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In your role as Dungeon Master, you're the focus of the game. If the game's fun, it will be to your credit. If it's a failure, you'll get the blame, whether it's deserved or not. Don't worry, though—running a D&D® game is not as hard as it may seem at first. (But don't tell the players that!)

WHAT IS A DM?

Dungeon Mastering involves writing, teaching, acting, refereeing, arbitrating, and facilitating. Described below are the different duties of the DM. You'll find that you like some more than others. As in any hobby, focus on what you enjoy the most, but remember that all the other duties are also important.

PROVIDING ADVENTURES

Your primary role in the game is to present adventures in which the other players can roleplay their characters. To accomplish this, you need to spend time outside the game sessions themselves, preparing. This is true whether you write your own adventures or use prepared adventures that you have purchased.

Writing Adventures

Creating adventures takes a great deal of time. Many DMs find that they spend more time getting ready for the game than they do at the table actually playing. These same DMs often find this creation time to be the most fun and rewarding part of being a Dungeon Master. Making up interesting characters, settings, plots, and challenges to present before your friends can be a great creative outlet.

Writing good adventures is so important that it receives its own chapter in this book. See Chapter 3: Writing an Adventure.

Using Purchased Adventures

Many published adventures are available for you to purchase if you don't want to write one of your own, or if you just want a change of pace. In a published adventure, you'll get a pregenerated scenario with all the maps, NPCs, monsters, and treasures you need, and an adventure plot designed to make the most of them. Sometimes, when you use a published adventure, you'll see that it presents challenges you would have never thought of on your own.

Remember, however, that you're the one who has to run the adventure: Anything you want to change, you can. In fact, you will often find you need to make at least small changes to fit the adventure into your ongoing campaign and to get your players into the action. You can have a great deal of fun replacing the villain of an adventure with one the players have already heard of in your campaign, or changing the background of the adventure so that it involves your players' characters in ways that the module's designer never could have possibly imagined.

TEACHING THE GAME

Sometimes it's going to be your responsibility to teach newcomers to the game how to play. This isn't a burden, but a wonderful opportunity. Teaching other people how to play provides you with new players and allows you to set them on the path to becoming top-notch roleplayers. It's easier to learn to play with someone who already knows the game. Those who are taught by a good teacher who runs a fun game

are more likely to join in the hobby for the long haul. Use this opportunity to encourage new players to become the sort of people you want to game with.

Here are a few pointers on teaching the game.

Read the *Player's Handbook* and know the character creation rules so you can help new players build characters. Have each of the newcomers tell you what sort of character he or she wants to play and then show them how they can create those heroes with the D&D rules. If they don't know what to play, show them the player character races and classes in the *Player's Handbook*, briefly describe each, and let them choose the one that appeals to them the most. Another option is to keep a few simple characters (such as a 1st-level fighter or rogue) around for newcomers. Advance those characters in level as the party advances, and you'll have "old friends" who adventure with the party when newcomers play them.

Once the PCs are created, don't worry about teaching the players all the rules ahead of time. All they truly need to know are the basics that apply to understanding their characters (how spells work, what AC means, how to use skills, and so forth), and they can pick up most of this information as they go along. Remember the most basic rule: To attack, make a saving throw, or use a skill, roll a d20 and hope for a high number.

As long as you know the rules, the players need be concerned only with their characters and how they react to what happens to them in the game. Have players tell you what they want their characters to do, and translate that into game terms for them. Teach them how the rules work when they need to learn them, on a case-by-case basis. For example, if the player of a wizard wants to cast a spell or the player of a fighter wants to attack, the player tells you what the character is attempting. Then you tell the player which modifier or modifiers to add to the roll of a d20, and what happens as a result. After a few times, the player will know what to do without asking.

PROVIDING THE WORLD

Every Dungeon Master is the creator of his or her own campaign world. Whether you use the GREYHAWK® setting (the standard D&D campaign setting) or another published setting for the D&D game, such as the FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting, it's still your world.

The setting is more than just a backdrop for adventures, although it's that too. The setting is everything in the fictional world except for the PCs and the adventure plot. A well-designed and well-run world seems to go on around the PCs, so that they feel a part of something, instead of apart from it. Though the PCs are powerful and important, they should seem to be residents of some fantasy world that is ultimately larger than they are.

Consistency is the key to a believable fictional world. When the PCs go back into town for supplies, they ought to encounter some of the same NPCs they saw before. Soon, they'll learn the barkeep's name—and she'll remember theirs as well. Once you have achieved this degree of consistency, however, provide an occasional change. If the PCs come back to buy more horses at the stables, you could have them discover that the man who ran the place went back home to the large city over the hills, and now his nephew runs the family business. That sort of change—one that has nothing to do with the PCs directly, but one that they'll notice—makes the players feel as though they're adventuring in a living world as real as themselves, not just a flat backdrop that exists only for them to delve its dungeons.

For much more on running a campaign, see Chapter 5.

ADJUDICATING

When everyone gathers around the table to play the game, you're in charge. That doesn't mean you can tell people what to do outside the boundaries of the game, but it does mean that you're the

final arbiter of the rules within the game. Good players will always recognize that you have ultimate authority over the game mechanics, even superseding something in a rulebook. Good DMs know not to change or overturn a published rule without a good, logical justification so that the players don't rebel (more on that later).

To carry out this responsibility, you need to know the rules. You're not required to memorize the rulebooks, but you should have a clear idea of what's in them, so that when a situation comes up that requires a ruling, you know where to reference the proper rule in the book.

Often a situation will arise that isn't explicitly covered by the rules. In such a situation, you need to provide guidance as to how it should be resolved. When you come upon a situation that the rules don't seem to cover, consider the following courses of action.

