



# Starting from scratch

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You have made the decision to begin a campaign, but you don't know where to start. You have a lot of great ideas, ways to mix existing monsters and spells with a few new things of your own creation. Still, you are unsure where to begin.

The worst place is in the middle. You should start fresh; a new party is required. Do not try to take an existing group of characters that has moved from dungeon to dungeon into your new world. Your old party will have some medium-level, if not more powerful, characters as well as many items and spells that would ruin a low-level dungeon. Designing a campaign means starting with low-level characters who are to be built up in the framework of the new world.

The existing characters might be brought in once the rest of the party has caught up to them in levels. Or the existing characters might be allowed to "settle down" in your world as non-player characters for the new group to meet. If this latter option is adopted, the existing characters should have no reason to automatically befriend the new party. Finally, the existing party can "sire" the new party—but there must be very few, if any, heirlooms passed down to the new group and the DM must control the gentry, not the players.

Creation of a campaign is best accomplished in three steps:

1. Creation of the party.
2. Creation of the first adventure(s).
3. Creation of the history and overview of the adventure site(s).

Does this sound backwards to you? It likely does, but there is an explanation. By knowing the size (that is, rank, level and number of members of the party that will go on an adventure, it is easier to design that adventure.

The adventure can be dangerous, but still a task that can be completed. It is too easy to design an adventure and then realize that a beginning party is too weak to attack it. The fun of a campaign is to promote low-level characters and to let players get close to the characters and to form their personas. That is almost impossible if character enters the game as a fourth, fifth, sixth or even higher level character.

## Creation of the party

There are many methods of creating characters. Rolling them up with the players present is usually a good policy for the DM to follow. A few methods are given in the *Dungeon Masters Guide*. Here is a variation on one of those:

1. Roll 4d6 seven times. Record the sum of the three highest six-sided dice. If that sum is six or less, reroll at once. The sums must be recorded in order.

For example:

Rolls	Record
6/5/3/1	14
3/3/3/2	9
6/6/5/3	17
5/5/3/2	13
2/2/1/1	discard
4/4/4/3	12
6/4/5/4	15
5/3/3/2	11

2. The player is allowed two chances to alter the numbers as recorded. He/she may switch the positions of two numbers and he/she may discard one number—not necessarily the lowest one. The resultant character will be described for abilities in the order

S-I-W-D-C-B ("B" is for Bearing or Beauty, used instead of Charisma, to avoid two characteristics beginning with "C"). At the moment the character has scores of 14-9-17-13-12-15-11. He or she could be altered as follows:

S 17, I14, W 13, D 12, C 15, B 11 (switch 14 and 17, eliminate 9)

S 14, I 17, W 13, D 15, C 12, B 11 (switch 15 and 12, eliminate 9)

S14, I12, W 13, D 17, C 15, B 11 (switch 12 and 17, eliminate 9)

S 14,19, W 15, D 13, C 12, B 17 (switch 15 and 17, eliminate 11)

3. Now adjust the abilities for race if he/she is to be other than a human. Taking the four characters given above, the Dungeon Master might allow these racial changes (also given is the selection of profession):

S 18, I 14, W, D 12, C 16, B 9: Half-orc fighter (He/she could now roll for unusual strength.)

S 14, I 17, W 13, D 16, C 11, B 11: Elven Magic-User

S 13, I 12, W 13, D 18, C 15, B 11: Halfling Thief

S 14,19, W 15, D 13, C 12, B 17: Human Druid

The DM might want the characters to meet certain criteria (see below), and might wish to forbid one or more of the sub-classes. The assignment of alignment, skills, languages, spells known, etc. is all the prerogative of the DM. He/she can ask the players to collaborate on the races and classes they select, or he/she might forbid such contact. In the latter case, however, there may end up being too many of one class. While that might be fun for a while, eventually it will harm your campaign and the players' enjoyment. The DM should always monitor the entire process of creation of player characters.

