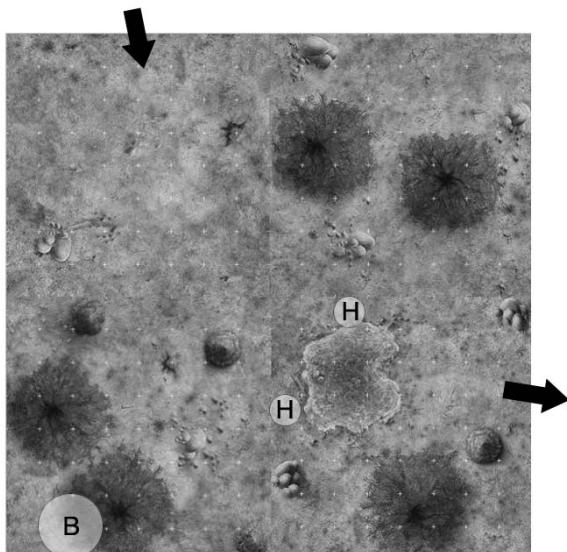
⤶ 2 chuuls (not on map)

⤶ 2 bog hags (H)

⤶ 1 venom-eye basilisk (B)

Set Up: As the characters make their way across swampy ground, they come across two young women weeping near a pool. Figure 23-10 shows the area. This doesn't have to be an outdoor swamp — it could be a vast underground cavern lit by glowing mushrooms that tower over the fetid water, or an ancient ruin half-drowned in a stinking marsh.

The weeping women are actually bog hags. They try to lure the characters close to the pool, then summon their allies — two chuuls hiding in the deep water and a venom-eye basilisk lurking in the undergrowth nearby — to help them kill and eat the characters.

Figure 23-10:
Who says wetter is better?

Read Aloud: *A pool of clear water comes into view, a welcome respite from the mud and muck you've been trudging through. Crouched at the edge of the pool, though, are two young human women, weeping and wailing. Seeing you approach, they stretch out their arms. "Help us, travelers! Our sister has drowned!"*

Insight DC 17: *There's something not quite convincing about the women's grief.*

Perception DC 21: *A large reptilian form is half-hidden beneath a tree over beyond the pool.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

> ✔ *Swampy Ground:* The whole encounter area is swampy ground. Creatures can't run or charge in the area unless they have swamp walk, but otherwise movement is unaffected.

- ✔ *Trees:* The five large tree trunks each fill one square, blocking movement through those squares and providing cover to characters behind them. A character can climb a tree with a DC 15 Athletics check.

- ✔ *Shrubs:* Smaller trees and shrubs in the area are difficult terrain. Tiny plants that don't fill a whole square have no effect on movement.

- ✔ *Rocks:* Squares full of large rocks block normal movement, but a character can scramble over them at half speed with a DC 10 Athletics check.

- ✔ *Pool:* What looks like a fairly small pool actually opens into a large water-filled cavern. Two chuuls lurk under there, waiting for the hags to signal them up to attack. Swimming in the pool requires a DC 15 Athletics check.

Monster Tactics: If they fool the characters, the hags wait until their prey is right next to the pool; then they whistle for the chuuls and basilisk to attack. Characters who notice either the hags' poor bluff or the hiding basilisk aren't surprised by the attack and can act in the surprise round along with the monsters. The chuuls erupt from the pool and attack the nearest characters, the hags make claw attacks against the nearest characters, and the basilisk turns its *venomous gaze* on the largest clump of characters it can affect.

Chuuls (2)

Looking somewhat like enormous crustaceans with poisonous tentacles, chuuls are strange aberrations sometimes associated with mind flayers.

Chuul   **Level 10 Soldier**

Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)   XP: 500

Initiative: +10   **Senses:** Perception +9; darkvision

HP: 109; **Bloodied:** 54

AC: 27; **Fortitude:** 26; **Reflex:** 20; **Will:** 21

Speed: 6, swim 6

   Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

   Reach 2, +17 versus AC; 1d6 + 6 damage, or 3d6 + 6 damage against an immobilized creature.

   Double Attack (melee attack, standard action, at-will)

   The chuul makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit a single target, the chuul makes a secondary attack against the same target with its tentacles. *Secondary Attack:* +14 versus Fortitude, the target is immobilized (save ends). This is a poison effect.

   Tentacle Net ♦ Poison

   A creature hit by a chuul's opportunity attack is immobilized until the end of the chuul's next turn.

Skills: Perception +9

See the chuuls' complete statistics on page 43 of the *Monster Manual.*

Bog Hags (2)

Vicious fey that embody the decay and corruption of the swamp, bog hags can appear as beautiful women to lure their prey. Once enemies are within reach, though, they reveal their true, hideous forms and rend with their long, sharp claws.

Bog Hag   **Level 10 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid (aquatic)   XP: 500
Initiative: +11   **Senses:** Perception +7; low-light vision
HP: 107; **Bloodied:** 53
AC: 24; **Fortitude:** 23; **Reflex:** 21; **Will:** 19
Speed: 8 (swamp walk), swim 8

     Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
     +15 versus AC; 1d8 + 6 damage.

     Rending Claws (melee attack, standard action, recharges when first bloodied)
     The bog hag makes two claw attacks against the same target. If both claws hit, the hag deals an extra 5 damage to the target.

     Unwholesome Presence: Aura 3; enemies in the aura gain only half the normal hit points from spending healing surges.

     Change Shape (minor action, at-will) ♦ **Polymorph**
     A bog hag can alter its physical form to appear as a beautiful young female elf, half-elf, eladrin, or human. It can revert to its true form as a minor action.

     Evasive Charge: The bog hag shifts 2 squares after charging.

Skills: Intimidate +12, Nature +12, Perception +7, Stealth +14

See the bog hags' complete statistics on page 150 of the *Monster Manual.*

After the surprise round, the chuuls pin characters down in melee while the hags charge in and shift out, taking full advantage of the swampy terrain. The basilisk doesn't emerge from its position unless it has to.

Venom-Eye Basilisk

Vaguely resembling a six-legged crocodile, a basilisk is a dangerous reptile with a deadly poisonous gaze.

Venom-Eye Basilisk   **Level 10 Artillery**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP: 500

(continued)

Initiative: +6   **Senses:** Perception +11
HP: 87; **Bloodied:** 43
AC: 27; **Fortitude:** 25; **Reflex:** 22; **Will:** 21
Speed: 6

    Bite (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

    +15 versus AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.

    Venomous Gaze (area attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Gaze, Poison**

    Area burst 1 within 10, +15 versus Fortitude, 2d6 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). As long as the target is taking ongoing poison damage from this attack, the target deals 2 poison damage to all creatures adjacent to it at the start of its turn.

Skills: Perception +11, Stealth +11

See the venom-eye basilisk's complete statistics on page 26 of the *Monster Manual.*

Chapter 24

Ten Paragon Encounters

*T*his chapter presents ten encounters designed to challenge characters in the paragon tier (level 11 through 20). See the beginning of Chapter 23 for general information about the encounters presented in this chapter.

Serpent Cult

Level 11 Encounter (3,075 XP)
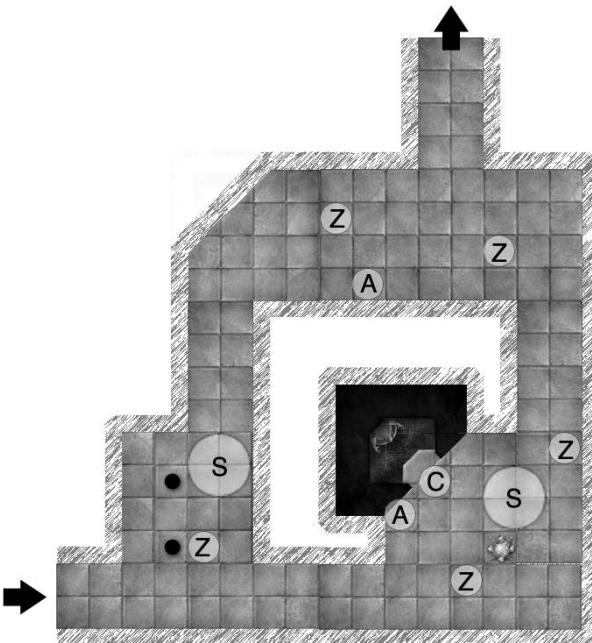
- ✔ Snaketongue celebrant (C)
- ✔ 2 snaketongue assassins (A)
- ✔ 5 snaketongue zealots (Z)
- ✔ 2 crushgrip constrictor snakes (S)

Set Up: Who's behind the strange disappearances and assassinations in the city? This cult of Zehir, human devotees of the serpent god who have received his "blessing" and become like the yuan-ti. Figure 24-1 shows their hidden temple, which might be hidden in the jungle, tucked amid some ancient ruins sacred to Zehir, or in an abandoned warehouse in a city slum.

Read Aloud: *The air here is warm and humid, and it seems very dark despite a hint of firelight flickering on the stone ahead. Yellow eyes gleam in the darkness as a dry scraping of scales reaches your ears.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

- ✔ *Pillars:* A Medium or smaller creature in the same square as one of the small pillars has cover.
- ✔ *Brazier:* Outside the snake pit is a large brass brazier full of flaming coals, standing on an elegant tripod. An adjacent creature can knock it over to attack another adjacent creature, making a Dexterity attack against the target's Reflex defense. On a hit, the target takes 3d10 fire damage.

Figure 24-1:
Why did it
have to be
snakes?

> ✔ *Snake Pit:* The center of the cult's complex is a pit full of venomous snakes, with a statue of Zehir overlooking it. Here the cult offers sacrifices to its dark god by throwing victims into the pit. A creature that starts its turn in the pit takes 2d10 poison damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Serpent Cult Tactics: The zealots and crushgrip constrictor snakes engage the characters in melee as the celebrant hangs back, leading with his ranged and area attacks. In melee, the assassins and the celebrant begin in their humanoid forms, using their poisoned blades to deal ongoing poison damage to characters and then switching to *serpent form* for the sake of higher defenses and superior melee attacks. When their opponents save against the ongoing poison damage, they switch back to humanoid form to deliver a fresh dose of poison.

If the celebrant or the assassin has an opportunity to bull rush a character into the snake pit, the monster does so in *serpent form*.

Snaketongue Celebrant

In the absence of true yuan-ti to lead them, snaketongue cults of Zehir turn to priests of their own kind, such as this celebrant. Mostly human, he wears a hooded robe that helps to hide his scaly skin

and alien eyes when he moves about the city. He carries a scimitar that drips with poison, calling it a fang of Zehir.

Snaketongue Celebrant   **Level 11 Controller**

Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger), human   XP: 600

Initiative: +9   **Senses:** Perception +14

HP: 117; **Bloodied:** 58

AC: 24; **Fortitude:** 22; **Reflex:** 20; **Will:** 24

Resist: 10 poison

Speed: 7

      Scimitar (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Poison, Weapon**

      +14 versus AC, 1d8 + 3 damage (crit 2d8 + 11), and the snaketongue celebrant makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +12 versus Fortitude, ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

      Serpent's Lash (ranged attack, standard action, recharge 4 5 6) ◆ **Psychic**

      Ranged 5, a whip of amber-colored energy lashes the target; +14 versus Will, 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage to all of its enemies until the end of the snaketongue celebrant's next turn.

      Coils of Despair (area attack, standard action, recharge 5 6)

      Area burst 5 within 10, targets enemies; +14 versus Reflex, the target is restrained (save ends) by writhing coils of green energy.

      Serpent Form (move action, at-will) ◆ **Polymorph**

      The snaketongue celebrant transforms into a crushgrip constrictor (see the "Crushgrip Constrictor Snakes" sidebar). Any equipment the celebrant is carrying merges with the new form. The celebrant uses the crushgrip constrictor's statistics instead of its own, except for hit points. Reverting to its true form is a minor action.

Skills: Diplomacy +15, Insight +14, Intimidate +15, Perception +14, Religion +13

See the snaketongue celebrant's complete statistics on page 273 of the *Monster Manual.*

Snaketongue Assassins (2)

These trained killers believe that killing with poison glorifies Zehir. They wear leather armor and carry poisoned daggers.

