

SLY FLOURISH'S
RISE OF THE
LAZY GAMEDMASTER



RUN GREAT TABLETOP RPGS BY PREPARING LESS

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INTRODUCTION

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

There's a common joke I've heard since the publication of this book's predecessor, *Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master*, and it goes something like this:

"I'm too lazy to read your book on being a Lazy Gamemaster."

Fear not, Lazy GM! *Rise of the Lazy Gamemaster* is built for you, and can be absorbed in several lazy ways. Here's how to get the most out of this book:

- Read this introduction to learn what the book has to offer you.
- Read chapter \$, "Top Tips for Gamemasters," for the best tips I can offer to benefit GMs new and old.
- Read chapter \$, "The Eight Steps of Lazy Gamemaster Prep," to review the eight steps of preparing your game that the rest of this book is built around.
- Scan through the book's table of contents to see what topics it covers—and stop and flip to any chapter that grabs you.
- Scan through the headers of each chapter to get a sense of the main points the chapter covers.
- Read the chapter summaries at the end of the chapters you're interested in. Dig in more on any given subject when you want more detail.
- Jump to "The Lazy GM's Toolbox" in chapter \$—a huge chapter filled with tools and tips for running RPGs. Scan through the list of tips and jump to the ones that interest you.
- Do a full read-through of any sections that interested you during your quick appraisal.
- Maybe sit down with your favorite beverage and read the whole book.

FOR NEW AND EXPERIENCED GMS ALIKE

This book walks tabletop RPG Gamemasters new and old through the way of the Lazy Gamemaster—a process meant to help you more easily prepare and run awesome roleplaying games. Everything you'll find here is built on over fifteen years of experience interviewing, surveying, and studying Gamemasters and their processes for preparing and running games. Whether you've been playing RPGs for fifty years or five weeks, this book can help you more easily run great, open-ended games for your friends. If you're brand new to roleplaying games, read chapter \$, "Getting Started Running RPGs." It'll lead you in the right direction.



WHAT'S NEW?

This book goes hand-in-hand with the concepts in the book *Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master*, published in 2018. Nothing in this book overwrites the material in *Return*, but you also don't need *Return* to get value from this book. Both books offer valuable insights to help you run great games.

Where *Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master* focused on preparing your game, running your game, and

WHAT DOES "LAZY" MEAN?

In the context of this book, a lazy Gamemaster is one who focuses on the most impactful preparation, and on techniques for play that offer the greatest value for increasing the fun of the game. "Lazy" in this context is about efficiency—focusing on what matters to the game and omitting what does not. Lazy GMs prepare to improvise, gathering the material they need to let the game unfold at the table. For decades, countless GMs have lamented the vast amount of prep they do only to have players veer off from the path they've laid out. Experienced GMs often come to the following realization: the less prep they do, the more fun the game is. This doesn't mean no prep, though—as you'll see from all the prep advice in this book. It means focusing our prep on the stuff that leads to fun stories not even we as GMs can predict.

thinking about your game, this book delves into helping you prepare and run individual sessions of your favorite tabletop RPG. It does so with a focus on expanding the eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep introduced in *Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master*, understanding how those steps can be used in different types of common adventures, and by giving you a huge toolkit of tips and tricks for running great games. This book builds off of eight years of experience since the publication of *Return*, expanding the concepts of the eight steps based on the experiences of thousands of Gamemasters.

THE EIGHT STEPS HAVEN'T CHANGED

If you're familiar with the eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep (see chapter 5 for a summary), those steps haven't changed. This book expands the utility of each step and how the eight steps relate to different game systems, different GMs, different groups, and different adventure types.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is for new or experienced tabletop roleplaying Gamemasters, both those who currently run tabletop RPGs and those who are looking forward to running an RPG. The advice in this book covers a wide range of tabletop games, with a focus on fantasy RPGs that include a single Gamemaster and one or more players.

Whether you're a long-term GM looking to expand to systems other than *Dungeons & Dragons* or a new GM eager to simply get started with *D&D*, this book can help you learn how to stay flexible, keep your prep under control, and run an awesome game with your friends whose ultimate direction surprises even you.

FOR NEW GMS

If you're new to running tabletop RPGs, before you dig into this book, you'll want to read and understand the basic rules of the game you want to run. This book doesn't cover the basics of running roleplaying games. Rather, it gives you a practical framework for building your sessions, adventures, and campaigns. It offers tested tips and tricks for helping you avoid common mistakes that many GMs spend years figuring out on their own. See chapter 5, "Getting Started Running RPGs," for more advice for new GMs.

FOR EXPERIENCED GMS

As a GM with plenty of tabletop RPG experience, maybe you're already familiar with the eight steps of Lazy GM prep, or maybe you have your own style for prepping your games. This book will still hopefully help you think more deeply about your game prep. Maybe you'll find some good ideas here that you can integrate into your own process, or what's presented here might inspire you to try out something new and discover an approach you like.

The material in this book can help you review and refine the prep system you already make use of—filling in gaps, cutting things you realize you don't need, and polishing up your prep so you feel great doing it and equally great when it's time to run a game. Maybe you'll find one key tip you love and want to bring into your own game. Maybe you'll re-evaluate your entire system. However long we as GMs have been running games, we can always find something new to try.

INSPIRATION

This book is inspired by the best advice I could find for Gamemasters from several systems. Here's a nonexhaustive list:

- *13th Age*
- *Apocalypse World*
- *Blades in the Dark*
- *Daggerheart*
- *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition*
- *Dungeon World*
- *FATE Core*
- *Ironsworn*
- *Level Up Advanced 5th Edition*
- *Numenera* and the Cypher System
- *Old-School Essentials*
- *Shadowdark*
- *Shadow of the Demon Lord*
- *Shadow of the Weird Wizard*
- *Tales of the Valiant*

Appendix A at the end of this book includes several other books that influenced the ideas in this one.

WHAT RPG SYSTEMS DOES THIS BOOK COVER?

This book is system agnostic, but with a focus mostly on fantasy RPGs that have one Gamemaster and one or more players. The RPGs mentioned above all influenced the ideas presented in this book. These games show off a wide range of styles, from high-fantasy character-focused games to dark and gritty dungeon delves. The steps and processes in this book not only support this wide range of RPG systems, but many of the features of those systems inspired the ideas found in this book. As just one example, the heavy use of random tables in old-school games can shake up our ideas for high-fantasy character-driven games as well.