The DM may find it wise to eliminate a few of the possible sub-classes when beginning a campaign, or at least to limit the total number of allowed sub-classes to a maximum of two. A beginning party should not contain a Paladin, an Assassin or an Illusionist. These are difficult sub-classes to play and they detract from a beginning adventure; add them later in the game. A Ranger, a Druid or a Monk is not too hard to control, but before you allow those sub-classes in the party be sure that there is a regular Fighter (or two) before you allow a Ranger and a regular Cleric before you allow a Druid or a Monk.

A campaign plays best with five or six players. Three is a minimum number and eight is a reasonable maximum. A group of more than eight is usually unruly and difficult to manage. I have run many tournament games at conventions and found parties of nine or ten to be difficult even for only four or so hours of an event; on a week-by-week basis this would be maddening. Three or four players is too few. Each player will usually have two characters, if not three, and the flow of ideas becomes stifled and limited.

Each player should have one or two characters according to the following formula. For every three first-level characters, a beginning party may have one second-level character. For every pair of second-level party members there may be one third-level character. (A multi-class, multi-level character counts in the following way: 1/1=2, 2/2=3, 3/3 not allowed.) If there is a third-level character it should be controlled by a single player. A pair of first-level characters can be given to a single player.

Thus, party size is limited to three to twelve figures. Having more than twelve figures to play is difficult in melee and other situations. The option of adding a few zero-level mercenaries should exist. Add

these in pairs, with six such characters as a maximum number while staying within the total allowable party size of twelve.

All of these number recommendations are based on the author's experience in some 50 tournament games, 50 or more miniatures games and five campaigns.

If a third-level character is allowed, he/she should be a Fighter, a Cleric or a Thief. Members of all of the other classes and sub-classes should have to work to gain third level. It is wise to allow one or two second-level characters to strengthen the beginning party. A dozen first-level types are fairly easy prey but if they are reinforced by two second-levels, their doom is not as easily foretold.

Player characters should always have the maximum possible hit points at first level. That is, Fighters ten, Clerics eight, Thieves six and Magic-Users four, adjusted for Constitution of course. Rangers begin with 8+d8 and Monks with 4+d4 hit points. Give player characters a good chance to survive: There is nothing more pitiful than a Fighter who has a strength of 18/00 and only two hit points to back him/her up!

Spells known by the group's Magic-User(s) should be as per the DM Guide. A DM can be a real sweetheart and not require a roll "to know" for the first three spells given at first level. If a knowledge roll is required, be sure to make at least three spells available to the Magic-User.

Spells not known on the first attempt can be tried again whenever the figure gets a promotion, as long as his/her teacher already knows the spell he/she has failed to learn in the past. This second roll is at minus 20%, however. If he/she fails a second attempt, the spell is forever beyond comprehension. (Exception: If the player somehow gains a full point of Intelligence, he/she may try one more time, but still at minus 20% and only with an instructor as before.)

Here is a weighting of the spells for Magic-Users at the first level (other levels can and probably should be weighted as well) following a set of criteria. Spells that are "common" are given a higher percentage chance to appear (and thus be taught to a Magic-User). Spells that are difficult to adjudicate are given a low probability. Spells that give the Magic-User too much power if given early in a campaign are given a low probability. Naturally, you can vary these percentages as you see fit or you might just choose all spells to be out.

#### Roll Offensive Spells

1-8 Burning Hands  
9-21 Charm Person  
22-27 Enlarge  
(or: 22-30 Enlarge  
31-37 Shrink)  
38-42 Friends  
32-57 Light  
58-70 Magic Missile  
71-78 Push  
79-83 Shocking Grasp  
84-91 Sleep  
92-00 DM's choice

#### Roll Defensive Spells

1-11 Affect Normal Fires  
12-23 Dancing Lights  
24-30 Feather Fall  
31-38 Hold Portal  
39-45 Jump  
46-60 Protection from Evil  
(or: 46-52 Protection/  
Evil  
53-60 Protection/  
Good  
61-75 Shield  
76-80 Spider Climb  
81-86 Ventriloquism  
87-00 DM's choice

#### Roll Miscellaneous Spells

1-7 Comprehend Languages  
8-23 Detect Magic  
24-31 Erase  
32-35 Find Familiar  
36-41 Identify  
42-50 Mending  
51-60 Message  
61-78 Unseen Servant  
49-85 Write  
86-00 DM's choice

Clerics should also be taught a limited number of prayers (spells) to begin the game. Mere knowledge of a spell title will not allow a Cleric to pray for it. Prayers are taught just as spells are taught/given by an instructor.