- Look to any similar situation that is covered in a rulebook. Try to extrapolate from what you see presented there and apply it to the current circumstance.
- If you have to make something up, stick with it for the rest of the campaign. (This is called a house rule.) Consistency keeps players satisfied and gives them the feeling that they adventure in a stable, predictable universe and not in some random, nonsensical place subject only to the DM's whims.
- When in doubt, remember this handy little rule: Favorable conditions add +2 to any d20 roll, and unfavorable conditions penalize the roll by -2. You'll be surprised how often this "DM's best friend" will solve problems.

If you come upon an apparent contradiction in the rules, consider these factors when adjudicating.

- A rule found in a rulebook overrules one found in a published adventure, unless the rule presented in the published adventure deals with something specific and limited to the adventure itself.
- Choose the rule that you like the best, then stick with it for the rest of the campaign. Consistency is a critical aspect of rules adjudication.

PROPELLING THE GAME EVER FORWARD

While all the players are responsible for contributing to the game, the onus must ultimately fall upon the DM to keep the game moving, maintain player interest, and keep things fun. Remember that keeping things moving is always more important than searching through rulebooks to find the exact details on some point or spending time in long debates over rules decisions.

Even a well-run game can bog down sometimes. Perhaps the players have been at it a while and are growing a little tired of the same old thing. Maybe a playing session falls flat for no apparent reason. Sometimes this can't be helped—you're only human. In fact, occasionally you will find it's better to cancel a playing session or cut it short rather than have a poor experience that may set back the whole campaign.

However, an average playing session can be turned into a memorable one, or a poor session can be spiced up. For example, props can bring new life to a game. You can make fake parchment from normal paper, "aging" it by wetting it slightly with coffee or tea and then letting it dry to an uneven yellow. Toss in a few creases or small rips, and later when the PCs find a map or a message you can actually hand it to them. Old coins, tarot cards, a battered book in a foreign language, and the like all make wonderful handouts to get players into the spirit of the game.

Another kind of visual aid is artwork. In all D&D game products, you'll find wonderful fantasy illustrations. Look through those products, or find a book cover or some other art source to provide you with a picture that fits something the PCs will encounter. Then, when the encounter comes to pass, pull out the picture and say, "This is what you see." While players' imaginations are fertile, sometimes seeing a depiction of something they encounter in the game—a character, a monster, or a place—

makes the experience all the more exciting or real. Sometimes you can find illustrations in odd places. Jewelry catalogs can provide visual aids for some magic items or treasure, and sometimes a history book or encyclopedia with illustrations is just as good as a fantasy book.

Of course, you can't always have a prop or a picture of some monster, NPC, or place that you have created. That's when you rely on an evocative, exciting description. Pepper your descriptions of what the characters see with adjectives and vivid verbs. Remember that you are the players' eyes and ears. "A dank, dark chamber with moss growing in cracks in the stone walls" is much more exciting than "a 10-foot-by-10-foot room." Throughout the game, continually ask yourself: What *exactly* do the characters see? Do they hear anything? Are there any noticeable odors? An unpleasant tang in the air? Do they feel the chill wind against their skin? Is their hair tousled by hot, damp gusts?

No player will forget a tense battle on a crumbling bridge in the middle of a thunderstorm. The best way to get the players' attention is with gripping action. While not every encounter needs to be life-threatening or earth-shaking, keep in mind how it would all seem in some action movie or exciting book. Villains shout epithets as they fight, and monsters roar menacingly. If a fight against gnolls is exciting, imagine how much more exciting a fight would be against gnolls on a ledge around a lava pit.

Some DMs enjoy creating just the right atmosphere for their playing sessions. Music is often a good way to accomplish this. It's sort of like having a soundtrack for your game. Not surprisingly, those who enjoy using music in their games often use soundtracks from adventure movies, although classical, ambient, or other styles work well. Keep in mind, though, that some players may find music distracting. Be receptive to what your players like—an atmosphere in which they can't hear, are distracted, or aren't enjoying themselves is never a good one. Other ways DMs can create an atmosphere are with painted miniatures and dioramas, specially adjusted lighting, and even sound effects. (If the door to the room you are in squeaks, you may want to use that when the PCs open a dungeon door.)

Another element many DMs employ and many players enjoy is for the DM to use different voices when speaking "in character." Practicing several different accents or ways of speaking and assigning them to different NPCs can be a striking way to make those characters stand out in the players' minds.

Occasionally, a little miming of actions can supplement a game that otherwise exists only in your imagination. If an NPC is shriveled and stooped over when she

walks, stand up and show the players exactly what you mean. When the ceiling above the PCs begins to collapse, slam your fists upon the table to simulate the sound of falling rocks. If someone holds out his hand and offers something to a PC, mime the action—almost every time, the player (assuming the character takes what's offered) will follow your cue instinctively and reach out, miming the character's grasping whatever it is. You could even make a player whose character is invisible sit under the table to remind everyone that they can't see her, and her voice just comes out of nowhere. Keep in mind, though, that this sort of activity can quickly get out of hand. Don't act out your combats, or someone could get a black eye!

Finally, every once in a while, really surprise your players. The NPC they thought was a villain turns out to be a shapechanged unicorn with only the best of intentions. The clue they thought led to the treasure vault turns out to be a red herring. If the PCs are in a dungeon room, and a fire giant is about to storm into the room and attack, keep your voice at a moderate or even soft level while describing the room. Then, suddenly, raise your voice and leap to your feet as the giant enters. That'll get their attention.

STYLE OF PLAY

The DM provides the adventure and the world. The players and the DM work together to create the game as a whole. However, it's your responsibility to guide the way the game is played. The best way to accomplish this is by learning what the players want and figuring out what you want as well. Many styles of play exist; two that sit at opposite ends of the playing spectrum are detailed below as examples.