CHAPTER 1

TOP TIPS FOR GAMEMASTERS

This chapter includes the best tips I have for running great tabletop roleplaying games for GMs new and old. These tips came from hundreds of GMs, dozens of books, and thousands of discussions and surveys.

Many GMs learn these tips the hard way after running games for weeks, months, or even years in frustration, only to come around to these maxims in the end. These tips aren't universal truths, though, and every one of them likely has a contrary experience. But I think they lead to the most fun games at the table for both GMs and players.

LET THE STORY UNFOLD AT THE TABLE

You don't define the story of an RPG adventure during prep. The story occurs during the game itself. The more you expect things to go a certain way—or *plan* for things to go a certain way—the more disappointed you'll be and the more unbalanced you'll feel when the game goes in a surprising new direction.

Instead of preplanning or expecting a particular story, let the story unfold at the table. Focus your prep on the components you need to help the story take shape as you describe the world and the situation for your players, and as your players choose the actions of their characters.

BUILD SITUATIONS AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS

One of the greatest joys of being a Gamemaster is to be surprised by the events of the game. Every game plays out as scenes, but you never want to build your game as predefined scenes with expected directions and outcomes. Instead, set up scenes as situations and let the characters interact with them.

When we talk about situations, we're talking about open-ended scenes as the foundation of our games. Unlike a narrative fiction scene in which a single storyline takes place regardless of the input of the characters, a situation lays out the foundations of the scene and then moves in the direction the characters take it during play.

Think about situations in your game using the following criteria:

- A situation takes place at a location.
- It usually involves one or more groups of NPCs, monsters, or both.
- Something is going on.
- A specific "draw" motivates the player characters to get involved.
- There's no expectation of how the situation is going to play out.
- Characters have multiple ways to engage in the situation.

- The results of the scene aren't predetermined—the situation can evolve in many ways.

The key to a situation-based scene is first setting things up, and then playing to see what happens. You don't know how things are going to go because you don't know the choices the characters make. You simply establish what happens when the characters arrive in the scene and see how it goes, becoming comfortable improvising the reactions of the world as the characters act.

FOCUS ON THE CHARACTERS

It's easy to fall into the trap that the GM is the enemy of the characters. Countless tropes reinforce this destructive idea. Instead, be a fan of the characters first and foremost. You want to watch them do cool stuff just as much as the players want to accomplish cool stuff. Put the characters first in your mind, reminding yourself that it's their story you're enjoying.

The characters are the heroes of your campaign, so be on their side. Keep them foremost in your mind when thinking about the game. What matters to them? What do they want? What choices can they make? What situations make them look cool?

Embrace the characters' successes and lament their failures. Do not be their antagonist. As a GM, you're not the enemy or the opposing side. Rather, you are the antenna that draws in this world of fantasy to the table. You are a facilitator, helping stories unfold during the game—and those stories focus on the characters.

BUILD FROM THE CHARACTERS OUTWARD

The characters are the focal point of the story, the campaign, the world, and the universe. Start where they are and spiral outward. You don't need a hundred-thousand-year history filled out. You don't need a pantheon of thirty-six gods. You don't need to fill out all the details of seven continents. Instead, start where the characters are—the town they're in and the monster-infested cellars under the old decrepit windmill atop a nearby hill. Fill out only the gods the characters might worship or oppose. Build out the town piece by piece based on the locations the character might want to visit.

Start from the characters and build the world around them using the concept of "two horizons out." Focus first on what the characters can see and where they might go, then focus on what they'll be able to see when they get there.

SEE THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUR VILLAINS

As the campaign unfolds, ask yourself what your villains are thinking about? What are they doing right now? What plans do they have? What quests are they working on? How do they react to the latest actions of the characters? Resilient campaigns flow from the actions of the characters and the reactions of the villains (more on this in chapter 5). Instead of plotting out a prewritten story for the antagonists in your campaign, learn to let seeing the campaign through the eyes of your villains shape what happens.

PREPARE TO IMPROVISE

Focus your preparation on the tools and materials that help you put the game together at the table when you run it. Avoid fragile adventure scenarios that require the characters to go only one way or risk having the whole adventure fall apart. Prepare for your game, run your game, and look back at what material helped you and what could have been omitted. Split your prep into components you can put together in different ways depending on how things go during the game. Take note of which tools help you improvise during your game, then keep those tools handy.

PAY ATTENTION TO PACING

Good pacing keeps your games exciting, with players on the edge of their collective seat waiting to find out what happens next. Bad pacing can make everyone miserable or feeling as if they want to go to sleep. Pacing is more than just keeping the action fast-paced, though. It's about the oscillation between upward and downward beats (see that section in chapter 5, "The Lazy GM's Toolbox"). Good pacing is about knowing how to move things forward when they slow down, knowing when it's time to give the characters a break, and knowing when it's time to fan the flames. Watch the clock, take note of the responses of your players, and focus on the tools that help you change the pacing of the game to make it as much fun as possible.

FOCUS ON YOUR NEXT GAME

It's easy to let your ideas run away with you and start writing an extensive outline for the campaign you want to run. Our creative minds can sometimes run wild with concepts for big multiyear campaign arcs. Sometimes this can help provide a direction for a campaign (see chapter 5, "Build and Run a Lazy Campaign"), but the elements of a campaign can change quickly depending on the situation in the game—and sometimes out of it.

Instead, focus on the one game you know is going to happen—your next one. Focus your attention on the specific things you need for the next session you're going to run, with an emphasis on what you need to feel comfortable sitting at the table (virtual or physical) surrounded by your friends and running a fun game. Worry about the sessions to follow only after you're done with that next session. Follow the eight steps to build the components you need for your next game. Then use any extra creative energy to think about how the world reacts to the characters' previous actions.

