



GOALS HELP GAMIFY COMBAT SO PLAYERS CAN QUANTIFY SUCCESS. CHOOSE 1 OR MORE!



ASSASSINATE
QUIETLY TAKE OUT A SINGLE TARGET



BBEG
DEFEAT THE BIG BAD EVIL GUY/GAL/THING



GAUNTLET
PASS THROUGH HOSTILE TERRITORY ALIVE



INFILTRATE
SNEAK IN WITHOUT RAISING A GENERAL ALARM



PROTECT
ENSURE THE SAFETY OF AN OBJECT OR NPC



RETRIEVE
OBTAIN AN OBJECT OR NPC OR INFORMATION



THWART
STOP A RITUAL, HEIST, AMBUSH OR EVIL PLOT



DRAMATIC QUESTION

Consider a single yes-or-no question that generates gravitas & urgency in your encounter? *Can the heroes stop the lich before she completes her ritual & absorbs the souls of the helpless villagers?*

SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Conflict pits two opposing forces against each other. Not just the monsters vs. the players! *Staking the vampire vs. the sun rising! Fighting the enemy vs. falling into the chasm! Defending from attacks vs. not hurting the charmed villagers!*

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WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Most encounters are not *designed* to be deadly. That's why you set one or more goals for the players to accomplish. Give them a reason to care! Set the stakes for failure, and make it clear that the consequences will be unpleasant. *If we fail to kill the chief hobgoblin and steal the Horn of Thunderous Victory a goblin war party will attack the town at daybreak, and all of your friends and family will be slaughtered!*

BUT, WHY? WHY IS THE CLOAKER SO HUNGRY? KOBOLDS ARE ENCROACHING ON ITS HUNTING GROUNDS! NOW ITS A 3-WAY ENCOUNTER! CONSIDER WHY TO ADD DIMENSION.

SETUP & HOOK HOW DO THE PLAYERS LAND IN THIS ENCOUNTER? WHAT STORYLINE LED THEM HERE? AND HOW DID THEY FIND IT?

HIDDEN CLUES & SECRETS THIS IS GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE THE STORY. WHAT CAN THE CHARACTER LEARN HERE BY INTERROGATING A CAPTIVE, SEARCHING THE AREA, DISSECTING A DEAD CREATURE, INVESTIGATING HOW A TRAP WAS MADE...?

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



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ENVIRONMENT SETS THE STAGE! CONSISTENCY LENDS BELIEVABLY WHILE PARADOX KEEPS PLAYERS GUESSING. PRO TIP: COMBINE 2 BELOW.

LORE EPIC LOCATIONS HAVE HISTORY. WAS THE DESERT ONCE AN OCEAN? WHAT CIVILIZATION ONCE INHABITED THESE RUINS? WHY DO LOCALS AVOID THESE WOODS?

-  **ARCTIC**
MOUNTAINS OF ICE. TUNDRAS. ICY WATERS...
-  **AQUATIC**
SEAFARING. SHIPWRECKS. UNDERWATER LAIRS...
-  **COASTAL**
BEACHES. BLUFFS. ISLANDS. LAKES. RIVERS...
-  **DESERT**
ENDLESS SANDS. DRY RAVINES. RED ROCKS...
-  **FOREST**
CONFIERS. EVERGREENS. UNKNOWN GROWTHS...
-  **GRASSLANDS**
FARMLANDS. HILLS. PLAINS. SAVANNAHS...
-  **HABITATIONS**
CITIES. HAMLETS. TOWNS & VILLAGES
-  **INTERPLANAR**
OVERLAP THE FEYWILD. THE SHADOWFELL...
-  **JUNGLE**
MANGROVES. PALMS. SWAMPS. VINES...
-  **MOUNTAIN**
ANCIENT TRAILS. HIDDEN CAVES. ROCKY CRAGS...
-  **RUINS**
KEEPS. TEMPLES. CITIES. UNKNOWN CIVILIZATIONS...
-  **SKY & SPACE**
AERIAL COMBAT. FLOATING CITIES. SPELLJAMMING...
-  **UNDERGROUND**
CAVERNS. MINES. UNDERDARK CIVILIZATIONS...