KICK IN THE DOOR

The PCs kick in the dungeon door, fight the monsters, and get the treasure. This style of play is straightforward, fun, exciting, and action-oriented. Very little time is spent on developing personas for the player characters, roleplaying noncombat encounters, or discussing situations other than what's going on in the dungeon.

The kick-in-the-door style of play.



In such a game, let the PCs face mostly clearly evil monsters and opponents and meet clearly good helpful NPCs (occasionally). Don't expect PCs to anguish over what to do with prisoners, or whether it's right or wrong to invade and wipe out the bugbear lair. Don't bother too much with money or time spent in town. Do whatever it takes to get the PCs back into the action as quickly as possible. Character motivation need be no more developed than a desire to kill monsters and acquire treasure.

Rules and game balance are very important in this style of play. If some characters have combat ability greater than that of their fellows, unfair situations may develop in which the players of the overpowered characters can handle more of the challenges and thus have more fun. If you're using this style, be very careful about adjudicating rules and think long and hard about additions or changes to the rules before making them.

DEEP-IMMERSION STORYTELLING

The Free City of Greyhawk is threatened by political turmoil. The PCs must convince the members of the ruling council to resolve their differences, but can only do so after they have come to terms with their own differing outlooks and agendas. This style of gaming is deep, complex, and challenging. The focus isn't on combat but on talking, developing in-depth personas, and character interaction. A whole game session may pass without a single die roll.

In this style of game, the NPCs should be as complex and richly detailed as the PCs—although the focus should be on motivation and personality, not game statistics. Expect long digressions from each player about what his or her character will do, and why. Going to a store to buy iron rations and rope can be as important an encounter as fighting orcs. (And don't expect the PCs to fight the orcs at all unless their characters are motivated to do so.) A character will sometimes take actions against his player's better judgment, because "that's what the character would do." Adventures in this style of play deal mostly with negotiations, political maneuverings, and character interaction. Players talk about the "story" that they are collectively creating.

Rules become less important in this style. Since combat isn't the focus, game mechanics take a back seat to character development. Skill modifiers take precedence over combat bonuses, and even then the actual numbers often don't mean much. Feel free to change rules to fit the player's roleplaying needs. You may even want to streamline the combat system so that it takes less time away from the story.

SOMETHING IN BETWEEN

The style of play in most campaigns is going to fall between the two extremes just described. There's plenty of action, but there's a storyline and interaction between characters as well. Players will develop their characters, but they'll be eager to get into a fight. Provide a nice mixture of roleplaying encounters and combat encounters. Even in a dungeon, you can present NPCs that aren't meant to be fought but rather helped out, negotiated with, or just talked to.

OTHER STYLE CONSIDERATIONS

A few other style-related issues are worth your consideration.

Serious versus Humorous: How seriously you take things sets the standard for how seriously the players take things. Jokes and silly remarks can make the game more fun, but they can also detract from the action. If you make funny comments during the game, expect that the players will, too.

Likewise, if you design adventures that are lighthearted, create NPCs that are slightly silly, or introduce embarrassing or humorous situations into the game, realize that it changes the tenor of the game. If the king of the land is a talking dog named Muffy or if the PCs have to find a *brassiere* of elemental summoning rather than a *brazier* of elemental summoning, don't expect anyone to take the game too seriously.

Overall, it's recommended that you play things straight. Don't intentionally insert jokes into the game. There'll be enough joshing around at the table already to keep the game fun. The in-game action should remain fairly serious (although an occasional funny moment is fine).

Naming Conventions: Related to how serious or humorous the game is, character names should be fairly uniform in style throughout the group. Although any character name is fine in and of itself, a group that includes characters named Bob the Fighter, Aldorius Killraven of Thistledown, and Runtboy lacks the consistency to be credible.

Multiple Characters: You need to decide if each player is going to be limited to one character or can have more than one, and whether a player is allowed to actually run more than one character at the same time. Generally, it's best if you keep to one character per player. However, when players are few, you might allow them to run more than one character just to get the group size up to at least four characters.

THE BOTTOM LINE

You're in charge. This is not being in charge as in telling everyone what to do. Rather, you get to decide how your player group is going to play this game, when and where the adventures take place, and what happens. *That* kind of being in charge.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

A DM guides four players through their first adventure. The players are playing Tordek (a dwarf fighter), Mialee (an elf wizard), Jozan (a human cleric), and Lidda (a halfling rogue). These four adventurers seek the ruins of an abandoned monastery, drawn by rumors of a fabulous fire opal, supposedly hidden there by the abbot when the place was attacked.

After passing through the lifeless aboveground ruins of the monastery, the adventurers find a rubble-strewn staircase leading down.

Tordek: Let's give these upper ruins one more quick look.

DM: [Making some rolls in secret, but knowing there's nothing to find in the burned-out shell of the monastery.] You don't find anything. What are you going to do now?

Jozan: Let's go down!

Lidda: We'll light a torch first.

DM: Fine, but I'll need the marching order that you'll be in.

At this point, the players arrange their miniature figures, each representing one character, in the order in which they will march down the stairs (and walk down corridors, and enter rooms). Tordek goes first, followed by Jozan (with the torch), then Mialee. Lidda brings up the rear, her player noting that she will be watching behind them occasionally.

If the players didn't have miniatures, writing down the marching order on a piece of paper would suffice.

Tordek: Fortunately, the torchlight won't spoil my darkvision—that'll help us navigate in the dark down there.

Jozan: Okay, we go down the stairs.

DM: You descend southward, possibly 30 feet laterally, and at the end of the stairway you see an open space.

Tordek: I enter and look around.

Jozan: I come in behind with the torch.

DM: You are in a chamber about 30 feet across to the south and 30 feet wide east and west. You see 10-foot-wide passages to the left and right as well as straight ahead, each in the center of its respective wall. Looking back, you see the stairway by which you entered the chamber in the center of the north wall.