Snaketongue Assassin   **Level 9 Lurker**

Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger), human   XP: 400

Initiative: +13   **Senses:** Perception +8

HP: 80; **Bloodied:** 40

AC: 23; **Fortitude:** 21; **Reflex:** 21; **Will:** 20

(continued)

Resist: 10 poison
Speed: 7

        Dagger (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Poison, Weapon**
+14 versus AC, 1d4 + 3 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

        Crowd Shield: The snaketongue assassin gains a +2 bonus to its AC and Reflex defense if it has one creature adjacent to it, or a +4 bonus if two or more creatures are adjacent to it.

        Serpent Form (move action, at-will) ♦ **Polymorph**

        The snaketongue assassin transforms into a crushgrip constrictor (see the "Crushgrip Constrictor Snakes" sidebar). Any equipment the assassin is carrying merges with the new form. The assassin uses the crushgrip constrictor's statistics instead of its own, except for hit points. Reverting to its true form is a minor action.

Skills: Perception +8, Religion +11, Stealth +14

See the snaketongue assassins' complete statistics on page 273 of the *Monster Manual.*

Snaketongue Zealots (5)

These low-ranking servants of the secret cult of Zehir do the celebrant's bidding. They wear leather armor and carry greatswords smeared with poison.

Snaketongue Zealot   **Level 12 Minion**
Medium natural humanoid, human   XP: 175
Initiative: +7   **Senses:** Perception +6
HP: 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC: 25; **Fortitude:** 23; **Reflex:** 22; **Will:** 22
Speed: 6

        Greatsword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Poison, Weapon**
+16 versus AC, 6 damage, and the snaketongue zealot makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +14 versus Fortitude, ongoing 3 poison damage (save ends).

Skills: Perception +6

See the snaketongue zealots' complete statistics on page 272 of the *Monster Manual.*

Crushgrip Constrictor Snakes (2)

These enormous snakes have yellow-gold scales and glittering topaz eyes.

Crushgrip Constrictor   **Level 9 Soldier**
Large natural beast (reptile) XP: 400

Initiative: +9   **Senses:** Perception +12; low-light vision

HP: 96; **Bloodied:** 48

AC: 25; **Fortitude:** 25; **Reflex:** 22; **Will:** 22

Speed: 6, climb 6, swim 6

> **Bite** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
>
> +15 versus AC, 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape).
>
> **Constrict** (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
>
> Affects a target the crushgrip constrictor has grabbed; +13 versus Fortitude, 2d6 + 12 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the crushgrip constrictor's next turn.
>
> **Bull Rush** (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
>
> +10 versus Fortitude, the target is pushed 1 square and the snake shifts 1 square into the space the target vacated. (The actual snakes don't generally use this attack, but an assassins or celebrant in *serpent form* might use it to push a character into the snake pit.)

Skills: Perception +12, Stealth +12

See the crushgrip constrictors' complete statistics on page 240 of the *Monster Manual*.

Rocky Road

Level 12 Encounter (3,500 XP)
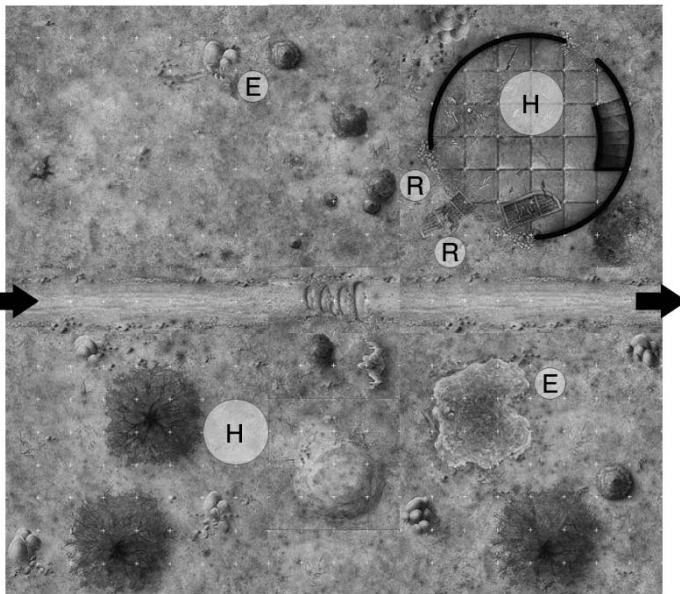
> ✔ 2 hill giants (H)
>
> ✔ 2 galeb duhr rockcallers (R)
>
> ✔ 2 galeb duhr earthbreakers (E)

Set Up: The characters are traveling along an old dirt road in the wilderness when they encounter a pair of hill giants and their galeb duhr slaves. This might be just a random encounter along the way to some other destination, or the characters might be looking for something in or under the old ruined tower on the map in Figure 24-2. Winding stairs in the tower might lead down to a tiny cellar or into the characters' next dungeon adventure.

Read Aloud: *A crumbling ruin that was once a round tower lies scattered on a hilltop ahead. The road runs straight ahead and past the tower, steps cut into the hillside. An old statue stands near the top of the steps, and for a moment you might think the hulking figure near it is another statue — but then it moves.*

Perception DC 19: *Some of the boulders scattered across the hillside seem to be moving!*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

✔ *Trees:* The three large tree trunks each fill one square, blocking movement through those squares and providing cover to characters behind them. A character can climb a tree with a DC 12 Athletics check.

✔ *Shrubs:* Smaller trees and shrubs in the area are difficult terrain. Tiny plants that don't fill a whole square have no effect on movement.

✔ *Rocks and Statue:* Squares full of large rocks block normal movement, but a character can scramble over them at half speed with a DC 10 Athletics check. The statue blocks two squares and gives cover to creatures behind it.

✔ *Rubble:* The rubble and other debris in and around the tower are difficult terrain.

✔ *Pool:* The shallow pool is difficult terrain.

Giant and Galeb Duhr Tactics: The galeb duhrs are hiding at the start of the encounter, looking just like the boulders that litter the field. They rely on this disguise only until the characters get close enough to attack.

The giant in the tower begins by hurling rocks, while the one outside gets into melee immediately. The galeb duhr rockcallers lead off with *earthen grasp* against player character defenders or leaders, and then they roll into melee. The giants attack restrained characters with their superior reach while the galeb duhr earthcallers use ranged attacks against player character strikers and controllers.

Hill Giants (2)

These 14-foot-tall humanoids have a rough, craggy look, as though they were shaped from the earth itself. They wear hide armor and carry greatclubs that might just be fallen trees.

Hill Giant **Level 13 Brute**
Large natural humanoid (giant) XP: 800
Initiative: +5 **Senses:** Perception +7
HP: 159; **Bloodied:** 79
AC: 25; **Fortitude:** 27; **Reflex:** 21; **Will:** 23
Speed: 8

Greatclub (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Reach 2, +15 versus AC, 2d10 + 7 damage.
Sweeping Club (melee attack, standard action, encounter) ♦ **Weapon**
The hill giant makes a greatclub attack against two Medium or smaller targets; on a hit, the target is pushed 2 squares and knocked prone.
Hurl Rock (ranged attack, standard action, at-will)
Ranged 8/16, +15 versus AC, 2d6 + 5 damage.
Skills: Athletics +16, Perception +7

See the hill giants' complete statistics on page 121 of the *Monster Manual.*

Galeb Duhr Rockcallers (2)

Legend says that these creatures of living stone were once dwarves who toiled in servitude to the titans of the Elemental Chaos. Now they look something like walking boulders, and until they start to move it's hard to distinguish them from the surrounding terrain.

Galeb Duhr Rockcaller **Level 11 Controller**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth) XP: 600
Initiative: +5 **Senses:** Perception +12; tremorsense 10
HP: 118; **Bloodied:** 59
AC: 25; **Fortitude:** 26; **Reflex:** 21; **Will:** 22
Immune: petrification, poison
Speed: 4 (earth walk), burrow 6

Slam (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
+16 versus AC, 2d8 + 4 damage.
Rolling Attack (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
The galeb duhr rockcaller moves up to 4 squares and then attacks an adjacent target; +14 versus Fortitude, 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

(continued)

> **Earthen Grasp** (ranged attack, standard action, at-will)
>
> An earthen fist rises up to restrain a target; Ranged 10, +14 versus Fortitude, the target is restrained (save ends). The target must be in direct contact with the ground or the attack fails. The rockcaller can use *earthen grasp* against only one creature at a time.
>
> **Rocky Terrain** (ranged attack, minor action, at-will)
>
> Ranged 10, up to 4 squares within range become difficult terrain. The squares need not be contiguous, but the affected terrain must consist of earth or stone.
>
> **Skills:** Perception +12, Stealth +10
>
> See the galeb duhr rockcallers' complete statistics on page 114 of the *Monster Manual.*

Galeb Duhr Earthbreakers (2)

These galeb duhrs pull rock from the earth under their feet and hurl it in devastating attacks.

Galeb Duhr Earthbreaker   **Level 8 Artillery**
Medium elemental humanoid (earth)   XP: 350

Initiative: +4   **Senses:** Perception +12; tremorsense 10
HP: 73; **Bloodied:** 36
AC: 22; **Fortitude:** 23; **Reflex:** 18; **Will:** 20
Immune: petrification, poison
Speed: 4 (earth walk), burrow 6

> **Slam** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
> +13 versus AC, 1d8 + 6 damage.
>
> **Hurl Stones** (area attack, standard action, at-will)
> Area burst 1 within 10, +13 versus AC, 1d10 + 6 damage. All squares in the area become difficult terrain. The earthbreaker can create stones to throw when none are present.
>
> **Shock Wave** (close attack, standard action, recharge 5 6)
> Close burst 2, +12 versus Fortitude, 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

Skills: Perception +12, Stealth +9

See the galeb duhr earthbreaker's complete statistics on page 114 of the *Monster Manual.*

Githyanki Raiders

Level 13 Encounter (4,600 XP)

| ↙ Githyanki gish (G)
↙ 2 githyanki warriors (W)
↙ Githyanki mindslicer (M)

Set Up: Figure 24-3 shows a ruined tomb that is the object of a githyanki raid. The raiders have opened a vortex from their Astral home into this dungeon, where they are seeking some relic that lies in an ancient sarcophagus. What is it they seek? It might be some remnant of their race's past, or an item they believe can help them against their mind flayer foes — or something they plan to use to conquer the world.

Read Aloud: *An eerie blue light gleams on stone walls far ahead. The hallway opens into a larger chamber, its floor split asunder in some ancient earthquake. Four gaunt humanoids are spread around the room. Two of them are standing near a huge stone sarcophagus, eyeing it with interest.*
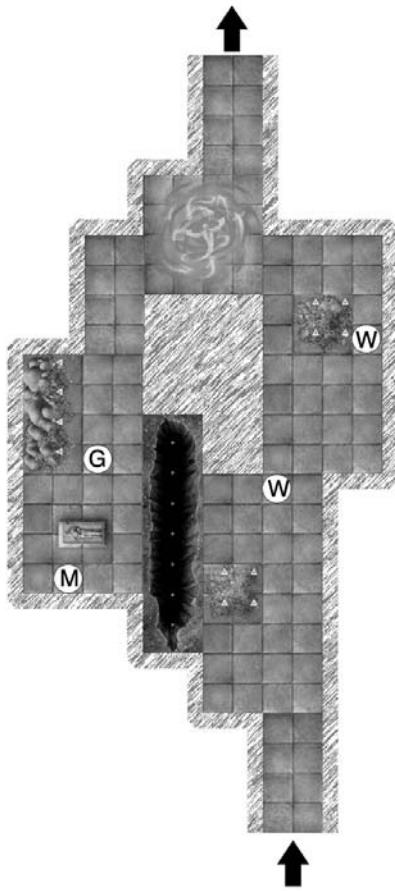
Features: Special features of this area include the following:

- *Chasm:* The chasm here is 60 feet deep. A creature who falls in takes 6d10 damage. Climbing out requires a DC 18 Athletics check.
- *Astral Vortex:* The swirling vortex of energy at the north end of the map is linked to the Astral Sea. A creature in the vortex has concealment and can make an Arcana check (DC 20) as a move action to teleport anywhere on the map. After teleporting, the creature has the insubstantial and phasing qualities until the start of its next turn. (This works just like the githyanki gish's *astral stride* power, except that the range is greater.) The vortex disappears 5 minutes after the start of the encounter.
- *Rocks and Rubble:* Squares full of large rocks block normal movement, but a character can scramble over them at half speed with a DC 10 Athletics check. Rubble is difficult terrain.
- *Sarcophagus:* The large stone sarcophagus is the object of the githyanki's raid. A character can clamber over it with a DC 14 Athletics check.