EPIC LOCATION EPIC LOCATIONS ARE KNOWN BY ENIGMATIC NAMES...THE VALLEY OF UNBURDENED SOULS

DETAILS THE SENSES CONVEY THE FEELING OF BEING THERE. WHAT DO THEY SEE, HEAR, SMELL & TASTE? WHAT MEMORIES OR FEELINGS ARE EVOKED?

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OBSTACLES ADD DIMENSION TO YOUR ENCOUNTERS WITHOUT PILING ON MORE MONSTERS. PRO TIP: MORE THAN 3 IS UNMANAGEABLE

TYPE	NAME			XP
DC AVOID	DESCRIPTION			SUCCESSFUL SAVE
DC DISARM				FAILED SAVE
DC REPAIR	ARMOR CLASS	HIT POINTS	SAVING THROW	

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HAZARDOUS BRAINSTORM

- Air Quality:** Contaminated, Poisonous, Thin...
- Bystanders:** Innocent Creatures
- Caustic:** Acid, Oozes, Rust Inducing...
- Climate:** Cold, Heat, Precipitation, Wind...
- Cover:** Constructed & Natural
- Darkness:** Cave, Fog, Magical, Nightfall...
- Desecrated:** Battles, Graves, Necromancy...
- Fire:** Buildings, Forest, Hearth, Pits, Pyres...
- Illusions:** Magical, Mirages, Optical...
- Magic/Anti-Magic:** Devices, Fields, Traps...
- Noise:** Damage, Deafness, Distraction...
- Poisonous:** Gases, Locks, Plants, Pools...
- Portals:** Doors, Gates, Locks, Planar...
- Psychic:** Charm, Fear, Madness, Sleep...
- Terrain:** Difficult, Hazardous... *Disasters!*
- Time:** Competitions, Countdowns, Timers...
- Traps:** Visible/Known vs. Unseen/Unknown
- Vertical:** Climbing, Falling, Flying...
- Volcanic:** Eruptions, Fire, Lava, Smoke...
- Water:** Drowning, Floods, Ice, Pools, Rivers...
- Webs:** Could Be A Bridge, Or A Ladder...








THREAT LEVEL YOU CAN NEVER TRULY PREDICT, BUT SET YOUR EXPECTATION.

	<input type="checkbox"/> TRIVIAL A STORY-BUILDING OBSTACLE
	<input type="checkbox"/> LOW SOFTEN 'EM UP FOR A FUTURE FIGHT
	<input type="checkbox"/> MODERATE HIGH TENSION. BUT ACHIEVEABLE
	<input type="checkbox"/> SEVERE OH, YOU WANT A CHALLENGE?
	<input type="checkbox"/> DEADLY RUNNING AWAY MIGHT BE SMART

ENCOUNTER PLANNER MONSTERS

THREAT ASSESSMENT MOST RPG SYSTEMS USE A VALUE (XP, CR, ETC.) TO GRADE MONSTERS AND PROVIDE WAY TO CALCULATE A BUDGET BASED ON THE LEVEL/NUMBER OF CHARACTERS.

<input type="text"/>	ENCOUNTER BUDGET					
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>	SUM TOTAL OF MONSTERS	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

CREATURE CHOICE

CREATURES WITHOUT MOTIVATION ARE JUST OBSTACLES. CONSIDER THEIR GOALS. ALSO CONSIDER HOW THEY RELATE. PRO TIP: DEFY EXPECTATIONS TO KEEP PLAYERS GUESSING!

CREATURE(S)	PRIMARY THREAT	XP
MOTIVATION & GOALS		
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER THREATS		
CREATURE(S)	SECONDARY THREAT	XP
MOTIVATION & GOALS		
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER THREATS		
CREATURE(S)	LESSER THREATS	XP
MOTIVATIONS, RELATIONSHIPS		
CREATURE(S)		XP
MOTIVATIONS, RELATIONSHIPS		

MOTIVATIONS

Abberations: Alien entities have inexplicable motivations. Focus on the terror they cause.