Lidda: What else do we see?

DM: The floor is rough and damp. The ceiling is supported by arches that probably rise to meet in the center, about 20 feet above you—it's hard to tell because of all the webs. Some moldering old sacks are lying in the southwest corner, and some rubbish is jum-

they arrive, the cleric is willing to raise Mialec, but only if the PCs help him by ridding the temple's lower level of wererats. . . .

- You know that the party has just finished clearing out a wizard's tower and has lots of treasure. Therefore, you don't lure them to the next adventure using the promise of gold, but instead with the rumor that the wizard isn't dead, but has risen as a vampire and has sworn revenge. . . .
- Tordek's brother Ralcoos comes to the PCs, explains that a terrible tragedy has beset the dwarven city of Dumadan, and asks for their help. . . .

A status quo motivation isn't really a motivation in the strict sense of the word. It's the fact that (for instance) adventure awaits in the Lost Valley for anyone who dares brave the wyvern-haunted cliffs that surround the place. The PCs can go there or not, depending on how they feel.

While a tailored motivation is good for ensuring that the PCs end up in the adventure you have designed and for letting the players feel that their characters have a real place in the world, a status quo motivation allows you to set up situations unrelated to the PCs specifically. Doing this creates a sense of perspective, the feeling that the campaign world is a real place that extends beyond the PCs.

ONE HUNDRED ADVENTURE IDEAS

Use the following list for spur-of-the-moment adventure seeds or for generating ideas.

d% Adventure Idea

- 1 Thieves steal the crown jewels.
- 2 A dragon flies into a town and demands tribute.
- 3 The tomb of an old wizard has been discovered.
- 4 Wealthy merchants are being killed in their homes.
- 5 The statue in the town square is found to be a petrified paladin.
- 6 A caravan of important goods is about to leave for a trip through a dangerous area.
- 7 Cultists are kidnapping potential sacrifices.
- 8 Goblins riding spider eaters have been attacking the outskirts of a town.
- 9 Local bandits have joined forces with a tribe of bugbears.
- 10 A blackguard is organizing monsters in an area.
- 11 A gate to the lower planes threatens to bring more demons to the world.
- 12 Miners have accidentally released something awful that once was buried deep.
- 13 A wizards' guild challenges the ruling council.
- 14 Racial tensions rise between humans and elves.
- 15 A mysterious fog brings ghosts into town.
- 16 The holy symbol of a high priest is missing.
- 17 An evil wizard has developed a new kind of golem.
- 18 Someone in town is a werewolf.
- 19 Slavers continue to raid a local community.
- 20 A fire elemental escapes from a wizard's lab.
- 21 Bugbears are demanding a toll on a well-traveled bridge.
- 22 A *mirror of opposition* has created an evil duplicate of a hero.
- 23 Two orc tribes wage a bloody war.
- 24 New construction reveals a previously unknown underground tomb.
- 25 A nearby kingdom launches an invasion.
- 26 Two well-known heroes fight a duel.
- 27 An ancient sword must be recovered to defeat a ravaging monster.
- 28 A prophecy foretells of coming doom unless an artifact is recovered.
- 29 Ogres kidnap the mayor's daughter.

STRUCTURE

An adventure runs its course from the beginning to an end. Some adventures are completed in an hour. Others take months of playing sessions. Length is up to you, although it's smart to plan ahead and know roughly how many sessions an adventure will last (and make sure that the current group of players can commit to that length). Following are some guidelines to keep in mind when structuring good adventures and avoiding bad ones.

GOOD STRUCTURE

Good adventures are fun. That's an easy generalization, but it's also true. An adventure that everyone enjoys likely includes the following features.

Choices: A good adventure has at least a few points where the players need to make important decisions. What they decide should have significant impact on what happens next. A choice can be as simple as the players deciding not to go down the corridor to the left (where the pyrohydra waits for them) and instead going to the right (toward the magic fountain), or as complex as the PCs deciding not to help the queen against the grand vizier (so that she ends up being assassinated and the vizier's puppet gains the throne).

- 30 A wizard is buried in a trap-filled tomb with her powerful magic items.
- 31 An enchanter is compelling others to steal for him.
- 32 A shapechanged mind flayer is gathering mentally controlled servitors.
- 33 A plague brought by wererats threatens a community.
- 34 The keys to disarming all the magic traps in a wizard's tower have gone missing.
- 35 Sahuagin are being driven out of the sea to attack coastal villages.
- 36 Gravediggers discover a huge, ghoul-filled catacomb under the cemetery.
- 37 A wizard needs a particularly rare spell component found only in the deep jungle.
- 38 A map showing the location of an ancient magic forge is discovered.
- 39 Various monsters have long preyed upon people from within the sewers of a major city.
- 40 An emissary going into a hostile kingdom needs an escort.
- 41 Vampires are preying upon a small town.
- 42 A haunted tower is reputed to be filled with treasure.
- 43 Barbarians begin tearing up a village in a violent rage.
- 44 Giants steal cattle from local farmers.
- 45 Unexplained snowstorms bring winter wolves into an otherwise peaceful area.
- 46 A lonely mountain pass is guarded by a powerful sphinx denying all passage.
- 47 Evil mercenaries begin constructing a fortress not far from a community.
- 48 An antidote to a magic poison must be found before the duke dies.
- 49 A druid needs help defending her grove against goblins.
- 50 An ancient curse is turning innocent people into evil murderers.
- 51 Gargoyles are killing giant eagles in the mountains.
- 52 Mysterious merchants sell faulty magic items in town and then attempt to slink away.
- 53 A recently recovered artifact causes arcane spellcasters' powers to go awry.
- 54 An evil noble puts a price on a good noble's head.
- 55 Adventurers exploring a dungeon have not returned in a week.

