SLY FLOURISH'S
THE LAZY DM'S COMPANION

GUIDELINES AND INSPIRATION TO HELP YOU RUN AWESOME
FIFTH EDITION FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAMES

MICHAEL E. SHEA

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the third in the Lazy DM's series, alongside *Return of the Lazy DM* and *The Lazy DM's Workbook*. As with each of those books, you don't need to read the entire series to find value in this book. Each title stands alone, but also works together with the others to help you run great fantasy RPGs.

Return of the Lazy DM offers an eight-step framework for preparing for your game, along with deeper dives into setting up, running, and thinking about your game. *The Lazy DM's Workbook* sits beside you at your table when you're running your game, offering references, random tables, and maps to help you improvise as things take unexpected turns.

The Lazy DM's Companion is designed to work with you while you're preparing your game, offering guidelines and inspiration to make running games easier, and to help you build fantastic adventures and campaigns.

Over the past seven years of running the fifth edition of the world's most popular fantasy roleplaying game, we've all learned new tips and tricks to make things run better. We've looked at the bumps and sharp corners of this system and have learned how to smooth them out. This book contains more such guidelines, all designed to make it easier to run our games and focus on the parts that bring the most fun to the table.

Although this book was written with fifth edition fantasy in mind, much of what's here can be used with any fantasy RPG. About half the book contains guidelines to help you prepare and run 5e fantasy games, with those guidelines able to be used alone or in conjunction with other parts of the book as you see fit. You're free to use what works for you, to skip what doesn't, and to modify any of the book's suggestions and advice to suit your game—including modifying it for games other than 5e fantasy.

The other half of the book contains adventure and campaign generators—sets of random tables built around particular themes or functions such as generating a villain, cult, or god; or for building adventures around different narrative frameworks. These random tables have been grouped thematically, so you typically won't need to flip around to access all the tables you need. We've spent a lot of effort making sure these tables hit the right resolution—specific enough to give you clear ideas you can use, but general enough that you don't get overtaken by minutiae.

This book also contains a number of location maps. While the maps in *The Lazy DM's Workbook* focused on specific locations, the maps in this book are more general purpose. Each has been designed to serve as the basis for multiple locations, using a mixture of natural and constructed environments. Each has enough details to fill things out, but enough details left blank that you can use them in multiple situations.

USING RANDOM TABLES

This book makes heavy use of random tables, in the hope of inspiring all of us as DMs to let our minds travel in directions we never would have considered on our own. These random tables aren't intended to build entire adventures with just a few dice rolls. Rather, they're intended to inspire you to come up with your own adventure ideas as you and the dice work together to create something new and unique.

When you're sitting down to plan an adventure, go through the generators in this book and see if any of them includes a theme that excites you. Then roll on the tables in that generator and see what comes up. The results might make no sense to you initially. But spend some time with them, and see if you can make sense of them as the story forms in your mind. If they *really* don't work, just reroll and try again. Random tables alone aren't enough to build a fun game, but a creative mind fueled by randomness can come up with truly unique and inspiring adventures.

GUIDELINES FOR STORY-FOCUSED GAMES

All the guidelines in this book serve one ultimate purpose—to make it easier for you to run your games while staying focused on the evolving story taking place at your table. This book is built from the philosophy that the stories we share with friends and family matter more than the mechanics of the game. The mechanics serve the story, not the other way around. Likewise, the book is built around the idea that as DMs, we don't write the story ahead of time. Rather, we set the stage for the story that we and the players create at the table together.

Every part of this book is intended to make it easier to share that story. As such, the book abstracts the mechanics as much as possible to keep a focus on high-action fantasy roleplaying. As you would expect from any Lazy DM book, *The Lazy DM's Companion* aims you towards the easy path whenever possible, sometimes simplifying the fine details that other DMs embrace. This process might push too far for you in some areas. That's fine. Just use the guidelines that help you share the story you want to share in the way you want to share it.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVISATION

The following tools can help you improvise during your games. Keep a copy of this section handy, paste notes in your favorite DM's book, or memorize the key mechanics presented here to help you react to unexpected events and unforeseen changes in the game.

DIFFICULTY CHECKS

For any given task or challenge, ask yourself how hard it is to accomplish. Then assign a DC from **10 (easy) to 20 (very hard)**. If a task is trivial, don't bother asking for a roll. Rather, the characters automatically succeed. Likewise, reserve DCs above 20 for superhuman challenges.

IMPROVISED DAMAGE

Decide on a challenge rating (CR) for the source of the damage, from **CR 1 (low challenge) to CR 20 (very high challenge)**. Then roll a number of damage dice of a particular kind, as follows:

- **Single-Target Damage:** 7 × CR (or 2d6 per CR)
- **Multiple-Target Damage:** 3 × CR (or 1d6 per CR)

This challenge rating can be thought of as roughly equivalent to the average level of a group of characters. However, don't automatically choose a challenge rating based on the level of the characters. Rather, the level of the challenge might be higher or lower than the characters, depending on the situation.

IMPROVISED STATISTICS

Whenever you need to improvise Armor Class, attack modifiers, saving throw DCs, or other combat statistics for a creature, trap, object, or obstacle, use the following guidelines based on its challenge rating::

- AC = 12 + 1/2 CR
- DC = 12 + 1/2 CR
- Attack Bonus = 3 + 1/2 CR
- Damage = 7 × CR (or 2d6 per CR)
- Saving Throw with Proficiency = 3 + 1/2 CR
- Hit Points = 20 × CR

When improvising statistics for traps and other objects that deal damage and can be attacked to destroy them, estimate the object's CR by comparing it to various creatures that produce the same sorts of effects in combat.

OTHER IMPROV TRICKS

The following tricks can also help make it easier for you to improvise during your game:

- Use the story the players give to you, rather than forcing the characters to stick to a path you set.
- Use static monster damage.
- In combat, go around the table by player instead of rolling for initiative.

- Use advantage and disadvantage to reward unique approaches or clarify poor choices.
- Improve pacing by changing monster hit points on the fly to speed up or prolong a fight. (See "Monster Difficulty Dials" on page 31 for more on this topic.)
- Let the characters stumble upon two weak monsters, then see whether the monsters and characters want to fight or simply have a conversation.

DEADLY ENCOUNTER BENCHMARK

Choose monsters that make sense for the location, the situation, and the story. Don't worry about whether an encounter is "balanced"—except to determine if it might be deadly. **An encounter might be deadly if the total of all the monsters' challenge ratings is greater than one quarter of the total of all the characters' levels, or one half of the characters' levels if the characters are 5th level or higher.**

If an encounter might be deadly, warn the players—and make sure the characters have a chance to escape. (See "Lazy DM Combat Encounters" on page 30 for more information on creating great combat encounters.)

RUNNING HORDES

When running large numbers of creatures, instead of rolling independent attack rolls or saving throws, **assume that one-quarter of those rolls succeed**. Increase or decrease that number depending on the situation (for example, if many creatures in the horde have advantage or disadvantage). Additionally, instead of tracking individual hit points for a horde, you can tally the damage done to the entire horde when any of its creatures are hit. Every time the tally becomes equal to or higher than the hit points of any individual creature in the horde, remove a creature from the horde and reset the tally. Round monster hit points to the nearest 5 or 10 to make things easier.

NAMES

You can never have enough names on hand while improvising your game. Here are a few you can use whenever an NPC, location, business, or other part of your game needs a name.

First Names: Shum, Agtos, Edbert, Josiane, Olaugh, Rosaline, Pearson, Boyle, Typhon, Satyros, Ronald, Brice, Wilford, Circe, Surbag, Kayla, Latona, Cecily, Shuzug, Moth, Dolly, Minerva, Prutha, Esmour, Tristan, Lake, Stewart, Hebub, Lanos, Ingram, Orvist, Daud, Metope

Last Names/Organization Names: Lionstone, Treeson, Oakhelm, Gentleheart, Whitesong, Starharp, Nightchaser, Shadowstinger, Catclaw, Faeriebound, Leafwing, Goldrock, Darkslicer, Gravewalker, Rainbright, Needleflinger, Goosechaser, Steelclaw, Scalerazor, Glasscutter, Ironhouse, Eboncloud

QUICK TRICKS FOR LAZY DMS

The following quick tricks are designed to make it as easy as possible to run fun, story-focused games. You can find more tricks like these in chapter 28 of *Return of the Lazy DM*.

START WITH INSPIRATION

Award inspiration to each character at the beginning of a session. This takes some of the weight off of needing to remember to reward inspiration during the game. You can still award it again during the game if players have used it.

USE INDEX CARDS FOR INITIATIVE

Index cards can be used to track initiative in two potential ways. First, fold them over into "table tents" and number them from 1 to 9. Then hand them out to the players in the order of their characters' initiative. Alternatively, write the characters' names on one side of the card and put character info useful for you on the other. Fold them over the top of your DM screen, then set them out in initiative order each time combat begins.

AVERAGE HANDFULS OF DICE

You can reduce the size of huge handfuls of dice by removing pairs of dice from the pile and adding their average as a static number. For every two dice you remove, just add the maximum value on a single die plus one to the static bonus. So 2d4 becomes 5, 2d6 becomes 7, 2d8 becomes 9, 2d10 becomes 11, and 2d12 becomes 13. This way, rolling 8d6 can instead become 2d6 + 21 or 8d8 can become 2d8 + 27.

USE PASSIVE SCORES

Continually calling for checks in the middle of the narrative can disrupt the flow of the story. Instead, keep the characters' passive Perception, passive Insight, and passive Investigation scores in front of you on a cheat sheet or on index cards. Then use those passive scores to describe what the characters see or experience while exploring the scene.

CAMPSITE STORIES

During rests, ask the players to tell a story of their character or describe how their character feels about what's been going on in the campaign. This can help players dig into their characters' thoughts and expose those thoughts to you and the other players. Players might want to describe their characters' conversations while on watch in the same manner.

PASSIVE MONSTER INITIATIVE

For simple battles, use a passive initiative score for monsters, equal to 10 plus the monster's Dexterity bonus. This typically puts monsters in the middle of the initiative order, rather than risking them being too high or too low.

STARS AND WISHES

Every few games, take time to ask each player for their "stars and wishes"—a concept described on the Gauntlet RPG blog. ⬈

Ask each player two questions:

- What have they enjoyed about the game so far?
- What do they want to see more of in future games?

The answers to these questions can help you understand exactly what your players are getting from the game, and can give you ideas for how the game might unfold in the future.

OFFER CINEMATIC ADVANTAGE

Throughout the game, offer players advantage on checks or attacks if they're willing to undertake high-action moves. For example, a character might leap up and swing from a chandelier to stab at a foe down below. Call for an ability check, granting advantage on the character's next attack with a successful check. But on a failed check, the character's move goes awry and they fall.

Most characters will focus on moves that use ability checks they're good at, making success more likely than failure. A slight chance of failure can make winning advantage feel that much sweeter, but keep failure conditions fairly minor so that going for cinematic advantage doesn't seem too risky to the players.

OTHER QUICK TRICKS

The following tricks make excellent additions to every DM's toolbox:

- Keep a list of random names on hand to use for NPCs, villains, and monsters.
- Describe the world through the eyes of the characters, actively narrating what they see and know about the world around them.
- Don't ask for a d20 roll if there isn't a chance for failure, or if failure wouldn't be interesting. This can help you remember to never bury useful or vital information behind an ability check.
- Reskin bandit, thug, ogre, and giant stat blocks to make new hard-hitting monsters of all different sizes.
- Reveal monster ACs and the DCs for ability checks to the players, and help them calculate ahead of time what they'll need on their d20 roll to succeed. This lets the players focus on the excitement of the die roll rather than the math.
- When appropriate, roll on a character's behalf so the player doesn't know the result for something their character wouldn't know.

CORE ADVENTURE GENERATOR

The tables in this section can help you generate a core fantasy adventure based on the traditional concept of getting hired by a patron or other NPC to take on a quest in a specific location. Often these adventures take place in small settlements surrounded by ancient ruins and monstrous lairs on the edge of civilization.

Use these tables together to generate and inspire full adventures, or use individual tables to fill in the details of other adventures you create or play. This generator (and specifically, the Dungeon Monsters table and the Treasure table) is set up for characters of 1st to 4th level, but can be easily modified for higher-level adventures.

PATRONS AND NPCS

Use these tables to generate a patron or NPC for your adventure, applying an NPC stat block to create villains, hirelings, rivals, or heralds.

d20	Behavior	d20	Ancestry
1	Enthusiastic	1	Human
2	Flighty	2	Elf
3	Shifty	3	Dwarf
4	Optimistic	4	Halfling
5	Paranoid	5	Orc
6	Well spoken	6	Drow
7	Superior	7	Tiefling
8	Haughty	8	Dragonborn
9	Pessimistic	9	Fey
10	Suspicious	10	Goblin
11	Worried	11	Construct
12	Greedy	12	Celestial
13	Brave	13	Ghost
14	Stern	14	Wizard's familiar
15	Sly	15	Talking animal
16	Wise	16	Avian
17	Reserved	17	Lizardfolk
18	Cheery	18	Catfolk
19	Opportunistic	19	Lycanthrope
20	Soft spoken	20	Artifact

QUESTS

Any quests the characters are asked to fulfill might be distilled down to one of the following starting points.

d20	Quest		Quest
1	Find an item	11	Open a gate
2	Kill a villain	12	Activate a monument
3	Rescue an NPC	13	Disable an artifact
4	Uncover a secret	14	Recover an item
5	Clear out monsters	15	Convince an NPC
6	Protect a monument	16	Awaken a monster
7	Protect an NPC	17	Put a monster to sleep
8	Steal an item	18	Bury a secret
9	Return an item	19	Discover a monument
10	Close a gate	20	Dig up an artifact

LOCATIONS, MONUMENTS, AND ITEMS

The location of the quest might also contain specific monuments or items tied to the adventure's goals.

d20	Location	d20	Monument	d20	Item
1	Tower	1	Sarcophagus	1	Coin
2	Crypts	2	Obelisk	2	Figurine
3	Keep	3	Orb	3	Gemstone
4	Cairn	4	Bone pile	4	Amulet
5	Giant statue	5	Skull	5	Earring
6	Caves	6	Megalith	6	Bell
7	Sewers	7	Pillars	7	Bone
8	Temple	8	Throne	8	Bowl
9	Mines	9	Statues	9	Candle
10	Mansion	10	Well	10	Ring
11	Academy	11	Orrery	11	Circlet
12	Dungeon	12	Effigy	12	Bracelet
13	Barrow	13	Arcane circle	13	Dagger
14	Vault	14	Spire	14	Goblet
15	Tomb	15	Altar	15	Key
16	Warren	16	Pit	16	Lamp
17	Ship	17	Fountain	17	Brooch
18	Sanctum	18	Archway	18	Skull
19	Cove	19	Cage	19	Mask
20	Castle	20	Brazier	20	Necklace

CONDITION, DESCRIPTION, AND ORIGIN

Locations, monuments, or items can be flavored by determining their condition, description, and origin.

d20	Condition	d20	Description	d20	Origin
1	Smoky	1	Ruined	1	Human
2	Acidic	2	Decrepit	2	Elven
3	Bloodied	3	Obsidian	3	Dwarven
4	Burning	4	Haunted	4	Halfling
5	Frozen	5	Unholy	5	Gnomish
6	Poisonous	6	Sunken	6	Tiefling
7	Necrotic	7	Forgotten	7	Dragonborn
8	Thunderous	8	Macabre	8	Orc
9	Ringing	9	Ancient	9	Goblinoid
10	Lightning	10	Festering	10	Undead
11	Radiant	11	Monstrous	11	Celestial
12	Shadowed	12	Golden	12	Fey
13	Oozing	13	Spired	13	Elemental
14	Ethereal	14	Towering	14	Giant
15	Whispering	15	Forsaken	15	Fiendish
16	Windswept	16	Gloomy	16	Unseelie
17	Drenched	17	Horrific	17	Aberrant
18	Diseased	18	Colossal	18	Shadow
19	Crystalline	19	Overgrown	19	Ethereal
20	Silvered	20	Shattered	20	Abyssal

CHAMBERS

Use this table when you need to define the purpose of a chamber in a dungeon, keep, or similar site. Reflavor any chamber to suit the theme of the adventure.

d20	Chamber		Chamber
1	Armory	11	Torture chamber
2	Prison	12	Bedchamber
3	Throne room	13	Gallery
4	Crypt	14	Dining hall
5	Treasury	15	Library
6	Barracks	16	Pantry
7	Monstrous lair	17	Laboratory
8	Storeroom	18	Cesspit
9	Charnel pit	19	Bone yard
10	Museum	20	Scrying chamber

DUNGEON DISCOVERIES

Add useful discoveries such as the following to your adventure, to create upward beats in the characters' story.

d20	Discovery		Discovery
1	Helpful NPC	11	Adventurer's journal
2	Holy fountain	12	Escape tunnel
3	Inspiring statue	13	Useful teleporter
4	Revealing mosaic	14	Enlightening mural
5	Radiant shrine	15	Healing spring
6	Friendly spirit	16	Wounded enemy
7	Hidden campsite	17	Well-stocked armory
8	Edible mushrooms	18	Friendly creature
9	Explorer's pack	19	Useful machinery
10	Spy hole	20	Historical library

DUNGEON MONSTERS

You can add monsters and other foes to your adventure by consulting the following table. Roll a d8 for easy monsters, roll a d12 to expand the range into hard monsters, or roll a d20 to also include dangerous monsters. If you decide to use a monster as a boss monster, give it double hit points and let it take an extra action each turn.

For foes such as bandits and cultists, you can also roll for ancestry on the previous page if those foes having a common origin makes sense for your narrative.

d20	Monster		Monster
1	Giant rats	11	Ghouls
2	Bandits	12	Specters
3	Cultists	13	Cult fanatics
4	Acolytes	14	Gelatinous cubes
5	Stirges	15	Ogres
6	Guards	16	Wererats
7	Skeletons	17	Basilisks
8	Oozes	18	Green hags
9	Shadows	19	Hell hounds
10	Spies	20	Mummies

TRAPS AND HAZARDS

Add traps as they make sense for the adventure. At 1st through 4th level, traps often have a DC of 13, and deal 7 (2d6) damage for easy traps or 11 (2d10) damage for hard traps.

d20	Trap or Hazard		Trap or Hazard
1	Spiked pit	11	Bear traps
2	Lightning blasts	12	Ghostly haunting
3	Poisoned darts	13	Poisoned gas
4	Swarms of insects	14	Magical instability
5	Explosive runes	15	Barbed spears
6	Radiant pillars	16	Dense fog
7	Flame-jet idols	17	Psychic feedback
8	Force beams	18	Greasy floor
9	Crippling caltrops	19	Thick webs
10	Acidic pools	20	Freezing jets

TREASURE

This table lets you add treasure to the adventure as appropriate. Roll a d10 to determine monetary treasure, or a d20 for monetary and magical treasure.

d20	Treasure		Treasure
1	Coins	11	*Potion of healing*
2	Bag of gemstones	12	Other potion
3	Platinum jewelry	13	Scroll or *spell scroll*
4	Rune-scribed gem	14	*Bag of holding*
5	Golden goblet	15	Wondrous item
6	Ancient tome	16	Wand or rod
7	Treasure map	17	Magic light weapon
8	Ancient relic	18	Magic heavy weapon
9	Fantastic art	19	Magic ranged weapon
10	Jeweled idol	20	Magic armor

SPELLS

Some commonly discovered relics might grant a single-use spell, while less common magic items might allow their wielder to cast a spell daily. Use the list of common spells below or choose specialized spells to create unique magic item rewards.

d20	Spell		Spell
1	*Magic missile*	11	*Spiritual weapon*
2	*Burning hands*	12	*Lesser restoration*
3	*Shield*	13	*Daylight*
4	*Cure wounds*	14	*Mass healing word*
5	*Guiding bolt*	15	*Revivify*
6	*Invisibility*	16	*Lightning bolt*
7	*Scorching ray*	17	*Fireball*
8	*Shatter*	18	*Dispel magic*
9	*Aid*	19	*Haste*
10	*Misty step*	20	*Fly*

BUILDING AN RPG GROUP

Finding and maintaining a solid group for roleplaying gaming remains the most difficult task for many DMs. This section offers suggestions for finding players that fit well with your group, and for keeping that group going for years to come.

FINDING PLAYERS

The first step to building an RPG group is finding players. Some of the most common ways to find players for a group include the following:

- Recruit friends and family
- Recruit coworkers
- Ask about putting a notice up at your local game store or library
- Join local organized play groups
- Seek LFG (Looking for Group) forums on Discord, Reddit, Meetup, Next Door, and other forums

SELECTING PLAYERS

Before you invite a player to your gaming group, ensure that they're the right fit for your game and the other players. Start by asking a prospective player questions about their commitment, play style, and reaction to your style of play. Example questions might include the following:

- Do they live nearby, and can they commit to the game's schedule?
- Do they consider themselves a more story-focused or more tactics-focused player?
- Are they okay playing with theater-of-the-mind combat or playing on a battle grid?
- What do they enjoy most about RPGs?
- How do they weight their enjoyment of the following: NPC interaction, exploration, world lore, character background, character optimization, and tactical combat?

Asking questions isn't about getting right or wrong answers. Rather, questions can help you identify players who will fit well into your game. They'll also help you determine if there are things a player desires that they're *not* going to find in your game.

Take the time to meet one-on-one with a prospective player and talk to them about what they want from your game and what experiences they've had with other groups. Go with your gut judgment on whether each player you meet will be a good fit for your group.

If they seem like a good fit, invite a player to a single-session game or a short series of games at a different time than your regularly scheduled session, ideally with one or more regular players from your group. See how they fit in during an actual game. If they don't fit, you don't have to invite them to another game. But if they do feel like a good fit, you can invite them to your regular game and see how things go.

FLEXIBLE NUMBERS OF PLAYERS AND ON-CALL PLAYERS

Decide on the minimum and maximum number of players for any given session. A minimum of three and maximum of six is often ideal. While seeking players, you might find some who can't commit to a regularly scheduled game, but who can come from time to time. Put these players on an "on-call" list so that if you have an open chair, you can ask them if they're able to fill it. Putting prospective new players on an on-call list is also a good way to see if they're a good fit for the group before they become a regular player.

CHOOSE A REGULAR SCHEDULE

Rather than attempting to schedule games from session to session, find a set day and time to run your games and stick to it. Run games every week if possible. Otherwise, try every other week at the same day and time. Choose regular, shorter games rather than longer, more infrequent games to help with scheduling.

THE GAME MUST GO ON

Run the game as regularly as you can. Don't cancel games if one or two players can't make it. If you're able to play with as few as three and have a regular group of six, it should take four players canceling before you have to call off a game. The more consistent the game, the more likely that the players will make it a part of their regular schedule.

If you find that certain players are regularly missing the game, ask if they would prefer to be on your on-call list, and then seek a new player with better availability.

LET ABSENT CHARACTERS FADE INTO THE BACKGROUND

Don't worry about what happens to characters in game when a player misses the session. If there is an easy way for the character to step out of the story, take it. Otherwise, just let the character fade into the background. Your players will understand why you're taking such liberties with the universe, and that in-world consistency isn't as important as making allowances for the realities of people's lives.

RPG SAFETY TOOLS

Safety tools help ensure that you and your players are always comfortable with the subject matter of the games you run—especially when that subject matter involves potentially troubling tropes or themes. The safety tools presented in this section can be used individually or together to make sure that everyone is comfortable with the material in the game, even as that material evolves during play. You can choose which safety tools work well for you and your group, and discuss their use early in your game. Usually this means discussing safety tools during your campaign's session zero, or at the beginning of a single-session game.

POTENTIALLY SENSITIVE TOPICS

When you discuss safety tools, describe potentially sensitive topics that might come up in an adventure or campaign. The following table presents a number of topics that are good to talk about, but this is not an exhaustive list.

Blood	Murder
Body horror	Paralysis
Burning	Physical restraint
Cancer	Racism
Cannibalism	Rats
Claustrophobia	Real-world religion
Death by exposure	Ritual sacrifice
Freezing	Self-harm
Gaslighting	Sexism
Genocide	Sexual assault
Gore	Sexual contact
Harm to animals	Slavery
Harm to children	Spiders
Homophobia	Starvation
Incest	Terrorism
Insects	Thirst
Kidnapping	Torture
Mental domination	Transphobia

Decide first what *you* are comfortable with as a DM before bringing a list of topics to your players. Add any topics you're not comfortable with to your own lines and veils (see below).

When describing these topics, ensure that the players are comfortable with them. But also ensure that you identify which topics they are *not* comfortable with, so you can omit that material from your game.

LINES AND VEILS

The concept of lines and veils was originally brought to RPGs by Ron Edwards, allowing you to set parameters for handling sensitive topics in your game. Once you've had a discussion with your players on those topics, talk about whether individual topics should be a **hard line** (material that should never come up) and which can be **veiled** (material that is okay being described vaguely or handled off-screen). For example, after discussion, you and your players might come up with something like the following:

Hard Lines: Sexual assault, violence toward children, abuse toward children or animals, inter-character betrayal, character-driven torture
Veils: Sex and sexual contact, torture, racism, slavery

Discuss hard lines and veils in an open, nonjudgmental conversation with your players, and capture each player's individual lines and veils along with your own.

THE X CARD

Developed by John Stavropoulos, the X card is an index card placed in front of each player with a large "X" drawn on it. Anytime a player isn't comfortable with the material in a scene, they can hold up or touch the X card, notifying you that they are not comfortable with the current situation. When you see this, you can edit out that portion of the scene. Or, if you're not sure what exactly is being X-carded, you can call for a break to get more information privately.

PAUSE FOR A SECOND

"Pause for a second" is a verbal cue that players and DMs can use to interrupt the current in-world scene, have everyone break character, and discuss the current situation as players. It's specifically designed to work well with both online and in-person games.

This safety tool works in much the same way as an X card. But it can also be used to ensure that all the players are comfortable with shifts in the game's story. To use it, you or any other player can say, "Pause for a second" to interrupt the current state of play and break character. It can be used to edit content ("Pause for a second. I'm not comfortable beating a helpless character for information.") or to check in with the group ("Pause for a second. Are we okay making a deal with a vampire?").