Githyanki Tactics: The githyanki warriors use *telekinetic grasp* and sustain it as long as they can to keep characters near the entrance and away from the sarcophagus. They engage the characters they have immobilized to gain increased damage against those targets with their silver greatsword attacks.

The mindslicer tries to stay out of melee. As soon as any character crosses the chasm, he flees toward the Astral vortex so he can better avoid character attacks. He uses *psychic barrage* as often as it recharges, as long as he can catch at least two characters in its area.

The gish leads off with a *storm of stars* attack against four different characters, and then uses *force bolt* as often as it recharges. He uses *astral stride* every round to gain the benefit of being insubstantial, teleporting from character to character to do heavy damage with *double attack* where he's least expected.

Figure 24-3: Raiders of the Astral Sea have come to this ancient tomb for plunder.

Githyanki Gish

Githyanki are gaunt humanoids that live in the empty expanse of the Astral Sea. They survive by launching raids into the world, leaving terror and devastation in their wake. The gish are battle leaders among them, skilled in both melee combat and arcane power. This gish wears ornate chain-mail armor and carries a silver longsword.

Githyanki Gish   Level 15 Elite Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 2,400
Initiative: +13   **Senses:** Perception +14
HP: 226; **Bloodied:** 113
AC: 31; **Fortitude:** 28; **Reflex:** 29; **Will:** 29

Speed: 5

> **Silver Longsword** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Psychic, Weapon**
> +20 versus AC, 1d8 + 3 damage plus 1d8 psychic damage.
> **Double Attack** (melee attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Psychic, Weapon**
> The githyanki gish makes two silver longsword attacks.
> **Force Bolt** (ranged attack, standard action, recharge 6) ♦ **Force**
> Ranged 10, +18 versus Reflex, 3d6 + 4 force damage.
> **Storm of Stars** (ranged attack, standard action, encounter) ♦ **Fire**
> The githyanki makes four attacks, no more than two of them against a single target;

ranged 5, +20 versus AC, 2d8 + 4 fire damage.

> **Astral Stride** (move action, at-will) ♦ **Teleportation**
> The githyanki gish teleports 6 squares and gains the insubstantial and phasing quali-

ties until the start of his next turn.

Elite: As an elite monster, the githyanki gish gets a +2 bonus on saving throws (or +4 against charm effects) and has 1 action point that he can spend during the encounter.

Skills: Arcana +16, History +13, Insight +14, Perception +14

See the githyanki gish's complete statistics on page 128 of the *Monster Manual.*

Githyanki Warriors (2)

These warriors wear elaborate plate armor and carry silver greatswords.

Githyanki Warrior	**Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid	XP: 700
Initiative: +13	**Senses:** Perception +12

HP: 118; **Bloodied:** 59
AC: 28; **Fortitude:** 25; **Reflex:** 23; **Will:** 22
Saving Throws: +2 against charm effects
Speed: 5

> **Silver Greatsword** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Psychic, Weapon**
> +17 versus AC, 1d10 + 3 damage plus 1d6 psychic damage, plus an extra 3d6 psychic

damage if the target is immobilized.

> **Telekinetic Grasp** (ranged attack, standard action, sustain minor, encounter)
> Ranged 5, Medium or smaller target, +15 versus Fortitude, the target is immobilized.
> **Telekinetic Leap** (ranged 10, move action, encounter)
> Ranged 10, the githyanki warrior or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

Skills: Arcana +7, History +9, Insight +12, Perception +12

See the githyanki warriors' complete statistics on page 128 of the *Monster Manual.*

Githyanki Mindslicer

A githyanki mindslicer is trained to disable his enemies by attacking their minds from range. He wears multi-layered robes and carries a silver longsword.

Githyanki Mindslicer   **Level 13 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid   XP: 800

Initiative: +11   **Senses:** Perception +12

HP: 98; **Bloodied:** 49

AC: 27; **Fortitude:** 24; **Reflex:** 25; **Will:** 24

Saving Throws: +2 against charm effects

Speed: 6

Silver Longsword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Psychic, Weapon**
+18 versus AC, 1d8 + 2 damage plus 1d8 psychic damage.

Mindslice (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Psychic**
Ranged 10, +16 versus Will, 2d8 + 3 psychic damage.

Telekinetic Leap (ranged 10, move action, encounter)
Ranged 10, the githyanki warrior or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

Psychic Barrage (area attack, standard action, recharge 6) ◆ **Psychic**
Area burst 1 within 20, +16 versus Will, 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends), and the target can't use daily or encounter powers (save ends).

Skills: Arcana +9, History +11, Insight +12, Perception +12
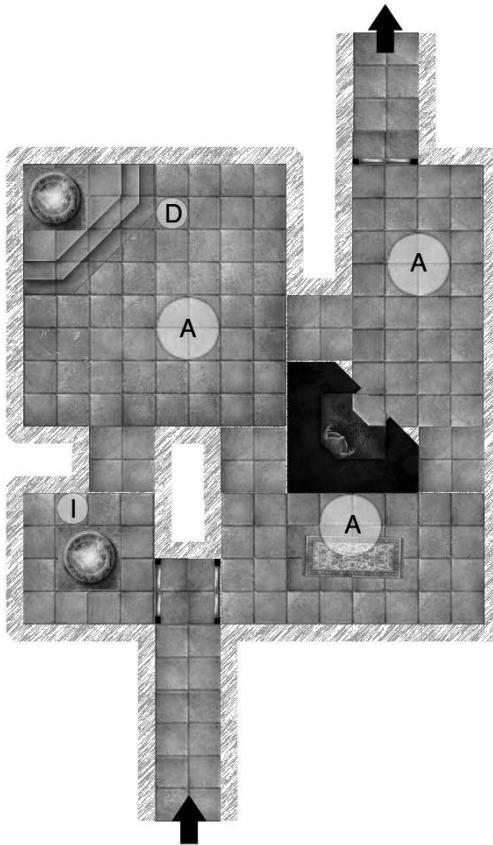
See the githyanki mindslicer's complete statistics on page 128 of the *Monster Manual.*

Zehir's Army

Level 14 Encounter (5,800 XP)

- ✔ Yuan-ti malison disciple of Zehir (D)
- ✔ Yuan-ti malison incanter (I)
- ✔ 3 yuan-ti abominations (A)

Set Up: Lurking deep in ancient ruins built by their ancestors during the long-forgotten empire of Zannad, these yuan-ti plot evil schemes to rebuild their bygone glory. Figure 24-4 shows their inner sanctum, where they offer sacrifices to the god of darkness and poison, Zehir.

Figure 24-4:
When serpents dream, they remember when they ruled the world.

Read Aloud (Left Side Doors): *Behind a pair of doors carved with images of snakes and snake-headed humanoids, you find what looks like a temple complex. A great fire burns in an urn nearby, and flickering light to the right suggests a similar blaze in a larger room in that direction. That room seems to wind around and might connect up with the other set of doors behind you. A snake-headed figure who might have stepped right out of one of the door carvings stands behind the fiery urn, pointing a twisted staff in your direction.*

Read Aloud (Right Side Doors): *Behind a pair of doors carved with images of snakes and snake-headed humanoids, you find what looks like a temple complex. An ornate carpet that looks hundreds of years old adorns the floor. An enormous snake with a humanoid torso coils on the carpet, holding a scimitar and shield at the ready, looking like something that stepped out of the door carvings to attack you. To the left, flickering firelight illuminates what seems to be a fairly large room that winds around, probably connecting up with the other set of doors behind you.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

- ✔ *Fire Urns:* A creature pushed into one of the fire urns takes 3d10 fire damage, and a creature that starts its turn in an urn takes 10 fire damage. A character can tip an urn over with a DC 20 Strength check, making an attack in a close blast 2: Dexterity versus Reflex, 1d10 fire damage.
- ✔ *Snake Pit:* The yuan-ti keep a pit full of venomous snakes, where they offer sacrifices to Zehir by throwing victims into the pit. A creature that starts its turn in the pit takes 2d10 poison damage and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Yuan-Ti Tactics: The abominations are the front-line fighters of this group of yuan-ti, and they move to intercept the player characters as soon as possible, shielding the malisons to the best of their ability. They use *grasping coils* to hold their opponents in place.

The malison incanter hurries from its starting position to get behind an abomination right away so it can benefit from its *deflect attack* power. It uses *poisoned domination* to control a player character defender (preferably) or striker that is taking ongoing poison damage from an abomination's attack.

The malison disciple of Zehir fights alongside the abominations, taking advantage of flanking positions and using its *soothing words* to dominate a player character defender or leader.

Yuan-Ti Malison Disciple of Zehir

Malisons are the natural leaders of the yuan-ti. They are humanoid in basic shape, having snake-like heads and scaly skin. The disciple of Zehir walks on two legs and carries a morningstar, its spikes dipped in poison.

Yuan-Ti Malison Disciple of Zehir	**Level 17 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile)	XP: 1,600
Initiative: +13	**Senses:** Perception +12
HP: 164; **Bloodied:** 82	
AC: 31; **Fortitude:** 29; **Reflex:** 29; **Will:** 32	
Resist: 10 poison	
Speed: 7	

Morningstar (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Poison, Weapon**

+22 versus AC, 1d10 + 3 damage, and the yuan-ti malison disciple of Zehir makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +20 versus Fortitude, ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Soothing Words (ranged attack, standard action, recharge 3 4 5 6) ♦ **Charm**

Ranged 5, the target must be able to hear the disciple of Zehir, +24 versus Will, the target is dominated (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).

Zehir's Favor (Healing, Poison): Aura 10, allies in the aura at the start of their turns regain 5 hit points, while enemies in the aura at the start of their turns take 5 poison damage.

Skills: Bluff +21, History +18, Insight +17, Perception +12, Religion +18, Stealth +18

See the yuan-ti malison disciple of Zehir's complete statistics on page 270 of the *Monster Manual.*

Yuan-Ti Malison Incanter

The malison incanter has a serpentine tail instead of legs. It wields a staff that crackles with magical energy.

Yuan-Ti Malison Incanter **Level 15 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (reptile) XP: 1,200
Initiative: +13 **Senses:** Perception +13
HP: 118; **Bloodied:** 59
AC: 29; **Fortitude:** 26; **Reflex:** 27; **Will:** 27
Resist: 10 poison
Speed: 7

Bite (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Poison**
+16 versus Fortitude, 1d6 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Mindwarp (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Psychic**
Ranged 20, +20 versus AC, 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Poisoned Domination (ranged attack, standard action, recharges when first bloodied) ♦ **Charm**
Ranged 5, affects a creature taking ongoing poison damage, +20 versus Will, the target is dominated until the end of the incanter's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).

Zehir's Venom (ranged attack, standard action, recharge 4 5 6) ♦ **Poison**
Ranged 10, affects a creature taking ongoing poison damage,+20 versus Fortitude, 2d10 + 6 poison damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Deflect Attack (immediate interrupt, when hit by an attack, recharge 5 6): The yuan-ti malison incanter transfers the attack's damage and effects to an adjacent enemy.

Slither Away: While bloodied, the yuan-ti malison incanter gains +2 speed and a +5 bonus to all defenses.

Zehir's Shield: Aura 10, allies in the aura gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses.

Skills: Arcana +19, Bluff +19, History +19, Insight +18, Perception +13, Stealth +18

See the yuan-ti malison incanter's complete statistics on page 269 of the *Monster Manual.*

Yuan-Ti Abominations (3)

Abominations are the soldiers of the yuan-ti, not as intelligent as most malisons but larger and more able to hold their own in melee combat. They resemble snakes more than humans, though they have arms and humanoid torsos. They wield bastard swords and carry heavy shields.