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Difficult Choices: When a choice has a significant consequence, it should sometimes be a difficult one to make. Should the PCs help the church of Heironeous wage war on the goblins, even though the conflict will almost certainly keep them from reaching the Fortress of Nast before the evil duke summons the slaadi assassins? Should the PCs trust the words of a dragon, or ignore her warning?

Different Sorts of Encounters: A good adventure should provide a number of different experiences—attack, defense, problem-solving, roleplaying, and investigation. Make sure you vary the kinds of encounters the adventure provides (see Encounters, page 48).

Exciting Events: Like a well-told story, a good adventure should have rising and falling tension. This sort of pacing is easier to accomplish with an event-based adventure (since you have more control over when each encounter takes place), but it's possible in a site-based adventure to design a locale where the encounters are likely to occur in a desired fashion. Make sure to pace events appropriately. Start slowly and have the action build. A climactic encounter always makes for a good ending.

Encounters that Make Use of PC Abilities: If the party's wizard or sorcerer can cast fly, think about incorporating aerial encounters into the adventure. When there's a cleric along, occa-

sionally include undead that she can use her turning ability on. If the party has a ranger or a druid, include encounters with animals (dire animals can make challenging encounters for even mid- to high-level PCs; see the *Monster Manual* for more information). The advice to remember is "Everyone gets a chance to shine." All abilities available to PCs were designed to make the characters better, but an ability (or a spell) that a character never gets to use is a waste.

BAD STRUCTURE

Try to avoid the pitfalls described below.

Leading the PCs by the Nose: A bad event-based adventure is marked by mandates restricting PC actions or is based on events that occur no matter what the PCs do. For example, a plot that hinges on the PCs finding a mysterious heirloom, only to have it stolen by NPCs, is dangerous—if the players invent a good way to protect the heirloom, they won't like having it stolen anyway just because that's what you had planned beforehand. The players end up feeling powerless and frustrated. No matter what, all adventures should depend upon player choices, and players should feel as though what they choose to do matters. The results should affect the campaign setting (albeit perhaps in minor ways), and they should have consequences (good or bad) for the PCs.

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- 56 The funeral for a good fighter is disrupted by enemies he made while alive.
- 57 Colossal vermin are straying out of the desert to attack settlements.
- 58 An evil tyrant outlaws nonofficially sanctioned magic use.
- 59 A huge dire wolf, apparently immune to magic, is organizing the wolves in the wood.
- 60 A community of gnomes builds a flying ship.
- 61 An island at the center of the lake is actually the top of a strange, submerged fortress.
- 62 Buried below the Tree of the World lies the Master Clock of Time.
- 63 A child wanders into a vast necropolis, and dusk approaches quickly.
- 64 All the dwarves in an underground city have disappeared.
- 65 A strange green smoke billows out of a cave near a mysterious ruin.
- 66 Mysterious groaning sounds come from a haunted wood at night.
- 67 Thieves steal a great treasure and flee into *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*.
- 68 A sorcerer attempts to travel ethereally but disappears completely in the process.
- 69 A paladin's quest for atonement leads her to a troll lair too well defended for her to tackle alone.
- 70 A kingdom known for its wizards prepares for war.
- 71 The high priest is an illusion.
- 72 A new noble seeks to clear a patch of wilderness of all monsters.
- 73 A bulette is tearing apart viable farmland.
- 74 An infestation of stirges drives yuan-ti closer to civilized lands.
- 75 Treants in the woods are threatened by a huge fire of mysterious origin.
- 76 Clerics who have resurrected a long-dead hero discover she's not what they thought.
- 77 A sorrowful bard tells a tale of his imprisoned companions.
- 78 Evil nobles create an adventurers' guild to monitor and control adventurers.
- 79 A halfling caravan must traverse an ankheg-infested wilderness.
- 80 All the doors in the king's castle are suddenly *arcane locked* and *fire trapped*.
- 81 An innocent man, about to be hanged, pleads for someone to help him.
- 82 The tomb of a powerful wizard, filled with magic items, has sunk into the swamp.
- 83 Someone is sabotaging wagons and carts to come apart when they travel at high speed.
- 84 A certain kind of frogs, found only in an isolated valley, fall like rain on a major city.
- 85 A jealous rival threatens to stop a well-attended wedding.
- 86 A woman who mysteriously vanished years ago is seen walking on the surface of a lake.
- 87 An earthquake uncovers a previously unknown dungeon.
- 88 A wronged half-elf needs a champion to fight for her in a gladiatorial trial.
- 89 At the eye of the storm that tears across the land lies a floating citadel.
- 90 People grow suspicious of half-orc merchants peddling gold dragon parts in the market.
- 91 An absentminded wizard lets her *rod of wonder* fall into the wrong hands.
- 92 Undead shadows vex a large library, especially an old storeroom long left undisturbed.
- 93 The door into an abandoned house in the middle of town turns out to be a magic portal.
- 94 Barge pirates make a deal with a covey of hags and exact a high toll to use the river.
- 95 Two parts of a magic item are in the hands of bitter enemies; the third piece is lost.
- 96 A flight of wyverns is preying upon sheep as well as shepherds.
- 97 Evil clerics gather in secret to summon a monstrous god to the world.
- 98 A city faces a siege by a force of humans, duergar, and gnolls.
- 99 A huge gemstone supposedly lies within a ruined monastery.
- 100 Lizardfolk riding dragon turtles sell their services as mercenaries to the highest bidder.

PCs as Spectators: In this kind of bad adventure, NPCs accomplish all the important tasks. There might be an interesting story going on, but it's going on around the PCs, and they have very little to do with it. As much as you might like one of your NPCs, resist the urge to have him or her accomplish everything instead of letting the PCs do the work. As great as it might be to have your big NPC hero fight the evil wizard (also an NPC) threatening the land, it's not much fun for the players if all they get to do is watch.