Animals, Beasts & Monstrosities: Instinctually want to eat & protect hunting grounds. Social species protect the pack. Some types can be trained by intelligent creatures to guard assets.

Constructs: Exclusively follow their creator's programming. They may act erratically in paradoxical situations or from critical damage.

Dragons: Tyrannical & greedy by nature. Driven to conquest, but generally apathetic as rulers. Pathological compulsion to hoard treasure.

Fey: Mischievous, but rarely evil. Driven to dramatic extremes by emotions or aesthetics. Consider child-like or dream-state goals.

Giant Folk: Concerned largely with Giant politics, varying in sophistication by type. Interested in beasts & humanoids for food, slaves & resources.

Humanoids: Driven to dominate territory & control resources. Sophistication depends on average intelligence. May use ideology or religion to quell and control populations.

Interplanar: Celestials seek to purify the cosmic order. Will influence or protect creatures for those interests. Fiends do just the opposite: they seek to corrupt. Elementals are unpredictable, like a storm, motivated by wavelengths outside of our perception. Controlling elementals is a tenuous undertaking of great hubris.

Plants, Oozes & Fungi: Exist to survive, propagate & divide. Higher intelligence may improve tactics, but not motives. Blights also have a compulsive streak, see Undead below.

Undead: Relentlessly act from compulsion. Lower beings carry out the will of their creator, even at the expense of survival. Ghosts and spirits have unfinished business. Higher beings are driven by malice, "hunger" or megalomania.

"AND IF YOU GAZE LONG ENOUGH INTO AN ABYSS, THE ABYSS WILL GAZE BACK INTO YOU."
-FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

IS IT TOO DEADLY?

According to Mike Shea (The Lazy DM), an D&D encounter may be deadly if the *sum total of monster challenge ratings* is greater than one quarter of the sum total of character levels, or half the sum total of character levels if the characters are above 4th.

Pathfinder players can generate a similar result using Table 10-2: *Creature XP and Role* from the Pathfinder 2e Core Rulebook.

LABEL

DATE



STR OFF: MELEE ATTACKS DEF: UNGRAPPLE

- 1-8 Weakling:** Avoids melee, more likely to flee. Very susceptible to being grappled & captured.
- 9-13 Average:** Will rely on other abilities first, knows that stronger creatures pose a threat up close.
- 14+ Brute:** Not afraid to get up close and personal. Capable of grappling & shoving average foes.

DEX OFF: RANGED ATTACKS DEF: ARMOR CLASS, SAVING THROWS, UNGRAPPLE

- 1-8 Easy Target:** Easy to hit, terrible aim & not very stealthy. Will rely on brute strength or magic.
- 9-13 Average:** Will rely on other abilities first, decent aim and agility. Tentative about using surprise.
- 14+ Lightfoot:** Harder to hit, prefers ranged attacks. When up close, will prefer to hide & ambush.

CON OFF: N/A DEF: HIT POINTS, SAVING THROWS

- 1-8 Lightweight:** Probably has an innate sense that it's fragile. Will prioritize defense & cover.
- 9-13 Average:** Healthy fear of taking damage, but not a coward. Unlikely to take unnecessary risks.
- 14+ Roughneck:** Not afraid to take some damage, resists endurance attacks quite well. (ex: Poison)

INT OFF: COMBAT STRATEGY, SPELLCASTING DEF: SAVING THROWS

- 1-7 Instinctual:** Uses natural advantages effectively, but can't adjust its tactics on the fly.
- 8-11 Adaptable:** Applies limited strategy, but can assess and adjust to threats on the fly.
- 12-13 Coordinated:** Plans & coordinates with others. Has several strategies, adjusts to adapt.
- 14-18 Proficient:** Able to assess enemy weaknesses and improvise strategies on the fly.
- 19+ Superhuman:** Able to detect hidden weaknesses. Can mimic or meet enemy tactics.