However, two Clerics can meet at any time and exchange spell

information. This exchange (learning process) takes three turns per level of the prayer. Thus, if a Cleric teaches another Cleric the prayer for Flame Strike (5th level), they will be at it for two and a half hours.

The number of prayers awarded at first level should be 2+d4. One of the spells, regardless of alignment, is always Cure Light Wounds. Obviously the instructor must know the spells to be able to teach them. The instructor will not necessarily teach all of the first level spells he/she knows to an Acolyte. Here is a weighting of spells for first-level Clerics:

Title	ALIGNMENT OF THE INSTRUCTOR						
	LAWFUL	PURE	CHAOTIC	LAWFUL	CHAOTIC	LAWFUL	EVILS
	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL	EVILS
Bless	1-7	1-6	1-6	1-4	1-4	1-3	
Curse	8-11	7-11	7-12	5-10	5-12	4-13	
Command	12-18	12-17	13-17	11-17	13-16	14-18	
Create Water	19-21	18-20	18-19	18-20	17-18	19-20	
Destroy Water	22-23	21-22	20-21	21	19	21	
Cause Light Wounds	24	23-24	22-27	22-27	20-28	22-30	
Detect Evil	25-36	25-35	28-35	28-32	21-25	31-34	
Detect Good	37-40	36-39	36-37	33-37	26-30	35-40	
Detect Magic	41-44	40-45	38-44	38-43	31-38	41-47	
Light	45-50	46-50	45-50	44-48	39-43	48-51	
Darkness	51-52	51-53	51-53	49-52	44-50	52-57	
Protection from Evil	53-60	54-59	54-58	53-56	51-54	58-60	
Protection from Good	-	6	0	59-60	57-60	61-66	
Purify Food and Water	61-66	61-65	61-64	61-65	59-64	67-69	
Putrify Food and Water	-	6	6	66-67	65-67	70-72	
Remove Fear	67-72	67-72	68-72	68-72	68-72	73-77	
Fear Touch	73-77	73-78	73-80	73-84	73-86	78-88	
Resist Cold	78-84	79-84	81-84	85-87	87-89	89-92	
Sanctuary	85-00	85-00	85-00	88-00	90-00	93-00	

#### How many magic items?

The beginning party can start with a few magic items, but they should be few in number and relatively weak in power: perhaps one item for every three levels at a maximum but at least one item for every seven levels. Note that men-at-arms and other hirelings do not have levels and would not count toward the awarding of magic items. A brief list of good first level items follows:

*Potions:* Animal Control (dogs, large cats, birds, but not giant types or insects), Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Climbing, Diminution, Extra Healing, Fire Resistance, Healing, Invisibility, Levitation, Polymorph Self or Sweet Water.

*Scrolls:* one to four first- or second-level spells of informational or miscellaneous types.

*Rings:* Feather Falling, Fire Resistance, Warmth, Water Walking.

*Rods and Staves:* none.

*Wands:* Enemy Detection, Illumination, Magic Detection, Metal & Mineral Detection, Negation, each with 2-7 charges—but only one wand to a party.

*Miscellaneous Magic:* Alchemy Jug (with a capacity of two or three useful potions; this item should count as two or three items, depending on the number of potions it gives in a week), Arrow of Direction, Boots of Elvenkind, Boots of Levitation (counts as 2 items), Bracers of Defense (Armor Class five to eight—count as one item for eight, two for seven, three for six and four for five), Cloak of Elvenkind, Keoghtom's Ointment (one jar counts as two items), Wings of Flying (counts as two items).

*Armor:* Chain Mail + 1, Leather Armor + 1, Shield + 1.

*Swords:* Sword + 1.

*Miscellaneous Weapons:* 2d4 Arrows + 1, Axe + 1, Hammer +1, Mace +1, Spear +1.