Deus ex Machina: Similar to the "PCs as spectators" problem is the potential pitfall of the *deus ex machina*, a term used to describe the ending to a story in which the action is resolved by the intervention of some outside agency rather than by the characters' own actions. Don't put the PCs in situations in which they can only survive through the intervention of others. Sometimes it's interesting to be rescued, but using this sort of "escape hatch" gets frustrating for the players quickly. Players would rather defeat a young dragon on their own than face an ancient wyrm and only defeat it because a high-level NPC teleports in to help them.

Preempting the Characters' Abilities: It's good to know the PCs' capabilities, but you shouldn't design adventures that continually countermand or foil what they can do. If the wizard just learned *fireball*, don't continually throw fire-resistant foes at him. Don't create dungeons where *fly* and *teleport* spells don't work, just because it's more difficult to design challenging encounters for characters with those capabilities. Use the PCs' abilities to allow them to have more interesting encounters—don't arbitrarily rule that their powers suddenly don't work.

THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Much of the structure of an adventure depends on what the PCs know and when they learn it. If they know that there's a dragon at the bottom of the dungeon, they will conserve their strength for that encounter and have proper spells and strategies prepared. When they learn the identity of a traitor, they will probably act on this information immediately. If they learn too late that their actions will cause a cavern complex to collapse, they won't be able to keep it from happening.

Don't give away the whole plot in one go, but do give the players some new bit of knowledge every so often. For example, if the drow elves are the secret masters behind an uprising of giants, slowly reveal clues to that fact. Information gained while fighting the hill giants leads the PCs to the frost giants, which in turn garners them clues that take them to the fire giants. Only among the

fire giants do the PCs encounter information that leads them to understand that the drow are involved. And thus the final encounter with those drow masters is made all the more dramatic.

In some situations, the PCs know everything they need to know before the adventure begins. That's okay. Occasionally, there is no mystery. For example, the adventurers learn that a haunted tower in the woods is inhabited by a vampire and her minions. They go in with stakes and holy water, slay a bunch of undead, and finally meet up with the vampire and take her out. That's a fun adventure. Sometimes, however, a surprise that the PCs never could have seen coming makes it all the more interesting—the vampire turns out to be a good-aligned undead resisting her bloodlust but slowly succumbing to the temptation of an erinyes drow who lives under the church back in town. Both the "no surprise" and the "unexpected twist" structures work well, so long as you avoid overusing either.

Divination Magic

Keep divination magic in mind when predetermining how you're going to control the flow of information. Don't deny spells their potency. Instead, learn what they can and cannot do and plan for the PCs to use them. (See *Handling Divination*, page 34). After all, if you have assumed that they would cast proper spells and they don't use what's available to them, they deserve to fail.

SITE-BASED ADVENTURE

The Tomb of Horrors, the Temple of Elemental Evil, the Gorge of the Tower of Inverness—these are places of legend, mystery, and adventure. If you create an adventure based around some place—a dungeon, a ruin, a mountain, a valley, a cave complex, a wilderness, a town—then you have created a site-based adventure. Site-based adventures revolve around a map with a key, detailing important spots on that map. Encounters in the adventure are triggered when the PCs enter a new location at the site. The implication is that each encounter describes what occurs at that site when the PCs arrive (or arrive for the first time).

Creating a site-based adventure involves two steps: drawing a map and keying the encounters.

Draw a Map: Graph paper is useful for mapping out dungeons because you can assign a scale for the squares, such as 5 feet per square. The printed gridlines also aid in drawing straight lines (particularly useful when you're mapping the interior

ADVENTURE WRITER'S CHECKLIST

If you want to write an adventure but aren't sure where to start, just work your way down the checklist below. Each entry corresponds to a section found later in this chapter.

- Brainstorm one or more motivations for the adventure, keeping in mind the style of play you prefer. Why will the PCs put their lives at risk?
- Decide whether you want a site-based adventure, an event-based adventure, or an adventure that incorporates both.
- If it's a site-based adventure, imagine where the adventure will take place. You don't need to know every detail yet, just a broad sense of what the place is like.
- If it's an event-based adventure, imagine the starting scene, a likely climax scene, and a few "set piece" intermediate scenes you think would be fun.
- Choose the most important antagonists for the PCs. If allies, patrons, or other NPCs are important, think about them too.
- Begin assembling your adventure. If it's a site-based adventure, sketch out the site and decide where your important NPCs spend most of their time. If it's an event-based adventure, identify the most

likely sequences of events that take the PCs from the beginning scene to the climax, hitting one or more of the important intermediate scenes along the way.

- Fill in the details. Create the areas and scenes that aren't integral to the adventure but may be fun or challenging nonetheless. Draw maps you'll need, build the NPCs, and create any random encounters you want for the adventure.
- Check your work. Examine what you've done, but think like your players. Is there a clever way to bypass many of the adventure's challenges? Think of ways to reward cleverness without rendering the adventure obsolete.

Now that you've worked your way down the checklist, here's a suggestion: You don't have to do the items in order. You can just as easily start by saying, "I want to write an adventure with mind flayer assassins and main villains," starting with the antagonists and making the choices later. You might design a site first, then figure out how to put the characters inside. But it's always a good idea to start with a plan, because it's the energy that gets your adventure off the ground.

building or a dungeon). Mark important areas with numbers or letters that reference the map key. Make notes on the map describing anything of importance, including room contents (statues, pools, furniture, pillars, steps, pits, curtains, and so on). Plan out which areas are linked by similar or allied inhabitants. Place traps, taking care to note particularly the location of trap triggers. Consider spell ranges—if an NPC wizard is in a particular area and you know that she might cast a particular spell, save yourself time during the playing of the adventure by noting now how far the spell effect can extend.