Yuan-Ti Abomination　　　**Level 14 Soldier**
Large natural humanoid (reptile)　　XP: 1,000
Initiative: +13　　　　　**Senses:** Perception +10
HP: 140; **Bloodied:** 70
AC: 30; **Fortitude:** 30; **Reflex:** 28; **Will:** 27
Resist: 10 poison
Speed: 7, climb 7

　　　　Bastard Sword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Poison, Weapon**

　　　　Reach 2, +20 versus AC, 1d12 + 6 damage (crit 2d12 + 18), and the target is marked until the end of the yuan-ti abomination's next turn and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

　　　　Grasping Coils (melee attack, minor action 1/round, at-will)

　　　　+18 versus Reflex, the target is pulled 1 square and grabbed (until escape). The yuan-ti abomination can grab only one creature at a time.

　　　　Bite (melee attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Poison**

　　　　Grabbed target only, +18 versus Fortitude, 1d12 + 5 poison damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Skills: Endurance +15, Intimidate +14, Perception +10, Stealth +14

See the yuan-ti abominations' complete statistics on page 270 of the *Monster Manual.*
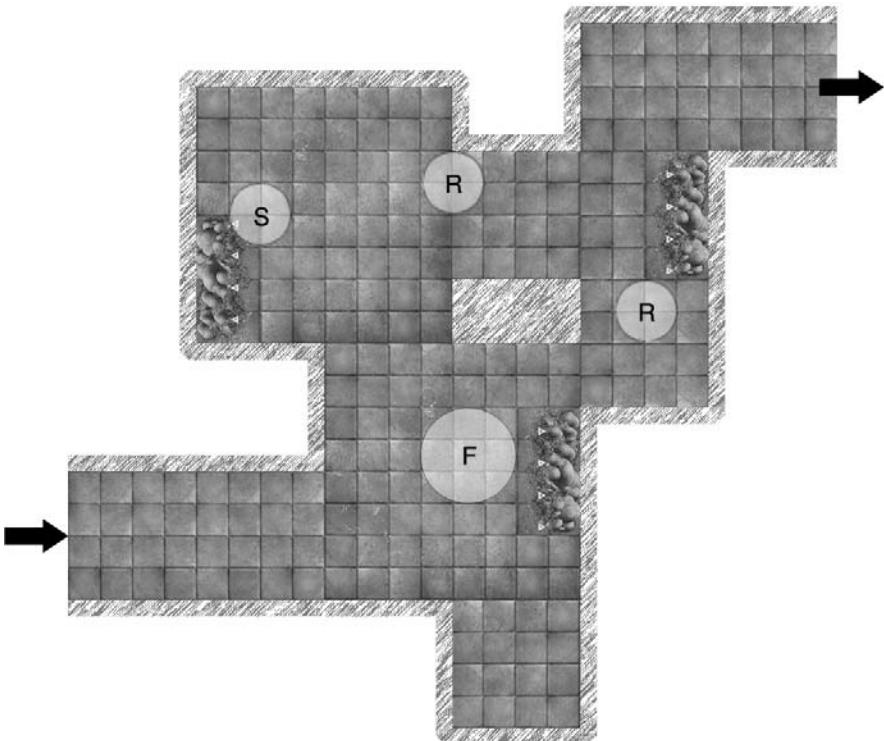
Feydark Terror

Level 15 Encounter (6,800 XP)

> ✔ Fomorian warrior (F)
> ✔ 2 cyclops ramblers (R)
> ✔ Cyclops storm shaman (S)

Set Up: Beneath the pristine wilderness of the Feywild, horrors lurk in the twisted caverns known collectively as the Feydark. Much like the Underdark of the mortal world, the Feydark is a twisting network of enormous caverns and wide tunnels, large enough for the evil rulers of the underground, the fomorians. If the fey in general embody the grace and beauty of nature, the fomorians represent everything that is twisted, evil, and ugly in nature. Figure 24-5 shows a small cavern complex where a fomorian warrior has made camp

with his cyclops servitors. These caves might be part of the Feydark, or the fomorian party might be raiding into the caverns of the natural world. Or the characters might pass unknowingly from a dungeon in the world to the caverns of the Feydark, with no clear means of return.

Figure 24-5:
Beware the
evil eye. . . .

Read Aloud: *The walls of these caves are warped and gnarled like the roots of an ancient tree, and the ceilings rise high above the relatively level ground. A wide tunnel opens suddenly into a gigantic cave with more wide passages leading off in three directions. An enormous, hideously twisted giant hunches in the middle of the cave, turning a baleful eye in your direction and emitting a wheezing, rumbling sort of laugh. There's a hint of movement from the other passages as the giant hefts his mace and readies himself for battle.*

Fomorian Tactics: The fomorian and the cyclopses don't coordinate their attacks together very effectively. Each creature chooses its own target and attacks that target in preference to all others. The fomorian uses *evil eye* on a player character defender, and uses *skullcracker* to deal extra damage to that character as long as he or she remains immobilized. The cyclops ramblers strike at individual targets and shift quickly away using *Feywild alacrity* and the benefit of their *evil eye* power. The cyclops storm shaman tries to catch multiple characters in its *storm burst,* but otherwise combines its *evil eye* and

tempest orb to maximize the damage it deals to a single foe. If pressed, the storm shaman takes shelter in the area of its own *storm burst,* since only enemies take damage there.

Fomorian Warrior

A fomorian is an enormous and hideous giant. It would stand nearly 30 feet tall if it could stand upright, but its posture is hunched and twisted in hideous deformity. Its skin is purple-gray and it lacks any hair on its warped limbs or disfigured head. Its right eye is larger than the other and unnaturally blue compared with the steel gray of the other eye. Its right eye is the "evil eye" that it fixes on its chosen target in melee. The fomorian wears hide armor and swings a mace appropriate to its enormous size.

Formorian Warrior   **Level 17 Elite Soldier**
Huge fey humanoid (giant)   XP: 3,200
Initiative: +12   **Senses:** Perception +13; truesight 6
HP: 332; **Bloodied:** 166
AC: 34; **Fortitude:** 38; **Reflex:** 30; **Will:** 32
Speed: 8

Mace (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
Reach 3, +22 versus AC, 1d12 + 10 damage.
Evil Eye (ranged attack, minor action, at-will)
Ranged 5, +20 versus Will, the target is immobilized (save ends). The target is no longer immobilized if the fomorian uses its *evil eye* on another creature.
Skullcracker: The fomorian warrior deals an extra 2d10 damage on melee attacks made against an immobilized creature.
Elite: As an elite monster, the fomorian warrior gets a +2 bonus on saving throws and has 1 action point that it can spend during the encounter.
Skills: Intimidate +17, Perception +13

See the fomorian warrior's complete statistics on page 110 of the *Monster Manual.*

Cyclops Ramblers (2)

Cyclopses are the willing servants of the fomorian rulers of the Feydark, believing the misshapen giants are divine. They stand about 14 feet tall and have a single, glaring eye above their noses. These cyclops ramblers wear chainmail and carry oversized greatswords.

Cyclops Rambler   **Level 14 Skirmisher**
Large fey humanoid   XP: 1,000
Initiative: +12   **Senses:** Perception +16; truesight 6

HP: 141; **Bloodied:** 70
AC: 29; **Fortitude:** 28; **Reflex:** 25; **Will:** 26
Speed: 8

Greatsword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
Reach 2, +20 versus AC, 1d12 + 6 damage.

Evil Eye (ranged attack, minor action, at-will)
Ranged 20, the cyclops rambler can designate only one target with its *evil eye* at a time. It can move 2 squares any time it shifts from a square adjacent to the designated target.

Feywild Alacrity (free action, when the cyclops rambler hits the target of its *evil eye* power, recharge 6)
The cyclops rambler gains an extra move action, which it must use before the end of its turn.

Mocking Eye: Aura 10; an enemy in the aura that makes an opportunity attack against any target takes a –5 penalty to the attack roll.

Skills: Perception +16

See the cyclops ramblers' complete statistics on page 47 of the *Monster Manual*.

Cyclops Storm Shaman

A cyclops storm shaman channels the power of the Feywild's worst weather to unleash thunder and lightning upon its foes. It wears leather armor and carries a quarterstaff that gives off sparks of lightning as the cyclops whirls it in the air.

Cyclops Storm Shaman	Level 17 Artillery
Large fey humanoid	XP: 1,600
Initiative: +11	**Senses:** Perception +17; truesight 6

HP: 128; **Bloodied:** 64
AC: 29; **Fortitude:** 28; **Reflex:** 26; **Will:** 27
Speed: 8

Quarterstaff (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Thunder, Weapon**
Reach 2, +22 versus AC, 2d4 + 4 damage plus 1d8 thunder damage.

Tempest Orb (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Lightning, Thunder**
Ranged 20, +20 versus Reflex, 2d8 + 6 lightning and thunder damage.

Evil Eye (ranged attack, minor action, at-will)
Ranged 20, +20 versus Fortitude, the target gains vulnerable 5 to thunder damage and vulnerable 5 to lightning damage (save ends both effects).

(continued)

> **Storm Burst** (area attack, standard action, encounter) ◆ **Lightning, Thunder, Zone**
> Area burst 2 within 10, the power creates a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Enemies within the zone at the start of their turns take 2d8 lightning damage. Uncovered flames are doused, and ongoing fire damage ends immediately within the zone.
> **Wind Flight** (minor action, encounter): The cyclops storm shaman gains a fly speed of 8 (hover) until the end of its next turn. If it doesn't land before then, it crashes.
> **Skills:** Perception +17
>
> See the cyclops storm shaman's complete statistics on page 48 of the *Monster Manual.*

Drow Scourge

Level 16 Encounter (7,800 XP)
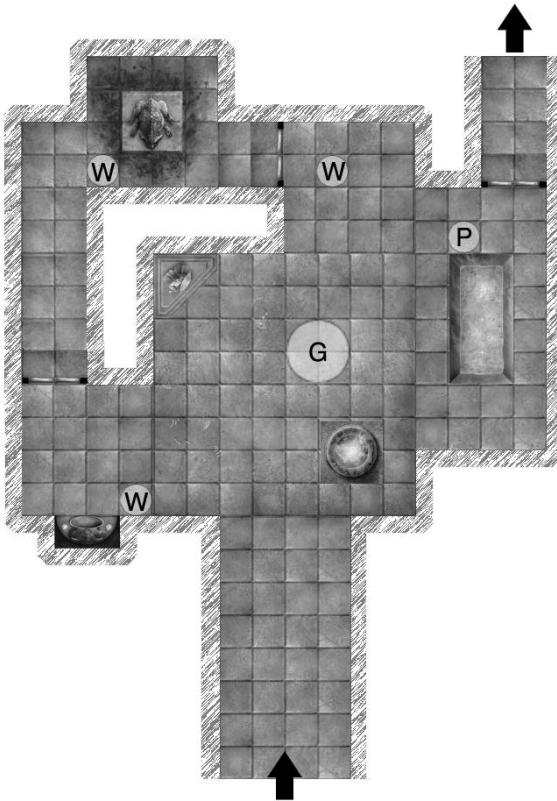
> ✔ Drow priest (P)
>
> ✔ 3 drow warriors (W)
>
> ✔ Goristro demon (G)

Set Up: The drow are so much viler than even the most uncaring of their elf and eladrin kin that it's hard to categorize the depth of their evil, but possibly their worst quality is that they regularly work and fight alongside demons. Figure 24-6 shows an underground shrine where the drow pay their respects to the Demon Queen of Spiders, their favorite goddess Lolth.

Read Aloud: *Hundreds of spiders skitter along the walls and floor of this passage, drawn inexorably forward toward whatever lies ahead. Some are as small as the head of a pin, and some are bigger than your outstretched hands, but they ignore you, scurrying away from your footsteps on the ground and marching around or over obstacles in their way. Firelight flickers on the stone walls of a large room ahead, and you can see spiders continuing to stream onward through that room. But then you see something huge come into the light, something like a giant with the head and massive horns of a bull. It sniffs the air and roars, and you see smaller humanoid forms behind it skulking in the shadows.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

> ✔ *Spiders:* Spiders from across the region stream to the statue of Lolth and disappear through a crack beneath it. The spiders have no actual effect on the encounter — they're only here for flavor, unless you decide otherwise. Their escape route might suggest that there's a secret tunnel beneath the statue that the characters could find, for example, leading them to their destination farther below.