Remember that awarding magic items is up to the DM. Even if the party is made up of the offspring of former player-characters from another series of dungeons, the DM controls what will be passed to their children. If the party is given too much to begin with, there is no challenge. If a magic item is too strong at the beginning of the campaign, play will revolve around that item and not around the characters. The more players have to work for items, the better the campaign will be.

#### Designing the adventure

Phase two of designing a campaign is designing the first adven-

ture. You have established the rough outline of the characters, so now it is easier to establish a resistance that is tough and challenging without being fatal to the party.

The first adventure can be a wilderness adventure, a town adventure, or a dungeon adventure. The latter is the most popular and is the easiest for a beginning party. Next, you have to decide if the monsters in the dungeon will be organized or random. That is, are the monsters separate from one another so that they do not warn or protect each other, or do they fully cooperate? Is one monster in charge of the dungeon, or are there numerous power bases?

Most initial adventures are of the dungeon/random monster type, which is fairly good for establishing new players/characters. Outdoor and organized-resistance adventures are generally tougher, and the players and characters have to be on their toes to handle these. If a few of the players are beginning *D&D* or *AD&D* players or if one or more is a complete novice then the dungeon/random monster adventure is almost mandatory for teaching him/her/them the game mechanics.

In an organized resistance there is a hierarchy: a leader, perhaps one or more co-leaders, some lieutenants and perhaps even some sergeants. If this organization is attacked, and if an alarm can be sounded, this organization will respond with a coordinated defense/attack.

Random-monster dungeons, on the other hand, have quite a few power bases within them. They co-exist for two major reasons: one power base is not strong enough to wipe out the other(s), and the more monsters in an area the better protected they all are.

Either type of adventure can produce multiple forays as the party hits, probes, retreats and hits again. The organized resistance will better prepare for the second coming of the party, but in the random monster dungeon little if anything will transpire between attacks.

Once the type of adventure is determined, the designer decides who the inhabitants will be and what treasure they will guard. It is wise to determine the total amount of treasure right now, before the inhabitants are determined. If you parcel the treasure out on a monster-by-monster basis, you may end up with too much or too little treasure. The treasure will include items the monsters may actually use against the party. Make up a list of treasure and subtract from the list as you place each monster or group of monsters.

How much treasure should there be? There should be enough treasure so that from 25% to 50% of the party can advance one level of experience. This does not include the one or two items the party may keep within the group, nor would it include the money/items that might have to be sold to raise the dead or cure the injured. To compute this, add up the number of points the party, as a whole, needs for each member to go up one level of experience. About 15,000 to 25,000 experience points would be correct for a party of nine consisting of six first-levels, two second-levels and one third-level character. Thus, treasure should have a resale value of 3,750 to 12,500 GP, depending on the exact nature of the party. Remember to then add an item or two for the party to keep as a group and a small amount of treasure for curative purposes. If the party goes into a dungeon, kills all of the monsters, but only gains enough to get everyone cured and everyone raised they will come out with nothing to show for their trouble.

If a party is poorly organized or if it makes a blunder or two, then that's their tough luck. If the party plays very well, perhaps they will get to keep more treasure, and someone might even go up two levels of experience from a single adventure. These guidelines are very rough but are stated to give you some "ball park" idea of how much should be there. An item's gold piece value may not be what a party can get for it; in fact, no one may want to buy it at all. However, calculate the value of the item as given in the DM Guide.

Here is a sample list of treasure, with a total value of 19,000 GP:

A Long Sword +1 valued at 2,000 GP, a set of Scale Mail +2 valued at 6,750 GP, a Potion of Invisibility valued at 500 GP, a *Ring of Free Action* valued at 5,000 GP, 350 Gold Pieces, 750 Electrum Pieces, 13,300 Silver Pieces, 17,400 Copper Pieces; Gems: 4x50 GP each, 3x100 GP each, 1 at 600 GP; a set of silver serving pieces (850 GP), a jade statue of a lion (45 GP), two barrels of mead (200

GP), a Holy Symbol encrusted with gems (550 GP), two vials of Holy Water (50 GP), a small silver mirror (20 GP), a set of plate armor (400 GP), two sets of studded armor (30 GP), and a two-handed sword (28 GP).