REINFORCED THROUGH PREP

You'll find through lines throughout the rest of this book connected to the tips in this chapter. How you'll prepare your game and how you'll run your game often ties back to these tips. These concepts can stand firmly in your mind, but how you use them is what really matters.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- Consider these top tips from many different GMs, with centuries of combined experience running tabletop roleplaying games.
- Let the story unfold at the table.
- Build situations and see what happens.
- Focus on the characters.
- Build from the characters outward.
- See through the eyes of your villains.
- Prepare to improvise.
- Pay attention to pacing.
- Focus on your next game.

CHAPTER 4

THE EIGHT STEPS OF LAZY GEMEMASTER PREP

This chapter sets out and summarizes the eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep—a framework to help you prepare for the next session of your roleplaying game, and the backbone of all the other advice in this book. The eight chapters following this one dive into the details of each step to explore their full breadth and depth. Later in the book, you'll find chapters describing how to customize the eight steps depending on the type of adventure you're running.

WHAT'S CHANGED?

If you're familiar with the eight steps from *Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master*, you'll note that those steps haven't changed. Some have been tweaked, so that we now say "Select Rewards" instead of "Select Magic Item Rewards." For others, the only differences are in the details. For example, the "Outline Potential Scenes" step carries several different potential elements of prep, and the details of the "Develop Fantastic Locations" step expand and contract to support the type of game you're running. These changes are covered in the chapters detailing each of the eight steps.

The eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep have held up since 2018. But what we prep *within* each step can change depending on the RPG we're playing, how long we've been playing it, where our session fits within a campaign, and many other variables. If you're an experienced Lazy Gamemaster, much will seem familiar, but take note of where this book expands the eight steps to suit a wider range of games, styles, and situations.

THE EIGHT STEPS

This section breaks out the eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep, setting up the full discussion in the following chapters.

REVIEW THE CHARACTERS

The player characters are the heroes of your game. They're the focus of the lens of the game. They're the actors in your evolving story who truly matter. Thus, you want to keep the characters foremost in your mind as you prep for your next session. During the "Review the Characters" step, you might review different elements of each character's story—their name, background, class, overall character arc, equipment, mechanical capabilities, dreams and wishes, and anything else that might help center them in the next session you run.

WHY THE EIGHT STEPS WORK

The eight steps of Lazy GM prep work well for two reasons. First, the framework of the eight steps gives you a clear outline of specific things you can do to help you prep your games. Most RPGs offer little specific guidance for game prep, as they don't want to lock themselves into any one given style of play. Roleplaying games give us a limitless sea of creativity for the games we run, but such wide-open waters can prove unnavigable when it comes to knowing what we should prep and how. The eight steps offer a life preserver in those dark waters of RPG prep, providing concrete activities to help you prep for your next game session.

The eight steps also work well for a wide range of RPGs because they focus on the specific elements of the fiction of the game—characters, the session start, scenes, secrets, locations, NPCs, monsters, and rewards. Most RPGs contain these elements, regardless of the mechanics, focus, theme, and flow of the game. And finally, the eight steps of Lazy GM prep work well because they're flexible. You can tailor each step for the kind of game you want to run, adding or eliminating steps depending on your needs. Much of this book is built around showing you how to customize and tailor the eight steps to fit your style and your game.

This step comes first because it helps to guide the rest of your prep in the remaining steps, letting you ask: "Who are the characters and how do they connect with the world in the next session?"

CREATE A STRONG START

As GMs, we have little control over the direction of our games once they're underway, but we can always decide how the game starts. The start of your session is the one scene where you *know* the setup. This is also your chance to draw the players into the world of the story and get things started with a bang. A strong start is a catalyzing event—something action-focused. The driving phrase for the "Create a Strong Start" step is "something happens."

Guide your prep by asking yourself: "What happens at the beginning of our next session to draw the characters into the adventure?"

OUTLINE POTENTIAL SCENES

RPG sessions are a collection of scenes. Sometimes we have a good idea of what scenes will occur in our game. Sometimes not. This step lets you capture things that will happen, things that might happen, options you might put in front of the characters, hooks that might draw the characters into the game, and more.

The “Outline Potential Scenes” step is a great junk drawer to help you capture the components you’ll need to string together the events in your upcoming game, even as you lay out the seeds for the game after that. This step can change significantly depending on what sort of session you’re running.

Guide your prep by asking yourself: “What scenes might occur in the next session?”

DEFINE SECRETS AND CLUES

Secrets and clues might be the most powerful idea you’ll find in this book. Secrets and clues are short pieces of information—usually a sentence or two—that the characters can learn in the next game session. Secrets and clues might include bits of history, information about events taking place, details of forgotten gods, clues about lost treasure, information regarding notable NPCs—any information or lore the characters and the players might find valuable.

A key design element for secrets and clues is that **you don’t define where or how the characters learn them.** Rather, you improvise their discovery during the game. The information you craft during the “Define Secrets and Clues” step might be learned by characters studying ancient mosaics on a temple wall, hearing rumors from NPCs, having lore revealed in a dream, reading clues on dusty parchments, and in many other potential ways.

Guide your prep by asking yourself: “What ten secrets might the characters learn in the next session?”

DEVELOP FANTASTIC LOCATIONS

Every event in your game happens somewhere. Every scene takes place in a location, whether a room in a sprawling dungeon or at a table in an old inn. You note these locations and what makes them interesting in the “Develop Fantastic Locations” step. The amount of detail you include and the resolution or depth you use to denote locations changes depending on your needs. Sometimes all you need is the evocative name of a dungeon. Other times, you might want to note several fantastic features the characters can use in a detailed battle arena.

Sometimes locations are a bunch of one-or-two-word descriptions of potential chambers in a larger dungeon. You can often abstract a location from the NPCs or monsters who dwell there (developed during the next two steps), so that you can decide during the game who

might inhabit a location based on the evolving story and the pacing of the game.

Guide your prep by asking: “What fantastic locations might the characters visit in the next session?”

OUTLINE IMPORTANT NPCs

Throughout your games, the player characters interact with nonplayer characters (NPCs). In the “Outline Important NPCs” step, you list notable NPCs, capturing their names and any details you might need to run them at the table. This might include a few words on their history, appearance, background, or motivations, but sometimes a name is all you need.

Guide your prep by asking: “What NPCs might the characters meet in the next session?”