As you map out the site, think about how you'll depict each area at the gaming table. It's a bad idea, for example, to design a site with many areas that are larger than the grid you place your miniatures on. If it's likely that characters will travel back and forth between two adjacent rooms, make each of the rooms small enough to fit both of them on the tabletop grid at the same time.

Remember that the player characters are catalysts for change. While you play, note changes caused by the PCs' presence—possibly even writing them directly on the map. That way it's easier to remember, on the second time they pass through an area, which doors they have knocked down, which traps they have triggered, which treasures they have looted, which guardians they have defeated, and so forth.

Create a Key: A map key is a set of notes (as detailed or brief as you need them to be) detailing each area's contents, NPCs (description, statistics, possible actions), and whatever else makes the place special. For example, on an outdoor map you might mark an area that triggers a landslide if crossed, a bridge over the river guarded by lizardfolk, and the lair of a basilisk—complete with details about the interior of the lair and the treasure formerly in the possession of the half-eaten, petrified victims in the back. Each entry should include the game information needed to run that encounter. If an area has nothing to write about, don't bother marking it on the key.

Most dungeon adventures are site-based. See *The Dungeon*, page 57, as well as the sample dungeon adventure that begins on page 78.

A site-based adventure allows the PCs to drive the action. If they come to a fork in the path, they're free to choose whichever way they want. It doesn't matter which path they choose, or if they never go down one path at all. The characters can leave the location and come back, often resuming the adventure exactly where they left off (although some aspects of the site may have changed, depending on how static the site is; see below).

A site-based adventure is easy to run once you've made all the preparations. All the information is right there in front of you, on the map and in the key. Between the two of them, you should be able to handle any sort of action the PCs may take during the adventure.

Site-based adventures often lure PCs based simply on the reputation of the site, but sometimes an event triggers a site-based adventure, drawing the PCs to the location. Once they are at the site, your map and its key come into play.

STATIC OR DYNAMIC

Sometimes a site-based adventure takes place at a static location. The map depicts an old ruin filled with monsters, shows where the ancient treasures are located within the ruin, where the traps or danger spots are located, and so on. The PCs can arrive at this location at any time, stay as long as they desire, leave whenever they want, and come back later to find the site pretty much the same as they left it (although more monsters may have taken up residence, or a few may have wandered off; maybe a trap has been triggered by a monster and no longer threatens the PCs, or a trap the PCs previously triggered has been reset).

Designing a static site-based adventure is fairly easy. You don't have to think much about how the residents of the various en-

counter areas interact, and each encounter area need only be designed with the most immediate implications in mind—namely, what happens when the PCs arrive?

By contrast, a good example of a dynamic site is a drow fortress-temple. A dynamic site usually involves some sort of intelligent organization. As the PCs move around the site, they discover that actions in certain areas affect encounters in other areas. For example, if the PCs kill two of the drow priestesses in the fortress-temple but allow a third one to escape, the fortress-temple mobilizes its populace—now, defenders are moving around from location to location and are much more likely to attack any unknown intruders rather than ask questions. Perhaps the two dead priestesses rise from the dead as vampires and start creating vampire spawn as bodyguards.

Designing a dynamic site is more complicated than designing a static one. In addition to creating a map and a key—both of which might be updated significantly as the adventure develops—you must address the following issues as well.

- Formulate defensive plans for the inhabitants. "If attacked, the guards use the gong to raise the alarm. The sound of the gong can be heard in areas A, B, and D. The inhabitants in those areas hastily don hide armor (5 rounds) and overturn tables to give themselves cover. The sorcerer in area B casts *mass invisibility* on himself and the barbarian."
- Develop conditional requirements for various areas. "If anyone disturbs the three unholy gems upon the altar, the Infernal Gates in area 5 open, allowing access to the City of Dis but also calling 3d4 barbazu devils, who live in the dungeon by day and come out at night to raid the countryside in a 5-mile radius."
- Determine the inhabitants' long-term plans. "In a month's time, the goblins will have completed the wall in area 39. With that defense to fall back on, they begin the assault on the kobold caves in areas 32 through 37. If no one intervenes, the goblins will clear out the kobolds in three weeks and the goblin adept will gain the *wand of lightning bolt* stored in the secret vault in area 35."

EVENT-BASED ADVENTURES

The death of the king. The Rain of Colorless Fire. The carnival's arrival in town. Unexplained disappearances. Merchants of Druus looking for caravan guards. Events can lead to adventures, drawing the PCs in and getting them involved in amazing predicaments.

When you create an event-based adventure, you structure it in the form of "Something happens, and if the PCs do this, then that happens..." An event-based adventure is built around a series of events influenced by the PCs' actions. The PCs' reactions change the events that occur, or the order in which they occur, or both.

In an event-based adventure, the PCs usually have a goal or a mission beyond "Kill all the monsters" or "Get as much treasure as possible" or even "Explore this area." The adventure instead focuses on the adventurers trying to accomplish something specific. The encounters in the adventure occur as an offshoot of that effort—either as a consequence of their actions, or as opposing forces attempting to stop them, or both.

This kind of adventure is often described as story-based, because it's more like a book or a movie and less like exploration of a passive site. An event-based adventure usually doesn't use a room-by-room key of a location but instead consists of notes on which events occur when. Two of the best ways to organize these notes are in the form of a flowchart or a timeline.

Flowchart: By drawing connected boxes or circles with event descriptions in them, it's easy to visually track the flow of events: "As the PCs investigate the murder, they question the innkeeper. She tells them that she saw someone suspicious hanging around the back of the livery last night. If they ask specifically about Greg-

ory, she tells them where he lives." In this example, the flowchart has two lines drawn away from the innkeeper. One goes to the livery and the other goes to Gregory's house, since those are the two likely paths the PCs will take next.