As the DM, think about using "pause for a second" regularly, so as to break the stigma of using it only for the most extreme circumstances—which might cause players to avoid using it at all.

SESSION ZERO CHECKLIST

Session zero is a vital tool for getting players and DMs on the same page about a new campaign. A session zero takes place *before* the first session of a campaign. This special session gives you time to ensure that the players are on board with the themes of the campaign, and that their characters will integrate well together and with the adventures to come.

The following guidelines take you step-by-step through a session zero.

WRITE A ONE-PAGE GUIDE

Before your session zero, write out and deliver a one-page campaign guide to your players. Include the following information:

- **The campaign's theme and flavor.** Sell the campaign's story to your players so they're excited for the campaign.
- **What separates this campaign from others?** What are the main things about this campaign that the characters would know going in? This might be the "six truths" that separate your campaign from all others (see "Spiral Campaigns" on page 27).
- **What characters work best in the campaign?** Talk about specific character options that are a good fit for the campaign, including classes, backgrounds, heritage, skills, and so forth. Then discuss what kinds of motivations will help the characters best enjoy the campaign?
- **What potentially troubling themes might this campaign include?** Write out a list so the players know what they might be getting into and can talk to you about it.
- **What group patrons might the players select as a group?** Who might serve as their primary quest giver? (See below for more information.)

Keep your campaign guide down to a single page so that the players can easily read and absorb it.

DESCRIBE THE THEME

Once you and your players are sitting around the table or gathered online for session zero, start by describing the theme of the campaign and going over the details of the one-page campaign guide. Use this time to get the players excited for the campaign.

DISCUSS SAFETY TOOLS

Discuss any potentially troubling themes of the campaign and its adventures, establishing the lines and veils you and your players have for the campaign. (See "RPG Safety Tools" on page 9 for more on these concepts.) Write these things down. Discuss what tools you and your players can use to pause the game and break character whenever it becomes necessary to talk about the campaign's themes and content.

DECIDE ON A GROUP PATRON

A group patron is any NPC tied to all of the characters, and who can help propel the characters forward in an adventure or campaign. Describe potential group patrons that the players can choose from in your campaign, and let them discuss which ones they like. Work toward a consensus where all players are happy with the chosen patron. Don't let this choice alienate any players.

BUILD CHARACTERS TOGETHER

Work with the players to develop their characters, reinforcing the themes of the campaign and establishing the character motivations that will work best to fit the characters into the campaign. Mention if any skills or backgrounds are an especially good fit for the campaign. All this work is to ensure that **the characters are motivated to adventure together to solve the campaign's goal**.

If desired, you can connect the characters together with individual relationships. Allow the players to roll on the following table, or to use it as inspiration for a unique relationship of their own devising.

d20	Relationship		Relationship
1	Adopted siblings	11	Noble and bodyguard
2	Mentor and student	12	Soul bound
3	Friendly rivals	13	Former prisoners
4	Sage and scribe	14	Former criminals
5	Priest and acolyte	15	Hunted quarry
6	Fellow veterans	16	Pact bound
7	Ward and guardian	17	Apocalypse survivors
8	Spouses	18	Savior and saved
9	Buddy cops	19	Business partners
10	Childhood friends	20	Master and servant

RUN A SHORT ADVENTURE

Once the characters are built and your players are ready, you can run a short adventure at the end of session zero to introduce the characters to the campaign in a fast and exciting way. You might choose to run a single combat encounter with some added negotiation and exploration, after which the characters advance to 2nd level and are ready to fully engage with the story of the campaign.

RUNNING ONE-ON-ONE GAMES

Though a typical fantasy RPG is played with a group of four to six players and a DM, running games with a single player can be a lot of fun. A one-on-one game offers a unique way to play that focuses the whole story on a single character. This section offers tips and tricks for getting the most out of one-on-one play.

RUN A SIDEKICK

In addition to their main character, get the player to build a secondary character to act as a sidekick. Use simple options for a sidekick, such as simple subclasses, no feats, and no multiclassing. Work with the player to design the sidekick to have abilities that will complement those of the main character.

During the game, **the player controls the actions of the sidekick while the DM roleplays the sidekick**. This gives the DM a way to pass along valuable information, offers a continual avenue for roleplaying, and can help guide the adventure in a direction that leads to the most fun.

TUNE COMBAT

5e combat challenges typically expect four or five characters, so that using standard encounter-building guidelines will result in deadly battles for just two characters. Two characters have fewer resources, fewer actions in a round, and less synergy than a group of four or five characters.

Keep the following guidelines in mind while tuning combat for one-on-one play:

- Be careful running three or more monsters, and default to one or two monsters in a battle if possible. You can increase the number of lower-CR monsters if the characters have effective area attacks such as *fireball*.
- Remove legendary actions from legendary monsters.
- From 1st to 4th level, encounters where the sum total of monster challenge ratings is greater than half the level of the main character might be deadly. At 5th level or above, encounters might be deadly if the sum total of monster CRs is greater than the characters' level.

In addition to building your own encounters, you can use these guidelines to modify encounters in published adventures when running them one-on-one.

THE INVESTIGATION MODEL

Running games one-on-one can expand the range of your gameplay options, including how long your games can take and where you can play. The following "investigation" model offers you three gameplay modes for quick, fun games, two modes of which you can enjoy anywhere.

Session One: Seeking Jobs. In the first roleplay-focused session, the sidekick comes to the character with three potential job offers. You can use any method you prefer to generate these jobs, including the adventure generators in this book. Each job has a **patron**, a **quest**, a **location**, and a **reward**.

The player chooses which job their character will take during this roleplay-based session, which takes about 15 minutes and can be played anywhere.

Prepare the next session based on the player's decision of which job to take.

Session Two: The Interview. In the second roleplay-based session, the character meets with the patron offering the chosen job and hears the specifics of the job. This includes the **goal**, the **location**, known **potential threats**, and the potential **reward**. This session takes about 15 minutes and can be played nearly anywhere. Dice and a character sheet might be needed for ability checks.

Session Three: The Job. This session plays out like a typical game session. The character and the sidekick go to the location and attempt to complete the quest, facing monsters, NPCs, and other challenges before they complete it. This session takes one to three hours and is played in a typical setting.

OTHER TIPS

The following general tips can help make for a better experience running one-on-one-games:

- Try it. Playing one-on-one games might seem awkward at first. But once you do it, it's great fun.
- Use the sidekick effectively by using them to provide valuable information and advice that moves the story forward.
- The sidekick should always be a trusted ally, and shouldn't betray the character.
- Use the character's background to drive the story. It's much easier to support a single character's backstory in a one-on-one game than it is to work in the backgrounds of all the characters in a larger group.
- Offer magic item rewards that shore up the main character's weaknesses, such as a magic weapon that can cast *burning hands* once a day for a fighter with no spellcasting ability.
- Build sessions around the schedules of both you and the player. One of the advantages of a one-on-one game is that you don't need to complete an entire adventure in one session.

PLAYING RPGS ONLINE

Though RPGs were developed for play at a physical table, online tools now let players gather together from all over the world. This section offers tips for playing RPGs online, suitable for many different games and many different online tools and virtual tabletops.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOLS

Many different tools exist to run RPGs online, including virtual tabletops (VTTs) and online tools for managing characters, monsters, initiative, and many other aspects of a game. Many tools have vast arrays of features, but add complications that might get in the way of the fun of the game. So focus in on the tools that most easily get you and your players into the game and support the stories you share.

AUDIO AND VIDEO

Shared voice and, ideally, video are the main tools required for online play. A wide range of apps can be found that let you talk to and see other players online, so you have lots of solutions to choose from. Aside from your game materials, online communication is really the only tool required to run RPGs online.

ROLL HOWEVER YOU WILL

Many online VTTs include a shared dice roller and character integration. While these things can be nice to have, they aren't required for play. If your players prefer to use paper character sheets and roll physical dice, let them.

COMMON TECHNICAL PITFALLS

Setting up two-way communication between every member of a gaming group can be complicated. Take the extra time to work with each player to set up your tools of choice, and prepare to handle technical problems as they happen. Some players might have excellent communications, while others are spotty. Use tools like "press to talk" on your audio- or video-sharing app to avoid background noise, and ask players to mute their mics when needed. If players have trouble with a computer-based system, you can always suggest they switch to running your group's online tools on their phones.

ONLINE ETIQUETTE

Playing RPGs online has complications not typically seen during in-person play. You should discuss these complications and matters of online etiquette before play begins, keeping the following in mind:

- Consider using "press to talk"—keeping players muted except when they push a key to turn their microphones on—to avoid feedback and crosstalk.
- If possible, use video in addition to audio, to get better engagement and feedback from all players.
- Crosstalk often disrupts online play, and latency between speakers adds to the problem. When interruptions occur, stop the interrupter, call on the original speaker, and then return to the interrupter.
- Moderate chat by calling on individual players for responses rather than asking for the whole group to chime in.
- Note and engage with quiet players to ensure they're still involved in and are enjoying the game.
- Augment voice communication with text chats. You can use text chat for polls on potential next steps for the characters, prompts to jump into the conversation, or side conversations.
- It's everyone's job to help others communicate effectively in an online game. Keep a close eye on the text chat while running the game.

SHARING VISUALS

Most VTTs include systems for sharing maps and images, and online chat applications also offer ways to share images. So share pictures of NPCs, locations, monsters, and maps through your chat tool. Using a graphics viewer on your computer, you can copy and paste specific sections of maps showing areas explored by the characters, then share those cut-down images with the players.

TEXT-BASED COMBAT TRACKER

While virtual tabletops let you display maps and tokens for grid-based combat, you can also use a text-based combat tracker to represent creature distance and positioning in zone-based combat (see page 29).

Use bold or all-caps text for the names of zones, which are separated by a blank line. Then put each creature's name on its own line in the appropriate zone. If creatures in a zone are far enough apart that they need to use their movement to reach other creatures, leave a blank line between their names. Creatures whose names are all in a group can attack each other without moving.

Zone 1 ⟶ **ICY CAVE**
Myria

Creatures are next
to each other ⟶ Frost Giant Champion
Bilgrim

Zone 2 ⟶ **FROST GIANT TOMB**
Gordak
Sylceran
Yepa

Creatures must
move to reach ⟶
each other

Skeletal Frost Giant
Skeletal Frost Giant

Zone 3 ⟶ **DRAGON SKULL CAVE EXIT**

RUNNING SINGLE-SESSION GAMES

Many times, DMs find themselves in the position of running an entire game in a single session—commonly called a "one-shot" game. These games, often played within a limited time, require a different style of prep and play than ongoing campaigns. This section offers suggestions for getting the most out of single-session games.

AN ENTIRE ARC IN 4 HOURS

Single-session games need to encompass the entire arc of a story in a single game. While different one-shot games might have different goals or formats, the following points cover what most one-shot games likely require:

- **A strong start.** How does the session begin and how are the characters thrown into the adventure?
- **A solid hook.** What motivates the characters to follow the rest of the adventure?
- **A clear goal.** What are the characters trying to accomplish? In a single-session game, you don't want the goal to get buried. Make it clear.
- **A good villain.** Players always appreciate a cool villain in a single-session adventure.
- **A cool location.** Include interesting locations to explore whose secrets the characters can discover, then add thematically appropriate and fun NPCs and monsters.
- **A satisfying conclusion.** Good single-session adventures have a clear crescendo leading to a satisfying ending. It's hard to go wrong with a boss fight, but give yourself time to run it.

Some of these steps are similar to the eight steps from *Return of the Lazy DM*, which should come as no surprise. The eight steps are built to fully support the next session of any game, including one-shot games.

PREGENS OR NOT?

When planning a one-shot game ahead of time, ask your players to build their characters around the theme of the adventure, giving guidance that supports that theme. Alternatively, if you're running a one-shot game on the spur of the moment or in a convention setting, keep a set of pregenerated characters on hand. Consider the free pregenerated character packet available for *Sly Flourish's Fantastic Adventures.* ↗

WATCH THE TIME

One-shot adventures typically have a fixed playing time, often around four hours. Check with your players at the beginning of the game to ensure they can stay for the game's expected duration. Then keep track of the time throughout the adventure.

Plan for every scene to take roughly 45 minutes, then note how much time goes by as you play and how much time you have remaining. If one section runs long, tune your remaining material accordingly. It's very easy to lose track of time while in the flow of a game, so set timers if needed to keep things on track.

CUT FROM THE MIDDLE

It's far more important to run the climax of the adventure than the material in the middle of the adventure. Whether running a homebrew or a published one-shot, be prepared to cut from the middle to ensure you have enough time to run the ending to its conclusion. Shrink the dungeon. Cut scenes. Reduce the number of battles or the number of combatants in a battle. Do anything you need to do so that you give enough time for the ending of the adventure.

If you can, design or prepare scenes and situations with a clear way to cut them short or cut them out if needed. Nothing is worse than saying, "We're out of time so we're going to end it right here," in the middle of the big final fight of an adventure.

KEEP AN EYE ON THE END

One-shot games often end with big climactic scenes, including big battles. However much time you plan for running your one-shot game overall, prepare for about 45 minutes to an hour to run this final battle. Scale and scope the rest of the game to ensure you set this time aside to run your big final scene.

TRY OUT NEW PLAYERS

Single-session games are a great way to try out new players for a long-term gaming group. Rather than building big commitments with new players in longer campaigns, one-shot games give everyone a chance to try the game, try the DM, and try the group to see how it all plays out. Even if you have a stable group, think about running one-shot games with new players for a chance to enjoy your favorite RPG with new people—and to put new players on your list of people you'd like to play with again.

TEACHING NEW PLAYERS

Experienced DMs sometimes find themselves teaching the game to players brand new to the hobby. While many of us might have played the game for decades, it can be difficult to remember how different RPGs are from most other games. The guidelines in this section are intended to help you teach new players how to play, and to bring them into this wonderful hobby.

WHAT DO THEY KNOW?

Take some time to understand what previous experiences a new player comes in with. Have they played computer RPGs? What fantasy or science fiction do they like? Getting a clear reference point helps you know how best to teach the game given a new player's previous experience.

SHOW WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

For decades, it was near impossible for people new to the game to understand what it looks like without playing it themselves. Now, with the advent of online streaming games, thousands of examples exist. If someone is brand new to the hobby, consider sending them a link to a live-play game you think best serves as a positive example of how to play. This way, the new player can get a sense of how the game is played even before they sit down at the table.

TEACH THE CORE PROCESS

The first thing to focus on is describing the core process of the game to a new player:

- The DM describes the situation.
- The players describe what they want their characters to do.
- The DM adjudicates. Sometimes this results in the character rolling an ability check versus a difficulty class (DC) to see if they succeed or fail.
- The DM describes the results.

TEACH THE CORE MECHANIC

Alongside the core process of the story moving back and forth between the DM and the players, teach new players the core mechanic of the game:

- Roll a d20 and add any modifiers.
- Compare the total to a target number—usually either a Difficulty Class (DC) for an ability check, or an AC (Armor Class) for an attack roll.

Whenever a character tries to do something that requires skill or has a penalty for failure, this core mechanic helps determine what happens.

GET INTO THE GAME FAST

The sooner you can get a new player playing the game, the better. It's tempting to start off by diving into the rules and explaining everything that's going on in the game. But it's better to start with the core process and the core mechanic, the get straight into the action. All the various details and mechanics of the game can be explained as they come up, and are often less interesting than the story that comes from playing the adventure.

ASSIGN A BUDDY

As the DM, your plate is often full. You likely won't have a lot of time to explain every nuance of a character to a new player. Instead, choose an experienced player able to explain the details, and pair them up with the new player. Another option is to run a one-on-one session with the new player to show them the game as they play through a short adventure. You can run a sidekick to avoid overwhelming the player with two full characters. (See page 11 for information on one-on-one play.)

START AT 1ST LEVEL AND BE NICE

It can be tempting to start games at higher levels, but the fewer mechanics a new player needs to learn, the better. Starting at 1st level is ideal for new players trying to understand how the game is played. That said, 1st level is the deadliest level of the game, so be careful not to kill a new player's character and ruin their fun before it ever begins. "Options for 1st-Level Play" on page 15 has more information.

KEEP THINGS SIMPLE

For a first adventure, consider something simple. An NPC hires the characters to slay a monster or seek out treasure in a nearby dungeon. Include opportunities to roleplay, to explore and make ability checks, to make clear meaningful choices, and to get into non-deadly fights. You can use the adventure generators in this book to generate many types of simple adventures as needed.

PREGENS OR NOT?

Ask prospective new players whether they'd rather make a new character from scratch, or would prefer jumping right into the game with a pregenerated character. If time allows, sitting down with a new player and talking through the creation of their character can be a lot of fun. For some players, the process of character creation creates a much stronger bond with the game and with the world of the campaign.

Other players learn best by playing with pregenerated characters. Playing with a pregen character means having to learn fewer rules before play, and taking less time to get into the action as the game is played. Pregenerated characters often include a few options for customization, helping a new player feel like they have some choice in who they play. Take the time to look into these options so that even a pregenerated character feels unique.

OPTIONS FOR 1ST-LEVEL PLAY

In many ways, the 1st level of our favorite fantasy RPG is a unique game of its own. At 1st level, games have a reputation for deadliness like no other levels in the game. This section offers guidelines and options for running 1st-level games to maximize the fun for the players.

EMBRACE THE DEADLINESS

If you and your players are on board, you can embrace the deadliness of 1st level. Remind the players that 1st-level characters can die easily, and set them up to be ready to either generate replacement characters in case of death, or keep pregenerated characters on hand.

If you adopt this play style, let the players bring in new characters easily. If a character dies in the middle of an adventure, you want to include an easy way to bring a new character into the game rather than making the player wait. Consider any of the following options to set up a new character waiting to be found nearby:

- The new character is the last member of a former adventuring band exploring the same location.
- The character emerges after being trapped in a cracked magic mirror.
- The character is magically raised from the remains of a skeleton.
- The character falls out of a fresco painted on the wall.
- The character has been resting in a hidden vault sitting outside of time.
- The character is a petrified statue holding a *spell scroll* of *greater restoration*.
- The character is trapped in a life-preserving sarcophagus.
- The character floats in a vat in a strange laboratory.
- The character is expelled by an eternal bonfire.
- The character is resurrected by their former holy symbol when it is found by the characters.

START AT A HIGHER LEVEL

One easy solution to counteract the deadliness of 1st level is to start the characters at 2nd or 3rd level. This option works best for players who already understand the basics of the game and can jump into a higher-level character without becoming overwhelmed by the options. At 3rd level, the characters have enough capabilities and hit points to survive a tough adventure.

REACH 2ND LEVEL QUICKLY

Another option to prevent the untimely deaths of 1st-level characters is to ensure the characters reach 2nd level quickly. Run a quick encounter as part of a session zero (see page 10), then take the characters to 2nd level once they've completed the encounter.

OFFER "AID"

One easy way to increase the survivability of 1st-level characters is to give them a blessing of the gods. As long as they are 1st level, each character is under the effect of the *aid* spell, increasing their hit point maximum and current hit points by 5. When they reach 2nd level, the *aid* effect wears off, giving 1st-level characters a greater chance to survive but not changing the rest of the game.

If you'd prefer something other than a divine blessing, you can give the characters an item that lets them cast the *aid* spell, or have a friendly NPC priest cast *aid* on them at the beginning of their adventures. Just make sure the characters know they will eventually lose universal access to this magic, so that they know to use it before they reach 2nd level.

REMOVE INSTANT DEATH

Death by massive damage is typically only a threat at 1st level, when hit points are at their lowest. By ignoring that rule at 1st level, you give 1st-level characters a better chance at survival.

BALANCING 1ST-LEVEL COMBAT

Running encounters at 1st level requires a different understanding of the threat of monsters at that level, as compared to all other levels. Keep the following guidelines in mind for avoiding encounters too deadly for 1st-level characters:

- Use monsters with a challenge rating of 1/2 or less.
- Include fewer monsters than characters.
- Avoid monsters that can deal more than 8 damage in a single turn.
- Avoid monsters with more than 30 hit points.

The following monsters provide appropriate challenges for 1st-level characters.

d20	Challenge		Challenge
1	Bandits	11	Giant centipedes
2	Cultists	12	Giant frogs
3	Giant rats	13	Giant wolf spiders
4	Kobolds	14	Goblins
5	Stirges	15	Skeletons
6	Guards	16	Swarms of rats
7	Dretches	17	Zombies
8	Drow	18	Cockatrices
9	Flying swords	19	Gnolls
10	Giant bats	20	Gray oozes

STRONG STARTS

A strong start kicks your game off in the middle of the action. It helps the players to let go of the real world and fall into the story unfolding at the table. Depending on where your adventure takes place, you can use any of the following strong starts in your own game, whether running a single-session adventure or a longer campaign.

CITIES AND TOWNS

In a settlement, a strong start can make use of either combat or roleplaying.

d10	Strong Start
1	The characters interrupt bandits breaking into a shop.
2	Something slithers out of a nearby sewer.
3	A noble lord bumps into one of the characters and threatens to have them arrested.
4	A group of cultists kindly ask for a sample of a character's blood.
5	A hooded patron visits the characters, asking the characters to kill them in two days.
6	A riot draws the local watch away, whereupon a squad of hired killers descends on the characters.
7	The campaign's main villain shows up and invites the characters for a drink.
8	A scarred explorer offers to sell one of the characters a map to a site of a lost or stolen ancestral heirloom.
9	A golem from a wizards' academy goes on a rampage.
10	The local monarch is assassinated and a villain takes over the government.

SEWERS

A session that starts in a sewer can make use of numerous monsters and hazards.

d10	Strong Start
1	A flood of poisonous water flows past the characters' position.
2	The sewer collapses into deeper tunnels sealed up for centuries.
3	A wererat approaches the characters, offering to sell valuable information.
4	A pack of ghouls chase a young couple reported missing days ago.
5	A legendary giant crocodile stealthily stalks the characters.
6	The characters find a powerful magical dagger sought by a guild of wraith assassins.
7	Swampy sewer gas gives one of the characters supernatural visions of the villain's master plan.
8	The characters meet an eccentric wizard farming mushrooms for spell components.
9	A wall collapses, revealing a hidden temple of the god of slimes and oozes.
10	A flood of water draws the characters into a dangerously large mechanical sluice system.

WILDERNESS

Wilderness locations can involve either action or mystery in a strong start.

d10	Strong Start
1	A nearby tree opens up, and a satyr steps through and says "Hi!"
2	A rampaging werebear storms through the area, mistaking the characters for the hunters who killed their mate.
3	Night falls, revealing an alien starscape above.
4	The characters see a tall humanoid with antlers stalking from the shadows, carrying a large scythe in one hand and three humanoid heads in the other.
5	The ground suddenly churns, bringing the body of a long-lost elf king to the surface. The king's eyes open.
6	The characters stumble upon a nest of skeletal pixies surrounding a desecrated fey gate.
7	A golden-antlered stag leaps into the characters' camp and asks to be defended from the hunters chasing it.
8	An old woman greets the characters, offering them candy and baked treats if they will come to her nearby cottage.
9	A skeleton hanging from a tree begs the characters to right the wrong it committed while alive.
10	A sinkhole opens up, revealing the tunnels of long-forgotten burial chambers.

DUNGEONS, CAVES, AND CAVERNS

Subterranean adventures lend themselves to the widest possible range of strong starts.

d10	Strong Start
1	A vampire appears from a sudden rise of mist, introduces herself, and asks the characters for a favor.
2	An ancient statue turns its head toward the characters and whispers a valuable secret.
3	The floor collapses, revealing even deeper tunnels long forgotten.
4	Through a cracked wall, the characters spot a gateway flanked by two huge obsidian statues, and featuring a set of stairs leading down.
5	The characters come across two bands of goblins fighting each other for the favor of a hag named Auntie Chiptooth.
6	An eyestalk swells out from an oozy patch on the wall, beholds the characters, and then disappears back into the wall.
7	A wounded knight collapses near the characters, begging them to find her lost love before she dies.
8	The ground cracks open and a pillar of chipped obsidian juts out, projecting a prophecy in red Infernal glyphs on the walls of the chamber.
9	Stars swim in a moonlit well, then rise up to reveal themselves as will-o'-wisps.
10	A spectral hound guides the characters to the camp of a reclusive mage.

QUEST TEMPLATES

Quest templates are general-purpose designs around which you can build specific quests for your own game, using adventure archetypes that have been standard for more than forty years in RPGs. This section offers ten quest templates you can customize for your own adventures. If generating a random adventure, just roll a d10 to determine which quest template to use, then fill in the details of the quest with your own ideas or by making use of the adventure generators in this book.

1. KILL THE BOSS

In this simple quest design, the characters are hired or conscripted to hunt down a particular monster or villain in a location, then permanently end their threat. The boss might be protected by lieutenants or other minions.

2. FIND SOMETHING

The characters are charged with finding an item, whether they have to steal it or hunt for it in a dangerous location. The item might be protected by a boss monster and could have many different purposes, such as opening a portal to another location, removing a curse, compelling servants to return it to its rightful owner, and so on.

In a variant of this quest, the characters can be charged with returning an object to a location rather than seeking one.

3. RESCUE SOMEONE

In this common quest, the characters are sent to a location in order to rescue someone—a captured spy, a wayward prince, a missing child, and so forth. In a variant of this quest, the characters must escort someone to a location, defending them every step of the way.

4. KILL THE LIEUTENANTS

In this variant of the "Kill the Boss" quest, the characters hunt down multiple sub-bosses or lieutenants, either eliminating, capturing, or converting them as the story demands. Each of these lieutenants might reside in different parts of a single location (a dungeon, a headquarters, and so forth) or at multiple locations across the land. Dealing with an appropriate number of lieutenants might lead to a final "Kill the Boss" quest.

5. DESTROY SOMETHING

With this variant of the "Find Something" quest, the characters enter a hostile location to destroy a particular object—an ancient evil obelisk, the catalyst of a dark ritual, a weapon of great power, and so forth.