This treasure is not only diverse, but contains items a party may not think of as treasure. The 19,000 GP figure takes into account the curing and necessary raising from the dead for one character. This total treasure would then be given out to the monsters in the dungeon.

Notice that there is no Magic User's Book and no scrolls. Thus, if there is a human in the monster list, he/she is likely not a Magic-User. If a Magic-User's Book were included then its value might well be thousands of gold pieces (see *The Dragon* #28 for a suggested value of such a book, page 31).

Now we know the party size, the items they possess and the treasure being guarded. Now all that is necessary is the designing of the adventure area itself. Either of two approaches can be used: Either draw a map of the area and then populate it, or determine the monsters and then draw a map of the area to accommodate them.

You may add a few traps, but they should not be lethal. Spiked pits, lethal poison needles, and falling two-ton blocks are too much for a first adventure. Limit traps to slides, shifting rooms, an aimed crossbow, a trip wire leading to a gong, etc.

### The March of the Monsters

Here is a list of some monsters that can be challenged by a typical party made up of six first-level characters, two second-level characters and one third-level character and possessing some minor magics:

Giant ants (6 workers and 2 warriors), black bears (2 or 3), bombardier beetles (2 to 4), fire beetles (4 to 7), bugbears (2 or 3), giant centipedes (3 to 5 as a trap), gargoyle (1 or 2—only if the party has two or three magic weapons), ghouls (2 or 3), gnolls (3 to 5), hell hound (3 hit dice, 1 or 2), hobgoblins (4 to 8), kobolds (6 to 12), werewolf (1), ogre (1 or 2), orcs (4 to 10), giant scorpion (1), shadows (2 to 4), skeletons (2 to 6), huge spiders (2 to 4), stirges (3 to 5), troll (1), zombie (3 to 5).

This number of monsters should be adjusted upwards if the party has access to a *Sleep* spell, and even more so if the party has access to multiple *Sleep* spells. The *Sleep* spell can make combat too easy for a party against many of the monsters given in the list above.

The list does not hope to include all monsters that might be pitted against a first-level party, but six hit dice for any other creature added should be about the limit. A monster with more than six hit dice will make mincemeat of a group even if the party finally does defeat the thing. If too many party members are killed in a single melee it will be almost impossible for the group to afford to get them all raised. If party members must constantly be buried then the players cannot form personas for the characters they control.

The treasure list given above would be parceled out to this group of monsters. Note that some of the humanoids in the monster list could use some of the treasure items against the party, making the monster even tougher. If a shaman or witch doctor is included in a humanoid tribe, the tribe's overall size might have to be reduced. Individual humans can also be included, up to a limit of fifth level. The party listed would have a very rough time against any single fifth-level character, especially a Fighter or a Magic-User. Again, the DM must balance humanoid and human monsters versus the party. If, for instance, the party has a third-level Cleric with *Hold Person* and/or *Silence*, those two spells could dispatch a single adversary quickly; thus, you should allow for single humans or humanoids to have some guards to help them.

In short, you must balance the party versus their opposition. If the opposition is too weak or if it is too easily defeated by a spell(s) the party possesses, then there is no challenge. If the opposition is too strong the DM will "win" but the characters may get wiped out. Remember, by the way, that a party that is losing a melee can be ordered (asked) to surrender by many monsters, and then robbed or imprisoned. All melees do not have to go to a final conclusion. Stupid monsters might only want one party member to eat, and thus the party could escape by an act of sacrifice. The DM should give the party as many options as possible.

### Organized resistance

Here follows a brief example of an organized resistance. Remember that all of the players in such an adventure should have played the game a few times before. An organized resistance is usually too tough for novice players.

An organized resistance might have one boss or it might be led by a partnership. A partnership may involve two or perhaps three power bases which will cooperate if any of them are attacked.

Some single-boss organized resistances: A Thaumaturgist backed up by a Hero. His sergeants are two bugbears. He controls 12 men-at-arms.

A band of 20 orcs led by a witch doctor and a chief.