Figure 24-6:
The drow
worship the
Demon
Queen of
Spiders,
who repays
their service
with
demonic
allies.

- ✔ *Fire:* A creature pushed into the fire takes 3d10 fire damage, and a creature that starts its turn in the fire takes 10 fire damage.

- ✔ *Statue and Blood Rock:* A statue of Lolth, appearing as a spider with the head of a female drow, stands in the back chamber of this area. It blocks movement through its four squares, although a creature can climb up onto and over it with a DC 20 Athletics check. A creature adjacent to the statue can score a critical hit with any of its attacks on a natural roll of 19 or 20.

- ✔ *Alcove:* A statue of a winged demon holds a basin of water in this alcove.

- ✔ *Acid Pool:* A shallow pool of bubbling green acid dominates the side chamber to the right of the entrance. A creature that enters or starts its turn in the pool takes 2d10 acid damage and ongoing 5 acid damage.

Drow and Demon Tactics: The goristro demon charges into melee combat. It charges (using *goring charge*) any time it has a chance to push a character into either the acid pool or the fire, even if it provokes opportunity attacks from a closer opponent. It doesn't leave the large open area near the entrance.

The drow priest uses *pain web* to hamper characters engaged with the goristro, making their attacks less effective and keeping them from moving into better positions. The drow warriors use stealth and flanking to gain combat advantage against the characters, avoiding anything approaching a fair fight. They make use of the back passage to get out of sight and to move around to advantageous positions.

When the demon falls, any surviving drow retreat to the statue of Lolth, relying on the blood rock to turn the tide of battle in their favor. The drow priest uses *spider link* to heal herself and *Lolth's wrath* to punish the warriors for their failure to defeat the characters.

Drow Priest

The evil race of drow are defined by their devotion to the evil goddess Lolth, and the priests of Lolth rule drow society — if it's possible to call the suspicion and treachery these chaotic evil priests foment anything like society. This priest wears fine chainmail, and the head of her mace suggests the shape of Lolth's spider-web symbol.

Drow Priest   **Level 15 Controller (Leader)**

Medium fey humanoid   XP: 1,200

Initiative: +9   **Senses:** Perception +12; darkvision

HP: 139; **Bloodied:** 69

AC: 28; **Fortitude:** 24; **Reflex:** 26; **Will:** 28

Speed: 7

> **Mace** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**
> +18 versus AC, 1d8 + 1 damage.
>
> **Bite of the Spider** (melee basic attack, standard action, usable only while bloodied, at-will)
> +17 versus AC, 2d6 + 6 damage.
>
> **Pain Web** (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Necrotic**
> Ranged 5, +18 versus Reflex, 1d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized and weakened (save ends both).
>
> **Darkfire** (ranged attack, minor action, encounter)
> Ranged 10, +18 versus Reflex, until the end of the drow priest's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.
>
> **Lolth's Wrath** (area attack, standard action, recharge 6) ♦ **Necrotic**
> Area burst 5 centered on a bloodied and willing drow ally; the ally explodes, releasing a burst of spectral spiders that bite all enemies in range; +20 versus Reflex, 4d8 + 5 necrotic damage. The drow targeted by this power is slain.

Spider Link (minor action, at-will) ◆ **Healing**

The drow priest can transfer up to 22 points of damage she has taken to a spider or a drow within 5 squares of her. She cannot transfer more hit points than the creature has remaining.

Skills: Bluff +17, Insight +17, Intimidate +19, Perception +12, Religion +15, Stealth +10

See the drow priest's complete statistics on page 95 of the *Monster Manual.*

Drow Warriors (3)

Drow warriors are deadly combatants, but they're not soldiers. Like all drow, they thrive on treachery and stealth, taking advantage of every unfair opportunity that arises in a fight. They wear chainmail, because heavier armor would interfere too much with stealth, and they carry rapiers and hand crossbows (with 20 bolts each). Their weapons are coated with a spider-derived poison that knocks victims unconscious.

Drow Warrior **Level 11 Lurker**

Medium fey humanoid   XP: 600

Initiative: +13   **Senses:** Perception +11; darkvision

HP: 83; **Bloodied:** 41

AC: 24; **Fortitude:** 20; **Reflex:** 22; **Will:** 19

Speed: 6

Rapier (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Poison, Weapon**

+14 versus AC, 1d8 + 4 damage, and the drow warrior makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +13 versus Fortitude, see *drow poison* for the effect.

Hand Crossbow (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Poison, Weapon**

Ranged 10/20, +14 versus AC, 1d6 + 4 damage, and the drow warrior makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +13 versus Fortitude, see *drow poison* for the effect.

Darkfire (ranged attack, minor action, encounter)

Ranged 10, +12 versus Reflex, until the end of the drow warrior's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.

Combat Advantage: The drow warrior deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.

Drow Poison ◆ **Poison:** A creature hit by a weapon coated in drow poison takes a −2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target is also weakened (save ends). *Second Failed Save:* The target falls unconscious until the end of the encounter.

Skills: Dungeoneering +11, Intimidate +8, Perception +11, Stealth +15

See the drow warriors' complete statistics on page 94 of the *Monster Manual.*

Goristro Demon

Looking rather like a giant, savage minotaur, a goristro demon is an incarnation of hatred and rage. It has only the barest concept of following orders, and it carries out its orders only when they involve destroying people and objects. Fortunately for it, its orders usually involve exactly that.

Goristro   **Level 19 Elite Brute**
Huge elemental humanoid (demon)   XP 4,800
Initiative: +10   **Senses:** Perception +17; darkvision
HP: 450; **Bloodied:** 225
AC: 31; **Fortitude:** 34; **Reflex:** 27; **Will:** 29
Resist: 20 variable (2/encounter)
Speed: 8

Slam (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
Reach 3, +22 versus AC, 2d10 + 8 damage.

Double Attack (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
The goristro makes two slam attacks.

Goristro Stomp (melee attack, immediate reaction, when a nonadjacent enemy moves adjacent to the goristro, recharge 4 5 6)
The goristro makes an attack against the enemy: +22 versus AC, 4d8 + 8 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Goring Charge (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
The goristro makes a charge attack: +23 versus AC, 3d10 + 8 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and knocked prone.

Raging Frenzy (melee attack, immediate reaction, when attacked by an adjacent enemy while bloodied, at-will)
The goristro makes a frenzied gore attack against the enemy: +22 versus AC, 2d8 + 8 damage.

Elite: As an elite monster, the goristro demon gets a +2 bonus on saving throws and has 1 action point that it can spend during the encounter.
Skills: Perception +17
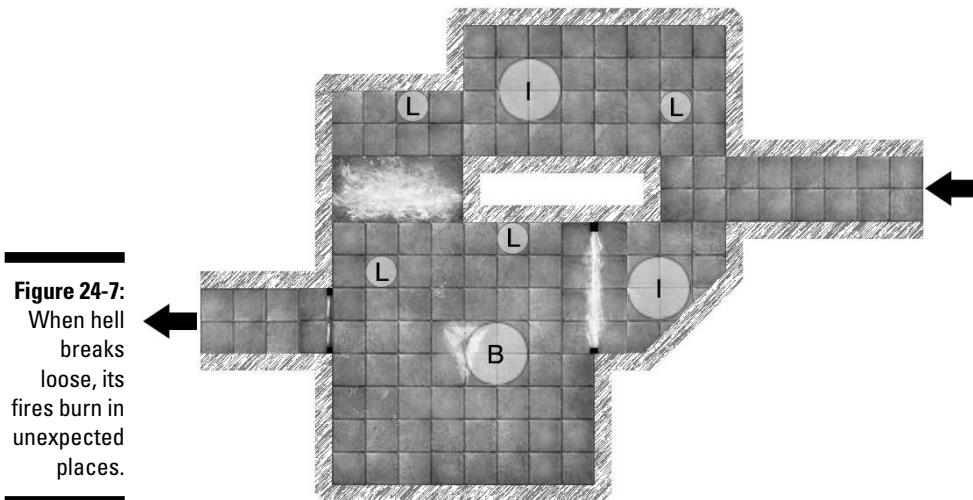
See the goristro demon's complete statistics on page 55 of the *Monster Manual.*

Diabolic Legion

Level 17 Encounter (8,600 XP)

- ✔ Bone devil (B)
- ✔ 2 ice devils (I)
- ✔ 4 legion devil veterans (L)

Set Up: An invasion force of devils has secured a foothold in the world, perhaps in the service of some evil church or possibly on the direct orders of Asmodeus or one of his archdevils. Figure 24-7 shows a map of their beachhead, which might be a few rooms within a larger dungeon, a part of a great fortress or crumbling ruin, or a secret foothold beneath a human city.

Figure 24-7: When hell breaks loose, its fires burn in unexpected places.

Read Aloud: *These chambers are lit by raging fire. As the hallway opens up, you see sinister figures to either side. On the left, a giant figure with an insect-like head and spiked tail stands in front of a curtain of flame stretching from wall to wall. On the right, a humanoid in spiked plate armor brandishes a sword at you and snarls over its shield, revealing a mouth full of sharp fangs. Another of the bug-headed devils stands behind it, and you see light as if from another enormous flame.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

- *Curtain of Fire:* The thin curtain of fire on the right side of the map deals 3d8 fire damage to any creature passing through it, and 2d8 fire damage to a creature that starts its turn adjacent to the curtain. The bone and ice devils pass through the curtain freely, since their fire resistance is sufficient to ignore its damage. The legion devils avoid the curtain or teleport through it. A bone or ice devil adjacent to the curtain can use a minor action to turn off the fire until the end of its next turn.

  The curtain blocks line of sight for nondevils, but the devils in this area can see through it.

- *Fire Storm:* The thicker wall of fire on the left side of the map burns hotter as creatures move within it, surrounding them with flame. A creature that enters a square within the fire storm takes 10 fire damage. Each

square the creature enters deals damage, so a character that passes directly through the storm takes 20 damage in two separate attacks. The legion devils can move freely through this storm because their fire resistance negates each attack of 10 damage, and the bone and ice devils can ignore the damage as well.

The fire storm blocks line of sight for devils and nondevils alike.

✐ *Mark of Asmodeus:* The symbol of Asmodeus burns in eldritch fire on the floor of the largest chamber. A devil in contact with the mark deals an additional 5 fire damage with any attack that deals damage. A nondevil that enters or starts its turn in a square of the mark takes 2d10 fire damage.

Devil Tactics: The devils in the outer chambers make a fighting withdrawal to the inner chamber in response to the characters' attack. The bone devil uses *fiendish focus* through the curtain of fire to weaken characters that engage the ice devil. It shifts away from adjacent characters to use *fiendish focus* without provoking opportunity attacks and then uses *double attack* with its superior reach to attack a character suffering from a defense penalty.

The ice devils try to use *chilling command* on any characters suffering from the bone devil's *poison sting* or *fiendish focus.* Their preferred position is just outside the bone devil's *aura of obedience,* with their enemies just inside its *aura of fear.*

The legion devils pull together at the start of the encounter, with the ones in the outer chambers moving through the fire storm to reach the inner chamber. They take up a position in tight formation to benefit from the defense bonus of their *squad defense* ability.

Bone Devil

Devils inhabit the Astral dominion known as the Nine Hells, ruled by the evil god Asmodeus. A bone devil is a skeletal humanoid that stands about 10 feet tall. A long tail arches behind it, lashing out to strike foes that it hits with its bony claws.

Bone Devil (Osyluth) **Level 17 Controller (Leader)**
Large immortal humanoid (devil) XP: 1,600
Initiative: +12 **Senses:** Perception +15; darkvision
HP: 165; **Bloodied:** 82
AC: 31; **Fortitude:** 29; **Reflex:** 26; **Will:** 27
Resist: 20 fire
Speed: 8, teleport 8
 Claw (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)
 Reach 2, +22 versus AC, 1d6 + 7 damage.

Poison Sting (melee attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Poison**

Reach 2, +20 versus Fortitude, 1d6 + 7 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 poison damage and takes a –4 penalty to its Will defense (save ends both).