6. STEAL SOMETHING

The characters have to obtain an object from a location where the challenge is more about intrigue than the dangers of a "Find Something" quest. Players must first plan their approach, then engage in the heist. Stealth and subterfuge are often required, and you should be ready to let the characters "fail forward" so that a single bad ability check doesn't ruin the entire plan. Likewise, the location should have multiple entry and exit paths such as sewers and rooftops in addition to a main entrance.

7. CLEAR THE DANGERS

In this simple quest template, the characters enter a hostile location and clear it of any dangers. A dwarf clan might need their ancestral mines emptied of monsters, a local lord might want to take over a haunted keep, and so forth. This quest focuses on the characters exploring an entire location to ensure that the danger has been dealt with, as opposed to taking on just a single known foe.

8. COLLECT THE KEYS

This quest template works for both small adventures and large campaigns, and sees the characters hunting for a number of keys before another group can get them first. This quest works best if it requires a majority of keys instead of all the keys. That way, no one side can thwart the other by possessing only one key. A setup where the characters search for three of five keys, four of seven keys, or five of nine keys works well. These keys might be hidden in a single dungeon for a small adventure, or spread across the entire multiverse for a huge campaign.

9. DEFEND A LOCATION

The characters must defend a location from oncoming enemies. As with the "Steal Something" quest, the players will spend time preparing for the quest, shoring up their defenses and perhaps positioning NPC groups to handle parts of the defense under their direction. Though it's tempting to run this sort of scenario as a large-scale mass battle, that kind of combat is best handled "off-screen" while you focus the spotlight on the characters and their individual roles in the defense.

10. END THE RITUAL

In this quest template, the characters must end an ongoing ritual. Doing so usually requires the disruption of multiple components, such as destroying glyph-marked pillars or corrupting magic pools. Suitable rituals might include those dedicated to opening or closing a gate, summoning a fiend, resurrecting a dead god, and so forth. In a variant of this quest template, the characters must defend those performing a ritual against other forces that seek to stop it.

CREATING SECRETS AND CLUES

Secrets and clues, as defined in *Return of the Lazy DM*, are short pieces of information the characters might discover during an adventure. Secrets and clues are initially written without regard to the method by which they might be discovered. Instead, we improvise their discovery as the characters engage with the adventure's locations and NPCs.

The following prompts don't create specific secrets and clues. Rather, the questions they ask are meant to inspire the creation of your own secrets for your campaign. Keep in mind that secrets are meant to serve you. Don't overthink them or worry about making them perfect. There's no wrong way to use secrets and clues as long as they help you run your game.

CHARACTER SECRETS

Use character secrets to tie the characters to the world around them. These sorts of secrets might be revealed by NPCs, old journals or letters, suddenly recalled memories, or prophetic dreams.

d10	Character Secret
1	What family history might be revealed?
2	What ties the character to this location?
3	What ghost or spirit haunts the character?
4	What dreams fill the character's rest?
5	What parasite secretly infests the character?
6	Which family member is involved in the adventure?
7	How is the villain related to the character?
8	What NPC who the character thinks is dead still lives?
9	What ritual was the character blessed with as a child?
10	What previous event ties the character to the story?

HISTORICAL SECRETS

Use historical secrets to give the characters meaningful and useful information as they explore the setting of the campaign. Secrets of this kind should provide characters and players alike with bite-sized pieces of local or world history.

Historical secrets might be found as mosaics in ancient tombs, statues in old ruins, dusty tomes in ancient libraries, markings on strange weapons, or tales shared among elderly villagers.

d10	Historical Secret
1	What dead god has a connection to the area?
2	What armies once battled here?
3	What cruel lord was slain in this place?
4	What ancient civilization once thrived here?
5	What old empire's settlements lie buried here?
6	What alien creature or power is hidden here?
7	What rebellion took place here?
8	What primeval mysteries lay buried here?
9	What was this location's former purpose?
10	What horrific monster once ruled here?

NPC AND VILLAIN SECRETS

Use NPC and villain secrets to reveal information about these NPCs to the characters, especially as a means of introducing villains before they face the characters.

Characters might learn NPC or villain secrets from a villain's herald or sidekick, rumors at a local pub, recovered journals, a minion's last words, captured letters, or town gossip.

d10	NPC or Villain Secret
1	What dark history follows the NPC?
2	What makes the NPC think they're right?
3	What was the NPC's great accomplishment?
4	What foe did the NPC defeat?
5	What makes the NPC politically untouchable?
6	What great power does the NPC possess?
7	What does the NPC desire?
8	What regular routines does the NPC follow?
9	Who does the NPC love above all others?
10	What secret does the NPC want to keep hidden?

PLOT AND STORY SECRETS

Use plot and story secrets to teach characters about the larger events going on in the world, and to move the characters forward in the story of your campaign.

Characters might learn these secrets from quest-giving NPCs, notes found on defeated foes, dreams or portents from the gods, NPCs fleeing a disaster, arcane feedback from an object, or psychic projections.

d10	Plot or Story Secret
1	What villainous event will soon come to pass?
2	What disaster is about to befall the land?
3	What royal figure was just assassinated?
4	What dungeon entrance just became revealed?
5	What monsters recently appeared in the realm?
6	What armies just invaded the realm?
7	What dark sign or portent just appeared?
8	What natural disaster has recently struck the area?
9	What unnatural being has appeared in the world?
10	What unusual creature was seen walking the wilds?

BUILDING SITUATIONS

DMs often build adventures from a string of sequential encounters, matching monsters and environments to be run in succession. Instead, consider building adventures around a larger situation—a location, a number of inhabitants with particular behaviors, and a goal for the characters. That way, instead of simply playing through an outline of scenes, the players create a more dynamic scenario by choosing how their characters approach the location and its inhabitants to accomplish their goal.

   Creating a situation for an adventure is as easy as coming up with those three elements—location, inhabitants, and goals—and seeing how they might work together. Consider the following example:

- A corrupt lord worships an archdevil within his keep, built on a rocky hill above the local village. (That's our location, which might be set up using a map.)
- In the keep's cellars, mercenaries, cultists, and sentient oozes begin to poison the river flowing through the town. (Those are our inhabitants and their behaviors.)
- The characters must infiltrate the keep, destroy the machinery poisoning the river, and slay the corrupt lord. (Those are the characters' goals.)

TIPS FOR BUILDING SITUATIONS

When building situations in your game, keep the following tips in mind:

- Think "big picture." Think about how the inhabitants act and react across the whole location, not just in individual encounters.
- Let the players fail forward. A single bad roll shouldn't bring total disaster and defeat. Rather, let each failed roll lead to interesting complications.
- Improvise upward and downward story beats during the game—moments that can make the players and characters feel like they're accomplishing things, or which can dash their hopes and highlight the challenges they face.
- Give the players enough information to plan a strategy.
- Add both unexpected benefits and complications as the characters enact their plans.
- Think about how the inhabitants of a location act and operate when left on their own. Then, during the game, think about how they react to the characters' actions.

COMPLICATIONS

While the characters are involved in a situation, they might run into a complication like one of the following.

d10	Complication		Complication
1	The villain arrives	6	Something's on fire
2	Drunken brawl	7	Something explodes
3	Rival infiltrators	8	Drunken witness
4	Magic goes awry	9	Situation goal is missing
5	Monster summoned	10	Training drill

EXAMPLE LOCATIONS

Any of the following locations can work for building a situation. Let the location suggest as many options as possible by including multiple entrances and multiple paths the characters can follow within the location.

d20	Location		Location
1	Noble's manor	11	Abandoned lair
2	Lord's castle	12	Underwater city
3	Mercenary camp	13	Floating fortress
4	Thieves' mansion	14	Huge airship
5	Crime boss's lair	15	Fiendish prison
6	Cult warrens	16	Fortified town
7	Unholy temple	17	Underground keep
8	Seedy undercity	18	Large watchtower
9	Pirate ship	19	Twisted village
10	Ruined citadel	20	Wretched museum

EXAMPLE INHABITANTS

When building a situation, populate locations with creatures that make sense for the story. Always think about the big picture when considering things like how creatures move within a location.

d20	Inhabitants		Inhabitants
1	Orc knights	11	Lizardfolk druids
2	Abyssal cultists	12	Corrupt nobles
3	Dwarf assassins	13	Vampire thralls
4	Kobold investigators	14	Vengeful mercenaries
5	Undead thralls	15	Dragonkin fanatics
6	Human bandits	16	Drow monks
7	Gnome pirates	17	Unholy paladins
8	Grimlock cannibals	18	Hags and thralls
9	Mages and servants	19	Gnoll marauders
10	Goblin sorcerers	20	War-scarred devils

EXAMPLE GOALS

Clear goals similar in setup to those on the following table are critical when running adventures featuring open-ended and flexible situations built from locations and inhabitants. Ensure that these goals and their importance are clear to the players.

d20	Goal		Goal
1	Steal an arcane tome	11	Meet a monarch
2	Rescue a prisoner	12	Retrieve an artifact
3	Kill a corrupt noble	13	Swap contracts
4	Evaluate enemy forces	14	Kill four lieutenants
5	Open a back door	15	Poison a supply of ale
6	Plant false evidence	16	Sabotage cannons
7	Destroy an altar	17	Copy a map
8	Steal a crystal ball	18	Steal a weapon
9	Recover secret plans	19	Open a magic portal
10	Save a royal heir	20	Stop a ritual

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NPC GENERATOR

NPCs bring our game worlds to life. You can use the generator in this section to quickly build NPCs to drop into your game, rolling on the tables below to generate baseline characteristics. To really bring the NPC to life, you can then model their personality and roleplaying off characters from your favorite books, TV shows, or movies, switching up gender and other traits to make them feel fresh.

NAMES

Osborne, Halstein, Rycheld, Symond, Sysley, Tansa, Levi, Beneger, Hailey, Jayce, Vesta, Savannah, Avelin, Claudia, Sighard, Timothy, Somerhild, Radolf, Denston, Judithe, Nireus, Sulen, Teukros, Cullive, Arnald, Guinevere, Madison, Stella, Edmund, Goddard, Paul, Gerland, Eupalamos, Sebastian, Anthonette, Lowell, Dauid, Halia, Colton, Bellinda, Roger, Chase, Pulmia, Sadie, Leofwen, Hildegard, Thelexion, Latisha, Raffe, Sydnee, Nicholas, Lausus, Johannes, Derkos, Boyle, Hudson, Meryll, Peter, Godebert, Randwulf, Aegipan, Bryde, Josiah, Sabra, Hilda, Lapithes, Reothine, Jeger, Sybaris, Cared, Clifton, Annabel, Kaylee, Neale, Bayard, Albin, Maronne, Jocelyn, Isemeine, Toril, Aisa, Franny, Turstin, Chulisa, Samantha, Poine, Sanche, Maya, Nicholina, Margry, Drew, Parnell, Taran, Cunovin, Ryan, Caroline, Halisera, Florens, Tantalos, Wynefreede

Brightwhisper, Redspur, Hollyfang, Goosewalker, Goldbane, Ebondazer, Emeraldstorm, Monsterthumb, Goblinchaser, Thornhelm, Lionfall, Swordbuckle, Earthdancer, Graywillow, Cloudlover, Sharpwhisker, Glasscleaver, Macebound, Icebrood, Fireheart, Angelbright, Anvilcloud, Heromaker, Lightblade, Shieldrazor, Whitetail, Spiderhunter, Shadowblood, Doombrissle, Bronzestone, Moongazer, Catfinger, Lawknocker, Rainsoother, Swiftcaller, Mudteeth, Wyrmriver, Dragonknee, Flamestar, Millhand

ANCESTRY

Use the following table to choose a random ancestry for your NPC.

d20	Ancestry
1–4	Human
5–6	Elf
7–8	Dwarf
9–10	Halfling
11–12	Goblinoid
13–14	Gnome
15–16	Orc
17–18	Dragonborn
19–20	Tiefling

WORLDVIEW

An NPC's worldview can help determine how they initially react to the characters, adjusted by how the characters approach them. Improvise DCs for social interaction ability checks based on that approach, with checks usually ranging between DC 10 (easy) and DC 20 (very hard). A default of DC 12 is usually a good choice.

d20	Worldview		Worldview
1	Surly	11	Cautious
2	Friendly	12	Roisterous
3	Brash	13	Optimistic
4	Elitist	14	Ignorant
5	Suspicious	15	Selfless
6	Carefree	16	Brazen
7	Loyal	17	Loving
8	Opportunistic	18	Ambitious
9	Wide-eyed	19	Greedy
10	Humorous	20	Outgoing

APPEARANCE AND MANNERS

NPCs will often be most easily remembered by the players based on some unique aspect of their appearance or manners.

d20	Appearance and Manners		Appearance and Manners
1	Wild hair	11	Feathered earring
2	Scarred cheek	12	Missing hand
3	Body tattoos	13	Spits a lot
4	Smokes a pipe	14	Shifty eyes
5	Golden teeth	15	Intense stare
6	Walks with a limp	16	Snorts often
7	Dashing clothes	17	Facial tattoos
8	Picks teeth	18	Heavy beard
9	Missing eye	19	Missing fingers
10	Multicolored eyes	20	Half-shaved head

PROFESSION

Assign a profession to your NPC to add color to their stat block. The **commoner** is the default stat block for NPCs of this type.

d20	Profession		Profession
1	Farmer	11	Acolyte
2	Blacksmith	12	Sailor
3	Clerk	13	Mercenary
4	Merchant	14	Sage
5	Apothecary	15	Noble
6	Bandit	16	Artisan
7	Guide	17	Priest
8	Entertainer	18	Veteran
9	Guard	19	Knight
10	Soldier	20	Mage

VILLAIN GENERATOR

Villains drive the stories underlying so many of our adventures. They follow their own quests based on their own motivations, and when a villain acts, the world moves in response. For longer campaigns, consider including three potential villains working either independently or in unison toward the central goal of your campaign.

Villains are typically sentient creatures. But it's possible to think of pure forces of nature such as a coming plague, an unnatural disaster, or the end of the world as villainous entities. *Return of the Lazy DM* uses the term "fronts" to describe the similar ways in which creature and non-creature villains use their own motivations to constantly move forward in opposition to the characters.

VILLAINS

Choose up to three villains for a campaign with an optimal amount of complexity.

d20	Villain		Villain
1	Ancient dragon	11	Archdevil
2	Ageless lich	12	Corrupt priest
3	Insatiable vampire	13	Merciless assassin
4	Corrupt emperor	14	Resurrected king
5	Brilliant crime lord	15	Buried horror
6	Alien moon	16	Elder evil
7	Hag coven	17	Elemental prince
8	War machine	18	Fallen celestial
9	Undead plague	19	Uncaring archmage
10	Demon prince	20	Vengeful villager

VILLAINOUS HERALDS

Heralds often speak for villains before they appear, bringing the villain's threat to the attention of the world. Use villainous heralds to clarify, reinforce, and bolster villains in the eyes of the characters. A herald might become a hated adversary in their own right, facing severe and satisfying ends.

d20	Herald		Herald
1	Spirited jester	11	Sadistic bard
2	Whispering spirit	12	Snobby valet
3	Deranged cultist	13	Sinister child
4	Obsessed wizard	14	Talking doll
5	Chattering skull	15	Sentient sword
6	Faithful priest	16	Well-dressed toady
7	Loyal villager	17	Evasive shapeshifter
8	Prophetic seer	18	Pompous thespian
9	Imp familiar	19	Armored champion
10	Talking vermin	20	Rotting necromancer

VILLAINOUS MOTIVATIONS

Every villain follows a core motivation, whether they believe themselves to stand at the center of a noble cause or because they hunger for destruction.

d20	Motivation
1	Wants the world to burn
2	Wants to see the world made better
3	Seeks to become a god
4	Seeks bloody vengeance
5	Wants to build an empire
6	Wishes to devour everyone and everything
7	Wants to create a staging ground for a bigger goal
8	Hopes to escape from somewhere
9	Wishes to awaken
10	Yearns to create balance
11	Seeks a state of advanced righteousness
12	Seeks to enter the world to escape its own realm
13	Hates all forms of life and light in the universe
14	Seeks total control
15	Wishes to spread at the cost of everything
16	Wishes to survive and grow
17	Seeks to destroy themself and everything else
18	Wants to get incredibly rich
19	Wishes to prove themself
20	Seeks to quell a terrible grief

VILLAINOUS QUESTS

Like adventurers, villains have specific quests that they undertake or steps that they follow. Described as "grim portents" in *Return of the Lazy DM*, villainous quests foreshadow the plots and movement of villains to the characters. Villains often have several such quests (three is a good number), which act as a countdown clock to the successful execution of the villain's master plan.

d12	Villainous Quest
1	Recover ancient artifacts
2	Destroy magic-infused shrines
3	Uncover ancient weapons
4	Destroy local kingdoms
5	Corrupt local lords
6	Fire up ancient machines
7	Form dark alliances
8	Open otherworldly portals
9	Awaken horrible monsters
10	Build invincible armies
11	Kill former or would-be heroes
12	Build powerful monuments

TREASURE GENERATOR

Piles of coins, shining gems, and powerful relics hidden away in the depths of the world await adventurers brave enough to seek them. This section offers a simple set of tables and guidelines that let you quickly reward treasure for your fantasy RPG, and which work well alongside the more detailed treasure rules of the game.

GOLD PER LEVEL

Use the following gold parcels to quickly reward adventuring groups based on the characters' average level. Reward four such parcels each level, or add parcels together to create larger rewards

Level	Gold per Parcel
1st–4th	100 gp (3d6 × 10 gp)
5th–10th	1,300 gp (3d8 × 100 gp)
11th–16th	7,000 gp (2d6 × 1,000 gp)
17th–20th	70,000 gp (2d6 × 10,000 gp)

This earned wealth can take the form of coins, gemstones, jewelry, and art objects as desired. You can also adjust the numbers slightly to keep hoards from looking too uniform. For example, you might turn two 1,300 gp parcels into 1,145 gp and 1,422 gp.

CONSUMABLE TREASURE

As desired, you can augment monetary treasure with consumable magic items from the following table.

d20	Consumable
1–7	Potion of healing
8–9	Potion of greater healing
10	Oil of slipperiness
11	Potion of animal friendship
12	Potion of climbing
13	Potion of growth
14	Potion of mind reading
15	Potion of poison
16	Potion of resistance
17	Potion of water breathing
18	Dust of disappearance
19	Dust of dryness
20	Dust of sneezing and choking

Rather than standard consumable items, you can also award powerful single-use magic items generated using the Spells table from the "Core Adventure Generator" section (page 6). You can also use the Condition, Description, and Origin table in that section to give an item a unique flavor.

MAGICAL TREASURE

Permanent magic items can be included with treasure as desired, with the uncommon items on the following table suitable for characters of all levels. Choose specific weapons and armor that fit the proficiencies and desires of the characters. You can use the Condition, Description, and Origin table from the core adventure generator to give such items additional flavor.

d100	Item
1–12	Weapon +1
13–24	Armor +1
25–26	Ammunition +1
27–28	Amulet of proof against detection and location
29–30	Bag of holding
31–32	Bag of tricks
33–34	Boots of elvenkind
35–36	Boots of striding and springing
37–38	Boots of the winterlands
39–40	Bracers of archery
41–42	Brooch of shielding
43–44	Broom of flying
45–46	Circlet of blasting
47–48	Cloak of elvenkind
49–50	Cloak of protection
51–52	Cloak of the manta ray
53–54	Eversmoking bottle
55–56	Eyes of charming
57–58	Eyes of the eagle
59–60	Figurine of wondrous power (silver raven)
61–62	Gauntlets of ogre power
63–64	Gloves of missile snaring
65–66	Gloves of swimming and climbing
67–68	Goggles of night
69–70	Hat of disguise
71–72	Headband of intellect
73–74	Helm of comprehending languages
75–76	Helm of telepathy
77–78	Immovable rod
79–80	Javelin of lightning
81–82	Lantern of revealing
83–84	Medallion of thoughts
85–86	Necklace of adaptation
87–88	Pearl of power
89–90	Ring of mind shielding
91–92	Rope of climbing
93–94	Slippers of spider climbing
95–96	Stone of good luck
97–98	Wand of magic missiles
99–100	Wand of web

UNDERSTANDING EXPLORATION

Our fantasy RPG includes three pillars of play: roleplaying, combat, and exploration. While roleplaying and combat are relatively well understood, **exploration consists of essentially everything else in the game**.

The fundamental process of exploration consists of the **DM describing the situation, the player describing their intended action, and the DM adjudicating the result**. Sometimes this involves an ability check if an intended action is risky or has a meaningful chance for failure. Otherwise, you can just let it happen.

TYPES OF EXPLORATION

Exploration covers a wide range of activities in the game. The following is just a partial list of activities that fall under the exploration pillar:

- Traveling across the wilds to old ruins
- Disarming a trapped treasure chest
- Revealing history captured in an ancient mosaic
- Mapping out the patterns of guard patrols at a villa
- Traveling through ancient labyrinthine sewers
- Exploring a ruined keep
- Picking a lock on a door
- Seeking and discovering a hidden chamber
- Carefully moving through a dangerous dungeon
- Sailing a ship through stormy seas
- Hunting an assassin in a seedy city

IMPROVISING ABILITY CHECKS

The fundamental mechanic of our fantasy RPG often requires that the DM improvise a check when the player wants their character to do something risky that has a meaningful chance for failure. To improvise a check, consider which ability score and potential skills best suit the attempt, then choose a difficulty between DC 10 (easy) and DC 20 (hard) for most checks. If the DC is less than 10, assume that a character just succeeds at their intended action. You can easily improvise DCs in this range by asking yourself, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how hard is this?" and then adding 10 to the result.

COMPLEX SITUATIONS

Often, situations are complex enough that a single ability check can't capture an entire event. In such cases, let each part of the scenario break down to chosen actions, with each check made leading to the next action. But because it can be difficult to plan out all potential paths mechanically, focus instead on thinking about how such a situation might work in the world of the game.

For example, breaking into a protected vault likely requires staying quiet, disarming any arcane protections, and then picking the lock. So let those real-world activities suggest the need for ability checks (likely Dexterity and Intelligence), applicable skills (Arcana and Stealth), and useful spells and gear (*dispel magic* and thieves' tools) before you start breaking things down to DCs and dice rolls.

FAILING FORWARD

Being able to improvise results that "fail forward" is critical for more complex situations. A single failed check shouldn't result in disaster. Instead, a failed roll should complicate the situation or bring in new challenges for the characters. This is an important skill for DMs, and one that we all get better at the more we do it.

PROGRESS CLOCKS

The RPG *Blades in the Dark* describes the use of "progress clocks" as a way to track complex situations. Consider how many successes it takes to accomplish a complex task or how many failures must take place before true disaster strikes. Keep track of these successes or failures as tick marks (or slices of a sketched-out pie as *Blades in the Dark* describes). ⬈

How many pieces of evidence must the characters recover before the guards become alerted to their presence? This might involve two competing progress clocks: one for the evidence collection and one for the guards' level of alert.

OVERLAND TRAVEL AND WILDERNESS EXPLORATION

Overland travel and wilderness exploration can be handled in many different ways, and you and your group will ultimately choose the approach that brings you the most enjoyment. Some groups prefer pure narration, with the DM describing the journey. Others like shared group storytelling, in which the players describe the events of the journey. Some groups like the more mechanical approach of a detailed hex crawl, with each stage of a journey possibly playing out like a short adventure. Point crawls offer a similar approach, and are described on the next page.

DUNGEON EXPLORATION

Dungeon exploration has its own set of additional steps, such as choosing a marching order, understanding lighting conditions, making decisions about scouting and stealth, and keeping an eye out for traps and secret doors. The "Underground Exploration" section on page 39 lets you build great dungeon exploration adventures.

POINT CRAWLS

Point crawls give GMs a simple tool to map and run overland travel or city exploration. This style of play allows characters to travel across a wilderness or within a large city by focusing on **notable locations** and the **routes between them**. Some locations on a point crawl map might be large adventure areas, while others are simple landmarks used as the backdrop for a single scene or encounter. Either way, a point crawl map built from locations and routes often resembles a classic dungeon with its connected chambers and hallways.

The concept of point crawls comes from Chris Kutalik at the Hill Cantons blog. ⬈

DESIGNING POINT CRAWLS

Point crawls are a network of locations and routes. You can draw simple point crawl maps as circles connected with lines, each with a short label. For example, in *Lord of the Rings*, two locations—the village of Bree and the ruined tower of Weathertop—are connected by the route through the Midgewater Marshes.

Point crawls work best when they don't just make a straight-line narrative route. Rather, they should offer meaningful choices as to where the characters can go, as well as chances for discovery en route. In many ways, good point crawls benefit from the same criteria as good dungeon design, including:

- Multiple meaningful paths
- An interesting asymmetric design
- Loops that reconnect with known locations
- Shortcuts to new or previous locations
- Secret paths to hidden areas

You can find two example point crawl maps—one detailing an underground environment and the other for an overland route—on pages 61 and 62.