A band of robbers made up of a fourth-level Thief, a third-level Magic-User, a second-level Cleric, and six Veterans.

An ogre in charge of eight hobgoblins.

A fourth-level Assassin backed up a second-level Illusionist and five first-level Thieves.

Some partnerships might be as follows: A pair of ghosts for night protection and a Prefect and six Acolytes for day protection.

A mantichore guarding the top of a hill with a Hero and five Veterans at the base in a cave.

A very young black dragon in cooperation with a Conjurer and seven men-at-arms.

Two sahuagin aiding a band of eight pirates on a small island.

In each of these cases, if one group/individual is attacked the other (if it learns of the attack) will aid at once. These symbiotic relationships benefit both partners with increased security and treasure. The two or three power bases should not be allowed to live together or to travel together, since combined they would be too strong for a first-level group.

The biggest mistake most designers make is to give away an item or items that destroy play balance. If an item, or the one character who owns it, dominates play, the DM has made an error. To redeem himself, he can try to regain the item in the next adventure. There can be a plan to get it back (or to destroy it), which might fail. This will test the DM and the party and will prevent charges that the DM is being arbitrary. If you as a DM make a mistake and you see it is ruining the game, try to correct the error in the context of the game if you can. Perhaps you might see fit to reward the party for the loss of the item but you should, at the very least, give them a good adventure in your attempt at regaining/destroying it.

### New monsters and magic items

New monsters and magic items are always interesting, but limit these creations to one or two such things per adventure. There is plenty of good adventuring to be had with the existing offerings, and something new and different is not necessary at every turn. If you do wish to add a few things, there should be some guidelines:

A new item does not have to be brand new. You can make items with properties identical to some existing items but housed in a new way: a Helm of Protection + 1, a Shield of Feather Fall, a Ring of Magic Missiles, a Wand of Warp Wood, and many other such items are just variations on existing items.

This trick is especially useful if you have a player(s) who, disregarding the spirit of the game, memorizes the books and can rattle off ten uses for a wand at the drop of a hat. You can contain this type of player with changed items, or you might require a knowledge roll before you allow any speculation about what an item might be. This will lead to some controversy, however. The knowledge roll was part of my campaign some years ago but it proved to be a source of argument instead of a solution. Yet, ours might have been problems unique to our group, and perhaps it will work for you.

Another trick the DM can use is to vary multi-purpose items so that a figure will not know all of the item's powers by finding out one. Multi-purpose items should not be given out to low-level groups or be guarded in a first adventure. Yet when they do become available, you can alter one or more properties without making a new magic item.

A totally new item, for a beginning party, must produce an effect no more dramatic than a second- or third-level attack spell or up to a

fourth-level defensive or informational spell. New spells must also be controlled. Use a check-and-balance system built into the spell if at all possible.

On one occasion, with a party of sixth- to eighth-level figures, a sword was awarded that teleported without error—and as if that wasn't bad enough, it also always struck first. This caused many a good plan to go right down the old toilet. It is very easy for a DM to overdo it; limiting new items and spells in a beginning campaign is most important.

### The campaign overview

Once the first adventure is designed, it is time to add a history and overview to your campaign. Now you can draw a map around the adventure site, showing towns and other features. Working your way out is better than handing the party a map of the world for the first campaign. Given a huge map, they will want to go somewhere you haven't even had a chance to consider as yet. By working your way from the inside out, you will have a much better grip on a history that makes sense and hangs together logically. Don't worry about other countries/islands/counties on the map until the home base for your first-level group is well defined. As you begin to expand, you can let the party hear about other adventures they may be able to try in the future. Thus, they will be able to choose where they will go as time passes and you will be ready for them.

Unfortunately, there is no pat formula for designing an adventure. That is what makes *D&D* and *AD&D* so attractive. Yet, after playing each design you can look at the overall result and learn from what you have done. If the party is moving too quickly or too slowly, you can make up for it in the next adventure. If you design too far ahead, either the party will be too weak or too strong to do what you would like to see them do. Moderation, equilibrium and care are the chief words to remember in designing a campaign.

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