WIS OFF: TARGETING, SPELLCASTING DEF: SURVIVAL INSTINCT, SAVING THROWS

- 1-7 Ignorant:** Chooses targets by proximity. May fail to flee in time: underdeveloped survival instinct.
- 8-11 Blunt:** Can make rudimentary target & threat assessments. Understands when to retreat.
- 12-13 Aware:** Chooses targets strategically. Likely to attempt to parlay rather than simply withdraw.
- 14-18 Wise:** Avoids fights where victory is in question. Likely to bluff, bargain or bully before retreating.
- 19+ Superhuman:** Rarely fights. Always has several escape plans. Never caught flat-footed.

CHA OFF: SPELLCASTING DEF: PARLAY, SAVING THROWS

- 1-7 Crude:** Poor social skills. Subject to tantrums and emotional outbursts. Easily fooled & conned.
- 8-11 Affable:** Reasonable self-control and will power. Can detect obvious lies & deception.
- 12-13 Disarming:** Quick witted and streetwise. Fast friends at the tavern, and tough to deceive.
- 14-18 Shrewd:** Can sell ice to an eskimo. Knows how to lie effectively. Strong willed & persuasive.
- 19+ Superhuman:** Charming almost to magical proportions. An iron will with a silver tongue.

PARSING ABILITIES MONSTERS PLAY TO THEIR STRENGTHS & AVOID THEIR WEAKNESSES:

STR CON Rushes in to melee, not afraid to take damage.

STR DEX Ambush predator, counts on a fast win.

DEX CON Hard to hit with lots of endurance. Willing to fight a battle of attrition.

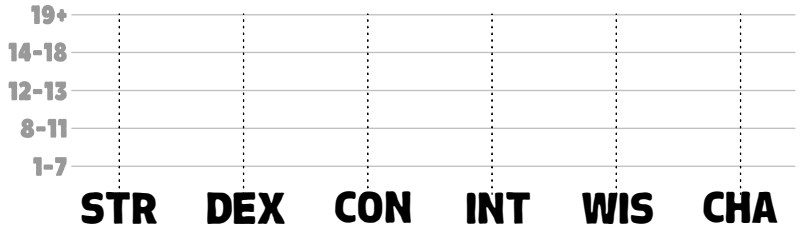
For a deeper understanding of these concepts, pick up *The Monsters Know What They're Doing* by Keith Ammann.

MONSTER

COMBAT TACTICS

Before you dig into making a stat block, consider this monster's fighting style from a more holistic perspective. Remember the story you're telling about this monster, and use these tools to build a believable tactical profile.

ABILITY CONTOUR PLOT THIS MONSTER'S ABILITY SCORES ON THE GRAPH BELOW. IDENTIFY PRIMARY OFFENSE & DEFENSE ABILITIES ON THE TABLES TO THE LEFT.



FIGHTING STYLE USING THE ABILITY CONTOUR & THE REFERENCE ON THE LEFT SUMMARIZE THIS CREATURE'S FIGHTING STYLE IN A FEW, QUICK SENTENCES.

ICONIC POWERS

Compelling monsters have an iconic ability that defines them, one or more abilities that enhance or augment it, and an armed or unarmed melee attack. This is a brainstorm, not a stat block. Consider the unexpected & play against expectations.

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HIDDEN ASSETS

Unique creatures have hidden talents & traits. Given the opportunity, they will shape the environment and the situation to leverage these strengths. Consider special senses, proficiencies, resistances, immunities and defensive magical abilities.

MORALE & FLAWS

Assess this creature's instincts, training & motivation. Consider the strength of its survival instinct. What does it fear? Does it have any sensitivities or an Achilles heel? Under what conditions will it withdraw, parlay or surrender?



HP Left Perceived Injuries

90% Light

70% Moderate

40% Severe

20% Critical

LABEL

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THEATER OF WAR USE THIS SPACE TO PLAN YOUR MANUEVERS. SIMPLE LINES & SYMBOLS WILL SUFFICE. TRY COLORED PENCILS!

A large grid of dotted lines for planning maneuvers.

MANUEVERS DEVISE A PLAYBOOK FOR EACH THREAT OVER THE FIRST THREE ROUNDS. USE THE SPACE ABOVE TO VISUALIZE. THEN, CONSIDER HOW EACH THREAT REACTS TO BELIEVING THEY ARE WINNING & LOSING.

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WINNING				
LOSING				