CHOOSE RELEVANT MONSTERS

The term “monsters” can be used to include any antagonists in your game, from NPCs with a sinister agenda to actual monsters. In the “Choose Relevant Monsters” step, you note any monsters the characters might run into in the next session. Sometimes this might be a short random list of potential assailants. Sometimes it’s a more detailed description of creatures making up a



WHERE TO WRITE YOUR NOTES

One of the great features of the eight-steps framework is that it's completely tool agnostic. Whether you use online software, a word processor, a notes app on your phone, or a physical notebook, the eight steps of Lazy GM prep support whatever tools you prefer to use. As such, consider using tools that fit the simplicity and speed the eight steps offer. The more complicated your tools, the harder it can be to prep.

I find that a simple digital notes application I can use on my laptop and phone works fine for me, and I still print my notes on a single sheet of paper for every session I run. In times past, I wrote my notes in a small pocket notebook I took everywhere, and I could still do so easily today. The main message of the eight steps—preparing only what you need to stay flexible and improvise during your game—is just as appropriate when choosing the tools we use to implement those steps. Keep things simple and focus on your game.

larger force. You can include page numbers referencing the stat blocks of monsters next to these names so that you can easily reference them during play.

Working with the other eight steps, you can improvise encounters by determining which monsters show up in which scenes at which location, depending on the circumstances of the story, the pacing of the game, or even a random roll of a die.

Guide your prep by asking: “What monsters might the characters face in the next session?”

SELECT REWARDS

At different points in the game, characters earn some sort of reward for their efforts. Such a reward might be renown and glory, or a magic item, or big piles of gold. In the “Select Rewards” step, you outline any rewards the characters might acquire.

Treasure often matters a lot to players, and it's worth your time to prepare that treasure. Sometimes you'll do so randomly, but you might pick specific rewards depending on the situation — perhaps after asking the players for “wish lists” of what they might want their characters to acquire. As with some of the other steps, you can decide when and where to include rewards depending on what happens in the game.

Guide your prep by asking: “What rewards might the characters receive in the next session?”

A FOCUSED, FLEXIBLE, AND CUSTOMIZABLE FRAMEWORK

The true value of the eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep is how those steps let you get a handle on what you need to do to prepare your game. You need not follow these steps rigidly. Hold on with a loose grip. Use the steps that help you prepare your game. Ignore steps that don't help. Change the steps and what you include in them to support your next game session.

The eight steps are a solid, flexible checklist that lets you focus the limitless possibilities of an RPG into manageable preparation for the next game you're going to run. These steps serve you, not the other way around. You owe them nothing. They exist only to help you run your game.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- The eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep are broken out as follows, and explored fully in the next chapters:
- Review the characters
- Create a strong start
- Outline potential scenes
- Define secrets and clues
- Develop fantastic locations
- Outline important NPCs
- Choose relevant monsters
- Select rewards

CHAPTER 14

FIND AND MAINTAIN A GREAT GROUP

Finding a great group of players who can regularly and reliably carve out the time to play a roleplaying game is notoriously the hardest part of the RPG hobby. Throughout the history of the game, this problem has persisted. Even with the explosion of online play and digital tools, finding and maintaining a great RPG group remains a challenge. This chapter offers tips and tools to help you build an awesome group, whose members can hopefully enjoy playing games together for years and decades to come.

WHERE TO FIND PLAYERS

For fifty years, GMs have shared the best places to find players for their games. Here's a list of some of the most common types of prospective players:

- Family members
- Friends
- Friends of friends
- Coworkers
- Fellow students at schools and universities
- Fellow players met at local game shops
- Fellow players met at local community centers, libraries, and other places for in-person play
- Fellow players met on online forums and message boards

MAKE YOUR DESIRE KNOWN

One of the best ways to find players is to simply let folks know about your interest in the hobby. Talk about it. Mention it in passing conversations at work or school. Don't be embarrassed by your love of gaming, and don't be shy. Nerd stuff is cool these days and roleplaying games have never been more popular. Sometimes you'll run into people who know nothing about RPGs, but many will have at least heard of *Dungeons & Dragons* or other games. Either way, you'll eventually find people who love to play and who *want* to play.

FINDING THE RIGHT PLAYERS FOR YOUR TABLE

Finding players is hard to start with, but finding the *right* players can be even harder. Different players and different GMs have different desires for the games they play. Some want brutal survival-based games while others want games of high fantasy and character-driven stories. Some want heavily narrative-focused games while others

want deep tactical combat simulators. It can take time to figure out which system and style you prefer, even while recognizing that some systems support many styles. Once you know what style of game you want to run, you'll want to make sure the players you're considering want that style as well.

The easiest way to gauge a player's desires is to ask them. Write a list of questions to gauge the interest of prospective players, making use of or drawing inspiration from the example questions below. The key to these questions is that there are no right or wrong answers. You're trying to figure out potential players' preferred style of play before you commit to a game, not trying to catch them with "gotcha" questions.

One important thing to remember about inviting players to your games is that **it is much harder to remove a player who isn't working out than it is to stop them from joining in the first place**. Rejecting people from any group is typically painful for everyone involved. So to prevent that, try to identify when a player isn't a good fit for your game before you've both committed to a long-term seat at the table.

For many, it's also important to keep personal safety in mind. When seeking new players, consider meeting up and playing in public places, and allowing a new player to bring a friend when you do so.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR NEW PLAYERS

When talking to potential players about their play style and interests, you can ask questions in person or in an email or other electronic format. The following questions are examples of the sorts of things you might ask:

- Are you able to play regularly at the same time?
- What RPGs do you enjoy? What systems do you not enjoy?
- How would you rank the following aspects of RPGs from the most to the least enjoyable for you?
 - Roleplaying
 - Exploration
 - Narrative ("theater of the mind") combat
 - Tactical combat
 - Character backstory
 - Campaign storylines
 - Getting together with friends
 - Mechanical character options
- What do you enjoy the most when playing RPGs?



- What do you enjoy the least?
- What do you look for in a good GM?
- What are examples of bad games you've played in? What went wrong?
- What's one of your favorite memories from a previous game?
- What's something in a previous game that didn't work out?