Timeline: Another way to organize an event-based adventure is by the passage of time. A timeline starts when the PCs get involved in the story (or sometimes even before then). It marks what happens when: "One day after the PCs arrive in town, Joham comes to them pleading for help. The next day, Joham is found dead in his room at the inn. That evening, Gregory comes to the inn, poking around for information to see if the body has been found."

Combination: An event-based adventure might use both a flowchart and a timeline that are closely integrated: "If the PCs ask the innkeeper about Gregory on the day after the murder, she tells them where he lives. The following morning, Gregory shows up at the inn, heavily disguised, and convinces the innkeeper that he is being framed for the murder. She agrees to hide him. If the PCs ask the innkeeper about Gregory after this occurs, she gives them the location of his house—but she also tells the PCs (untruthfully) that Gregory has been away from town on a trip for the last several days."

Random Encounters: Even in an adventure driven by events, an encounter unrelated to the flow of events can serve to emphasize (or distract from) the ongoing plot. See Table 3–28: Urban Encounters, page 102, for an example of an event-based random encounter table.

THE END (?)

Eventually, each adventure comes to an end. A climactic encounter places a nice capstone on an adventure, particularly if it's one that the players have seen coming. (If the ogres they have been fighting have been referring to a dragon, then an encounter with the dragon is a suitable ending.)

Many adventures require a denouement—some wrap-up to deal with the aftermath of the final encounter. This can be the time when the PCs discover what treasure is in the dragon's hoard, a dramatic scene in the king's court in which he thanks the adventurers for slaying the dragon and passes out knighthoods all around, or a time to mourn those comrades who did not survive the battle. Generally, the denouement should not take nearly as long as the climax itself.

As with movies and books, adventures sometimes deserve sequels. Many adventures lead directly into new adventures for the PCs, relating to what they have accomplished or discovered. If the characters just destroyed the fortress of the evil overlord, they may find clues within the fortress that betray the identity of a traitor on the town council who has been secretly aiding the warlord. Perhaps the overlord's orc minions fled the site—where did they go? (Orcs, no matter where they go, are sure to cause trouble!) Suppose bandits attacked the adventurers while they were on their way to the overlord's fortress—going back now and finding the bandits' lair is an adventure of both justice and vengeance.

ENCOUNTERS

As interesting as it is to talk about adventures (and the stories behind them), the game is really composed of encounters. Each individual encounter is like its own game—with a beginning, a middle, an end, and victory conditions to determine a winner and a loser.

TAILORED OR STATUS QUO

Just as with motivations, encounters can be tailored specifically to the PCs or not. A tailored encounter is one in which you take into consideration that the wizard PC has a *wand of invisibility* and the fighter's AC is 23. In a tailored encounter, you design things to fit the PCs and the players. In fact, you can specifically design some-

thing for each PC to do—the skeletal minotaur is a challenge for the barbarian, another skeleton with a crossbow is on a ledge that only the rogue can reach, only the monk can leap across the chasm to pull the lever to raise the portcullis in front of the treasure, and the cleric's *hide from undead* spell allows her to get to the treasure while the skeletons are guarding while the battle rages.

A status quo encounter forces the PCs to adapt to the encounter rather than the other way around. Bugbears live on Clover Hill, and if the PCs go there, they encounter bugbears, whether bugbears are an appropriate encounter for them or not. This kind of encounter gives the world a certain verisimilitude, and so it's good to mix a few in with the other sorts of encounters.

If you decide to use only status quo encounters, you should probably let your players know about this. Some of the encounters you place in your adventure setting will be an appropriate challenge for the PCs, but others might not be. For instance, you could decide where the dragon's lair is long before the characters are experienced enough to survive a fight against the dragon. If players know that the setting includes status quo encounters that the characters might not be able to handle, they will be more likely to make the right decision if they come upon a tough encounter. That decision, of course, is to run away and fight again another day (when the party is better equipped to meet the challenge).

CHALLENGE RATINGS AND ENCOUNTER LEVELS

A monster's Challenge Rating (CR) tells you the level of the party for which that monster is a good challenge. A monster of CR 5 is an appropriate challenge for a group of four 5th-level characters. If the characters are of higher level than the monster, they get fewer XP because the monster should be easier to defeat. Likewise, if the characters are of lower level than a monster's Challenge Rating, the PCs get a greater award.

Parties with five or more members can often take on monsters with higher CRs, and parties of three or fewer are challenged by monsters with lower CRs. The game rules account for these factors by dividing the XP earned by the number of characters in the party (see Rewards, page 36).

Multiple Monsters and Encounter Levels

Obviously, if one monster has a given Challenge Rating, more than one monster represents a greater challenge than that. You can use Table 3–1: Encounter Numbers to determine the Encounter Level of a group of monsters, as well as to determine how many monsters equate to a given Encounter Level (useful for balancing an encounter with a PC party).

To balance an encounter with a party, determine the party's level (the average of all the members' character levels). You want the party's level to match the level of the encounter, so find the number in the "Encounter Level" column. Then look across that line to find the CR of the kind of creature that you want to use for the encounter. Once you have found it, look at the top of the column to find the number of creatures that makes a balanced encounter for the party.

For example, suppose you want to send ogres against a 6th-level party. The *Monster Manual* entry on ogres shows that they are CR 2. Looking at the "6" row in the "Encounter Level" column, you go across to the "2" entry and then check the top of that column to find that four CR 2 monsters make a good 6th-level encounter. To determine the Encounter Level of a group of monsters, reverse these steps (begin with the number of creatures, read down to the CR for the creature, then look left to find the appropriate Encounter Level).

In general, if a creature's Challenge Rating is two lower than the given Encounter Level, then two creatures of that kind equal the challenge of one creature of that Encounter Level. Thus, a pair of frost giants (CR 9 each) is an EL 11 encounter. The progression holds of doubling the number of creatures for each drop of two places in their CR.