LARGE LOCATIONS

Large locations usually mark the site of a full adventure area. These locations likely have their own detailed maps, and locations such as cities might be a point crawl of their own. Any of the following make good choices for large point crawl locations.

d20	Location		Location
1	Ancient watchtower	11	War-ravaged dam
2	Ruined castle	12	City of towers
3	Seedy city	13	Riverside town
4	Pirate docks	14	Library of the ages
5	Elven respite	15	Shadowgate keep
6	Dwarven mines	16	Grand observatory
7	Haunted manor	17	Blood-soaked arena
8	Vast metropolis	18	Goblin king's citadel
9	Giants' fortress	19	Mountain of doom
10	Warlord's bastion	20	Sunken ziggurat

SMALL LOCATIONS

Small locations often serve as the backdrop for a single scene or encounter. Routes on a point crawl might have numerous hidden small locations along them that the characters discover as they travel.

d20	Location		Location
1	Dragon's graveyard	11	Mesa of tusks
2	Standing stones	12	Fallen statue
3	Tar pits	13	Travelers' rest
4	Fetid swamp	14	Monstrous lair
5	Bloody battlefield	15	Fey spring
6	Bridge of teeth	16	Ghostly shipwreck
7	Crashed airship	17	Titanic skull
8	Primeval shrine	18	Bottomless shaft
9	Elven portal	19	Huge throne room
10	Shining oasis	20	Ring of teeth

ROUTES

The routes in a point crawl connect locations together using in-world descriptions. Some routes will be known ahead of time to the characters, while others are only revealed when the characters reach a particular location. Still other routes might be hidden, and must be found as the characters explore a location. Finding new routes is an element of discovery that most players enjoy.

d20	Route		Route
1	Ancient roadway	11	Cracked plains
2	Dry riverbed	12	Subterranean trek
3	Old aqueduct	13	Precarious switchback
4	Well-traveled road	14	Thunderous gap
5	Peaceful seacoast	15	Goblin tunnels
6	Hidden stair	16	Lost mines
7	The shadowpath	17	Passages of the beast
8	Golden stag's trail	18	Road of despair
9	Overgrown vale	19	Sapphire rapids
10	Fey forest path	20	Path of bones

WILDERNESS TRAVEL

This section offers a systematic approach for handling travel through wild lands filled with potential dangers, and can be used with both point crawls (see the previous page) or hex crawls.

As the characters travel overland, they undertake specific activities related to the journey. Select appropriate DCs for those activities, with checks usually ranging between DC 10 (easy) and DC 20 (very hard). A default of DC 12 is usually a good choice.

CHARACTER ROLES

When the characters choose to travel through the wilderness, each player chooses a role for their character to take on. If two characters feel like good choices for a particular role, one character can use the Help action to assist the other, granting advantage on the check.

TRAILHAND

Applicable Skills: Nature, Survival

A trailhand ensures that the party follows the right path to reach an intended destination, masterfully navigating the natural or constructed paths that crisscross the wilds. With a successful check, the characters stay on the correct paths. On a failure, they might become lost, stumbling into a hostile area or losing resources. Characters might also be subject to exhaustion as they try to make their way back to the correct path, or might find it difficult to take a short or long rest until they do.

SCOUT

Applicable Skills: Insight, Investigation, Nature, Perception, Survival

A scout keeps an eye out for potentially hostile creatures during the characters' journey. These might be creatures stalking the characters, creatures that have earlier crossed the characters' path, or creatures that are traveling in the same direction and overtake the party. With a successful check, the characters spot the potentially hostile creatures and can plan their response. On a failure, the scout might unknowingly lead the party into a hostile encounter or an ambush.

QUARTERMASTER

Applicable Skills: Medicine, Survival

A quartermaster ensures that the characters remain well fed and hydrated during their journey. They ensure that provisions remain unspoiled, and help forage for additional resources along the way. Shorter journeys might not require a character to take on this role.

With a successful check, the characters have plenty of food and water for the journey, with provisions remaining unspoiled. On a failure, the characters might lose precious resources of food and water (potentially leading to exhaustion), or need to spend additional time searching for resources.

GROUP STEALTH

If the characters decide to move stealthily through the wilderness, doing so doubles the length of their travel time and might impose disadvantage on other checks at your discretion. To move stealthily through the wilderness, the characters make a group Dexterity (Stealth) check and compare that result to the passive Wisdom (Perception) scores of any potentially hostile creatures that might spot or hear them.

CREATING THE WILDERNESS

When an adventure sees the characters trekking across the wilds, use the following steps to create an adventure framework for that wilderness journey. The "Wilderness Exploration" section (page 38) features lots of details for wilderness journeys, including encounter ideas and suggestions for landmarks.

DETERMINE THE WEATHER

Choose or randomly select potential weather for the characters' journey. Weather mostly adds to the in-world atmosphere, but harsh weather can change the DCs of the characters' activities as they travel if you wish.

DETERMINE POTENTIAL ENCOUNTERS

As the characters travel through the wilderness, choose or randomly select potential encounters. These might be face-to-face encounters with denizens of the wilderness, but not all such encounters need to be hostile. The characters could run into friendly travelers, fearful monsters, weak foes, or signs of a previous battle. Likewise, they might spot the tracks of creatures recently passed by, or that are heading in the party's direction.

PLACE NOTABLE LANDMARKS

Use notable landmarks to mark key points along the characters' journey. Such landmarks can serve as a backdrop for random encounters or as places to rest. They might also serve as a source of secrets and clues that the characters can discover.

ENVIRONMENT LOCATIONS

This section offers up a number of location ideas tied to particular environments. You can use any of these locations as the site of an encounter or a whole adventure, or as backdrops while the characters travel through the wilderness. "Point Crawls" (page 24), "Wilderness Travel" (page 25), and "Wilderness Exploration" (page 38) can all make use of and build on the quick ideas generated with these tables.

ARCTIC LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Titanic skull	11	Hunting lodge
2	Frost giant's lodge	12	Precarious cliff
3	Frozen corpses	13	Frozen lake
4	Faerie glade	14	Abandoned village
5	Frozen ship	15	Stone circle
6	Glacial rift	16	Icy tower
7	Shifting ice flow	17	Fisher's hut
8	Ice palace	18	Frozen battleground
9	Melted tunnels	19	Domed warren
10	Giant's cairn	20	Old war machine

DESERT LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Shattered ziggurat	11	Half-buried statue
2	Shimmering oasis	12	Grasping stone hand
3	Abandoned campsite	13	Sacrificial podium
4	Huge statue's legs	14	Bestial skeleton
5	Floating earthmote	15	Collapsed tombs
6	Abandoned fort	16	Shifting sinkhole
7	Ruined fortress	17	Infested boneyard
8	Towering wall	18	Black megalith
9	Sundered tower	19	Half-buried ship
10	Huge sundial	20	Abandoned city

FOREST LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Fetid mire	11	Ivy-covered altar
2	Shadowy gateway	12	Empty tree house
3	Faerie glade	13	Standing stones
4	Huge hollow tree	14	Huge dragon skull
5	Overgrown gazebo	15	Crashed airship
6	Shattered statue	16	Forgotten graveyard
7	Broken pillars	17	Mudflat warren
8	Old aqueduct	18	Cavernous sinkhole
9	Petrified beast	19	Circle of dead trees
10	Root-cracked cave	20	Cavernous maw

MOUNTAIN LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Altar of the sun	11	Narrow goat path
2	Draconic statue	12	Smoking crater
3	Hollow spire	13	Titanic bones
4	Volcanic rift	14	Stone temple
5	Abandoned tower	15	Hanging cages
6	Primeval carvings	16	Floating castle
7	Sky tomb	17	Ring of giant swords
8	Huge nest	18	Rune-marked meteorite
9	Hidden waterfalls	19	Natural archway
10	Misty overhang	20	Acidic geysers

SWAMP LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Sunken ziggurat	11	Flaming monster effigy
2	Collapsed statue	12	Sunken ship
3	Ghostly village	13	Ruined fortress
4	Boiling bog	14	Shattered gateway
5	Poisonous geysers	15	Steaming pond
6	Unholy altar	16	Tree-house village
7	Fetid sinkhole	17	Bloody battleground
8	Submerged corpses	18	Obsidian tower
9	Gnarled tree	19	Mushroom forest
10	Misty tower	20	Rotted caves

UNDERGROUND LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Abyssal altar	11	Petrified skeleton
2	Massive shaft	12	Haunted boneyard
3	Bloody fountain	13	Bloody battlefield
4	Huge rift	14	Natural megalith
5	Petrified statues	15	Ring of stones
6	Tunnel network	16	Natural hot spring
7	Bloody mosaic	17	Roiling lava flow
8	Carved temple	18	Crumbling chasm
9	Narrow bridge	19	Planar shipwreck
10	Gaping maw	20	Alien stone shapes

RUINED SETTLEMENT LOCATIONS

d20	Location		Location
1	Old well	11	Crumbling watchtower
2	Ivy-covered statue	12	Darkened mansion
3	Fetid fountain	13	Rotted orchard
4	Half-collapsed house	14	Thorny garden
5	Broken wall	15	Hedge maze
6	Desecrated altar	16	Sodden monster effigy
7	Abandoned temple	17	Smuggler's warehouse
8	Collapsed sinkhole	18	Shadowy alley
9	Noxious sewer	19	Rusted prison
10	Sundered keep	20	Creaking scaffold

SPIRAL CAMPAIGNS

Spiral campaign development builds campaign worlds starting in the area immediately surrounding the characters, then spirals out, expanding the world as the characters experience it. This section offers suggestions and inspiration for building a spiral campaign.

CAMPAIGN PITCH

Start off by describing the central theme of your campaign in a single sentence. This campaign pitch becomes the main focus of the campaign, and might be given to the players during your session zero so they can build their characters around it. Use the following campaign pitches as a starting point for a campaign, or as inspiration for pitches of your own.

d20	Pitch
1	Prevent the summoning of the Dragon Queen
2	Prevent the coming of the Black Moon
3	End the dark reign of Elenda the lich queen
4	Break the political power of Vroth the death knight
5	Kill Veresyn the vampire lord and his horde
6	Restore light to the Vale of Nightmares
7	Restore the prison of Orlon the demon prince
8	Shatter the draconic Alliance of Five Claws
9	Save people from the blood feast of a gnoll war band
10	Restore light to the fallen celestial Ixyan
11	Dismantle the Empire of the White Blade
12	Find the seven keys to the gates of Ilumenia
13	Prevent the resurrection of the sorcerer king
14	Stop the cult of the Red Ocean
15	Save the heir of the sapphire throne
16	Find and seal the vault of the world serpent
17	Close the gateway to the Outside
18	Destroy the Sword of the Black Sun
19	Slay the ancient dragon Larthyx Flametongue
20	End the dark pact of Karthyn the archdevil

SIX TRUTHS

Once you have your pitch, identify six truths that set your campaign apart from others, then share them with your players. Here are six example truths for a campaign built around the coming of the Black Moon from above.

- Sages and cultists describe the coming of the Black Moon—an elder evil that will swallow the world.
- Monsters have been sighted along what were once the safest roads. The populations of whole villages are disappearing without a trace.
- A floating obsidian citadel has appeared above the Cragteeth Mountains to the north.
- Folk once had to deal with the coming of the Black Moon, but their secrets for surviving it were lost.
- The evil King Trex uses the chaos created by the coming of the Black Moon to wage war across the land.
- Prophecy speaks of the return of the Knights of the White Sun, who will restore light to the land.

STARTING LOCATION

Spiral campaigns begin in a central location, often a small settlement from which the characters set out to explore neighboring lands. A village always works well as a starting location, but there are many alternatives.

d10	Location		Location
1	Adventurers' guild	6	Refugee camp
2	Mining outpost	7	Fortress under siege
3	Recent shipwreck	8	Great library
4	Frontier outpost	9	Planar hub city
5	Holy temple	10	Crumbling fortress

CAMPAIGN FRONTS

Campaign fronts are the external motivators in a campaign. Like a battlefront (from which they're named), a front is a point of conflict that advances and retreats as the campaign develops. Fronts are often villains (including any of the villains from page 21), but might also be external forces such as natural disasters or grim fate. Campaigns might have up to three fronts at any given time, including any of the following.

d20	Front		Front
1	Thieves' guild	11	Mages' guild
2	Dark necromancer	12	Outlander horde
3	Armageddon cult	13	Meteor storm
4	Mercenary army	14	Planar invaders
5	Forgotten machine	15	Powerful archmage
6	Evil construct	16	Ancient lich
7	Demon prince	17	Blood-raging cannibals
8	Archdevil	18	Unseelie fey lord
9	Corrupt noble lord	19	Draconic terror
10	Rival adventurers	20	Undead prince

LOCAL ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

As the campaign spirals outward, the characters will become aware of local adventuring locations. Drop three such adventure locations into the areas close by the starting location. And if you need help filling out an adventure location, just look to the other sections of this book!

d20	Location		Location
1	Ancient crypt	11	Abandoned dungeon
2	Forgotten sewers	12	Ruined watchtower
3	Haunted keep	13	Huge hollow statue
4	Festering well	14	Sunken catacombs
5	Rat-infested cellar	15	Obsidian ziggurat
6	Unholy temple	16	Haunted forest
7	Dangerous caves	17	Otherworldly rift
8	Underground city	18	Submerged grotto
9	War-torn citadel	19	Dead hollow tree
10	Fey glade	20	Sundered shipwreck

UPDATED THEATER OF THE MIND

This section builds on the guidelines offered in *The Lazy DM's Workbook* for running "theater of the mind" combat—no maps or miniatures, making use only of narrative and your players' imaginations. Share these guidelines with your players so that everyone has a common understanding of how this style of playing out combat works at the table.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Round-by-round combat played in the theater-of-the-mind style is built around three core principles:

- The DM describes the situation.
- Players describe their characters' intent.
- The DM helps the players achieve that intent and adjudicates how the situation unfolds as a result.

COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS

For best results, build your theater-of-the-mind combat around the following ideals:

- The DM and the players are working together to share a story of high action and adventure. They are not opponents.
- The DM and players do not hide their intentions during combat.
- Players and DMs assume that the characters and their enemies all move cautiously, avoiding opportunity attacks whenever possible.
- The DM identifies when a character is taking a risk, such as provoking an opportunity attack, before the player chooses the character's action.

PLAYER ADVICE

Players in a theater-of-the-mind game should keep the following points in mind:

- Describe your intent. Tell the DM what you want your character to do in the story that the combat encounter is building. Avoid a back-and-forth series of tactical questions.
- Tell the DM what special features your character has that you want to highlight. If you have crunchy tactical abilities you want to use, describe how you want them to work for the situation. For example: *"I want to stay close to the cleric so I can use my Protection Fighting Style, but I'll keep 10 feet away from the orcs so I can use my Polearm Mastery feat to hit them on their way in."*
- Describe specifically what you want to do. *"I want to stay within the paladin's aura but still attack the hobgoblin ravager."*
- Look for fun ways to use the environment described by the DM.
- Worry less about the mechanical details of the game and more on the high action and adventure of the story. One good way to do that is to imagine combat as a high-action battle in one of your favorite movies.

DM ADVICE

A DM running a theater-of-the-mind game should keep the following points in mind:

- Work with the players, not against them. Err in favor of the characters as you help the players achieve their intent.
- Each turn, describe the situation surrounding the acting character.
- Adjudicate the number of targets in an area attack based on the situation, the assumed positions of the combatants, and the size of the area.
- Use evocative in-world narration to describe the characters, the monsters, the action, and the high adventure of the story as it plays out.
- Make bargains and deals with the players. "You can hit three orcs with *fireball*, or you can hit five orcs if one of your companions is willing to be hit as well."
- Describe the distances between combatants in feet to help players recognize what they can and can't do. Default to 25 feet if you don't really know.
- Run simpler encounters with useful environmental features, such as flipped tables, cracked stalagmites, cliff edges, bottomless pits, roaring fires, and hanging chandeliers.
- Ask the players to identify monsters by describing interesting physical characteristics.
- Give the players opportunities to show off their characters' skills and abilities.
- Some players can't visualize combat scenes in their head, a condition known as aphantasia. For these players, consider providing a quick sketch or other visual.

ONE TOOL OF MANY

Add theater of the mind to your collection of ways to run combat, including abstract maps, zone-based combat (see the next page), gridded combat, or 3D terrain. Choose the right style of combat for the pace and complexity of the scene. Keep each approach as a tool in your DM's toolbox to help you share exciting tales of action and high adventure.

ZONE-BASED COMBAT

Zone-based combat can help DMs run fast, dynamic, and high-action combat without worrying about all the details of tactical combat played out on a grid. It supports multiple combat styles, including pure narrative theater-of-the-mind combat, quickly drawn abstract sketches, or miniatures used with detailed maps or 3D terrain.

Using zone-based combat means you have to worry less about the details of a 5-foot-per-square grid and can focus more on big heroic action. Zone-based combat simply requires that the DM and the players work together with the shared goal of creating fantastic stories of high adventure.

Share these guidelines with your players so that everyone has a common understanding of how this style of playing out combat works at the table.

ZONE RULES

The following guidelines establish the broad strokes of zone-based combat:

- Combat areas are made up of one or more zones, each of which is roughly 25 feet on a side but which can be any size.
- The DM defines zones using evocative descriptions, such as "a crumbling bridge over a bottomless gorge," "a blood-covered altar," or "a holy statue of light."
- The DM can write down or define these zones and their descriptions on paper, note cards, or erasable battle maps so the players can visualize the situation. Miniatures or tokens can mark out the positions of characters and monsters in zones.
- Players are encouraged to make use of features in a zone, whether by taking cover, climbing to an advantageous position, activating magical locations, and so forth.
- Most combat encounters occur in a single zone. Big battles might use two or more zones.
- On each of their turns, a character can move within a zone or can move from one zone to another. Characters with extra movement can move up to two zones away.
- Assume that all creatures in combat move cautiously, avoiding opportunity attacks when possible. The DM informs the players if a character risks an opportunity attack from their intended activity in the fight.
- Attacks with a range of 25 feet or greater can target creatures within a zone or one zone away.
- Attacks with a range of 50 feet or greater can also target creatures two or more zones away.
- If a character attacks with or is attacked by a melee attack with a 5-foot reach, that character will provoke opportunity attacks if they attempt to move away from their opponent. A character attacked by a melee attack with a 5-foot reach also has disadvantage on ranged attacks.

- Players can make best use of zone-based combat by describing their intent—for example, "I want to attack the orc chief with my glaive but stay out of his reach," or "I want to get between our wizard and the ogre."
- The DM then works with the players to help them achieve their intent.

AREAS OF EFFECT IN ZONES

Many spells and features have areas of effect. DMs can use the following guidelines to adjudicate which targets are hit by such effects. These guidelines break out general descriptions of the size of an area of effect, how many creatures are typically affected in that area using zone-based combat, and examples of common spells and class features that use that size:

- **Tiny Area:** One or two creatures in the same zone (*cloud of daggers*)
- **Small Area:** Two or three creatures in the same zone (*burning hands*, *thunderwave*)
- **Large Area:** Four to six creatures in the same zone (*cone of cold*, *fireball*)
- **Huge Area:** Twelve creatures across two zones (*circle of death*, Turn Undead)
- **Short Line:** Two or three creatures in the same zone (*wall of fire*)
- **Large Line:** Two to four creatures across two zones (*lightning bolt*)

DMs can adjudicate and adjust these numbers based on the current situation. For example, an area containing a horde of monsters might double the potential number of monsters affected. Whatever the circumstances, though, a DM should always adjudicate in favor of the characters.

HANDLING EDGE CASES

Zone-based combat doesn't account for a wide range of features that make use of specific distances. In those cases, it's up to the DM to work with a player's intent to help them make use of those features. In all cases, the DM should ask what the player wants to do, then help them figure out how to do it.

LAZY DM COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

This section helps you build and improvise dynamic combat encounters based on the fiction of the game. It's intended as an alternative take on the encounter-building guidelines in *The Lazy DM's Workbook*.

START WITH THE STORY

Good combat encounters begin with the story. Instead of building combat encounters as fixed components of the game, let combat encounters evolve naturally from the story taking place at the table.

Begin by asking the following question: **What monsters make sense given the current location and situation?** Then let that question guide you in the creation of a list of monsters and NPCs that might show up at a given location, and in what quantity.

Instead of predefining scenes as combat, roleplaying, or exploration, let the characters' approach determine what happens. Maybe they fight the guards at the gatehouse. Maybe they sneak past. Maybe they try to play the part of hired mercenaries. But let whatever happens come from the choices of the players.

AVERAGE CHARACTER HIT POINTS

Gauging the level of challenge in an encounter often comes down to comparing the amount of damage a monster can deal to the hit points of the characters. Hit points vary widely between classes, but you can use the following formula to estimate an average character's hit points at a given level: **(Level × 7) + 3**.

By giving you a rough estimation of how tough characters of a given level are, this formula can help you gauge how dangerous a specific monster will be, as well as judging the potential deadliness of traps, hazards, and other effects that deal damage.

POTENTIAL DEADLINESS

Assuming that your chosen monsters aren't dealing damage that easily overwhelms the characters' hit points, you can usually not worry about an encounter's difficulty—unless the encounter is potentially deadly. You can gauge an encounter's potential deadliness with the following benchmark:

An encounter might be deadly if the total of all the monsters' challenge ratings is greater than one quarter of the total of all the characters' levels, or one half of their levels if the characters are 5th level or higher.

To use this benchmark for characters of 1st through 4th level, add up the challenge ratings of all monsters in the encounter. Then add up the levels of all of the characters and divide that number by 4. If the challenge level summation is greater than the sum of character levels divided by 4, the encounter might be deadly. If the characters are above 5th level, use the same process but divide the total character levels by 2 instead of 4.

Each time the characters gain a new level, calculate this deadly benchmark score and jot it down in your preparation notes so you have it on hand. If you find that the characters in your game often have an easy time with potentially deadly encounters, treat the characters as though they are one or more levels higher. This will raise the benchmark at which an encounter might become deadly, making the calculation more accurate.

This benchmark assumes multiple monsters, and doesn't work well for gauging combat against a single monster. For legendary monsters—those with legendary actions and possibly lair actions—an encounter is generally deadly if the monster's challenge rating is 5 or more higher than the characters' average level.

CHARACTER CAPABILITIES VARY

No chart, table, or equation works perfectly to judge encounter balance at any given level, because no such system can take into account the wide range of options that can affect combat. Any individual character's effective power in a fight can go well beyond what's expected for their given level, especially at higher levels. And other factors that can affect a character's power might include any of the following:

- Player experience
- Class synergy between different characters in the party
- Magic items
- Environmental and situational circumstances
- Feats and multiclassing
- The total number of actions on either side
- How well rested the characters are

So use the benchmarks for determining whether an encounter might be deadly as a starting point. Then trust that you'll be better able to gauge what your characters can handle in combat the more you see them in action during the game.

SCALING FOR HIGHER LEVELS

As characters reach 11th level and higher, the deadly encounter benchmark becomes less useful for accurately representing a deadly encounter. Depending on the capabilities of those higher-level characters, monsters might pose even less of a threat than their challenge rating denotes. As such, you can further adjust the deadly encounter benchmark to account for this power with the following optional guideline:

At 11th level and higher, an encounter might be deadly if the total of all the monsters' challenge ratings is greater than three quarters of the total of all the characters' levels, or if it is equal to the total of their levels if the characters are 17th level or higher.

This sets up encounters of a much greater challenge than the baseline benchmark, but it might work more accurately for higher-powered characters.

MONSTER DIFFICULTY DIALS

Balancing combat encounters is notoriously difficult. Different groups of characters can bring very different capabilities to each battle, even at the same level. However, because monsters as they are typically presented are the average of their type, you can adjust the averages to subtly or dramatically change the difficulty of a given monster or group of monsters. By turning these "difficulty dials" for monsters, you can easily shift the tone of combat even in the middle of a battle.

"HIT POINT" DIAL

Hit points given for monsters are the average of their Hit Dice. This means you can adjust hit points within the minimum and maximum of a monster's Hit Dice formula based on the individual story for that particular monster, the current pacing of the battle, or both.

For example, an average ogre has 59 hit points from 7d10 + 21 Hit Dice. This means a weak ogre might have as few as 28 hit points, while a particularly strong ogre might have 91. This lets you easily set up fights in which minion ogres might have fewer hit points while boss ogres have more. (As an even lazier rule of thumb, you can halve or double a monster's average hit points to give you a weaker or stronger version of that monster.)

You can turn this dial before a battle begins or even during the battle itself. If a battle drags, reduce the hit points of a monster to get it out of the fight earlier. If a battle feels like it will be over too quickly, increase the monster's hit points to make it hold up longer. Start with average hit points, and then turn the hit point dial one way or the other whenever doing so can make the game more fun.

"NUMBER OF MONSTERS" DIAL

The "number of monsters in a battle" dial alters combat challenge the most dramatically of all the dials—but because it's so clearly visible to players, this dial is also sometimes difficult to change during a fight.

If circumstances allow for it, some monsters might flee or automatically fall depending on the events of a fight. Undead might break if their necromancer master is killed, and many intelligent creatures will flee a fight they can't win. Other times, more monsters might enter the fray in a second wave if the first wave isn't standing up to the characters.

When developing a combat encounter in which you think you might turn this dial, consider beforehand how monsters might leave the battle or how other monsters might join the fight as reinforcements in a realistic way.

"DAMAGE" DIAL

Increasing the amount of damage a monster deals on each attack increases the monster's threat and can make a dull fight more fun. In the same way, decreasing monster damage can help prevent a fight from becoming overwhelming if the characters are having trouble.

The static damage value noted in a monster's stat block represents the average of the damage formula for the monster's attack. If you use average damage, you can adjust the damage based on that formula. For example, an ogre deals 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage with their greatclub attack, so you can set this damage at anywhere from 6 to 20 and still be within the range of what you might roll.

If you're a DM who rolls for damage, you can also turn the damage dial up by adding one or more additional damage dice. If you like, you can have an in-game reason for this increase. Perhaps an ogre sets its club on fire to deal an additional 4 (1d8) or 7 (2d6) fire damage. Or a particularly dangerous vampire with an unholy sword might deal an extra 27 (6d8) necrotic damage if you so choose. Adding these kinds of effects to a monster's attack is an excellent way of increasing a monster's threat in a way the players can clearly understand—and it has no upper limit.

"NUMBER OF ATTACKS" DIAL

Increasing or decreasing the number of attacks a monster makes has a larger effect on its threat than increasing its damage. You can increase a monster's number of attacks if it's badly threatened by the characters, just as you can reduce its attacks if the characters are having an easy time. An angry ogre left alone after its friends have fallen to the heroes might start swinging its club twice per Attack action instead of just once. Single creatures facing an entire party of adventurers often benefit from increasing their number of attacks.

MIX AND MATCH

You can turn any or all of these dials to tune a combat encounter and bring the most excitement to your game. Don't turn the dials just to make every battle harder, though. Sometimes cutting through great swaths of easy monsters is exactly the sort of situation players love.