Double Attack (melee attack, standard action, at-will)

The bone devil makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit the same target, the bone devil can make a secondary attack using *poison sting* against the target.

Fiendish Focus (ranged attack, minor action, at-will)

Ranged 5, +18 versus Will, the target takes a –5 penalty to all defenses until the end of the bone devil's next turn.

Aura of Fear (Fear): Aura 5, enemies in the aura take a –2 penalty to attack rolls. This is a fear effect.

Aura of Obedience (Charm, Healing): Aura 5, bone devils are immune, any bloodied devil in the aura at the start of its turn takes 10 damage but gains a +4 bonus to attack rolls and deals an extra 5 damage on melee attacks until the start of its next turn. If a devil is slain by this aura, the bone devil regains 10 hit points.

Skills: Insight +15, Intimidate +18, Perception +15

See the bone devil's complete statistics on page 62 of the *Monster Manual.*

Ice Devils (2)

Ice devils are chitin-plated humanoids, about 10 feet tall, with heads that resemble praying mantises. They wield icy spears in battle, taking advantage of their long reach to restrict their enemies' movement.

Ice Devil (Gelugon)   **Level 20 Soldier**
Large immortal humanoid (devil)   XP: 2,800
Initiative: +18   **Senses:** Perception +13; darkvision
HP: 195; **Bloodied:** 97
AC: 36; **Fortitude:** 33; **Reflex:** 31; **Will:** 29
Immune: cold, **Resist:** 20 fire
Speed: 8

Icy Longspear (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold, Weapon**
Reach 3, +27 versus AC, 1d12 + 7 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Claw (melee attack, standard action, at-will)
Reach 2, +25 versus AC, 1d6 + 7 damage.

Freezing Breath (close attack, standard action, recharge 3 4 5 6) ◆ **Cold**
Close blast 5, +23 versus Fortitude, 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

(continued)

> **Chilling Command** (close attack, minor action, recharge 5 6) ◆ **Cold**
> Close burst 5, +23 versus Will, the target takes ongoing 5 cold damage and is immobilized (save ends both).
> **Cold Aura (Cold):** Aura 5, enemies in the aura take a –2 penalty to all attack rolls.
> **Skills:** Endurance +23, Perception +13
>
> See the ice devils' complete statistics on page 63 of the *Monster Manual*.

Legion Devil Veterans (4)

Legion devils are human-sized devils with horned heads, scaly skin, and fiercely glowing eyes. They wear black plate armor and carry heavy shields and longswords.

> **Legion Devil Veteran**   **Level 16 Minion**
> Medium immortal humanoid (devil)   XP: 350
> **Initiative:** +9   **Senses:** Perception +9; darkvision
> **HP:** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
> **AC:** 32; **Fortitude:** 28; **Reflex:** 27; **Will:** 27
> **Resist:** 10 fire
> **Speed:** 7, teleport 3
> **Longsword** (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Weapon**
> +21 versus AC, 7 damage.
> **Squad Defense:** The legion devil veteran gains a +2 bonus to its defenses when adjacent to at least one other legion devil.
> **Skills:** Perception +9
>
> See the legion devil's complete statistics on page 64 of the *Monster Manual*.

Forge Defenders

Level 18 Encounter (10,800 XP)
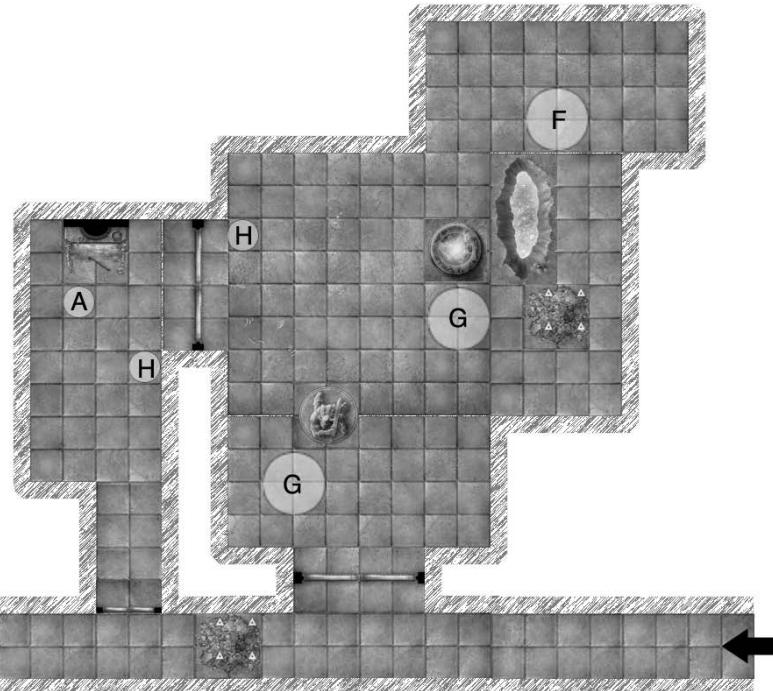
- ✔ 2 fire giants (G)
- ✔ Fire giant forgecaller (F)
- ✔ 2 firebred hell hounds (H)
- ✔ Azer beastlord (A)

Set Up: Three fire giants, with their pet hell hounds and azer servant, guard their sacred site, a scar in the earth where the fiery power of the Elemental Chaos bubbles into the world. Figure 24-8 shows the site of this sacred forge, where the giants pay homage to the titans of the Chaos.

Read Aloud: *The mighty doors swing open to reveal a cavernous room bathed in lurid red light. A black-skinned giant with hair and beard of fire stands right by the door, raising its sword as it whirls to face you. Two more giants are in the room, and a living fire in the shape of a hound stands near another pair of doors set in the left wall.*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

✔ *Chaos Chasm:* A creature that falls into or starts its turn in the lava-filled chasm takes 4d10 fire damage. If a bloodied creature ends its turn in the chasm, it is transported to the Elemental Chaos. The creature finds itself in a lake of fire in the Chaos and takes another 4d10 fire damage at the start of its turn. If the creature heals so it is no longer bloodied, it can fight its way back through the portal to the world by making a successful Arcana check (DC 25).

Figure 24-8:
The forge is where the giants themselves were made.

- ✔ *Fire Urn:* A creature pushed into the fire urn beside the chasm takes 3d10 fire damage, and a creature that starts its turn in the urn takes 10 fire damage. A character can tip the urn over with a DC 20 Strength check, making an attack in a close blast 2: Dexterity versus Reflex, 1d10 fire damage.

- ✔ *Statue and Rubble:* The giant-sized statue near the door blocks four squares. The rubble near the chasm and in the hall is difficult terrain.

- ✔ *Forge:* The large forge in the smaller chamber to the left holds a blazing fire. A creature pushed into the forge takes 3d10 fire damage, and a creature that starts its turn in the forge takes 10 fire damage.

Giant and Azer Tactics: The fire giants move to engage characters near the doorway, but they leave room for the hell hounds to move around the fray and flank characters. The forgecaller stays back near its starting position, using *flame burst* indiscriminately (because the fire damage can't hurt any of its allies).

The hell hounds move up to fight alongside the giants, maneuvering into flanking positions. The azer beastlord uses *on my command* as soon as both hell hounds are within the power's 5-square range. Under the azer's leadership, the hell hounds use their *fiery breath* carefully, avoiding catching their giant allies in the blast since their fire resistance isn't high enough to negate all the damage.

Fire Giant (2)

Fire giants are about 18 feet tall, but they're built like dwarves, strong and stocky. Their hair and eyes are burning red, sometimes actually bursting into flame with the giant's wrath. These giants wear black iron plate armor and carry greatswords that glow with heat.

Fire Giant   **Level 18 Soldier**
Large elemental humanoid (giant)   XP: 2,000
Initiative: +11   **Senses:** Perception +14
HP: 174; **Bloodied:** 87
AC: 34; **Fortitude:** 34; **Reflex:** 28; **Will:** 28
Resist: 15 fire
Speed: 7

      Searing Greatsword (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire, Weapon**
      Reach 2, +23 versus AC, 1d12 + 6 damage plus 2d8 fire damage, and the target is marked until the end of the fire giant's next turn.

      Sweeping Sword (close attack, standard action, encounter) ◆ **Fire, Weapon**
      Close blast 2, +21 versus AC, 1d12 + 6 damage plus 2d8 fire damage, and the target is marked until the end of the fire giant's next turn.

Iron Javelin (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Weapon**

Ranged 15/30, +21 versus AC, 1d10 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the fire giant's next turn.

Skills: Intimidate +14, Perception +14

See the fire giants' complete statistics on page 123 of the *Monster Manual.*

Fire Giant Forgecaller

A forgecaller is something like a priest or shaman for the giants, channeling power directly from the Elemental Chaos. This giant wears armor made of dragon hide and wields a mace.

Fire Giant Forgecaller   **Level 18 Artillery**

Large elemental humanoid (giant)   XP: 2,000

Initiative: +11   **Senses:** Perception +17

HP: 136; **Bloodied:** 68

AC: 32; **Fortitude:** 33; **Reflex:** 29; **Will:** 30

Resist: 15 fire

Speed: 8

Smoldering Mace (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Fire, Weapon**

Reach 2, +21 versus AC, 1d10 + 6 damage plus 1d10 fire damage.

Fire Pillar (ranged attack, standard action, encounter) ♦ **Fire**

Ranged 20, +21 versus Reflex, 3d8 + 3 fire damage.

Flame Burst (area attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Fire**

Area burst 2 within 10, +21 versus Reflex, 2d8 + 3 fire damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Skills: Intimidate +14, Perception +17

See the fire giant forgecaller's complete statistics on page 123 of the *Monster Manual.*

Firebred Hell Hounds (2)

Hell hounds are beasts formed of raw elemental fire in a vaguely canine shape. These creatures are trained to fight alongside fire giants under the leadership of the azer beastlord.

Firebred Hell Hound   **Level 17 Brute**

Medium elemental beast (fire)   XP: 1,600

(continued)

Initiative: +10   **Senses:** Perception +17
HP: 205; **Bloodied:** 102
AC: 30; **Fortitude:** 30; **Reflex:** 28; **Will:** 29
Resist: 40 fire
Speed: 8

      Bite (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire**
+20 versus AC, 1d10 + 6 damage plus 1d10 fire damage.

      Fiery Breath (close attack, standard action, recharge 4 5 6) ◆ **Fire**
Close blast 3, +18 versus Reflex, 4d6 + 7 fire damage.

      Fiery Burst (close attack, standard action, recharge 6) ◆ **Fire**
Close burst 3, +18 versus Reflex, 4d10 + 7 fire damage.

      Fire Shield (Fire): Aura 1, any creature that enters or begins its turn in the aura takes 1d10 fire damage.

Skills: Perception +17

See the firebred hell hounds' complete statistics on page 160 of the *Monster Manual.*

Azer Beastlord

Azers were once dwarves who were enslaved by the titans of the Elemental Chaos when the world was young. They look much like dwarves, but with hair and beards made of fire. This beastlord, skilled at handling the giants' hell hound pets, wears brass chainmail and carries a light shield and flaming battleaxe.

Azer Beastlord   **Level 17 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium elemental humanoid (fire)   XP: 1,600

Initiative: +13   **Senses:** Perception +12
HP: 167; **Bloodied:** 83
AC: 32; **Fortitude:** 31; **Reflex:** 28; **Will:** 29
Resist: 30 fire
Speed: 5

      Battleaxe (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Fire, Weapon**
      +22 versus AC, 1d10 + 5 damage plus 1d8 fire damage, and the target is marked until the end of the azer beastlord's next turn.

      On My Command (standard action, encounter)
      Each allied elemental beast within 5 squares of the azer beastlord makes a basic attack as a free action, provided the elemental beast is flanking an enemy and can both see and hear the azer beastlord.