These questions aren't perfect for every player or every group, so customize your own set of questions to support the style of game you're running. In some cases, the RPG you're running will filter out players who aren't interested in that system, so be sure to mention that. If you have particular styles of play you know you want to use, ask if players are interested in those styles too. For example, you might want to ensure that players are okay running at least some battles using theater of the mind combat if that's a play style you like. If you have more or less interest in deep tactical combat, talking about that will often get players to self-select out of your group with no harm done.

RUN SINGLE-SESSION OR SHORT-TERM GAMES

A great way to see if a player is a good fit for your group is to actually play with them. Single-session games have a low commitment but can still give you a feel for how

MANAGING PEOPLE ISN'T FAIR, BUT IT IS NECESSARY

Fair or not, as a GM, you'll often find yourself in the position of managing the people at your table. This means handling personal conflicts, ensuring that one or more players don't dominate the spotlight, making sure everyone's comfortable with the material in the story, and so on. You can delegate some duties to other players—such as scheduling—but most parts of your game, you're just going to have to manage.

When handling personal conflicts, focus on the problem, not the person. Deescalate tension as much as possible and talk to people one-on-one instead of in a group so they don't feel ganged up on. Sometimes, however, you might find yourself in the position of handling harassment or other unacceptable behavior. Manage those situations swiftly and protect those who need protecting.

a player plays at the table. Sometimes one session isn't enough to get a full picture, so think about running a short-term campaign of two to four sessions. That should be enough time to determine whether a player will be a good fit for your group.

Run these intro games outside of your regularly scheduled long-term campaign if you have one. If you can, include players from your regular group and ask their thoughts about the new potential player as well. Again, it's much less disruptive to not invite a player to your regular group than to ask them to leave the group later.

FIND AND FILTER PLAYERS ONLINE

Finding players for online games can be a bigger challenge than inviting players to an in-person game. Playing online lets you cast a much wider potential net for players, since geography is less of an issue (though time zones can be an extra complication). But because of general internet anonymity and a lower level of commitment, the behavior of some online players can be challenging.

Because of these potential behavior issues, you'll want to focus even more on initial interviews, ask questions about prospective players' goals and desires for their games, and try out single-session or short-term games before you invite someone to a regular campaign.

MAINTAIN A REGULAR SCHEDULE

The challenge of maintaining a regular RPG group is exacerbated if you don't have a regular time scheduled to play. The best approach is often to select a specific day of the week and a specific time for a regular three-to-four-hour game, then play with whoever can make it. The more

you reinforce a regular time, the easier it is for players to block that time in their schedule and commit to a regular game.

You can also consider running shorter games that don't require as much of a commitment. A two- or three-hour game might be easier for players to fit into a once-a-week schedule than a four-hour game.

RUN WITH MISSING PLAYERS

If you always require every player to be at every game, you might cancel more games than you run. Instead, run your game whenever you have enough players to play. During your session zero, ensure that all of your players recognize and agree that the game rolls on if anyone is missing (see chapter 5, "Run a Session Zero").

Games often thrive with somewhere between four and six players. You can get away with fewer players (even as few as one!) but most groups work best with four players. With more than six players, the game becomes much harder to run, with less time focused on each player around the table.

If you build a group of six players, being able to run even if one or two players can't make it means you'll run more games. Missing players can catch up with the game when they return, and their characters can fade into the background when the player isn't there. Try not to tie the story of your game so tightly to a single character that a missing player throws the whole adventure off. This isn't always possible, but do your best and your game will work out better for it.

RECRUIT ON-CALL PLAYERS

Another trick for a more flexible and consistent group is to have "on-call" players. These are players who can't commit to a regular seat at the table but still want to play from time to time. When one of your regular players can't make it, you can call one of your on-call players to step in. Having one or two such players interested in your game works well.

If you have a consistent group already but someone else approaches you with interest in your game, explain to them the concept of being an on-call player. In most

cases, potential players understand the idea of being an on-call player and don't view it as a negative.

If one of your regular players starts to miss too many games, have a conversation with them about becoming an on-call player instead. Explain that moving them to on-call status isn't a matter of their behavior or any other aspect of the game. It's simply about giving a regular seat to someone who can be there more consistently. This is a potentially sensitive conversation to have, but doing so can help you build a fantastic, reliable, and flexible group.

If the concept of on-call players seems strange to your group, explain the situation so that the players understand why you can't just swamp the table with seven or eight regular players. Most people recognize that having too many players makes the game worse for everyone.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- Finding and maintaining a great group is one of the hardest parts of the RPG hobby.
- Look for players among family members, friends, friends of friends, coworkers, and fellow students; at game shops, community centers, or libraries; and on online forums.
- Let people around you know of your passion for RPGs. Players might come to you looking to join a game.
- When considering a new player, ask questions to gauge what type of game they might want to play. For online play, pay special attention to players who might have more anonymity and less commitment.
- Build a list of questions to gauge prospective players' play styles and desires.
- Run single-session games or short-term campaigns with new players to feel them out before inviting them to a long-term campaign or ongoing group.
- Maintain a regular weekly schedule when possible. Aim for three- or four-hour games.
- Aim for six regular full-time players. Play even if only three or four players can make it. Let missing characters fade into the background.
- Recruit one or two "on-call" players who can fill in when you have a seat free.

CHAPTER 16

BUILD AND RUN A LAZY CAMPAIGN

Single-session games are a great way to enjoy an RPG without a big commitment, but long-term campaigns can build stories that last a lifetime. Long-term campaigns can last for as few as four or five sessions or go on for years—even decades. These campaigns often include large and evolving storylines, high stakes, and deep character growth for both the player characters and the GM's villains and other NPCs.

RPG campaigns come in different flavors. Some groups prefer open-ended player-directed campaigns where the characters seek their own goals and the GM builds the path in front of them as they go. Sometimes referred to as sandbox-style or “West Marches”-style games, these campaigns let the players drive the direction of the game while the Gamemaster builds the world out according to the directions the players choose. (There's more to a true West Marches-style game, such as player-driven scheduling, shifting groups, and sometimes shared worlds, but that topic goes beyond the scope of this book.)

Some RPG campaigns follow an overarching story with clear beats the characters are intended to follow, moving from one to the next. Published campaign adventures often include these big-beat storylines as individual chapters in a large campaign book. The characters are intended to navigate through the storyline from the first chapter to the last as the story moves forward.