Turning several dials together can change combat dramatically, helping to keep things feeling fresh. For example, a group of starving ogres might be weakened (lowering the hit point dial) but also frenzied in combat (turning up the attack dial). By adjusting these dials when designing encounters and during your game, you can keep the pacing of combat exciting and fun.

MONSTER TEMPLATES

The following monster templates can help you customize existing monsters into new unique variants that can fit a variety of locations and circumstances. With just a few templates in hand, your core monster books can become much more useful.

CHALLENGE RATING INCREASE?

The challenge ratings described in these templates are loose guides, so use your best judgment with them. Apply these templates only when you have a good handle on your characters' capabilities, and be prepared to tune your new monsters accordingly.

ELEMENTAL MONSTERS

Apply this template to any monster to make an elemental version of that monster. Choose from or roll on the following table to determine the type of elemental template you want to apply:

d8	Elemental Template		Elemental Template
1	Fire	5	Poison
2	Cold	6	Necrotic
3	Lighting	7	Radiant
4	Acid	8	Thunder

Then choose one or more of the following traits to customize your monster, making use of the damage type determined by the elemental template:

- **Elemental Resistance.** The templated creature has resistance against its damage type.
- **Elemental Damage.** When the templated creature scores a hit using a weapon attack, the attack deals extra damage of its damage type.
- **Elemental Aura.** Any creature that starts their turn within an area surrounding the templated creature, or that enters that area for the first time on a turn, takes damage of the templated creature's type.
- **Elemental Shield.** Any creature that touches the templated creature or hits them with a melee attack while within 5 feet of them takes damage of the templated creature's type.

The amount of damage and the size of a templated creature's elemental aura is determined by the base creature's challenge rating. The damage noted is the same for both attacks and the creature's aura.

CR	Damage	Aura Size
0–1	3 (1d6)	5 feet
2–5	7 (2d6)	10 feet
6–10	10 (3d6)	15 feet
11–15	14 (4d6)	20 feet
16+	21 (6d6)	25 feet

This elemental template increases a monster's challenge rating by 1 or 2.

DIRE MONSTERS

Dire monsters are particularly large and dangerous versions of typical monsters, and can be created using the following guidelines:

- The monster's hit points are doubled.
- The monster's size increases one category.
- The monster gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls.
- The monster can use one or more of its standard attacks multiple times on its attack action. Use your best judgment to choose which of the monster's attacks to use for multiple attacks.
- The monster's challenge rating increases by 2 or 3.

FIENDISH MONSTERS

Infernal or abyssal variants of existing monsters are endlessly spawned across the Lower Planes. This template can turn any monster into a fiendish variant:

- The monster's type becomes fiend.
- The monster has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.
- The monster has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.
- The monster has resistance to cold and fire damage.
- The monster has immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition.
- The monster's weapon attacks are magical.
- The monster has darkvision out to a range of 120 feet.
- The monster's challenge rating increases by 1.

SPELL-INFUSED MONSTERS

Some monsters can innately cast magical spells. Spell-infused monsters typically have a spell attack bonus of 3 + one-half the monster's challenge rating, and a spell save DC of 12 + one-half the monster's challenge rating (rounded down in both cases).

Spell-infused creatures do not require components to cast their spells. They typically use each of their spells once, recovering the ability to do so when they finish a long rest. Roll for or choose from the table to determine which spells a creature can use. Spells that deal high damage can affect a creature's challenge rating.

d20	Spell		Spell
1	Burning hands	11	Invisibility
2	Magic missile	12	Misty step
3	Disguise self	13	Scorching ray
4	Fog cloud	14	Shatter
5	Shield	15	Spirit guardians
6	Inflict wounds	16	Dispel magic
7	Faerie fire	17	Fly
8	Thunderwave	18	Gaseous form
9	Blur	19	Lightning bolt
10	Darkness	20	Fireball

UNDEAD TEMPLATES

Death comes to all things, but not even death can keep a good monster down. You can easily create an undead variant of any monster simply by giving it the undead type and describing its undead appearance, letting the narrative feed the players' impression of fighting undead without requiring any mechanical changes. But for even more realistic undead, you can use any of the following templates to give a monster some of the properties and attributes of a specific type of undead creature.

UNDEAD TEMPLATES

All creatures that take on one of these templates gain the following universal changes:

- The creature's type becomes undead.
- The creature has darkvision out to a range of 60 feet.
- Any new trait of the creature's that requires a saving throw uses a DC of 12 + one-half the undead creature's challenge rating.

Then apply the traits and actions of any of the following specific templates.

SKELETON

- Vulnerability to bludgeoning damage.
- Immunity to poison damage, to exhaustion, and to the poisoned condition

ZOMBIE

- Immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition.
- **Undead Fortitude:** If damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the creature drops to 1 hit point instead.

GHOUL

- Immunity to poison damage, to exhaustion, and to the charmed and poisoned conditions.
- **Paralyzing Touch.** When this creature hits with a melee attack using a natural weapon, the target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Elves and undead are immune to this effect.

WIGHT

- Resistance to necrotic and poison damage, and to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.
- Immunity to exhaustion and the poisoned condition.
- **Life Drain.** When this creature hits with a melee attack using a natural weapon, the attack deals necrotic damage equal to 1d6 + one-half the creature's challenge rating, and the target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

WRAITH

- Resistance to acid, cold, fire, lightning, and thunder damage, and to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered.
- Immunity to necrotic and poison damage, to exhaustion, and to the charmed, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, and restrained conditions.
- The creature has the wraith's Incorporeal Movement and Sunlight Sensitivity traits.
- The creature gains the following trait: **Life Drain.** When this creature hits with a melee attack using a natural weapon, the attack deals necrotic damage equal to 1d6 + one-half the creature's challenge rating, and the target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or have its hit point maximum reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

VAMPIRE SPAWN

- Resistance to necrotic, bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks.
- The creature has the vampire spawn's Spider Climb, Vampire Weaknesses, and Regeneration traits.
- **Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* 4 + one-half the creature's CR to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by the vampire spawn creature, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* piercing damage equal to 1d6 + one-half the creature's CR, plus necrotic damage equal to 1d6 per one-half the creature's CR (minimum 1d6). The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the templated creature regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.
- The creature can grapple a target instead of dealing damage with any of its attacks. If it makes multiple attacks, it can replace one of those attacks with the Bite action.
- If you want your vampire spawn creature to feel even more vampiric, give it the ability to cast the *misty step*, *command*, or *hold person* spells at will as a bonus action.

POWERFUL UNDEAD TEMPLATES

To build variants of creatures modeled after more powerful undead, use the undead creature's stat block and add traits from the base creature. It's easier to apply the traits and actions of a stone giant to a lich or vampire stat block than it is to apply lich or vampire traits to a stone giant stat block.

ABILITY MODIFICATIONS

Ability score modifications to undead creatures aren't covered in these templates. For example, skeletons might have reductions to Dexterity and Charisma, and vampire spawn might have boosted Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution scores. Most of the time, you can safely skip such changes, simply improvising adjustments to the baseline abilities of the monster when needed.

MAKING LEGENDARY MONSTERS

This section helps you quickly improvise a legendary version of an existing monster, letting you make a single monster a greater challenge. Such improvised monsters break the challenge ratings of the creatures they're based on, so use your experience with the capabilities of the characters to build encounters with these monsters. Focus on building an exciting boss monster that challenges the characters and lets them show off their coolest abilities, and let the encounter define its own difficulty.

When using an improvised legendary monster, make sure the players and characters know that they are facing a more powerful legendary version of a foe they might have fought before, so they know what to expect. As well, avoid combining multiple legendary creatures in a single combat encounter, whether standard legendary creatures or new creatures improvised with these rules.

LEGENDARY RESISTANCE

You don't want a legendary monster getting pinned down by a few failed saving throws early in the fight. The Legendary Resistance trait is the solution:

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the monster fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

You can also choose to boost a boss monster's defenses by granting it advantage on saving throws against magical effects, advantage or immunity to effects that turn undead, or advantage when making Constitution saving throws to maintain concentration. Do whatever makes sense for the narrative of the battle.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Legendary actions increase the number of actions your boss monster can take, making a potent foe throughout each round of the fight:

This legendary monster can take 3 legendary actions. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The legendary monster regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Legendary actions typically include such things as making a single attack, casting a low-level spell, or taking the Dash, Dodge, Disengage, Hide, or Search actions. Legendary creatures might likewise be able to take such actions as bonus actions on their turn.

Powerful effects such as area attacks might cost 2 or 3 legendary actions.

TWEAK HIT POINTS

Boss monsters are often the central target of the characters, and need the defenses to be able to withstand the brunt of their attacks. Consider increasing the hit points of a boss monster, most easily by doubling the hit points of the base monster.

TWEAK DAMAGE

Adding attacks as legendary actions dramatically increases the overall damage done by a legendary version of an existing monster. If you feel the need to add even more damage, consider adding elemental damage that makes sense for the monster. For example, a legendary wight might deal an extra 7 (2d6) necrotic damage with successful weapon attacks.

USEFUL INNATE SPELLS

Even if a legendary monster isn't a traditional spellcaster, giving them access to innate spells is an easy way to make them significantly more interesting. Choose spells that work well for the boss monster's role in the combat narrative, based on the challenge you want to provide and what makes thematic sense for the monster.

Certain innate spells might be "always on," creating effects that the boss can use automatically. Others might be cast by the monster as an action, a bonus action, or a legendary action, or might replace one attack in the monster's Multiattack action.

PERSISTENT THREAT

Spells that can threaten the characters regardless of how the boss takes its actions make good candidates for "always on" effects, and might not require concentration as you see fit. Such spells include *spiritual weapon*, *spirit guardians*, *cloudkill*, and *fire shield*.

ESCAPE AND DEFENSE

Some spells can help boss monsters survive longer and counter debilitating effects, including *shield*, *fog cloud*, *darkness*, *misty step*, and *greater invisibility*.

HIGH DAMAGE

Some of the best spells for an improvised legendary creature allow it to deal a whole bunch of damage to one or more creatures, including *fire bolt*, *scorching ray*, *shatter*, *lightning bolt*, and *fireball*.

ADD MINIONS

One of the easiest ways to keep a boss battle a continuing challenge is to add more monsters to it. Whether a legendary monster is a shadowy assassin, a high cultist, or a monster with foul servants, minions can help harry attackers and create a protective barrier around the boss. A boss might also be able to redirect the damage they take to their minions if it makes sense for the story.

RUNNING HORDES

This section helps you more easily run battles in which the characters face large numbers of monsters, and provides an alternative to the guidelines found in *The Lazy DM's Workbook*.

To accommodate running horde combat, we change the rules for running monsters in two ways: adjusting how we track damage done to monsters in a horde, and how we adjudicate attack rolls and saving throws for the horde. You can use these approaches individually or together when running large numbers of monsters.

POOLING DAMAGE

Pooling damage means that instead of tracking the damage dealt to individual monsters, you track damage dealt to the horde as a whole. Add up the damage of each attack, regardless of which monster in the horde is hit. Then every time the total of damage taken is higher than the hit points of a single monster in the horde, remove the last monster hit and reset the damage dealt to zero. If enough damage is dealt with a single attack to kill multiple monsters, remove that number of monsters, subtracting their hit points from the damage dealt until there isn't enough damage remaining to kill another monster.

To make this math even easier, you can round each monster's hit points to the nearest 5 or 10.

If the horde is hit by a damage-dealing area effect (including spells), remove any creatures that took damage equal to or greater than their hit points after determining their saving throw results. If the damage isn't enough to kill a single monster, tally up the total damage done and remove monsters one at a time, subtracting their hit points from the damage until all damage is accounted for.

For even easier adjudication, you can simply remove any monsters that fail their saving throws, without worrying about their hit points.

DETERMINE TARGETS

The circumstances of the encounter dictate how many members of the horde can attack the characters. Unless the circumstances dictate otherwise, assume the horde evenly spreads its attacks across all characters. If certain characters step ahead of the rest of the party or block choke points that prevent the horde from reaching other characters, you can redirect the horde's attacks to the characters stepping forward.

ADJUDICATING ATTACKS AND SAVING THROWS

Whenever rolling individual attacks or saving throws would be a burden, assume that **one quarter** of attacks or saving throws rolled by the horde succeed. Round up or down depending on the circumstances, such as when determining how many attacks succeed against characters with wildly different ACs.

If all the creatures in a horde have advantage on an attack or saving throw, increase the number of successful attacks or saving throws to **one half**. If the horde has disadvantage, reduce the number to **one in ten**.

If any member of the horde is affected by an effect that leaves them incapacitated, remove them from play.

If you prefer to roll dice, roll twice when a group of monsters all make attacks or saving throws. On each success, one quarter of the monster attacks or saving throws succeed. If both rolls fail, no attacks or saving throws succeed.

ADJUDICATING AREAS OF EFFECT

Adjudicate the number of creatures caught up in an area of effect based on the circumstances, but leaning toward more creatures rather than fewer. You can use the following as a baseline for the number of tightly packed creatures in a horde that are affected in a given area:

- **Tiny Area** (5-foot radius): Two creatures
- **Small Area** (10- to 15-foot radius): Four creatures
- **Large Area** (20-foot radius): Sixteen creatures
- **Huge Area** (30-foot radius or more): Thirty-two or more creatures
- **Short Line** (60 feet): Six creatures
- **Long Line** (120 feet): Eight creatures

TIPS AND TRICKS

The following guidelines can help you use horde combat most effectively:

- Describe these horde combat rules to the players so everyone understands how they work. Always adjudicate combat to the characters' benefit, and help the players achieve their goals.
- Use evocative descriptions to flavor a horde. Worry less about the mechanics and more about the feeling involved in fighting a huge horde of monsters.
- Avoid using hordes with monsters of different types in a single battle. Instead, use a single stat block and describe any physical differences between monsters narratively.
- Augment a horde with a handful of more powerful monsters when desired. Track the hit points and attacks of these powerful monsters normally.
- As hordes diminish to a manageable level, return to tracking individual hit points, attacks, and saving throws normally.

STRESS EFFECTS

The guidelines in this section replace the madness rules found in the game's core rules and *The Lazy DM's Workbook*. The concept of "madness" has long been used to malign and marginalize complex psychological symptoms and the individuals coping with them. This new approach works with explicitly supernatural hindrances to break away from those stereotypes.

These effects represent dire reactions to a character witnessing something so alien and horrific that it has a lasting effect. You can use these descriptions to replace the more general frightened, stunned, or incapacitated conditions as desired.

When amplifying a sense of stress or horror in a game, ensure that you have the players' permission ahead of time and that proper safety tools (see page 9) are in place.

USING STRESS EFFECTS

Some things are beyond the ability of the mortal mind to comprehend. When witnessing alien or horrific entities, locations, and events, even the most powerful heroes might find their ability to process what unfolds around them shut down, forcing them to make a stress check. Such a check might be warranted by any of the following situations:

- Witnessing a ghoul devouring a body
- Beholding a bloody sacrificial altar
- Watching the raising of the dead
- Witnessing a ritual sacrifice
- Hearing the sermon of a dark priest
- Reading words from a forbidden tome
- Reading glyphs describing an elder evil
- Seeing a parasite burst free from its host
- Beholding unholy primordial cave paintings
- Touching an unholy artifact
- Peering through a portal into the Nine Hells
- Staring into a scrying pool showing the Abyss
- Discovering the ruins of a sentient alien vessel
- Watching depraved acts of cannibalism
- Seeing the true form of an abomination
- Falling into the depths of the Astral Plane
- Staring into the tumultuous extents of Limbo
- Standing in the presence of a demon prince
- Beholding an alien city of elder evils
- Witnessing the death of a god

STRESS RESULTS

Whenever a character witnesses a potential stress event, you can ask for a Charisma saving throw with a DC based on the severity of the event, from DC 10 (easy) to DC 20 (hard). On a failed save, the character suffers a roleplaying effect from the Stress Effects table. Make sure you review the effects on the table during session zero to ensure they don't cross any players' lines of comfort.

STRESS EFFECTS

d20	Effect
1	You slip into a mental vision of a restful place.
2	You whisper in a tongue no mortal understands.
3	Blood flows from your eyes.
4	You collapse as you lose all strength.
5	A screaming whine fills your hearing.
6	Your heart seems to stop in your chest.
7	The faces of your friends hideously contort.
8	Your heartbeat hammers in your ears.
9	You hear strange, discordant music.
10	You fall asleep and dream of darkness.
11	A terrible memory of your past comes to mind.
12	Physical pain and burning wracks your body.
13	You find yourself unable to move or speak.
14	Unbound shadows seem to crawl toward you.
15	You hear the echoing sound of children crying.
16	You lose control of your bodily functions.
17	Your vision fills with twisted geometric shapes.
18	You hear the whispers of an otherworldly being.
19	You scream as blood flows from your mouth.
20	You feel as though all your bones begin to crack.

You determine how long the effect lasts and can add mechanical hindrances inspired by the effect at your discretion. Alternatively, you can add the following mechanical effect:

On a failed save, the character becomes stunned for 1 minute. The character can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns and whenever they take damage, ending the effect on themself on a success. If the character's saving throw is successful or if the effect ends for it, the character is immune to this effect for the next 24 hours. A character can also choose to break this effect at the start of their turn by taking 4 (1d8) psychic damage per two character levels. A *lesser restoration* or equivalent effect likewise negates a stress effect.

(You can also apply this mechanism for breaking an effect by taking psychic damage to characters who are frightened, stunned, or incapacitated.)

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

DMs and players can work together to determine whether stress effects have longer-term ramifications. Any such long-term results should reflect not just the character and the situation, but also the players' desires.

Be mindful to avoid terms such as "madness" or "crazy" to describe the long-term effects of stressful encounters. Consider instead the otherworldly nature of the situation and effect, and focus on how the character might respond to such a stressful experience.

SETTLEMENT GENERATOR

This section can help you quickly build a village, town, or city with a focus on the features that are generally most important for fantasy adventures. You can roll for various features on the following tables, or use them as inspiration for features of your own.

SETTLEMENT LOCATIONS

The establishments the characters might find themselves in can help build out a settlement. Roll a d8 for villages, a d12 for towns, and a d20 for cities.

d8/d12/d20	Establishment		Establishment
1	Inn	11	Magistrate
2	Tavern	12	Druid's grove
3	Outfitters	13	Military castle
4	Blacksmith	14	Apothecary
5	Small keep	15	Wizard's tower
6	Job board	16	Prison
7	Butcher/grocer	17	Coliseum
8	Stables	18	Amphitheater
9	Temple	19	Adventurers' guild
10	Weaponsmith	20	Royal court

NOTABLE LANDMARKS

As the characters travel within a settlement, drop in landmarks as encounter backdrops or to bring the settlement to life.

d20	Landmark		Landmark
1	Hero's statue	11	Signal brazier
2	Holy shrine	12	Ancient gateway
3	Funeral pyre	13	Lush gardens
4	Old tomb	14	Carved pillars
5	Empty well	15	Ornate fountain
6	Prisoners' stocks	16	Beautiful mosaic
7	Public bell	17	Seedy market
8	Executioner's block	18	Crumbling watchtower
9	Faerie tree	19	Old sewer entrance
10	Ancient megalith	20	Triumphal arch

ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

Any settlement can contain exciting adventure locations.

d20	Location		Location
1	Haunted manor	11	Crumbling cairn
2	Forgotten sewers	12	Old tomb
3	Abandoned mines	13	Trapped mansion
4	Deep well shaft	14	Otherworldly portal
5	Ancient catacombs	15	Smugglers' warehouse
6	Ruined tower	16	Wrecked vehicle or ship
7	Thieves' den	17	Abandoned lighthouse
8	Castle dungeons	18	Underground caverns
9	Infested cellars	19	Forgotten halls
10	Flooded tunnels	20	Ruined bridgeworks

MAIN INDUSTRIES

A settlement could have a number of industries around which it has grown and developed.

d20	Industry		Industry
1	Fishing	11	Military training
2	Hunting	12	Religion
3	Horses	13	Winemaking
4	Livestock	14	Arcane research
5	Farming	15	Higher learning
6	Woodworking	16	Exploration
7	Metalworking	17	Dungeon delving
8	Mining	18	Archaeology
9	Guilds and trade	19	Beast riding
10	Boatbuilding	20	Protectors

LOCATION NAMES

A traditional-sounding fantasy name can help make shops and businesses memorable for the players. You can extend the use of this table by rolling twice, and using the first word from the first roll and the second word from the second roll. Add "The" as appropriate.

d20	Name		Name
1	Rusty Lantern	11	Swooning Lion
2	Learned Rooster	12	Angry Bottle
3	Steel Sword	13	Pleasant Friend
4	Ruby Goat	14	Sunlit Cloister
5	Midnight Tomcat	15	Autumn Citadel
6	Shining Gemstone	16	Sunken Warship
7	Iron Cauldron	17	Burning Blossom
8	Midday Moon	18	Frozen Skull
9	Lady's Stallion	19	Old Warhorn
10	Lord's Basket	20	Black Sun

SETTLEMENT EVENTS

The events taking place in a settlement while the characters are visiting can make the place come to life or provide an interesting backdrop to the adventure.

d20	Event		Event
1	Street theater	11	Knights' tournament
2	Holy anointing	12	Athletic competition
3	Military parade	13	Great hunt
4	Costumed parade	14	Children's festival
5	Seasonal festival	15	Historic remembrance
6	Royal excursion	16	Official proclamation
7	Public execution	17	Somber funeral
8	Grand bazaar	18	Bandit attack
9	Grand feast	19	Grand discovery
10	Day of mourning	20	Arcane display

WILDERNESS EXPLORATION

This section can be used to build out an interesting environment while the characters are exploring a wilderness setting. Rather than having a wilderness feel like an empty landscape, you can focus on memorable landmarks, distinct paths and route markers, and noteworthy encounter possibilities to bring the characters' wilderness journey to life.

WILDERNESS QUESTS

If you don't have a quest already in mind, or if you'd like to set up a side quest during the characters' wilderness exploration, you can use the following table for inspiration.

d10	Quest
1	Restore a defiled grove
2	Find and heal a wounded beast
3	Locate an ancient fey gateway
4	Find a lost city
5	Recover an item stolen by unseelie fey
6	Find a rare spell component
7	Hunt down a defiler
8	Seek the counsel of an ancient being
9	Locate someone lost in the deep wood
10	Plant a magical acorn

WILDERNESS LANDMARKS

To start building out your wilderness location, choose a number of landmarks the characters might discover while they explore, using the following table for inspiration.

d20	Landmark		Landmark
1	Cracked megalith	11	Acidic hot springs
2	Giant mushroom	12	Natural archway
3	Hollow meteorite	13	Standing stones
4	Huge dead tree	14	Gateway to shadow
5	Perfectly still pool	15	Huge cave entrance
6	Ancient fey gate	16	Lost city of gold
7	Lava lake	17	Huge glowing crystal
8	Giant skull	18	Tunneled mud flats
9	Faerie village	19	Primeval graveyard
10	Tree of skulls	20	Floating monolith

WILDERNESS PATHS

For each of your landmarks, determine what paths—literal or virtual—might connect them. Include multiple paths, loop backs, dead ends, and secret paths to create interesting options for the characters while traveling.

d20	Path		Path
1	Dancing faeries	11	Pointing skeletons
2	Arcane ley line	12	Obsidian markers
3	Bloody game trail	13	Strange smells
4	Glyphed trees	14	Tree carvings
5	Mushroom path	15	Ghostly wolf
6	Running hares	16	Laughing nymphs
7	Lines in the stars	17	Alluring songs
8	Ancient ravine	18	An old string
9	Roaring river	19	Unique plants
10	Friendly critters	20	Ivy-covered statues

MONSTROUS ENCOUNTERS

You can use this table to determine what monstrous encounters the characters might face while exploring. And even if the characters don't face a monster, they might see signs of monsters that traveled through an area earlier.

d20	Monsters		Monsters
1	Goblin scouts	11	Ancient skeletons
2	Unseelie elves	12	Raging redcaps
3	Mutated giants	13	Solitary vampire
4	Wrathful cyclopes	14	Ravenous ghouls
5	Vengeful medusas	15	Hag coven
6	Gazing basilisks	16	Dark knights
7	Dreadful spiders	17	Twisted cultists
8	Territorial dragon	18	Evil druids
9	Betrayed banshees	19	Drow protectors
10	Confused specters	20	Defiling wizards

WONDROUS SITES

In addition to the locations and encounters above, give thought to unusual creatures and sites the characters might encounter. Such sites can provide upward beats and positive experiences in your adventure.

d10	Encounter
1	Secluded village
2	Ancient healing fountain
3	Natural restful spring
4	Holy knight on a quest of honor
5	Helpful but mischievous faeries
6	Celestial entity of a hero's god
7	Elder tree of wisdom
8	Lost enclave
9	Glade of empowering flowers
10	Vine-covered statue of blessings

UNDERGROUND EXPLORATION

This section helps you build rich encounters in the caverns, tunnels, and chambers hidden beneath the surface of the world. You can use the point-crawl style of adventure design (see page 24) to create a map of caverns and other areas, linked by tunnels and other connecting routes. Then fill those caverns and chambers with interesting monuments, effects, and encounters as needed. Include multiple paths, secret routes, and loop backs to make exploration interesting.