> **Spur the Beast** (minor action, at-will)
>   One allied elemental beast within 5 squares of the azer beastlord recharges an encounter or daily power of the beastlord's choice.
> **Skills:** Perception +12
>
> See the azer beastlord's complete statistics on page 23 of the *Monster Manual.*

Death's Chill

Level 19 Encounter (12,800 XP)
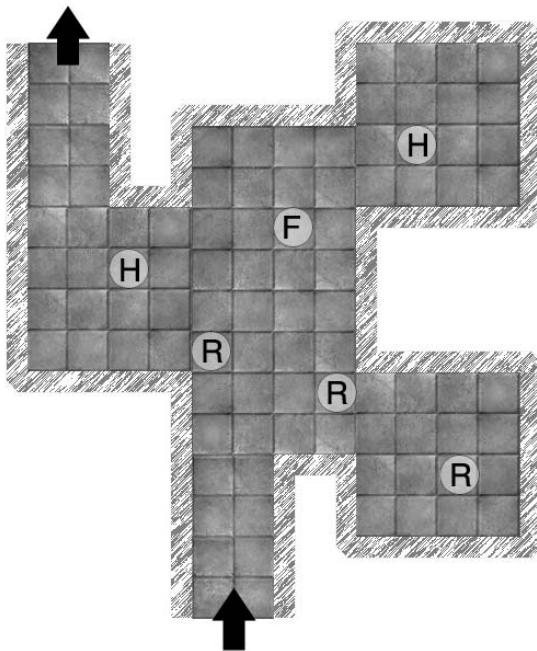
| ✔ Ice archon frostshaper (F)
| ✔ 3 ice archon rimehammers (R)
| ✔ 2 ice archon hailscourges (H)

Set Up: Archons were made to serve as the legions of the Elemental Chaos when the primordials warred with the gods at the birth of the world. Today they still serve as armies for the various warlords and potentates of the Chaos, including titans and efreets. Come to the world on some mission of conquest, these ice archons have made a temporary lair in the small cluster of rooms shown in Figure 24-9. Or perhaps the characters are in the Elemental Chaos, infiltrating the stronghold of a mighty lord who uses archons as guards, and this is their watchpost.

Read Aloud: *Ice covers the walls, floor, and ceiling of the hall as it opens into a cluster of small rooms. It's hard to find sure footing, but the creatures you see ahead of you don't seem to have any trouble. They're made of ice, clad in blue steel armor and bearing weapons of the same material.*

Ice: A character who runs or charges in this encounter area must make a DC 15 Acrobatics check or fall prone at the midpoint of the move.

Ice Archon Tactics: The archons fight together as a skilled unit, complementing each other's abilities. The rimehammer soldiers move to form a barrier between the characters and the other archons. Because of their *icy ground* aura, characters can't shift around them, so two archons can effectively block the 20-foot-wide passage with a square between them, allowing the third rimehammer to move into a flanking position or attack characters that are hanging back from the front line.

Figure 24-9:
Death comes on the point of a shard of ice, or in the slow grasp of wintry cold.

The frostshaper fights just behind the rimehammers, hurling *icy bursts* and loosing *ice javelins* at targets behind the front rank of characters. Occasionally it uses *ice blade* against front-line characters to recharge its *icy burst* attack. Its *icy aura* effectively prevents characters from shifting anywhere near it, helping the rimehammers maintain control of the front line.

The hailscourges hang back from melee, using *hail storm* as often as possible. They don't worry about catching allies in the area of the *hail storm,* because the other archons are effectively immune to the cold damage of that attack. They use *double attack* to target single characters, focusing on characters that are avoiding melee.

Ice Archon Frostshaper

Ice archons are human-sized elemental soldiers formed of solid blue and white ice. They wear breastplates and helms made of icy steel that helps define their humanoid shape. Instead of legs, they move about on pillars of ice that let them skate effortlessly over the icy ground. The frost-shaper forms blades of ice from the water in the air, either wielding them in melee or hurling them at enemies.

Ice Archon Frostshaper   **Level 20 Controller (Leader)**
Medium elemental humanoid (cold)   XP: 2,800

Initiative: +14   **Senses:** Perception +14

HP: 190; **Bloodied:** 95

AC: 34; **Fortitude:** 32; **Reflex:** 28; **Will:** 32

Immune: disease, poison; **Resist:** 30 cold

Speed: 6 (ice walk)

      Ice Blade (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Cold, Weapon**

    +23 versus AC, 2d6 + 8 cold damage.

      Ice Javelin (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Cold, Weapon**

    Ranged 5, +23 versus AC, 2d6 + 8 cold damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the frostshaper's next turn.

      Icy Burst (area attack, standard action, recharges when the frostshaper hits with a melee attack) ♦ **Cold**

    Area burst 1 within 5, +23 versus AC, 3d8 + 8 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not slowed.

      Icy Aura (Cold): Aura 5 (not active while bloodied); cold creatures in the area gain regeneration 10. Enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.

Skills: Intimidate +23, Perception +14

See the ice archon frostshaper's complete statistics on page 21 of the *Monster Manual.*

Ice Archon Rimehammers (3)

The rimehammer archons wield great two-handed hammers formed of blue ice.

Ice Archon Rimehammer   **Level 19 Soldier**

Medium elemental humanoid (cold)   XP: 2,400

Initiative: +15   **Senses:** Perception +12

HP: 185; **Bloodied:** 92

AC: 35; **Fortitude:** 35; **Reflex:** 32; **Will:** 31

Immune: disease, poison; **Resist:** 30 cold

Speed: 6 (ice walk)

      Maul (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ♦ **Cold, Weapon**

    +25 versus AC, 2d6 + 7 damage plus 1d6 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). Against a slowed target, the rimehammer deals an extra 2d6 cold damage.

      Icy Ground (Cold): Aura 1; enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.

Skills: Perception +12

See the ice archon rimehammers' complete statistics on page 20 of the *Monster Manual.*

Ice Archon Hailscourges (2)

The hailscourges hurl tiny blades of ice like throwing stars, or conjure storms of ice to batter their enemies.

Ice Archon Hailscourge   **Level 16 Artillery**

Medium elemental humanoid (cold)   XP: 1,400

Initiative: +11   **Senses:** Perception +10

HP: 120; **Bloodied:** 60

AC: 30; **Fortitude:** 28; **Reflex:** 27; **Will:** 26

Immune: disease, poison; **Resist:** 20 cold

Speed: 6 (ice walk)

       Slam (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold**

       +19 versus AC, 1d6 + 4 cold damage.

       Ice Shuriken (ranged basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold**

       Ranged 6/12, +21 versus AC, 1d6 + 4 damage plus 1d6 cold damage.

       Double Attack (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold**

       The ice archon hailscourge makes two *ice shuriken* attacks.

       Hail Storm (area attack, standard action, recharge 5 6) ◆ **Cold**

       Area burst 1, 2, 3, or 4 within 20; +21 versus AC, 2d8 + 4 cold damage. *Miss:* Half damage. The ice archon hailscourge determines the exact burst radius of the *hail storm.*

       Frost Shield (immediate interrupt, when attacked by a ranged, close, or area attack, encounter) ◆ **Cold**

       The ice archon hailscourge gains resist 20 to all damage against the triggering attack.

Skills: Perception +10

See the ice archon hailscourges' complete statistics on page 20 of the *Monster Manual.*

Winter Hunt

Level 20 Encounter (15,600 XP)
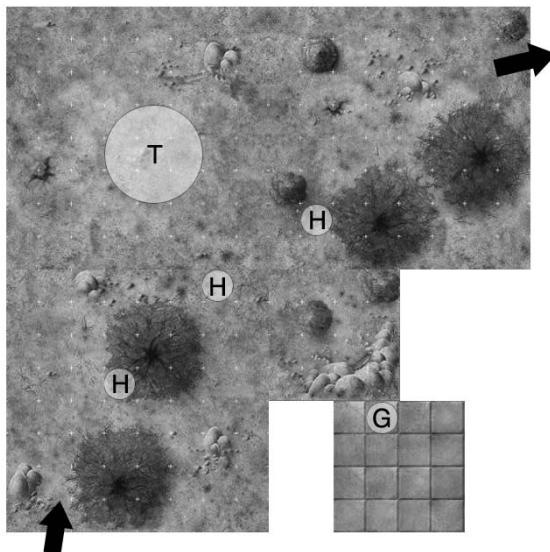
     ✔ Ghaele of winter (G)

     ✔ Treant (T)

     ✔ 3 wild hunt hounds (H)

Set Up: The noble eladrin of the Feywild aren't always friendly to visitors, and that's particularly true of the cold-hearted ghaeles of winter, who view mortals as interlopers in a world where they don't belong and can never fit in. Figure 24-10 shows the location of a ghaele's ambush. The characters

might be traveling through the Feywild when the ghaele and her allies attack them, they could be seeking the ghaele or some treasure in her possession, or they could be looking for the cave where the ghaele happens to be hiding.

Figure 24-10:
These fey creatures put the wild in the Feywild.

Read Aloud: *A hound begins to bay as you approach — a magnificent creature with glowing yellow eyes and sleek, patterned fur. You see two similar creatures nearby, among the trees — and then notice that one of the trees is moving!*

Features: Special features of this area include the following:

- *Trees:* The three large tree trunks each fill one square, blocking movement through those squares and providing cover to characters behind them. A character can climb a tree with a DC 15 Athletics check.

- *Shrubs:* Smaller trees and shrubs in the area are difficult terrain. Tiny plants that don't fill a whole square have no effect on movement.

- *Rocks:* Squares full of large rocks block normal movement, but a character can scramble over them at half speed with a DC 10 Athletics check.

Fey Tactics: The fey don't fight a straightforward, toe-to-toe fight. The treant is the most likely to stand still in combat (partly just because of its size), while the hounds dart in and out of combat with *mobile melee attack,* claiming combat advantage when they can by flanking or attacking opponents knocked prone by the treant's *earthshaking stomp.* The ghaele hangs back near the cave entrance and uses *freezing ray.* She uses *chilling defiance* and *imperious wrath* in the same round if she has multiple foes within 3 squares of her, and *fey step* or flight to avoid characters who get too close.

Ghaele of Winter

A ghaele of winter is a noble eladrin who embodies the cold cruelty of winter. Her skin is pale blue, and her hair and pupilless eyes are snow white. She wears shimmering blue robes and disdains weapons.

Ghaele of Winter   Level 21 Artillery
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin   XP: 3,200
Initiative: +19   **Senses:** Perception +16; low-light vision
HP: 134; **Bloodied:** 67
AC: 33; **Fortitude:** 30; **Reflex:** 33; **Will:** 33
Resist: 25 cold, 25 radiant; **Vulnerable:** necrotic (slowed until the end of the ghaele's next turn)
Saving Throws: +5 against charm effects
Speed: 6, fly 8 (hover)

   Winter's Touch (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold**
   +25 versus AC, 2d8 + 9 cold damage.
   Freezing Ray (ranged attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold**
   Ranged 12, +25 versus Reflex, 2d8 + 9 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
   Chilling Defiance (close attack, standard action, at-will) ◆ **Cold, Healing**
   Close burst 3, targets enemies, automatic hit; the target takes 10 cold damage and is slowed until the end of the ghaele's next turn. The ghaele of winter regains 2 hit points for each enemy who takes damage from this power.
   Imperious Wrath (close attack, minor action, recharges when the ghaele of winter regains at least 4 hit points with *chilling defiance*)
   Close burst 3, +23 versus Will, the target is dazed until the end of the encounter.
   Fey Step (move action, encounter): The ghaele of winter can teleport 5 squares.
Skills: Arcana +15, Diplomacy +24, History +15, Insight +21, Intimidate +24, Nature +21, Perception +16

See the ghaele of winter's complete statistics on page 103 of the *Monster Manual.*

Treant

A treant is a huge fey tree, walking on twin trunk-like legs and battering foes with mighty branch arms. The trees respond to its call, attacking its enemies and tangling their feet with their roots.

Treant   Level 16 Elite Controller
Huge fey magical beast (plant)   XP: 2,800
Initiative: +9   **Senses:** Perception +13; low-light vision
HP: 316; **Bloodied:** 158
AC: 32; **Fortitude:** 32; **Reflex:** 27; **Will:** 32

Vulnerable: fire (a treant takes ongoing 5 fire damage [save ends] when damaged by fire)
Speed: 8 (forest walk)

    Slam (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

    Reach 3, +21 versus AC, 1d10 + 7 damage.