Other campaigns offer a mix of styles, often presenting a clear overarching campaign goal for the characters to move toward, but with many possible ways to get there. These campaigns have a specific goal, but they don't map out how the characters are meant to reach that goal, with the direction of the campaign evolving based on the players' and characters' decisions. This campaign model fits well with the Lazy GM style, and it's the one we're going to focus on in this chapter. However, many of the ideas discussed here work well for many different campaign styles.

A campaign model built around a specific goal with several possible paths to reach that goal works well with homebrew campaigns set in published campaign settings, but it can work equally well when running fully in a published setting or running homebrew adventures in your own setting (talked about in chapter \$, “Lazy World Building”).

There are many ways to prepare a campaign, but this chapter offers a five-step process intended to fit the ethos of the Lazy Gamemaster. It does so by focusing on preparing only what you need to run your campaign, and

on building a story that evolves the more you play. The major steps of this process include:

- Building a campaign seed (this chapter)
- Writing a short campaign guide for your players (chapter \$)
- Running a session zero (chapter \$)
- Filling out your lazy campaign (chapter \$)
- Optionally, building out more of your world (chapter \$, “Lazy World Building”)

CHOOSE YOUR WORLD

Where does the campaign take place? What world is it in? Some RPGs have their own built-in world, while others expect you to either create your own or use a published world. Campaign worlds usually detail such things as:

- Notable locations
- Geography
- History
- Politics
- Factions (political, religious, villainous)
- Pantheons and theology

Many published campaign worlds include even more esoteric information, much of which you won't need to get your campaign started. But whether you're using a published world or creating your own, make sure it has what you do need.

HOMEBREW ADVENTURES IN A PUBLISHED WORLD

The laziest way to fill out a world is to build off of one that already exists. The hobby features hundreds of published RPG fantasy worlds from which you can choose the location of your campaign. These highly polished

CONSIDER SHORTER CAMPAIGNS

When thinking about long-term campaigns, you might be drawn to imagine a campaign that goes on for years. Don't discount the value of shorter long-term campaigns, though—ones that might run anywhere from five to twenty sessions. Such campaigns have several advantages:

- They let you develop a more focused story.
- They give you the opportunity to try out character options or optional rules you might not want to work with for years.
- They offer an easier path to trying out a different RPG system, with a lower level of commitment.
- They let you fit more stories into your life.

Great joy can come from running any type of campaign. Consider all your options when choosing what type of campaign to run.

products offer way more information than you're likely to develop for your own custom world. Published campaign settings also feature fantastic art, detailed geography, rich lore for pantheons and histories, and much more—all of which you can easily reskin to make it work for your campaign. Published campaign settings offer tremendous value for the money.

DEFINE THE CAMPAIGN'S HOOK

With a world selected, it's time for a campaign hook—a story beat that the whole rest of the campaign surrounds and focuses on. The hook is what the campaign is about. It's a north star—a way for you and your players to know the goal of the campaign and see some of the directions in which the campaign might go.

Here are ten example campaign hooks, including some from a number of classic fantasy adventures:

- Destroy the vampire Strahd.
- Destabilize the tyrannical Dragon Empire of Midgard.
- Stop the rise of the Queen of Dragons.
- Save the world from the apocalyptic magic of the Second Mourning.
- Save the forest region of the Gloaming from the ooze god Mugdulblub.
- Close the doors of the demon-summoning Black Cathedral.
- Stop the rise of the galaxy-ending entity known as the Fourth Emperor.
- Prevent the expansion of the Ghoul Imperium into Midgard.
- Recover the Key of Worlds before the cult of Ibraxus can do so.
- Prevent the return of the Nameless King.

When you come up with a campaign hook, you're looking for something you can drop in front of the players and the characters at the beginning of your campaign so they know where things are headed. Avoid being too vague in an attempt not to spoil the surprises you might be planning. Let the players know what they're getting into. It's possible, of course, for a campaign's goal to shift as the campaign rolls on. But ideally, you want to put enough of the campaign story in front of the players so they understand what their characters face.

DETAIL THE CAMPAIGN'S TRUTHS

What are the "truths" of your campaign and your world that the players should know before they start thinking about building their characters? What are the important elements of history, politics, environment, and the current situation that matter to them right now,

A LESS-DEFINED CAMPAIGN

The idea of having a clear campaign hook might not work for you, or might not work for every campaign you want to run. Some campaigns focus on the characters simply exploring the world and getting caught up in adventures right in front of them. You might also have an initial campaign hook that evolves or is completed unexpectedly early, leading to a new campaign hook. You still want to be clear with your players what your campaign is about. You don't want to risk having the characters wander about with no idea what they should be doing because your players have no idea what they should be doing. As such, the strong campaign hook is a strong recommendation.

and which will matter in the future? How do the world and characters connect to the campaign's hook?

Think about **three to six truths** that define what makes your campaign different from others. These truths can offer hooks to the players to help them build their characters. They help define this particular story in this particular world. These truths should also help sell this campaign to your players. What promises to make the campaign exciting? Why should the players want to play a game in this campaign?

Be wary of having too many truths or making them too long and complex. Too many truths start to lose their



impact and meaning. Players start to tune out. You want enough truths to define your setting, but not so many that the players start to forget them. Remember that you'll always have time to reveal more secrets in the sessions ahead. Likewise, you don't want vague truths. Each truth should be specific enough to clarify what sets this campaign apart from others.

Here are six truths for a campaign set in the world of the Sly Flourish's *City of Arches* sourcebook:

- A thousand years ago, a tyrannical ruler was banished and cursed so that all memories and visages of him have been wiped from the annals of history. He is now known only as the Nameless King.
- As the former capital of a once-mighty empire, the City of Arches contains dozens of portal archways that once connected different worlds. Now the archways are largely dormant—though some flare to life on occasion. Others are rumored to activate in the proximity of an arch key.
- Sometimes arches activate and beings step through into the world with no memory of who they are or where they came from. A band of sages known as the Archkeepers greet such arrivals with warmth, a promise of safety, and a basket of fine gifts.
- Cultists known as the Knights of the Nameless King believe it's imperative that the nameless tyrant be found and restored to his throne. They operate in ancient ruins, shadowy alleyways, and the parlors of corrupt nobles.
- Though the City of Arches is quite safe aboveground, the shady undercity known as the Lower Reaches is ruled over by loose bands of criminals. Deeper still is the deadly and chaotic ruined city of Sunken Revvia.
- Rumors speak of a single key called the Key of Worlds—a magical artifact able to open any archway in the city to reach any other world. A cult known as the Children of Ibraxus seeks this key to bring their beloved demon prince into the City of Arches.