UNDERGROUND LOCATIONS

The nature of underground adventuring means that each location might serve as simple backdrop for exploration, or could be the site of a full adventure.

d20	Location		Location
1	Towering waterfall	11	Ruined village
2	Massive rift	12	Underground lake
3	Spiraling pit	13	Hall of faces
4	Chilled bone yard	14	Chamber of pillars
5	Molten lake	15	Huge stairwell
6	Mushroom grove	16	Petrified forest
7	Shattered keep	17	Crystalline chamber
8	Forgotten crypt	18	Infernal prison
9	Primeval cairn	19	Cavern of echoes
10	Deep shaft	20	Abandoned mine

UNDERGROUND CONNECTORS

Paths and passageways of all kinds can connect the various areas of the underworld.

d20	Connector		Connector
1	Narrow rift walkway	11	Natural caves
2	Underground river	12	Steam vents
3	Molten lava flow	13	Failing fey gate
4	Giant worm's tunnel	14	Giant staircase
5	Rotten roots	15	Narrow bridge
6	Dimensional portal	16	Arcane doorway
7	Ancient hallway	17	Dimensional rift
8	Infested warren	18	Forgotten sewers
9	Dwarven roadway	19	Earthquake fissure
10	Mining tunnels	20	Bottomless ravine

UNDERGROUND MONUMENTS

The monuments of contemporary, ancient, and lost civilizations often decorate caverns and chambers underground.

d20	Monument		Monument
1	Floating rocks	11	Towering effigy
2	Black obelisk	12	Offal mound
3	Huge skull	13	Giant sword
4	Iron statues	14	Huge statue
5	Charnel pit	15	Steam vents
6	Webbed corpses	16	Carved stalagmites
7	Arcane circle	17	Sacrificial altar
8	Cracked megaliths	18	Iron sarcophagus
9	Glyph-marked archway	19	Smoldering firepit
10	Bloody battlefield	20	Hanging cages

UNDERGROUND HAZARDS

Locations and connectors alike can feature strange ongoing hazards and effects. Some of these might be wholly descriptive, or you can improvise mechanical effects as desired.

d20	Hazard		Hazard
1	Dripping acid	11	Ancient traps
2	Psychic screams	12	Scarab swarms
3	Lava cracks	13	Gripping shadows
4	Freezing fog	14	Razor-sharp stones
5	Blood-raging song	15	Charming mosaics
6	Poisonous geysers	16	Explosive runes
7	Static discharge	17	Falling rocks
8	Arcane instability	18	Magnetic ceiling
9	Life-draining glyphs	19	Armed statues
10	Slippery ooze	20	Antimagic pockets

UNDERGROUND ENCOUNTERS

Countless sinister monsters lurk in the shadows underground. These encounters are best suited for characters of 3rd through 6th level.

d20	Encounter		Encounter
1	Murderous bandits	11	Howling death dogs
2	Bloody cultists	12	Starving ghouls
3	Plague-ridden rats	13	Giant spiders
4	Drow scouts	14	Misguided specters
5	Skeletal guardians	15	Spiders and ettercaps
6	Cunning cockatrices	16	Gibbering mouthers
7	Orc zombies	17	Ogre mercenaries
8	Gray oozes	18	Minotaur skeletons
9	Monstrous shadows	19	Stone-eyed basilisks
10	Bugbear hunters	20	Guardian wights

LAND OF THE FEY

Beauty and ugliness, night and day, summer and winter—the lands of the fey are lands of duality, filled with mysteries and wonders. Use the tables in this section to build out your own faerie-inspired adventures. Each table is set up so the first half provides options for the seelie fey, with the second half providing options for the unseelie fey.

FAERIE ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

Wondrous locations abound across the lands of the seelie and the unseelie alike.

d20	Location		Location
1	Summer palace	11	Hollow dead tree
2	Faerie pool	12	Defiled grove
3	Tree of life	13	Cavernous maw
4	Golden earthmote	14	Dead village
5	Sunbathed tower	15	Lost oubliette
6	Treant grove	16	Acidic geysers
7	Mushroom villa	17	Wild cairn
8	Maze garden	18	Volcanic caverns
9	Natural airship	19	Overgrown keep
10	Faerie menagerie	20	Winter court

STRANGE EVENTS

As characters journey throughout the lands of the fey, they might find themselves caught up in mysterious happenings of all sorts.

d20	Event
1	A character's bootlaces suddenly tie together.
2	Snowballs appear in clement weather.
3	All rations turn into cupcakes.
4	A rain of honey mead begins to fall.
5	Frogs begin to sing a bawdy tune.
6	The party's silver coins are replaced with marbles.
7	Day changes to night, then back to day in minutes.
8	The party's water is replaced by wine.
9	Characters' pockets are filled with tiny bells.
10	Animals and insects mock the characters.
11	The party's rations grow rancid.
12	It begins to rain black oil.
13	Muddy ground sucks the boots off characters' feet.
14	The air fills with ashen butterflies.
15	Bugs erupt out from the characters' packs.
16	Plants exude the smell of rotting meat.
17	The temperature drops to freezing.
18	The characters find the graves of loved ones.
19	Blood flows like sap from trees and stones.
20	Statues whisper terrible secrets.

FAERIE MONUMENTS

Overgrown monuments dot the lands of the fey, many containing secrets lost to time.

d20	Monument		Monument
1	Tree of flowers	11	Hag's cauldron
2	Faerie spring	12	Impaled faeries
3	Elven monoliths	13	Titanic bones
4	Floating orrery	14	Headless statue
5	Satyr statue	15	Unholy megaliths
6	Blue-water fountain	16	Tree of corpses
7	Rosebud throne	17	Dark portal
8	Mirror pond	18	Obsidian throne
9	Wishing well	19	Unsettling sculpture
10	Wine grove	20	Icy tomb

FEY ENCOUNTERS

Travelers to the lands of the fey might encounter wonders both delightful and terrible.

d20	Encounter		Encounter
1	Mischievous faeries	11	Bloodthirsty redcaps
2	Lost travelers	12	Twisted giants
3	Court picnic	13	Battle-worn hobgoblins
4	Centaur hunters	14	Beguiling devil
5	Luminescent stag	15	Friendly hag
6	Beguiled minstrels	16	Elf hunters
7	Satyr flautist	17	Haunted vampire
8	Queen's procession	18	Cruel spiders
9	Elven plane walker	19	Bloody werewolves
10	Golden unicorn	20	Cursed treants

FEYTOUCHED OBJECTS

Strange feytouched objects can be found anywhere in the lands of the seelie and unseelie.

d20	Object		Object
1	Stone mushroom	11	Black staked heart
2	Ever-growing root	12	Bloody fang
3	Unicorn pendant	13	Ever-sticking thistle
4	Ring of living wood	14	Candle of darkness
5	Liquid sunshine	15	Bag of children's teeth
6	Gold-laced silk rope	16	Idol of madness
7	Moon-phase amulet	17	Screaming black root
8	Golden hairbrush	18	Vampiric fangs
9	Ever-full wineglass	19	Crown of thorns
10	Self-playing harp	20	Tiny sarcophagus

WAR-THEMED CAMPAIGNS

In a war-themed campaign, battles rage around the characters while they do their part to turn the tide in favor of their forces. This section lets you generate the details of a campaign in which the characters play a part in a larger war between two or more armies. While the war rages around them, they choose or are assigned missions to bolster their allies and defeat their enemies.

Rather than running a complicated mechanical system for large conflicts, a war campaign can focus on traditional party-based adventures and quests against a backdrop of battle, allowing the characters' accomplishments to affect larger events.

WARTIME MISSIONS

As war rages around them, the characters take on missions that help steer the conflict. Consider offering three such missions at a time, and let the players choose the one that most interests them.

d20	Mission		Mission
1	Kill enemy leaders	11	Defend a watchtower
2	Rescue prisoners	12	Take out lieutenants
3	Steal enemy plans	13	Defend a keep
4	Sabotage machines	14	Open a drawbridge
5	Deliver intelligence	15	Detonate a bomb
6	Forge alliances	16	Seize a commander
7	Defend a choke point	17	Awaken a monster
8	Steal enemy treasure	18	Retrieve a spy
9	Uncover a weapon	19	Protect refugees
10	Destroy a bridge	20	Scout positions

BATTLEGROUND LOCATIONS

Locations typical to a wide-scale battle can be used as backdrop or the sites of individual adventures.

d20	Location		Location
1	Ruined watchtower	11	Underground bunker
2	War-torn manor	12	Dimensional gateway
3	Newly raised fort	13	Massive war machine
4	Old castle	14	Siege tower
5	Occupied town	15	Fortified hill
6	Naval ship	16	Repurposed factory
7	Planar airship	17	Occupied cathedral
8	War barge	18	Wizard's tower
9	Floating keep	19	Defended mines
10	Mountain caves	20	Grisly prison

MONUMENTS OF WAR

As the characters explore or travel the battlefield, they might come across any number of war-torn monuments.

d20	Monument		Monument
1	Sundered machine	11	Burned bodies
2	Bloody battlefield	12	Cracked memorial
3	Massive crater	13	Shattered wall
4	Impaled victims	14	Overgrown garden
5	Destroyed fortress	15	Heads on pikes
6	Wrecked statue	16	Empty gallows
7	Charred farmhouse	17	Destroyed cemetery
8	Defiled graveyard	18	Abandoned cannons
9	Crashed airship	19	Acidic pools
10	Corpse-filled trench	20	Collapsed bridge

ENEMIES

At any point in their journey across hostile lands, the characters might run into deadly foes.

d20	Enemy		Enemy
1	Dwarf brigands	11	Bugbear assassins
2	Elf mercenaries	12	Troll warriors
3	Ogre infantry	13	Orc conscripts
4	Wounded soldiers	14	Siege-specialist giants
5	Halfling hunters	15	Guardian elementals
6	Goblin scouts	16	Protective constructs
7	Elite soldiers	17	Evil cultists
8	Hired mages	18	Loyal worgs
9	Awoken undead	19	Summoned demons
10	Kobold spies	20	Armored minotaurs

WARTIME ENCOUNTERS

A number of encounters in a battlefield begin peacefully, but might lead to combat when tensions run high.

d20	Encounter		Encounter
1	Wounded soldiers	11	Broken knights
2	Scrounging bandits	12	Frightened turncoat
3	Refugee villagers	13	Hidden treasurers
4	Prisoners of war	14	Friendly farmers
5	Stern mercenaries	15	Druid band
6	Displaced nobles	16	Surrendering troops
7	Confused spirits	17	Malfunctioning machine
8	Undercover spies	18	Neutral hospital
9	Helpful priests	19	Abandoned camp
10	Lost scouts	20	Drunken enemies

HAUNTED LAIRS

Horror hides in the forgotten places of the world, and this section offers all kinds of inspiration to create haunted lairs as part of your campaign.

HAUNTED LOCATIONS

Many lost and abandoned locations become conduits for paranormal activity and fell magic.

d20	Location		Location
1	Ancient cairn	11	Sacrilegious temple
2	Decrepit manor	12	Diseased farmstead
3	Crumbling keep	13	Gothic castle
4	Unholy monastery	14	Opulent palace
5	Festering warren	15	Foggy ghost ship
6	Twilight tower	16	Abandoned mine
7	Abandoned village	17	Unseelie fey grove
8	Hollow tree	18	Moonlit cemetery
9	Forgotten dungeon	19	Frozen watchtower
10	Tainted well	20	Dusty catacombs

DARK LORD

In the heart of many horror-filled locations, a being of pure malevolence watches and waits before it strikes. Creatures that appear higher up on the table are typically more powerful than creatures lower down.

d20	Dark Lord		Dark Lord
1	Familiar zombie	11	Skeletal mage
2	Hungering ghoul	12	Raging demon
3	Haunted specter	13	Vampire lord
4	Scheming ghast	14	Death knight
5	Vengeful mimic	15	Skeletal dragon
6	Entombed mummy	16	Dusty demilich
7	Tortured ghost	17	Forgotten lich
8	Wailing banshee	18	Otherworldly horror
9	Scheming devil	19	Bound demon prince
10	Cursed revenant	20	Imprisoned god

DREADFUL MONUMENTS

The chambers of a haunted lair often contain physical monuments dedicated to its horrors. Roll more than once for a more flavorful location

d20	Monument		Monument
1	Bloody altar	11	Bloody iron maidens
2	Bone-filled cages	12	Disturbing frescoes
3	Thrumming obelisk	13	Twisted statues
4	Charred bodies	14	Dissected aberration
5	Unholy sigil	15	Massive sarcophagus
6	Abyssal portal	16	Maddening effigy
7	Deep well	17	Spiked throne
8	Crucified demon	18	Tree of woe
9	Impaled corpses	19	Iron bull
10	Charnel pit	20	Dusty columbarium

TWISTED ENCOUNTERS

A haunted environment can inspire any number of malevolent horrors.

d20	Encounter		Encounter
1	Confused ghost	11	Raving tomb robber
2	Vengeful specter	12	Starving vampire
3	Reanimated bones	13	Otherworldly horror
4	Haunted tea party	14	Curious will-o'-wisps
5	Restless mummy	15	Life-seeking shadows
6	Ghostly child	16	Swarm of insects
7	Trapped demon	17	Unholy cultists
8	Hooded torturer	18	Evil adventurers
9	Bone-filled ooze	19	Zombie horde
10	Floating skull	20	Undead mage

STRANGE HAUNTINGS

In every corner of a haunted location, tormented spirits might manifest in terrible ways.

d20	Haunting		Haunting
1	Dripping blood	11	Shrieking screams
2	Horrid stench	12	Maddening laughter
3	Squirming worms	13	Tortured wails
4	Slimy walls	14	Disturbing shadows
5	Unholy scrawling	15	Upward-flowing water
6	Flashing lights	16	Blue flames
7	Bug infestation	17	Flashes of darkness
8	Quivering corpse	18	Pulsing walls
9	Bloody markings	19	Twisting fog
10	Floating eyes	20	Strange music

ACCURSED OBJECTS

Within the haunted lair, strange and disturbing items contain forgotten secrets or dark power.

d20	Object		Object
1	Bloody hairpin	11	Severed hand
2	Amulet of skulls	12	Bleeding candle
3	Jar of eyes	13	Disturbing portrait
4	Tortured doll	14	Locket of the dead
5	Bag of teeth	15	Biting ring
6	Impaled rat	16	Thorny rose
7	Bloody dagger	17	Otherworldly cube
8	Writhing necklace	18	Twisted diary
9	Unholy coin	19	Haunted music box
10	Mist-filled canister	20	Iron skull

GOD GENERATOR

Forces beyond mortality exist throughout the cosmos, and the signs of the gods mark the world in its largest cities and its oldest forgotten ruins. Some gods directly influence the lives of mortals, while others sit back on astral thrones and watch the world move as it will.

You can use this section to generate gods and their secrets, whether for a single-session campaign or as part of building a larger world. For sinister gods and their followers, you can also make use of the "Cult Generator" section (page 45).

DOMAINS

Each god commands a specific domain covering some aspect of life in the mortal realm. Some domains fall under the auspices of good or neutrality, while others represent amorality and evil.

d20	Good or Neutral	d20	Evil
1	Light	1	Darkness
2	Life	2	Death
3	Nature	3	Plague
4	Crafting	4	Destruction
5	The Sea	5	The Wrathful Sea
6	The Sky	6	Storms
7	Fire	7	Wildfire
8	Valor	8	Wrath
9	War	9	Murder
10	Bravery	10	Greed
11	Peace	11	Hell
12	Order	12	Chaos
13	Arcana	13	Occult Magic
14	Blacksmithing	14	Cold Iron
15	Beauty	15	Horror
16	Death	16	Undeath
17	Knowledge	17	The Forbidden
18	Entertainment	18	Lies
19	The Seelie Fey	19	The Unseelie Fey
20	Dreams	20	Nightmares

HOLY SYMBOLS

The symbols of deities both popular and forgotten can be found throughout history and across all lands, whether hanging from every hearth of a great city or moldering over centuries in an ancient tomb.

Whether you roll on this table or use it for inspiration, mix the results with iconography from your god's domain and your own ideas. As an example, the symbol of a nail for the god of the wrathful sea might be a rusted nail sticking in the shattered board of a wrecked ship. A sphere for the Forbidden domain might be a cracked glass orb leaking black liquid.

The Condition, Description, and Origin table in the "Core Adventure Generator" section can be used to add additional detail to specific holy symbols.

d20	Symbol		Symbol
1	Open hand	11	Sphere
2	Eye	12	Hammer
3	Star	13	Pair of hands
4	Roiling wave	14	Droplet of liquid
5	Crossed branches	15	Nail
6	Skull	16	Pointing hand
7	Sword	17	Fire
8	Shield	18	Scales
9	Book	19	Horns or antlers
10	Spear	20	Open claw

DIVINE NAMES

Each deity has a unique name among all the other beings of the cosmos. Roll twice on the following table to inspire your own divine names for the gods, or pick from name components you like.

d20	Name Fragment	d20	Name Fragment
1	Ava	1	ark
2	Bor	2	alys
3	Car	3	bin
4	Drin	4	ceen
5	Faer	5	druun
6	Go	6	enath
7	Gor	7	etar
8	Kal	8	ofer
9	Kor	9	gaen
10	Mir	10	kan
11	Mul	11	kuun
12	Ora	12	lenar
13	Prae	13	meer
14	Rave	14	oban
15	Sil	15	orin
16	Saar	16	syth
17	Trun	17	serath
18	Tre	18	talis
19	Wor	19	undar
20	Zyr	20	zin

LOST KINGDOMS

The world is old, and much of it lies buried beneath the sands of time. Characters who explore forgotten tombs, crumbling castles, and dead cities can easily discover the remnants of what came before.

The tables in this section let you construct the broad details and historical flavor of a lost kingdom.

KINGDOM'S NAME

The name of an ancient kingdom might be found in the depths of old ruins or whispered by inebriated folk at the local tavern.

d20	Name		Name
1	Evanton	11	Zederotha
2	Rasal	12	Gleven
3	Sezar	13	Abator
4	Wovuna	14	Xendrya
5	Shade	15	Vorolus
6	Texobron	16	Puria
7	Yventra	17	Wevendra
8	Steptia	18	Makaar
9	Kralion	19	Delrya
10	Prolyn	20	Nagon

RULERSHIP

The oldest legends of a forgotten kingdom talk of its founders and how they came to rule.

d20	Ruler		Ruler
1	War-made monarch	11	Brutal warlord
2	Imperial lineage	12	Corrupt nobility
3	Corrupt council	13	Peaceful monarch
4	Magocracy	14	Demon lord
5	Theocracy	15	Aberrant horror
6	Guild council	16	Vast parliament
7	Living god	17	Regional warlords
8	Undead lord	18	Charismatic bard
9	Council of elders	19	Elected senate
10	Child emperor	20	Ageless vampire

FORGOTTEN MONUMENTS

Many ancient kingdoms leave monuments and ruins that can linger for centuries after the last legends fade.

d20	Monument		Monument
1	Massive statues	11	Songs of old
2	Stone ziggurats	12	Ancient coins
3	Trees of iron	13	Glyphed monoliths
4	Crashed earthmotes	14	Huge burial cairns
5	Huge sunken ships	15	Massive aqueducts
6	Vast spiral mines	16	Glass statues
7	Obsidian cathedrals	17	Mysterious orbs
8	Empty catacombs	18	Dead war machines
9	Charred battlefields	19	Underground cities
10	Crystalline towers	20	Dead moon

CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

Horrific events might have shaped the rise of a lost kingdom—or been responsible for sending it into the pages of history.

d20	Event		Event
1	Falling meteor	11	Sudden disappearance
2	Arcane apocalypse	12	Roiling earthquake
3	Vast flood	13	Demonic invasion
4	Terrible war	14	Ancient dragon
5	Alien invader	15	Psychic disease
6	Civil war	16	Unleashed horror
7	Bloody rebellion	17	Internal decay
8	Flesh-eating plague	18	Vast sinkholes
9	Undead hordes	19	Divine wrath
10	Cruel starvation	20	Huge monstrosity

CUSTOMS AND LEGACIES

Unique customs and behaviors often define the kingdoms of old, and might linger as superstitions or unexplained traditions to the present day.

d20	Legacy		Legacy
1	Strange deity	11	Trial by arena
2	Unusual writing	12	Ritual dancing
3	Communal families	13	Live burials
4	Strict caste system	14	Moon worship
5	Traditional piercings	15	Living artwork
6	Dances with the dead	16	Esoteric magic
7	Huge stone clocks	17	Construct technology
8	Lifelike mosaics	18	Tamed monsters
9	Numerous tattoos	19	Dragon worship
10	Brutal laws	20	Living with undead

CULT GENERATOR

From the depths of forgotten sewers to towering obsidian cathedrals, twisted cults can be found in any location, drawing in all those who seek answers and power.

CULT ORIGINS

Cults can originate among all the lineages of the world. Roll for or choose as many options on the table below as feels right to define a cult's starting place.

d20	Origin		Origin
1	Human	11	Serpentfolk
2	Elven	12	Lycanthrope
3	Dwarven	13	Bugbear
4	Halfling	14	Fiendish
5	Gnome	15	Celestial
6	Orc	16	Dragonkin
7	Goblin	17	Vampiric
8	Hobgoblin	18	Ghoulish
9	Drow	19	Winged humanoids
10	Tiefling	20	Lizardfolk

CULT WORSHIP

At its core, a cult typically focuses on a single theme of worship and symbolic power.

d20	Theme		Theme
1	Death or undeath	11	Pain
2	Fire	12	The Black Moon
3	Water	13	Disease
4	Demons	14	Murder
5	Devils	15	War
6	Fallen celestial	16	Shadow
7	The Abyss	17	The Far Realm
8	Snakes	18	Blood
9	Insects	19	Pestilence
10	Rats	20	Earth

CULTIST APPEARANCE

Strange marks or decorations often identify individual cult members. You can roll for or choose multiple options on the table below.

d20	Appearance		Appearance
1	Intricate tattoos	11	Ornate clothing
2	Bite marks	12	Gilded weapons
3	Third eye	13	Horned headdress
4	Long claws	14	Amulet of an eye
5	Scarred necks	15	Black veins
6	Facial piercings	16	Eyes of flame
7	Bony protuberances	17	Bloody face paint
8	Half-shaved heads	18	Monstrous hand
9	Missing eye	19	Ornate masks
10	Ceremonial scars	20	Blindfolds

CULT HEADQUARTERS

Cults practice their darkest rituals in hiding, seeking the shadows of many potential locations.

d20	Headquarters		Headquarters
1	Abandoned tower	11	Ancient monastery
2	Forgotten sewers	12	Bloody dungeon
3	Obsidian cathedral	13	Mountainous spire
4	Royal cellars	14	Black-sailed ship
5	Unhallowed temple	15	Hollow volcano
6	Haunted keep	16	Sunken ruin
7	Buried ziggurat	17	Sundered city
8	Pit-strewn cave	18	Floating earthmote
9	Dead forest	19	Aged museum
10	Defiled crypts	20	Twisted university

STRANGE RITUALS

Characters investigating a cult will discover the strange and twisted rituals in which cultists partake.

d20	Ritual		Ritual
1	Flesh eating	11	Dark scribing
2	Humanoid sacrifice	12	Disturbing songs
3	Sacramental murder	13	Blood drinking
4	Cultists sacrificed	14	Insect stinging
5	Incense inhalation	15	Ceremonial suicide
6	Ritual combat	16	Body painting
7	Eclipse worship	17	Flesh branding
8	Self-mutilation	18	Planar binding
9	Monstrous worship	19	Cosmic whispering
10	Live burial	20	Forbidden spells

CULT PROTECTORS

The core of a cult is often formed of one or more types of protectors dedicated to hiding the cult's deepest secrets.

d20	Protector		Protector
1	Rich aristocracy	11	Beloved performers
2	City guards	12	Greedy merchants
3	Devout villagers	13	Bloody pirates
4	Hired toughs	14	Murderous bandits
5	Holy templars	15	Corrupt officials
6	Shadowy assassins	16	Armored giants
7	Silent monks	17	Decrepit undead
8	Hidden demons	18	Animated statues
9	Disguised devils	19	Huge insects
10	Thieves' guild	20	Servile elementals

ALIEN WORLD

Sometimes adventurers catch glimpses of worlds beyond their own, whether a portal manifesting in the nighttime sky, another plane of existence phasing into the mortal realm, a world trapped in its own pocket universe, or a magical realm lost in the depths of the multiverse.

    This section helps you build out the broad details of an alien world as glimpsed through gateways or mirrors, written about in forbidden tomes, seen in dark dreams—or where the heroes find themselves trapped.

TWISTED SKIES

As the characters look above them, they see a sky never before witnessed by mortal eyes. You can roll for or choose multiple options from the table to create a rich tapestry for your alien sky.

d20	Sky
1	Sheets of deep red that are the color of blood
2	Swirling violet clouds in a vortex
3	A starscape of huge dying suns
4	Lightning-laced clouds and dark shapes
5	Roiling flames and screaming faces
6	Floating shattered obsidian earthmotes
7	A lacework arrangement of huge twisting conduits
8	Pure light-absorbing darkness
9	A massive revolving black hole
10	Flying monstrosities dwelling in sickly yellow clouds
11	Twisting worms in a red haze
12	Filled with huge nearby planets
13	Three suns of different colors and sizes
14	A maze and webwork of walkways
15	Floating plates of shattered worlds
16	Orbiting ruins of ancient citadels
17	The fleshy maw of a huge monster
18	The roiling of an inverted sea
19	Towering pyramids on the horizon
20	Stars colliding and exploding

SHATTERED LANDSCAPES

The strange and twisted landscape of this otherworldly realm stretches out in front of the characters.

d20	Landscape		Landscape
1	Fractured stones	11	Giant bone fields
2	Acidic oceans	12	Lakes of black oil
3	Organic spires	13	Silvery rivers
4	Glyph-marked pillars	14	Skull-topped hills
5	Massive mountains	15	Geometric patterns
6	Huge crevasses	16	Floating discs
7	Glass deserts	17	Wrecked vessels
8	Towering forests	18	Ancient ruins
9	Spewing volcanoes	19	Massive fortresses
10	Vast sinkholes	20	Dead cities

OTHERWORLDLY LANDMARKS

An alien landscape can be marked with monuments both ancient and awe-inspiring.

d20	Landmark		Landmark
1	Huge stone hands	11	Writhing tentacles
2	Floating obelisks	12	Petrified worm
3	Acidic geysers	13	Circle of spires
4	Poisonous fissures	14	Huge ribcage
5	Massive skulls	15	Shattered gateway
6	Petrified aliens	16	Black moon
7	Twisting towers	17	Molten meteorite
8	Sundered keep	18	Scarlet vortex
9	Baleful red sun	19	Ring of huge teeth
10	Huge orbital eye	20	Ironspire tree

OTHERWORLDLY LAIRS

Throughout the alien world stand lairs filled with beings from beyond nightmare.

d20	Lair		Lair
1	Alien tomb	11	Vast temple
2	Hollow obelisk	12	Cracked earthmote
3	Half-buried statue	13	Ancient citadel
4	Shattered ziggurat	14	Towering spire
5	Titanic corpse	15	Walking colossus
6	Ruined alien city	16	Floating dungeon
7	Fallen skyship	17	Dormant volcano
8	Floating vessel	18	Hovering pyramid
9	Rotten tunnels	19	Festering hive
10	Hollow mountain	20	Howling mausoleum

ALIEN ENCOUNTERS

Characters who explore an alien world might come into contact with all manner of otherworldly creatures.

d20	Encounter		Encounter
1	Chosen cultists	11	Twisted construct
2	Gibbering mouthers	12	Alien hunters
3	Grasping oozes	13	Eccentric mage
4	Festering demons	14	Flying horrors
5	Ancient purple worm	15	Lost travelers
6	Sentient crystal	16	Raving telepath
7	Trapped angel	17	Tattooed hulk
8	Planar mercenaries	18	Chained giant
9	Singing pillar	19	Blinded priest
10	Grasping tentacles	20	Bursting behemoth

THE TRAITOR

This section lets you create an adventure inspired by Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, in which the characters hunt down a traitor in a hostile land. Use the tables below to build out your scenario.