    Awaken Forest (area attack, standard action, sustain minor, encounter) ♦ **Zone**

    Area burst 3 within 10, trees come alive and attack the treant's enemies within the zone, +21 versus AC, 1d10 + 7 damage. The treant makes new attack rolls when it sustains the zone.

    Earthshaking Stomp (close attack, standard action, encounter)

    Close burst 2, +19 versus Fortitude, 2d6 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone if it's Medium or smaller. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not knocked prone.

    Grasping Roots: Aura 3; nonflying enemies treat the area within the aura as difficult terrain.

Skills: Nature +20, Perception +15, Stealth +14

See the treant's complete statistics on page 251 of the *Monster Manual.*

Wild Hunt Hounds (3)

Born and bred in the Feywild, these great mastiffs are far more intelligent and dangerous than mundane hunting dogs. Their eyes glow yellow, and their sleek fur shines with magical sigils in weaving patterns around their necks.

Wild Hunt Hound   **Level 21 Skirmisher**
Medium fey magical beast   XP: 3,200
Initiative: +21   **Senses:** Perception +23; low-light vision
HP: 205; **Bloodied:** 102
AC: 35 (37 against opportunity attacks); **Fortitude:** 34; **Reflex:** 33; **Will:** 32
Speed: 10, fly 10 (clumsy)

    Bite (melee basic attack, standard action, at-will)

    +26 versus AC, 1d8 + 10 damage (1d8 + 20 against an immobilized enemy), and the target cannot teleport and is slowed (save ends both). If the target is already slowed, it is immobilized instead.

    Mobile Melee Attack (melee attack, standard action, at-will)

    The wild hunt hound can move up to 5 squares and make one bite attack at any point during that movement. The hound doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when moving away from the target of its attack.

(continued)

> **Combat Advantage**
>
>   The wild hunt hound deals an extra 1d8 damage on melee attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.
>
>   **Menacing Growl (Fear):** Aura 10; enemies within the aura take a –2 penalty to all defenses.
>
> **Skills:** Endurance +24, Perception +23, Stealth +24
>
> See the wild hunt hounds' complete statistics on page 161 of the *Monster Manual.*

Chapter 25

Ten Things to Avoid When DMing

Keeping track of all the things you're supposed to be doing (or not doing) when you're behind the DM screen can be hard. You're supposed to be the unquestioned master of a 1,000-page game system . . . and a riveting story-teller, talented worldbuilder, and passable amateur thespian, to boot.

You're going to make a goof at some point, so in this chapter, we list some of the DMing don'ts you should try hardest to avoid. These list items are Big Picture problems that many DMs struggle with, not details of how the rules work or what's actually in the game.

Don't Get Attached to Your Villains

When you spend hours crafting interesting, powerful, and charismatic villains for your game, you can easily get attached to your favorite bad guys. It's especially easy when you've worked all week to come up with a great story-line featuring that villain as the principal nemesis of the heroes for your next game. You might be tempted to go to some effort to prevent the player characters from beating your mastermind before they're "supposed to."

REMEMBER

Here's our advice: Don't ever cut your villains a break. The stars of the story are the player characters, and if the players outwit you or just blunder into victory through sheer dumb luck, you need to let them win.

Don't Try to Kill the PCs

Back in the dark old days of gaming, many Dungeon Masters cultivated a rep-utation as "killer DMs." They'd gloat over how tough their dungeons were, what sort of mortality rate they achieved, and exactly how they humbled even the most cocksure and disrespectful players by mincing, mashing, or flat-out disintegrating their characters.

Here's the deal: Killing a character is nothing to be proud of, because anyone can do it. You can do in the heroes any time you like by dropping death traps or monsters far above their power level into the adventure. Try throwing a *sphere of annihilation* or a nightwalker at a party of 1st-level characters if you don't believe us. On second thought, don't do that; just trust us that it'll mean game over.

REMEMBER

You don't win anything when one of your monsters or traps kills a player character. There might be times in your game (possibly even most of the time) when you're indifferent to character deaths and let the dice fall where they may — but don't ever go gunning for the player characters. Clever, vicious, or evil monsters may certainly do so within the constraints of a fair and balanced encounter, but *you* shouldn't.

Don't Let the Players Become Too Frustrated

The ultimate measure of a successful D&D game is simply: "Did everybody have fun?" If the players get stuck on a particular obstacle, opponent, or dead end and become frustrated, you should intervene.

If you're crafty enough, the players might not even realize that you're helping them because the exact form of your intervention doesn't even *seem* to be helpful. For example, imagine that the party is stuck in a dungeon room, confronting a door that they can't open until they solve a puzzle. The players can't figure it out, and they're getting bored and frustrated — so you intervene by suddenly throwing a couple of wandering monsters into the room. You might have had no intention of giving the players a fight at this point in the adventure, but now you've changed the challenge. And, if the player characters discover a clue when they defeat the monsters, the players might not even suspect you're tossing them a softball to help them beat the puzzle.

Don't Compete with Other Entertainment

Wherever and whenever you set up the game session, avoid playing while the players are distracted by something else. For example, don't try to run your game while a couple players are over on the couch playing a video game, or at the computer instant-messaging other friends, or keeping an eye on the football game. D&D works best when you have the full use of the players' imaginations, and you need their undivided attention for that.

TIP

If you find yourself trying to run the game with a truly unavoidable distraction (maybe the Big Game is on the TV in the other room, and several players are really trying to keep half an eye on it), consider calling a break. Wait until the players are ready to pay attention to the game before resuming.

Don't Overcomplicate the Encounter

What's better than a memorable villain or monster? Two memorable villains or monsters! Three! Four! With arrow traps, and a lightning storm, and an icy cliff the player characters are trying to climb!

Well, not really. The best encounters need only a group of monsters about the same size as the player character group, plus one or two interesting terrain elements, traps or hazards, or other special effects. Anything beyond that becomes hard to keep track of for everyone.

Don't Play Favorites

You're only human, so it's inevitable that you like some of the characters the players bring to the game more than others. For that matter, you might just like some players better than others (especially if your significant other is in your game group). Be careful not to show preferential treatment at the table.

Don't Give the Players Everything . . .

Players like it when their characters get rewarded. You might be tempted to make sure the players like your game by giving their characters frequent and powerful rewards — quick level-ups, powerful NPC allies, or great hauls of magic items.

In our experience, players enjoy the rewards their characters gain much more if they have a sense that their characters really earned them. To keep the players interested in your game, make sure that they stay a little hungry. If they aren't anxious to get to the next reward because you've already given it away, they have little motivation to play.

. . . But Don't Be Stingy, Either

Conversely, the players deserve and expect regular rewards from your game. Without a sense that their characters are indeed making progress and becoming more capable and powerful, the players might begin to wonder why

they're showing up. If a fighter in your game reaches 6th level and is still toting around the scale mail and longsword he started with at 1st level, you're keeping that player from enjoying some of the fun the game promises.

TIP

Reward success appropriately, and the players can't help but come back to your game with just the right balance of hunger for the next big thing and real satisfaction at the progress they've already made. To make sure you're handing out treasure at the right rate, refer to Chapter 7 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Don't Sit There Like a Lump

You can easily fall into the habit of parking behind your DM screen, reading the adventure's boxed text, and announcing attack results without any particular inflection. Some people are naturally low-key, and even a high-energy DM can show up for a game tired or distracted. We don't expect you to deliver riveting lines every time you speak, but you need to make yourself the center of attention to be an effective and engaging DM. That often means standing up, moving around, and speaking with some animation and excitement. Deliver your own colorful commentary when you're narrating a combat. If the ogre swings and misses, pantomime a gigantic swing and say something like, "Wow, Jozan, that would've taken your head clean off your shoulders if it had landed! Good thing you ducked!"

Don't Center the Game on One Player

Don't let one player do all the talking. If your gaming group includes a loud, expressive, or flamboyant roleplayer who wants to engage every NPC he meets in deeply immersive conversations, keep an eye on how the other players react. When you go one-on-one with a single player at the table, no one else is playing D&D — they're watching their fellow player play. You might also run into this with a player who's more of a power gamer than a roleplayer; perhaps she insists on doing all of the thinking, planning, and leading in the party. Go out of your way to keep less assertive or confident players just as involved as the extrovert.

TIP

One of the classic ways a selfish player seizes the spotlight is to insist that his character is going to go off and do his own thing, regardless of what the rest of the party decides. Typically, that forces less assertive players to cave in to his plan or puts you in the awkward spot of trying to DM two separate parties at the same time. The next time the overly assertive player does this,

let him go off and separate from the group. Then, instead of using cut-aways to give him equal time with the rest of the group, ignore him as much as possible. Give him a couple minutes of playing time every 20 or 30 minutes, sticking with the rest of the group and following their adventure for the rest of the time. When Mr. Assertive figures out that he's playing less D&D, he ought to come around.

Chapter 26

Ten Things to Do All the Time When DMing

Keep these ten suggestions in mind whenever you run a D&D game. They'll help you keep your eye on the big picture and make you a better Dungeon Master. You won't have a chance to use all these suggestions simultaneously, but watch for opportunities to put them into play in your game sessions.

Be Prepared

Review the rules. Know your adventure. Be prepared.

It all boils down to doing a little before-game reading and being organized. Gather your adventure materials and notes before the game. Collect the miniatures you want to use ahead of time. Mark the sections of any rulebooks or *Monster Manuals* you plan to use in the game session. The players expect you to be ready to run the adventure when the group meets up, and if you're prepared, everything will run that much more smoothly.

Provide Various Challenges

Don't just present combat encounter after combat encounter in your adventures. Player characters and roleplaying games can't survive on combat alone. You need to present encounters to challenge all character types, testing the skills and brains and roleplaying abilities of the players and their characters, at least every so often. This gives every character a chance to shine at some point in the adventure, and variety helps make your adventures more dynamic and satisfying.

Start Each Session with Action

As often as possible, kick off each game session with some kind of action. Whether you drop the player characters into the middle of a fight, start off with a chase, provide the means for a breathtaking escape, or let them witness some awe-inspiring or terrible event, starting with action leads to excitement, and excitement leads to a good game session.

Look for Opportunities

Because you never know what the player characters are going to do, you have to keep an open mind and look for opportunities to translate their actions back into your plot. For example, the players might decide that something you never thought of is really behind the whole adventure. If it sounds good to you, work it in! Look for places to drop hints and seeds that lead to future adventures. And always try to make it look like you planned it all along, even if you just thought of it thanks to something the player characters did.

Exude Drama in Your Descriptions

Be entertaining. When you set the scene and describe the action, use evocative language, stand up, sit down, point, lean, talk slowly, talk fast, talk loud, whisper, explain what characters see, hear, feel, and smell. In other words, do whatever is dramatically appropriate to get the scene across to the players in a colorful, fun, and informative manner.

Use Visual Aids

Maps, play surfaces, miniatures, music, and handouts of all descriptions help add context and texture to the imaginations of you and the players. A picture is worth a thousand words and helps you quickly get across the information you're trying to impart. So, use visual (and audial) aids. They're good for the game. And they're fun, too.

Be Responsive

Take cues from the players. If your description is running on and the players are beginning to get bored or fidgety, cut it short and move on. If they seem to need more information, provide it. If they really want to get to the action now, have a wandering monster show up or have the villains kick in the door. So, be responsive to the needs of the players, and you will be rewarded with attentive and excited play.

Be Consistent

When you create house rules, write them down. When you make a ruling on something in a rulebook that you and the players don't think is clear, make a note of it. When you describe a nonplayer character (NPC) that the player characters (PCs) meet, note any pertinent details so that you can play that NPC the same way the next time they encounter him or her.

In short, be consistent as a rules referee and as a narrator. It makes for a better game, builds trust, and helps encourage the fun.

Be Impartial

Impartially interpret the rules, whether you're ruling on something for the player characters or the monsters. The players won't trust you if you play fast and loose with the rules, or if you play favorites, or if you cheat to help out your favorite monster or NPC. And if they don't trust you, your game group will collapse. Where's the fun in that?

Have Fun

Relax! D&D is a game. There are no tests or pop quizzes. There aren't any right or wrong ways to play the game, because you can alter things to your own style and taste. In the end, D&D provides a fun activity that's part story-telling and part wargame. Have fun with it, and the players will have fun, too!

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