Like the campaign's main hook, the truths of your campaign should be player facing. They help your players understand the scope and scale of the game you want to run, giving them enough information to tie their characters to in-game events, histories, or situations. One player in a *City of Arches* campaign might want to play a character who has always lived in the wondrous city, while another envisions a character who came through one of the arches. And all the players will be thinking about what drives them to thwart the Knights of the Nameless King or the cult of Ibraxus.

OPTIONALLY DEVELOP PATRONS OR FACTIONS

If you plan on having your players choose a patron or faction during your session zero (see chapter 5), start

NAMES ARE HARD

Asking players to name things doesn't always work out well. Coming up with good names is hard—for both GMs and players. If you find yourself needing to define your world with lots of proper names, seek out good name generators or good lists of random names, then give those to your players ahead of time. That way, whenever you ask a player to define a location, NPC, or other detail of your world, they have a source of good names they can use.

thinking about these patrons or factions during this initial stage of campaign prep. Patrons might represent particular alignments or goals within the world or framework of the campaign. As such, when the characters choose a patron during session zero, they're selecting the general approach of the campaign.

The following example patrons appear in *City of Arches*:

- **Roselyn Zeshe:** The city's spymaster serving the queen (neutral)
- **Garland Willowmane:** Lead archkeeper of the City of Arches (neutral good)
- **Joslyn Halfcloak:** The lieutenant commander of the Golden Knights who watch over the city (lawful good)
- **Adel Rosethorn:** The main fence in the Lower Reaches who works for the criminal guild known as the Black Hand (chaotic neutral)

Choosing a patron doesn't lock the characters exclusively onto one path, but it gives them an initial connection with which to get the campaign started. Alternatively, you can skip the selection of a patron or faction at the start of the campaign, letting the players decide who their characters align with after they've played in the campaign a while.

CONSIDER QUESTIONS FOR PLAYER-DRIVEN WORLD BUILDING

Some game systems encourage player-driven world building—handing the creation of some of the aspects of the larger world to the players. This gives players more direct involvement in the world in which their characters live and travel, and can lead to exciting campaign elements that you might never have come up with on your own.

Instead of leaving player-driven world building open-ended, consider preparing questions to guide the players as they create new locations and lore. Here are some examples:

- Tell us about the thieves' guild your character once belonged to.
- What are some unique features of the inn and tavern in this town?
- What are three interesting nearby adventure locations your character always wanted to explore?

- What nightmares do you imagine lurk beneath the city streets?
- What force fights against the kingdom of this region?
- Tell us about the god of light and the god of darkness.
- What location does your character go to when they want to escape from the bustle of the town?
- Who runs the local blacksmith's shop, and what relation do you have with them?
- What businesses has your character previously worked for?
- What cafe does your character visit each morning?
- What fantastic feature is most notable in this town?

Focused questions help players come up with interesting aspects of the world without coloring too far outside the lines of the campaign you're putting together. Ask questions that steer creativity into areas that support, rather than oppose, the theme of the campaign.

PREPARE A STARTING ADVENTURE

With the first steps of world building done, you and your group are now ready for your first adventure. The first adventure for your campaign should be short and focused, getting you and the players familiar with the world, the game system (if it's not one your group is familiar with already), the campaign, the player characters, and each other.

Keep your starting adventure simple. An NPC gives a quest to the characters to go somewhere and do something. The "NPCs and Patrons" section in appendix B includes a number of quest seeds that can be easily modified to fit your world, setting, and system. You can even skip the quest-giving part and jump right into the adventure, explaining that the characters have already received the quest.

You won't be able to fill out all eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep for this first adventure, since you don't know who the characters are yet. But you can prepare enough to run a short one- or two-hour adventure at the end of your session zero.

Here are ten possible introductory adventure scenarios to get your campaign started:

- The characters fall down a sinkhole full of skeletons.
- The characters witness a robbery by a bunch of bandits.
- The characters are attacked by brigands on their way back to the starting location.
- The characters are already in the process of exploring an old ruin and attempting to disrupt an evil ritual.

- The characters start out in an arena, fighting for their lives.
- The characters wake up in a cell after having been captured.
- The characters find their hometown under attack.
- The characters witness travelers attacked by monsters.
- The characters hear a voice pleading for help from down in the sewers.
- The characters defend innocents from a summoned foe.
- The characters are dug up out of a charnel pit by grave robbers.

As the game evolves, you'll switch to a more open quest model (explored in chapters \$ through \$). But to keep things simple up front, focus on a single quest and a single adventure to get started.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- Building a lazy campaign involves several steps (covered in the following chapters): developing an initial campaign seed, writing a short campaign guide for your players, running a session zero, and filling out your campaign to make it ready to run adventures.
- Choose a campaign world, potentially including one of many published campaign worlds that offer a great deal of material you can use or reskin.
- Define your campaign's hook by writing down a single story beat that defines the goal and directions of the campaign for you and the players.
- Write down three to six truths for your campaign that define it and clarify how it differs from other campaigns.
- Optionally prepare a handful of patrons or factions the characters might align themselves with.
- Optionally consider and prepare questions to guide the players as they help build out parts of the world.
- Prepare a short one- to two-hour adventure to get your campaign started at the end of your session zero.

ADVENTURE TYPES

For fifty years, companies big and small have published thousands of adventures to run in our tabletop roleplaying games, with millions more homebrew adventures created by Gamemasters to run for their groups. The full range of RPG adventures spans countless narrative universes, taking characters to the very furthest reaches of the collective human imagination.

Still, some adventures work better than others.

Rather than getting lost in the infinite planes of possible adventures, though, we're going to spend the next few chapters discussing specific adventure types. These adventure types commonly appear across multiple RPGs and for good reason—they work. All of the adventure types under discussion share a few key qualities:

- They're easy to get our heads around. Based on the adventure's type, we intuitively understand its intent and structure.
- They offer freedom for the players and their characters to make meaningful choices, which can evolve the scenario in ways that we as the GM can't always predict.
- They let us focus our prep, and yet are open and flexible enough to build unique and fantastic stories.