PATRON

The characters' quest might have a patron whose history with the traitor gets the adventure going.

d20	Patron		Patron
1	Vengeful royalty	11	Local sheriff
2	Trading guild	12	Witch coven
3	University	13	Astral presence
4	Military officer	14	Ancient tome
5	Wizards' guild	15	Celestial prophecy
6	Religious leader	16	Relative of a character
7	Local magistrate	17	Woodlands hunter
8	Bounty hunter	18	Dwarf miners
9	Thieves' guild	19	Elf aristocrats
10	Noble family	20	Halfling merchants

WHO IS THE TRAITOR?

The traitor's background and backstory establish the baseline of what they're capable of, and suggests what they might have done to become the characters' target.

d20	Traitor's Background		Traitor's Background
1	Military commander	11	Uncaged devil
2	Deadly assassin	12	Fallen celestial
3	Unholy priest	13	Living weapon
4	Forbidden mage	14	Betraying monk
5	Corrupting artist	15	Unleashed monster
6	Embezzling thief	16	Traitorous knight
7	Triple-agent spy	17	Bandit captain
8	Dangerous historian	18	Blasphemous sage
9	Royal family member	19	Escaped murderer
10	Dangerous telepath	20	Ancestral demon

MOTIVATIONS

In addition to (or instead of) a quest-giver, one or more of the characters might have personal motivations for seeking the traitor.

d10	The Traitor ...
1	... murdered a loved one.
2	... committed a coup.
3	... stole something valuable.
4	... has vital information.
5	... possesses a sought-after relic.
6	... received a vision.
7	... is kin to the character.
8	... escaped a debt.
9	... is possessed by an evil spirit.
10	... poses a future threat.

HOSTILE LANDSCAPE

As the characters pursue the traitor, the landscape they pass through will shape the rigors of the hunt.

d20	Landscape		Landscape
1	Fetid swamp	11	Rugged mountains
2	Abandoned mines	12	Scorched desert
3	Ruined city	13	Parched badlands
4	Abyssal realm	14	Haunted dungeon
5	War-torn hellscape	15	Underwater city
6	Sinister shadowland	16	Icy wasteland
7	Lush fey realm	17	Hostile war zone
8	Crime-infested city	18	Volcanic wastes
9	Ancient sewers	19	Nightmarish necropolis
10	Wild forest	20	Abstract dreamscape

HOSTILE INHABITANTS

In addition to other threats of your design, one particular group surrounds and protects the traitor in their sanctum.

d20	Inhabitants		Inhabitants
1	Ravaging undead	11	Dwarf headhunters
2	Goblinoid hunters	12	Drow assassins
3	Orc cultists	13	Vengeful wererats
4	Ogre mercenaries	14	Ravenous gnolls
5	Lizardfolk spies	15	Bloodthirsty sahuagin
6	Kobold mages	16	Stalking ghouls
7	Human cannibals	17	Ettercap hunters
8	Elf bandits	18	Hungering demons
9	Former soldiers	19	Devilish soldiers
10	Aberrant horrors	20	Feywild monsters

TRAITOR'S SANCTUM

The traitor's sanctum is their last line of defense, and most likely the site of a final climactic battle.

d20	Sanctum		Sanctum
1	Dilapidated castle	11	Ancient machine
2	Ruined fey grove	12	God-touched ziggurat
3	Charred hellgate	13	Shattered earthmote
4	Deep cairn tunnels	14	Abyssal cyst
5	Forbidden library	15	Hollow meteorite
6	Hollow statue	16	Sunken ship
7	Unholy temple	17	Infernal prison
8	Stone fortress	18	Multiverse orrery
9	Infested sinkhole	19	Forgotten vault
10	Shadowy rift	20	Dead titan's carcass

THE HUNGER

Inspired by Stephen Spielberg's *Jaws*, these tables help you build an adventure focused on hunting a creature of nightmare holding a settlement in terror. Can the characters eliminate the threat before its ravenous hunger causes it to kill again?

WHAT IS THE CREATURE?

Any number of creatures might follow the call of hunger or evil to become a monstrous threat. The higher the roll on the following table, the more powerful the creature.

d20	Creature		Creature
1	Cunning dire wolf	11	Forgotten chuul
2	Ancient spider	12	Buried bulette
3	Ravenous toad	13	Legendary crocodile
4	Elusive ankheg	14	Entombed gorgon
5	Brutal ettercap	15	Chaotic chimera
6	Mythic basilisk	16	Vengeful wyvern
7	Deadly scorpion	17	Restless hydra
8	Scarred owlbear	18	Bound golem
9	Planar spider	19	Scheming behir
10	Hidden werewolf	20	Apocalyptic worm

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE?

In addition to its baseline traits and attacks, the hungering creature can have one or more unusual abilities.

d20	Ability		Ability
1	Invisibility	11	Teleports
2	Flies	12	Disrupts magic
3	Spider climbing	13	Burning eyes
4	Magic resistance	14	Stone armor
5	Elemental attacks	15	Darkness aura
6	Necrotic aura	16	Magical shield
7	Sprays acid	17	Elemental aura
8	Turns ethereal	18	Reflects magic
9	Charms victims	19	Blinding gaze
10	Regenerates	20	Turns to stone

WHERE DOES IT RESIDE?

The lair of the creature could be the site of a final battle, or an entire adventure location to be explored.

d20	Lair		Lair
1	Primeval cairn	11	Sunken grotto
2	Unholy cesspit	12	Derelict vessel
3	Lich's sanctum	13	Volcanic cave
4	Forgotten sewers	14	Twisted dreamscape
5	Moonlit tower	15	Infested warrens
6	Empty undercity	16	Decrepit mansion
7	Unhallowed temple	17	Underground ziggurat
8	Lost menagerie	18	Alchemist's lab
9	Uncovered mineshaft	19	Treacherous mountain
10	Ancient shipwreck	20	Infernal forge

WHO PROTECTS THE CREATURE?

Different groups might protect, lair with, or have built a symbiotic relationship with the hungering creature.

d20	Protectors		Protectors
1	Fanatical cultists	11	Duergar miners
2	Swarms of insects	12	Drow knights
3	Feral grimlocks	13	Plane-walking azers
4	Pack wolves	14	Ogre zombies
5	Death dogs	15	Plotting devils
6	Giant crabs	16	Hag coven
7	Loyal skeletons	17	Lycanthropes
8	Scheming bandits	18	Soulless nobles
9	Vengeful shadows	19	Reverent trolls
10	Worg sycophants	20	Plotting mages

WHAT DRIVES THE CREATURE?

The creature's specific motives for its attacks might be a mystery the characters uncover.

d10	The Creature ...
1	... seeks a stolen beacon.
2	... has had their territory encroached.
3	... is wounded and in pain.
4	... has been awoken from a long slumber.
5	... is the weapon of another unknown villain.
6	... was a failed sacrifice by those they now hunt.
7	... is the guardian of disturbed ruin.
8	... had their offspring kidnapped.
9	... was part of a pact that is now broken.
10	... committed a grievous sin.

WHO ELSE HUNTS THE CREATURE?

The characters' hunt for the hungering creature can be complicated by the actions of another faction also seeking the creature, and who might actively try to prevent the characters' success.

d20	Faction		Faction
1	Holy paladins	11	Guardian orcs
2	Vengeful villagers	12	Planar hunters
3	Bounty hunters	13	Naive scouts
4	Fanatic cultists	14	Isolationist druids
5	Greedy bandits	15	Devout monks
6	Trophy hunters	16	Ancient knightly order
7	Mercenary soldiers	17	Elven protectors
8	Local militia	18	Outlander wolf-riders
9	Rival adventurers	19	Celestial guardians
10	Scheming wizards	20	Opportunistic fiends

VENGEANCE FOR HIRE

This section lets you create adventures that see the characters hunt down villains, whether for coin or retribution. You can roll multiple times on these tables to generate a series of revenge missions, whether disconnected or feeding into an overarching plot of your own design.

VENGEFUL PATRONS

If the characters are enlisted to deal with a villain, the patron who hires them sets the initial tone for the hunt.

d20	Patron		Patron
1	Vengeful spirits	11	Prophet with visions
2	Resurrected noble	12	Lone survivor
3	Warring king	13	Military veteran
4	Assassins' guild	14	Historian with a secret
5	Struggling priest	15	Village elders
6	Avenging angel	16	Mourning widows
7	Bargaining devils	17	Restless dead
8	Relative of victim	18	Orphaned children
9	Witness to destruction	19	Religious zealots
10	Stoic monks	20	Merchant's guild

HUNTED VILLAINS

A wide range of villains might be the target for the characters' missions of vengeance.

d20	Villain		Villain
1	Uncaring mage	11	Brutal warlord
2	Dark priest	12	Fallen knight
3	Corrupt noble	13	Sinister vampire
4	Cult fanatic	14	Unbound devil
5	Bloodthirsty gladiator	15	Horrid demon
6	Retired assassin	16	Twisted faerie
7	Bandit captain	17	Duplicitous veteran
8	Possessed warlock	18	Horrifying hag
9	Master thief	19	Destructive dragon
10	Violent brigand	20	Murderous medusa

VILLAINOUS CRIMES

The characters might learn of the specific crimes of a villain before undertaking the quest, or might uncover them as part of bringing the villain to justice.

d10	The Villain ...
1	... murdered a friend of a character.
2	... murdered a character's loved one.
3	... assassinated a local lord.
4	... destroyed something vital.
5	... abandoned someone to a terrible fate.
6	... grievously wounded someone important.
7	... stole something that cannot be returned.
8	... defiled something holy.
9	... kidnapped someone.
10	... betrayed someone.

WHO PROTECTS A VILLAIN?

Each villain the characters go after might have one or more groups protecting them.

d20	Group		Group
1	Fanatical cultists	11	Conspiring mages
2	Thieving bandits	12	Summoned elementals
3	Rampaging undead	13	Animated plants
4	Mercenary orcs	14	Trained beasts
5	Elf spies	15	Armored ogres
6	Loyal kobolds	16	Battle-scarred trolls
7	Conscripted devils	17	Trained wolves
8	Bound demons	18	Loyal dragon
9	Bladed constructs	19	Mercenary drow
10	Hired ruffians	20	Murderous wererats

WHERE DOES EACH VILLAIN HIDE?

Part of the characters' pursuit of a villain involves seeking out the sanctum in which they hide.

d20	Hiding Place		Hiding Place
1	Ruined watchtower	11	Wizard's tower
2	Well-guarded inn	12	Thieves' den
3	Abandoned prison	13	Unhallowed grove
4	Noble's villa	14	Sinister cathedral
5	Crumbling castle	15	Earthmote fortress
6	Mining tunnels	16	Dragon's lair
7	Fortified monastery	17	Unholy temple
8	Docked ship	18	Dank crypt
9	Monstrous lair	19	City center
10	Treasure vaults	20	Local lord's keep

COMPLICATIONS

To make the hunt interesting, work in one or more complications that impede the characters' progress.

d10	Complication
1	Law enforcement protects the villain.
2	The villain is related to a character.
3	Eliminating the villain will unleash a greater threat.
4	The villain has turned over a new leaf.
5	The villain is beloved by their family.
6	The villain knows vital information.
7	The villain will ally with the characters against a greater threat.
8	The villain was a patsy used by another foe.
9	The villain was set up by an unknown foe.
10	The villain hid a valuable treasure.

PROTECT THE VILLAGE

This adventure generator builds upon the story model of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, a movie that's inspired dozens of other movies and hundreds of other stories since it premiered in 1954. The setup of the adventure sees the characters hired by villagers to protect them from marauders. It delivers an excellent situation-based adventure in which the characters are free to choose how, when, and why they protect the village.

WHO ARE THE VILLAGERS?

The villagers who hire the characters to protect their home can be generated on the following tables. Multiple NPCs bring even more richness and roleplaying opportunities to the scenario.

d10	Villager Ancestry	d10	Villager Occupation
1	Human	1	Farmer
2	Elf	2	Miner
3	Dwarf	3	Scholar
4	Halfling	4	Crafter
5	Gnome	5	Trapper
6	Orc	6	Hunter
7	Tiefling	7	Monk
8	Dragonborn	8	Druid
9	Fey	9	Logger
10	Goblinoid	10	Fisher

VILLAGE FEATURE

Some specific feature makes the village unique, and might have a connection to why the marauders are intent on attacking.

d10	Village Feature
1	Built atop collapsed mines
2	Built atop ancient catacombs
3	Surrounded by ancient standing stones
4	Was the site of a terrible battle
5	Built above the bones of a dead dragon
6	Built atop a bottomless dungeon
7	Built within a mysterious crater
8	Built underneath a gleaming star
9	Built in the shadow of a huge statue
10	Surrounded by petrified titans

THE VILLAGERS' SECRET

Even as they ask for help, the villagers have a secret they don't want the characters to know.

d10	Secret
1	They know of treasure hidden beneath the village.
2	They once burned witches.
3	They committed a sacrilege.
4	They know the village sits on tainted holy ground.
5	They're led by devil worshipers.
6	They're peaceful lycanthropes.
7	They kidnapped a celestial creature.
8	They made a pact with an undead lord .
9	They hide the sins of their ancestors.
10	They stole a holy relic.

MARAUDERS

A variety of different types of marauders might threaten the village.

d20	Marauders		Marauders
1	Elf bandits	11	Animated armor
2	Goblin bounty hunters	12	Ravenous demons
3	Mindless skeletons	13	Conquering devils
4	Orc renegades	14	Dire wolves
5	Hobgoblin gangsters	15	Bugbear hunters
6	Sahuagin	16	Armored ogres
7	Drow knights	17	Blood-raging ghouls
8	Dwarf cultists	18	Zombie villagers
9	Gnoll warriors	19	Ancient specters
10	Dragonborn wizards	20	Vengeful wraiths

MARAUDERS' LAIR

Before or after they encounter the marauders in the village, the characters might investigate the lair the marauders strike out from.

d20	Lair		Lair
1	Fortified keep	11	Deep grotto
2	Mountain caves	12	Ancient castle
3	Twisted warren	13	Destroyed village
4	Unholy temple	14	Ruined watchtower
5	Forgotten tomb	15	Abandoned mines
6	Occupied manor	16	Docked warship
7	Old catacombs	17	Huge dead tree
8	Defended mesa	18	Floating citadel
9	Extraplanar sanctum	19	Extraplanar world
10	Unhallowed grove	20	Burned-out war camp

THE KEEP

Based on the film of the same name written and directed by Michael Mann, this adventure generator builds on the idea of a powerful entity intent on breaking free from its prison. One faction serves the entity in its imprisoned state while another faction is set on freeing it, perhaps inadvertently. The characters must deal with both these factions in order to either prevent the entity's release, destroy the entity, or return it to its prison.

THE ENTITY

The entity breaking free from its prison is some manner of powerful or unusual being, including any of the following.

d20	Entity		Entity
1	Ancient vampire	11	Doom construct
2	Powerful lich	12	Powerful child
3	Raging demon	13	Elemental prince
4	Archdevil	14	Otherworldly horror
5	Hunting revenant	15	Deadly shapechanger
6	Hellish hag	16	Cursed mummy
7	Soul-draining ghost	17	Demon lord
8	Sleeping tarrasque	18	Psionic horror
9	Undead dragon	19	Evil wizard
10	Elder evil	20	Rogue angel

THE PRISON

The entity's prison might be found at some manner of fantastic location, a more inconspicuous site, or even within a magical object.

d20	Prison		Prison
1	Ancient keep	11	Astral prison ship
2	Castle cellar	12	Deserted island
3	Featureless obelisk	13	Hollow meteorite
4	Cracked crystal	14	Elven temple
5	Dreamscape	15	Dwarven citadel
6	Pocket dimension	16	Cooled volcano
7	Buried crypt	17	Abandoned church
8	Crashed vessel	18	Wizard's tower
9	Old mine	19	Massive sarcophagus
10	Uncovered tomb	20	Forgotten city

THE BREAKERS

Members of a specific group are intent on freeing the entity from its prison, often to slay it themselves or release it into the world. They might even do so inadvertently.

d20	Breakers		Breakers
1	Dedicated cultists	11	Greedy mercenaries
2	Ignorant soldiers	12	Power-hungry nobles
3	Cabal of mages	13	Astral hunters
4	Holy paladins	14	Unscrupulous thieves
5	Grim gravediggers	15	Naive archaeologists
6	Devout priests	16	Innocent children
7	Enslaved telepaths	17	Scheming devils
8	Demonic thralls	18	Hag coven
9	Devilish servants	19	Sinful villagers
10	Undead minions	20	Enthralled dreamers

RELICS OF FEAR

A powerful relic the entity fears might be central to the adventure—perhaps one usable as a weapon against the entity if battle is inevitable.

d20	Relic		Relic
1	Holy sword	11	Powerful holy symbol
2	Arcane wand	12	*Sun blade*
3	*Arrow of slaying*	13	Binding idol
4	Jeweled medallion	14	Mummer's mask
5	Glyph-scribed stone	15	Bestial claw
6	Tattooed NPC	16	Marked skull
7	*Mace of disruption*	17	Alchemist's bottle
8	Flaming blade	18	Vial of blood
9	Gnarled staff	19	Binding cage
10	Ancient censer	20	Rune-marked bell

THE SERVITORS

Finally, determine which beings serve the entity and enforce its will.

d20	Servitors		Servitors
1	Dark monks	11	Otherworldly guardians
2	Mindless undead	12	Devout cultists
3	Abyssal beasts	13	Servant elementals
4	Powerful constructs	14	Doom-touched wizards
5	Draconic servants	15	Bound devils
6	Ageless giants	16	Alien aberrations
7	Deadly traps	17	Fallen knights
8	Crystalline entities	18	Unerring constructs
9	Bodiless specters	19	Lycanthrope clan
10	Vampiric thralls	20	Enthralled mummies

INVADERS

In this scenario, a patron hires the characters to find a group gone missing in a dangerous and mysterious location. Built around the storyline of the movie *Aliens* by James Cameron, this sort of adventure pits the characters against monsters that occupy a well-protected or dangerous lair.

PATRON

The adventure begins when a patron hires the characters to seek out a group of lost or missing NPCs.

d20	Patron		Patron
1	Religious order	11	Freelance investigator
2	Explorers' guild	12	Erudite sage
3	Town constable	13	Fortune teller
4	Worried relative	14	Curious alchemist
5	Thieves' guild	15	Local lord
6	Poor families	16	Spy guild
7	Mining syndicate	17	Secret society
8	Rich nobility	18	Military commander
9	Wizards' guild	19	Corrupt politician
10	Druid elder	20	Young child

THE MISSING

Any sort of NPCs might be the lost or missing targets of the characters' rescue mission.

d20	Group		Group
1	Dwarf miners	11	Disgruntled townsfolk
2	Goblin explorers	12	Eager archaeologists
3	Bold crusaders	13	Halfling frontier folk
4	Drow artisans	14	Fleeing bandits
5	Elf monks	15	Military scouts
6	Devout priests	16	Excited adventurers
7	Religious followers	17	Wandering children
8	Orc refugees	18	Hapless heroes
9	Wandering nomads	19	Famous troubadours
10	Traveling sages	20	Ignorant thieves

LOCATION

The characters might be told of the location where the NPCs went missing, or could discover it during the course of the adventure.

d20	Location		Location
1	Abandoned mine	11	Otherworldly portal
2	Ancient temple	12	Abandoned machine
3	Haunted cairn	13	Moon-touched citadel
4	Wizard's tower	14	Mushroom cavern
5	Crumbling fortress	15	Old druid's grove
6	Cave network	16	Abandoned manor
7	City of gold	17	Castle overlook
8	Buried ziggurat	18	Celestial palace
9	Fey forest	19	Primeval dwellings
10	Floating earthmote	20	Underwater grotto

HOSTILE CREATURES

A wide range of horrific creatures might have infested the adventure location.

d20	Creatures		Creatures
1	Guardian skeletons	11	Mutated monsters
2	Alien aberrations	12	Awakened beasts
3	Cutthroat bandits	13	Displaced goblinoids
4	Rampaging giants	14	Bloodthirsty demons
5	Raging elementals	15	Dragon worshipers
6	Flesh-eating devils	16	Voracious ankhegs
7	Swarming insects	17	Stone-eyed basilisks
8	Ravenous ghouls	18	Disturbed vampires
9	Vengeful spirits	19	Murderous elves
10	Secluded medusas	20	Bloodletting cultists

ALIEN ENVIRONMENT

As a parallel threat, the adventure location has been corrupted in some way, whether by the creatures infesting it or through latent magic.

d20	Environment		Environment
1	Psychic wailing	11	Colors out of space
2	Verminous infestation	12	Slime-covered walls
3	Lava tubes	13	Thousands of skulls
4	Abyssal incursion	14	Crashed planar vessel
5	Twisted hellscape	15	Sentient moss
6	Organic caverns	16	Floating crystals
7	Ancient glyphs	17	Shattered gateways
8	Deep shafts	18	Chaotic magic
9	Ancient barrows	19	Otherworldly auras
10	Unholy radiance	20	Acidic pools

SECRET TWIST

At the heart of the location, the characters discover a dark secret that changes the scope of their mission.

d10	Secret
1	The patron sent the NPCs to the location.
2	The patron is allied with the hostile creatures.
3	The NPCs attacked the hostiles first.
4	The hostiles have converted the NPCs to their side.
5	The hostiles are seeking well-justified vengeance.
6	The patron is responsible for bringing the hostile creatures into the location.
7	The patron seeks a secret magical weapon.
8	The patron considers everyone expendable.
9	The NPCs don't want to be saved.
10	The hostiles are fleeing from a much worse threat.

HUNT FOR THE RELIC

These tables let you build an adventure inspired by Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The characters must retrieve a powerful magical relic before their rivals, either by focusing on that relic or undertaking a multipart quest in which retrieving a number of lesser relics leads them to the final relic.

WHAT IS THE RELIC?

You can use this table to determine a single relic at the heart of the quest, or a number of relics whose quests are tied together.

d20	Relic		Relic
1	Glyph-marked bowl	11	Rune-scribed medallion
2	Powerful wand	12	Glowing blade
3	Ancient staff	13	Possessed amulet
4	Prescient orb	14	Plane-touched ring
5	Forgotten key	15	Sealed reliquary
6	Destructive sword	16	Jeweled skull
7	Cursed crown	17	Twisted figurine
8	Holy chalice	18	Rune-forged hammer
9	Forbidden tome	19	Disturbing mask
10	Unholy mirror	20	Gem-encrusted tiara

WHERE IS THE RELIC?

Each relic sought by the characters might be on display in a well-guarded location, or might be hidden in a location lost to time.

d20	Location		Location
1	Shadowy tower	11	Unhallowed temple
2	Stepped pyramid	12	Derelict mine
3	Shattered castle	13	Haunted tomb
4	Isolated cove	14	Primeval cairn
5	Howling caverns	15	Monster's den
6	Underground city	16	Depraved manor
7	Sealed catacombs	17	War-torn citadel
8	Bloody dungeon	18	Wizard's sanctuary
9	Ruined keep	19	Crashed airship
10	Otherworldly prison	20	Forgotten vault

WHAT FANTASTIC ENVIRONMENT SURROUNDS THE LOCATION?

The magic of a legendary relic often transforms the environment around it.

d20	Environment		Environment
1	Swarms of vermin	11	Insect plague
2	Relentless storm	12	Ancient traps
3	Acidic rain	13	Eternal darkness
4	Poisonous fog	14	Burning sun
5	Necrotic flood	15	Radiant light beams
6	Fiery geysers	16	Arcane instability
7	Psychic storm	17	Lightning blasts
8	Frozen gale	18	Falling rocks
9	Bloodstorm	19	Earthquakes
10	Razor-sharp hail	20	Planar chaos

WHO GUARDS THE RELIC?

Powerful guardians protect the relic when the characters find it, and might have done so for thousands of years.

d20	Guardians		Guardians
1	Undead protectors	11	Scheming devils
2	Animated armor	12	Tortured zombies
3	Trapped aberrations	13	Serpentine clan
4	Unholy warriors	14	Raging elementals
5	Fanatic cultists	15	Brutal lizardfolk
6	Ageless nagas	16	Caretaker goblinoids
7	Restless specters	17	Defending celestials
8	Obedient golems	18	Greedy dragon
9	Devastating traps	19	Unseelie fey
10	Bound demons	20	Shadow demons

WHO ARE THE RIVALS?

One or more groups of rivals likewise seek the relics the characters are after, and will do anything to get there first.

d20	Rival		Rival
1	Hobgoblin hunters	11	Local lord
2	Sinister elves	12	Greedy mercenaries
3	Malicious drow	13	Powerful warlord
4	Wizards' guild	14	Ghoulish assassins
5	Treasure hunters	15	Shadowy warlocks
6	Thieves' guild	16	Demon worshipers
7	Vampire thralls	17	Unscrupulous scholars
8	Rogue adventurers	18	Faerie queen
9	Cult fanatics	19	Avaricious lich
10	Royal family	20	Merciless dragonborn

THE HEIST

These tables help you create a heist adventure. Characters who are driven to steal something from a specific location must plan their approach, deal with the location's hazards and defenders, and be ready to face unexpected complications.

THE TARGET

At the center of every heist is the target—the object that the characters must obtain.

d20	Target		Target
1	Jeweled idol	11	Prophetic orb
2	Valuable weapon	12	Royal ring
3	Secret plans	13	Chest of jewels
4	Kidnapped prince	14	Treasure map
5	Magical creature	15	Sacrificial dagger
6	Cursed scroll	16	Blackmail materials
7	Ancient tome	17	Powerful spell
8	Unholy skull	18	Sentient shield
9	Lost pet	19	Obsidian key
10	Angelic essence	20	Map to lost city

THE LOCATION

The location that holds the target object is the primary adventure site, and should feature multiple entrances and lots of different pathways.

d20	Location		Location
1	Goblinoid fortress	11	Crime lord's sanctum
2	Noble manor	12	Pleasure barge
3	Fortified keep	13	Haunted house
4	Monstrous prison	14	Garrisoned fort
5	Tower of sorcery	15	Occupied town
6	Faerie court	16	Impregnable tomb
7	King's castle	17	Naval warship
8	Protected vault	18	Dragon's lair
9	Underworld tavern	19	Demon's citadel
10	Unholy temple	20	Manifested mind

THE PROTECTORS

As the characters navigate the location of the adventure, they must contend with one or more groups of guardians protecting the target.

d20	Guardians		Guardians
1	Serpent people	11	Scarred mercenaries
2	Careful goblinoids	12	Summoned fey
3	Brutal giants	13	Trained wolves
4	Uncaring sentinels	14	Bound devils
5	Corrupt guards	15	Loyal dragonborn
6	Rotting undead	16	Local toughs
7	Bladed constructs	17	Hidden shadows
8	Steel-eyed veterans	18	Bloody werewolves
9	Cursed gorgons	19	Devoted drow
10	Floating eyes	20	Fanatical cultists

HAZARD GAUNTLET

To get to the target, the characters must traverse a gauntlet of natural hazards and cunning traps designed to protect it. Improvise the mechanics of these hazards and traps when you use them.

d20	Hazard		Hazard
1	Radiant traps	11	Shuffling shriekers
2	Pressure plates	12	Ooze pools
3	Unstable floor	13	Serpent holes
4	Spiked pits	14	Insect swarms
5	Poisoned darts	15	Lightning glyphs
6	Draconic statues	16	Psychic screams
7	Radiant beams	17	Acidic sprayers
8	Whirling blades	18	Death-touch specters
9	Poisonous gas	19	Bladed pillars
10	Magical missiles	20	Grinning flameskulls

FINAL GUARDIAN

Even after the target's protectors are neutralized, a single more-powerful guardian protects against the characters' final approach.

d20	Final Guardian		Final Guardian
1	Riddling sphinx	11	Death dog
2	Cursed medusa	12	Chained chimera
3	Cunning vampire	13	Conscripted devil
4	Bound demon	14	Invisible stalker
5	Ancient golem	15	Hungry hydra
6	Grinning aberrant eye	16	Unholy knight
7	Guardian naga	17	Tortured troll
8	Entombed mummy	18	Huge spider
9	Sentient lich's skull	19	Undead priest
10	Greedy dragon	20	Hell hounds

COMPLICATION

No heist goes off without a hitch, so use the table below to determine what last-second complication finishes off the characters' quest.

d10	Complication
1	The main villain shows up unexpectedly.
2	Another group wants to steal the target.
3	A celebration takes place nearby.
4	The protectors change their behavior.
5	The target is being moved.
6	A spy has learned of the characters' plans.
7	The target isn't what the characters expect.
8	A natural or magical disaster tears the location apart.
9	Prisoners at the location escape and cause chaos.
10	Another final guardian steps forth.

DUNGEON OF SHADOWS

"Dungeon of Shadows" is an adventure outline built using many of the tables found in this book. The adventure was created during a livestream now available as a pair of Sly Flourish YouTube videos: "Let's Make an Adventure with the Lazy DM's Companion: Dungeon of Shadows," part 1 and part 2. ⬀

As an adventure outline, "Dungeon of Shadows" is just a starting point for play. But by adding some of your own ideas, you can easily build it out into a full adventure for 3rd-level characters.

ADVENTURE START

While traveling through an ancient forest, the characters meet the spectral form of a unicorn named Egrena, who paces before a throne formed of black rosebushes. The haughty Egrena asks the characters to travel to a nearby unseelie ruin known as the Dungeon of Shadows. There, they can release her physical body, which is trapped in a crystalline-obsidian megalith oscillating between the realm of the faerie and the realm of shadows.

ADVENTURE OUTLINE

The following loose outline covers some of the potential events that might take place during this adventure:

- Meeting Egrena at the black rose throne
- Traveling to the Dungeon of Shadows
- Exploring the dungeon and meeting Mother Catclaw, a trapped night hag
- Meeting Mother Catclaw's mortal husband Ronald, and acquiring Catclaw's magic dagger
- Using the dagger to release Mother Catclaw and recover her ring
- Using the ring to release Egrena from the megalith

NPCS

During their journey, the characters meet the following NPCs:

- **Egrena** is a haughty unicorn who became imprisoned in the megalith in the Dungeon of Shadows.
- **Mother Catclaw** is a night hag trapped in an arcane circle in the dungeon, and who wears the Catclaw Ring. The ring has the power to release Egrena from the megalith. Mother Catclaw often uses her former mortal name, Carla Treeson.
- **Ronald Treeson** is Mother Catclaw's elderly human husband. He struggles with the truth of his wife's true nature, and with the decision over whether or not to release her from the arcane circle.

SECRETS AND CLUES

You can reveal the following secrets and clues as the characters explore the Dungeon of Shadows:
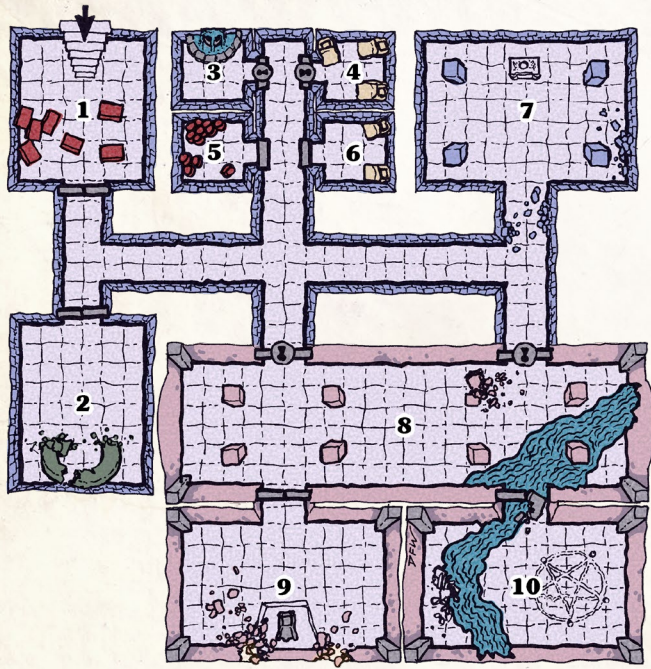
- Preyoban, unseelie warden of the Archfey, built the Dungeon of Shadows to imprison powerful seelie and unseelie prisoners.
- Preyoban's sigil is a pupil-less blind crying eye.
- Egrena is caught along the border between the realm of the faerie and the realm of shadows, trapped in a megalith that exists within both worlds and the mortal realm.
- Nine hundred years ago, Mother Catclaw was a woman named Carla. She has since taken on this original persona again and become the wife of a human named Ronald Treeson.
- Ronald has been married to Carla for decades. He loves her, but having learned her true nature, he doesn't have the will to free her from the magical circle that now imprisons her.
- Ronald hopes to get Preyoban to change Mother Catclaw back into the mortal woman Carla, but Preyoban doesn't listen to him.
- The unicorn Egrena failed at a plot of court intrigue, spreading lies against a celestial archfey in the hope of being elevated as an archfey herself.
- Mother Catclaw once served as a hunter for Preyoban. She is the one who captured Egrena and trapped her in the megalith.
- Mother Catclaw holds a ring that can bring the megalith into the mortal ream, free Egrena, and temporarily transform the megalith into a portal to the realm of the faeries.
- Mother Catclaw was sentenced to incarceration in the Dungeon of Shadows after attempting to build her own empire and usurp the Archfey of Shadows.

LOCATIONS

This adventure outline uses the dungeon map on page 57, but leaves out its southern caverns and changes up some of the interior details. The dungeon is lit by arcane energy in some areas, but is otherwise dark. Hallways have 8-foot-high ceilings, and chambers have 15-foot-high ceilings. The stone walls of the dungeon are carved with faded images, many of which depict the hunts of Preyoban and his unseelie bounty hunters throughout the realm of the faerie, the realm of shadow, and the mortal world.

1. ENTRYWAY

The carvings on the walls of this chamber depict armored hobgoblin guardians with a sigil of a crying eye on their armor. Four inverted obsidian spires hanging from the ceiling radiate arcane energy.

Anyone stepping into the center of the chamber causes the spires to fire a thunderous blast that cracks open the center of the floor into a 20-foot-deep pit trap. If the trap is triggered, each creature in the room must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (1d10) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Any creature in the center of the chamber must also succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the pit and take an additional 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

2. SHIFTING MEGALITH

A cracked stone megalith in the center of this chamber constantly changes its nature, shifting back and forth from crystal to obsidian. Each time it shifts, flashes of the realm of the faerie and the realm of shadow appear around it, along with images of Egrena the unicorn struggling to free herself from shadowy bonds.

A podium near the door holds a desiccated hand missing half its ring finger. If Mother Catclaw's ring is placed on that finger stump, the megalith shifts to its crystalline form and Egrena the unicorn can step forth from it. The megalith then becomes a portal to the faerie realm for one hour, after which it closes and can't be opened again for one year.

3. THE BLACK FOUNTAIN

A black fountain flows along the north wall of this chamber, with a number of **shadows** spawned from the trapped souls of a murderous band of unseelie elves swirling within it. If defeated, the shadows flow back into the fountain, which turns gold. The first time any creature drinks from the golden fountain, they gain the benefit of a short rest.

4. FESTERING SPIRE

A black obsidian spire juts out of the ground in this chamber. A number of **giant rats** surround the spire, standing on their hind legs and swaying back and forth. The spire is the magical prison of a **wererat** brigand named Svixx.

5. OOZING TITANIC BRAZIER

A large brazier blazes with red flames and oozes oil around its base. An orc **revenant** named Krovon the Kingslayer is trapped by the flames, which deal damage to all but him. Krovon can be released if noble blood is spilled in the oily reservoir around the brazier's base.

6. SHADOW ORRERY

An orrery of planets unseen in the mortal world slowly turns in the center of this chamber. The spectral form of an elf sage (use the **noble** stat block) named Binvalla is trapped in the orrery, but can be freed if the device is advanced ten thousand years (the length of his sentence in Preyoban's prison).

7. PREYOBAN'S ALTAR

A large statue of Preyoban, the unseelie warden of the Dungeon of Shadows, stands on the north wall of this chamber. An obsidian altar sits in front of the statue.

Ronald Treeson, a human **commoner** and the husband of Mother Catclaw, kneels in front of the altar and begs Preyoban to turn his wife into the woman she once was many years ago, to no avail. Ronald holds Mother Clatclaw's *+1 dagger*, which lets its attuned wielder cast the *misty step* spell, then regain the ability to do so at the next dawn.

8. CHAMBER OF PILLARS

Eight pillars, one collapsed to rubble, line this hall. Each pillar is carved with graven images representing the fey lords of the realm of the faeries and the realm of shadows. Fomorian **ogre** guardians loyal to Preyoban patrol the hall.

9. PREYOBAN'S THRONE

An obsidian throne decorated with the image of a crying blind eye sits on the south wall of this chamber. Bones scattered across the floor animate into a number of elf and hobgoblin **skeletons** if any mortal being enters the area.
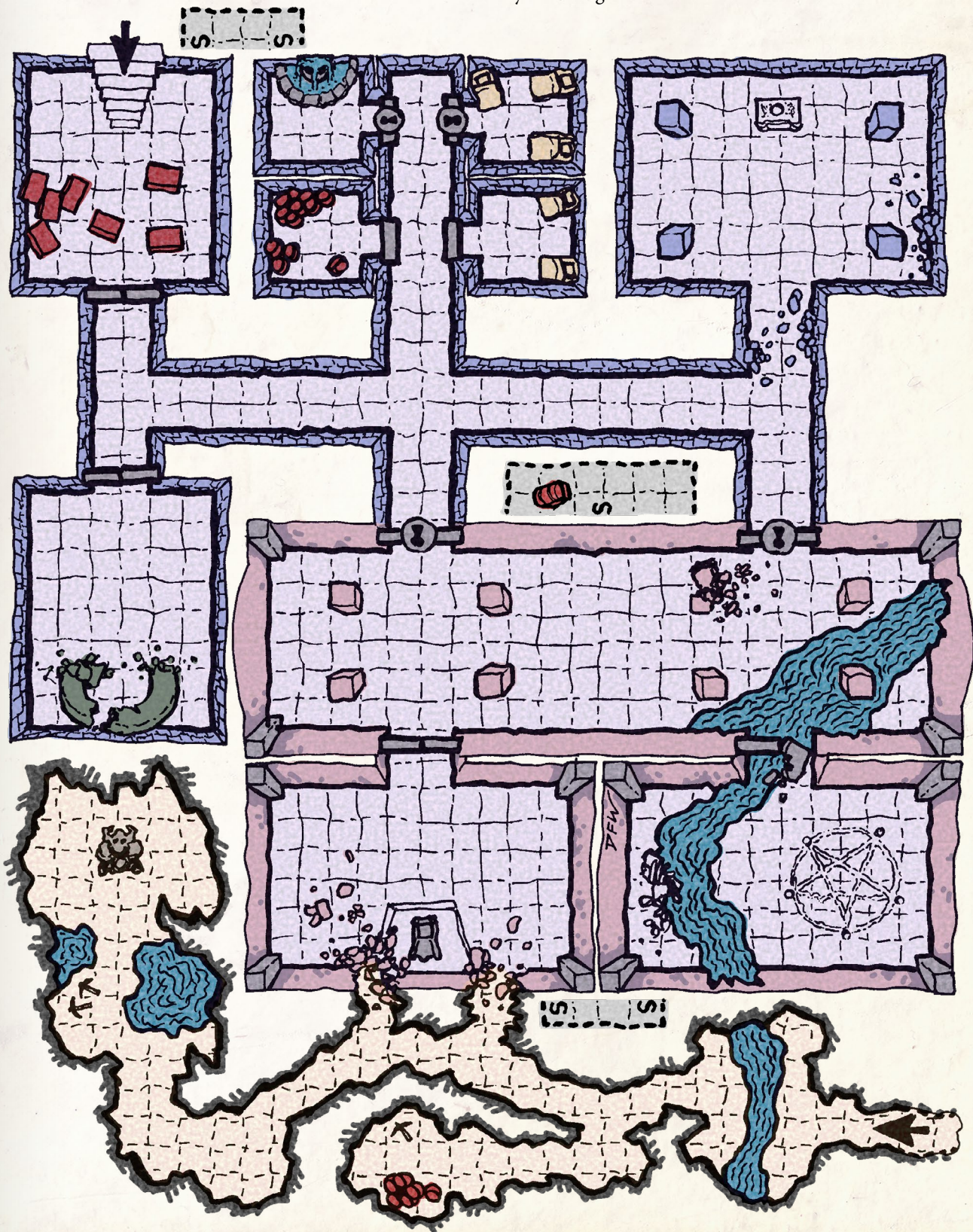
10. ARCANE CIRCLE

A large arcane circle in the east half of this chamber traps the **night hag** Mother Catclaw. She stays in her human form, calling herself Carla Treeson and claiming she was trapped here accidentally while exploring. She wears an ornate ring, but will not part with it unless she is freed.
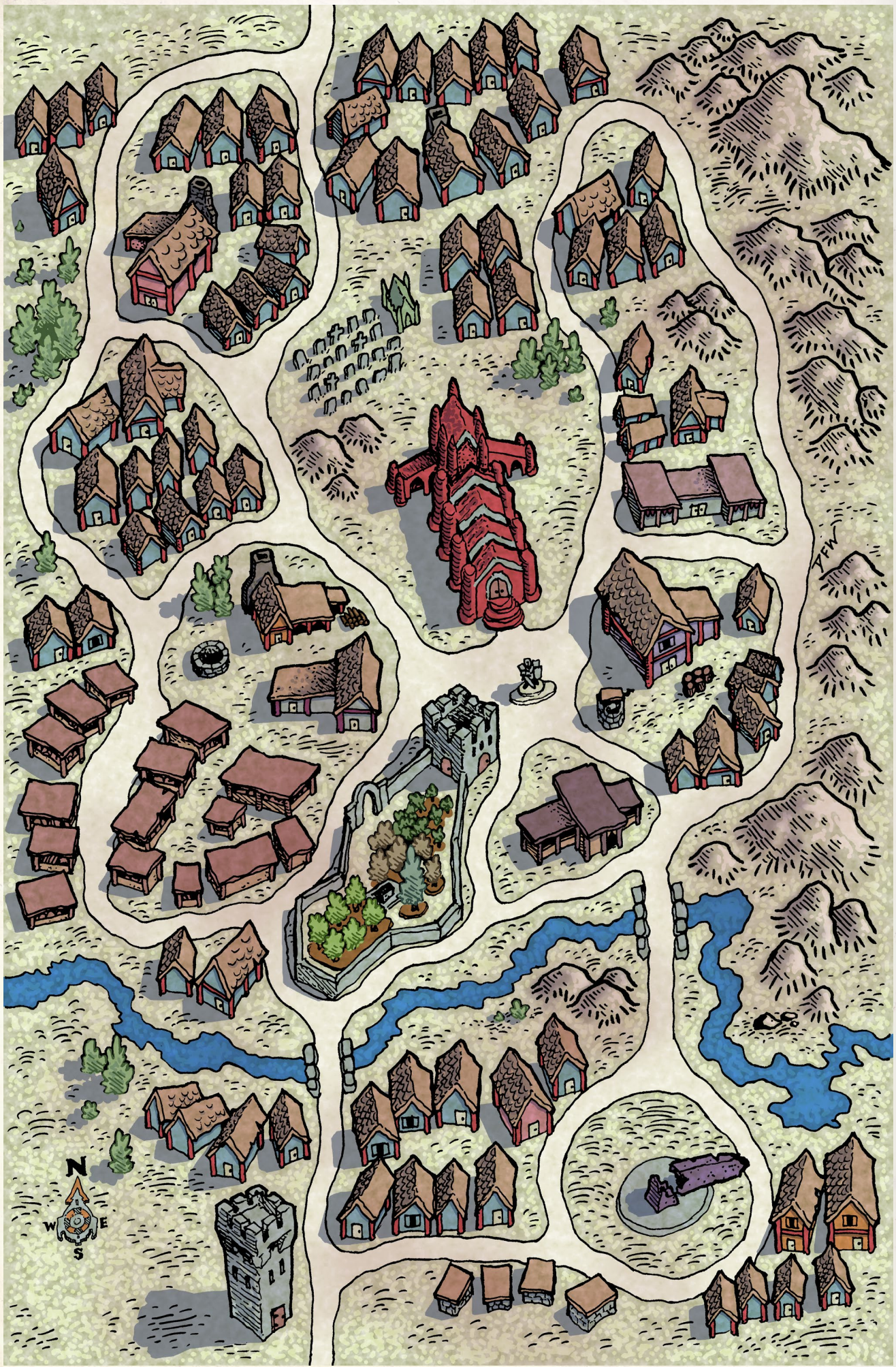
To escape the circle, Mother Catclaw must be handed her blade (presently held by her husband Ronald in area 7). The creature handing her the blade takes 16 (3d10) necrotic damage, which is enough to kill Ronald if he completes the task.

COMPANION MAPS

A handful of general-purpose maps always serves well in a lazy GM's toolkit, and the following maps are intended to cover a variety of different locations and situations. The characters might come across an underground ruin or a comfortable inn at any point in their adventures, while a rich manor might be a home base for the party or a location to infiltrate. These maps also include two example point crawl maps—one aboveground and one underground—showing locations and connecting paths. Reskin and modify all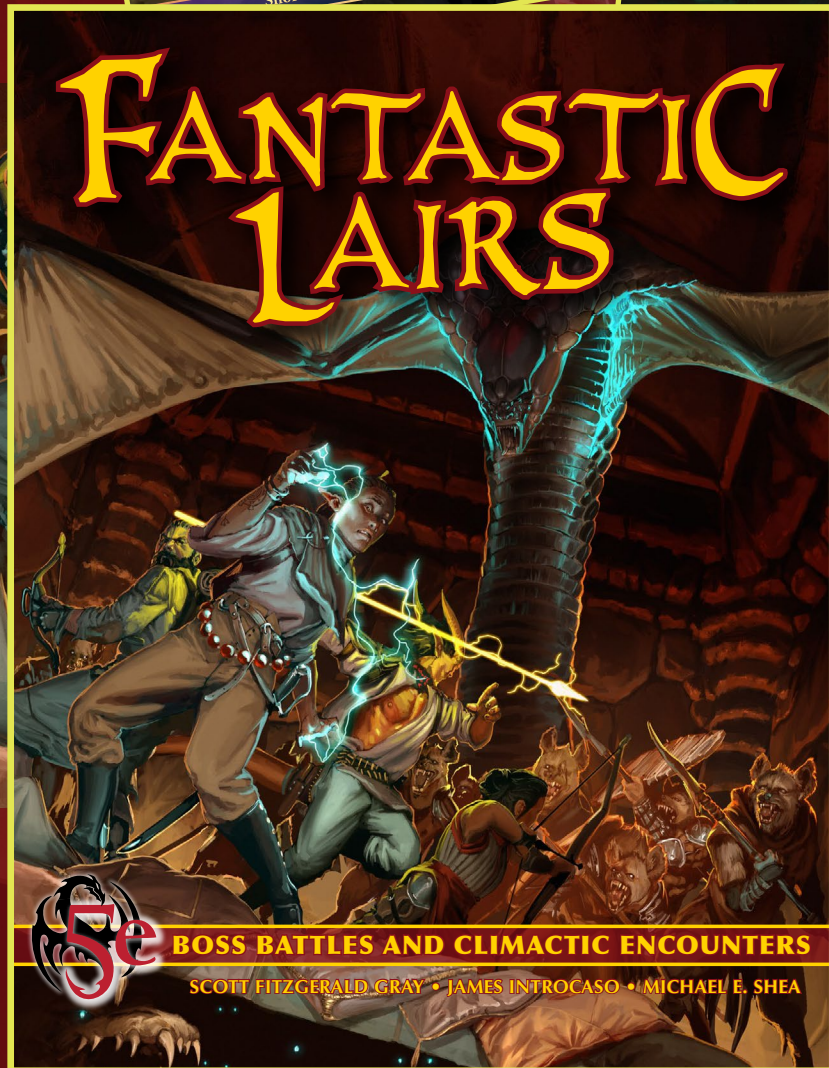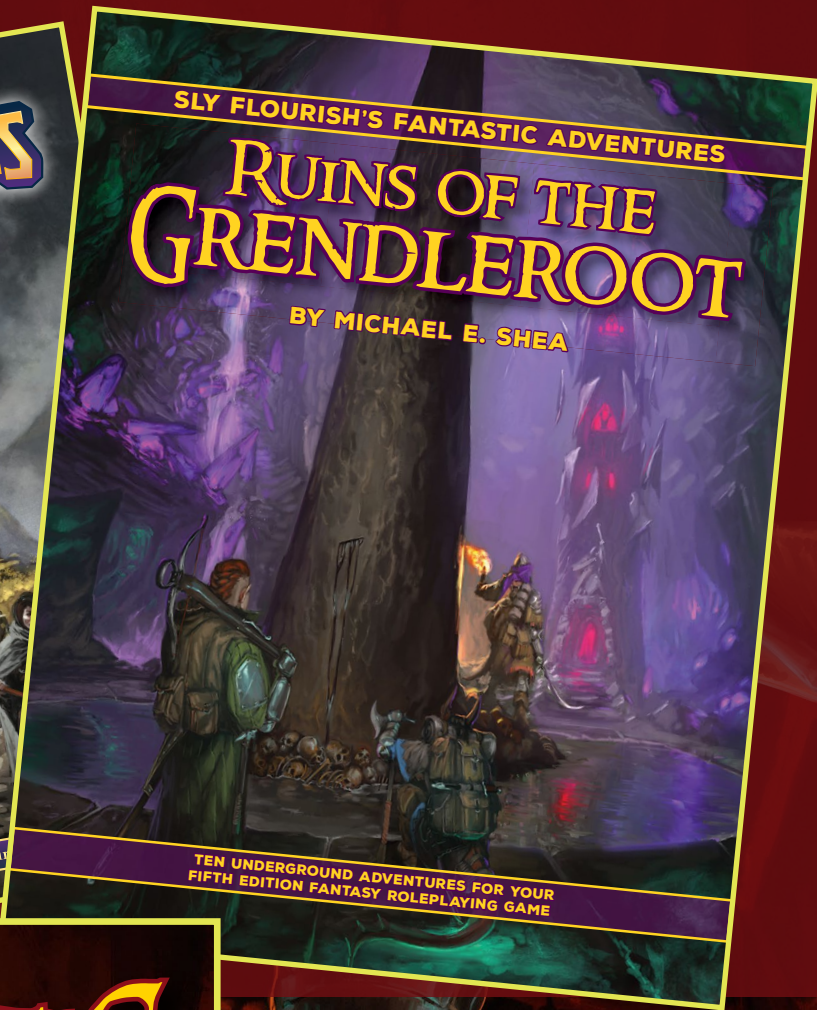 these maps in any way that serves your own games.