Few adventures fall cleanly into a single type. Chapter 5, "Mash-Ups and Undefined Adventures," discusses how most sessions we prep aren't going to follow a specific adventure type, or end up being a mash-up of several adventure types. But it's still worth understanding each adventure type to see what it offers and to gauge how each type differs from the others.

Adventures built from a particular type usually don't fit perfectly within a single game session. Some sessions might include components from multiple adventure types, while some adventure types might span multiple sessions. A session might start off with a bit of roleplay and intrigue, then turn into an overland journey, and then transform into a dungeon crawl. The next few sessions might stay in that dungeon crawl until a final combat-focused boss battle. However they play out, though, adventure types give us a meaningful structure to understand how these paradigms for gameplay can work at the table.

ADVENTURE TYPES

Each of the following adventure types are explored in detail in the chapters ahead.

Scene-Based. This common adventure type sees the characters navigate a series of scenes. Each scene takes a party through one or more locations, dealing with individual situations and talking to NPCs, facing monsters, or exploring the location while attempting to complete one or more quests. Think of this as a "default" adventure type.

Dungeon Crawl. Dungeon crawl adventures primarily follow the characters as they explore ancient ruins, old crypts, decaying castles, or other places mostly abandoned by intelligent inhabitants. Dungeon crawls are a common scenario in which characters push through ruins, fight monsters, and collect treasures, often while seeking to accomplish a specific higher-level goal.

Infiltration and Heist. In these adventures, the characters infiltrate an inhabited location to accomplish a specific goal, often using stealth or subterfuge to avoid confrontation. Like dungeon crawls, infiltration and heist adventures focus on a location. Unlike dungeon crawls, infiltrations and heists have a greater focus on the goal, the characters' plans, the evolving behavior of the inhabitants of the location, and the complications that arise as the characters get closer to their goal.

Investigation and Mystery. Adventures of this type follow the characters as they uncover information, often in several locations and through interactions with numerous NPCs. Investigations and mysteries put a heavy focus on secrets and clues, ensuring that the characters learn what they need to let them follow through with the adventure regardless of their path of investigation.

Overland Exploration and Travel. Adventures of this type see the characters journey from one place to another. Such adventures can be short, focusing on a single encounter as the characters travel. Or they might run longer as the characters choose from several paths and destinations, often by traversing a series of hexes on a detailed map (a hex crawl) or navigating paths between locations with or without a map (a point crawl).

Roleplay and Intrigue. These adventures focus primarily on interacting with NPCs, learning information from them, and convincing those NPCs to follow a particular path or goal. While roleplay and intrigue adventures focus heavily on character-to-NPC interaction, they can include elements of exploration and combat as well.

DON'T GET CAUGHT UP WITH NAMES OR DEFINITIONS

The way this book names and defines these adventure types isn't universally accepted. You might have a different way to break up and think about these types of adventures, how to label them, what separates them from each other, and what sorts of materials and preparation go into adventures of different types. That's totally cool. There's still lots of value to be gained from the material you'll find in these chapters, so mentally translate labels and definitions as you go, and focus on how the approaches and advice discussed here can help support your games.

Combat. Combat adventures primarily focus on the characters facing one or more battles, or multiple waves of combatants in a big battle.

Defense. Defense adventures see the characters defending a location, typically by setting up defenses, working with NPCs, or seeking to thwart a group of attackers before they have a chance to go on the offensive.

Mash-Ups and Undefined Adventures. A final chapter in this section covers adventure types that don't fit the common models above or that include elements of multiple adventure types.

A COMMON APPROACH

Each of the adventure types discussed in the following chapters is broken down as follows:

Understanding the Adventure Type. Each chapter begins by describing the adventure type and discussing what separates it from other types of adventures.

Prepping the Adventure Type. This section discusses general preparation for an adventure of this type, and specific approaches to using the eight steps of Lazy GM prep.

Running the Adventure Type. Each adventure type breaks out the typical process for running adventures of that type at your table.

Common Pitfalls. This section describes common pitfalls with this type of adventure and how to avoid or mitigate those pitfalls.

BUILT FOR CHOICE AND AGENCY

A good RPG adventure offers interesting and meaningful choices to your players and gives the characters the agency to make those choices. Too often, we hear about adventures where the characters have no real choices. They're less involved in an ongoing story and more just going along for the ride. Such adventures are often referred to as "railroads," because no matter what options the players and characters pick, the story goes in the same set direction. Each of the adventure types we'll be talking about breaks away from narrative rails to give the characters and their players agency to choose different paths, take different directions, and change the story based on the choices they make.

A FOCUS ON LAZY CHOICES

Different RPGs have differing opinions on how to run the adventure types we'll be talking about—or might not even consider some of them to be valid types of adventures at all. Likewise, lots of GMs have their own opinions. For the purpose of discussion, though, the next nine chapters take an opinionated approach built around the following philosophy: the structure you choose for an adventure should give you the best outcome for the effort you put into the adventure.

This philosophy is something for all of us to strive for as GMs. Almost certainly, none of us will get it perfect. But that goal of seeking the easiest way to bring open-ended, improv-focused gameplay to our tabletop RPGs is the one we're aiming for.

CHOOSING AN ADVENTURE TYPE

You might choose an adventure type for your ongoing game in a number of ways. If your next session is already headed in a particular direction, you might realize that direction is a perfect fit for one adventure type or another. Maybe the party is headed toward an old ruin to pick up a key they need to open the door to a locked vault. Sounds like a dungeon crawl! Or maybe your group plans to head across a vast wilderness from one city to another. Sounds like overland exploration and travel!

Other times, you might not yet have a scenario in mind and can go through the adventure types to gauge which one might be fun. Has your group already spent a number of sessions delving into dungeons? Maybe it's time for an investigation and mystery adventure, or perhaps roleplay and intrigue. Have you spent a lot of time in recent sessions running big conversations and negotiations? It might be time for a combat-focused adventure.

Treat the adventure types as a menu of options if you don't already have something in mind, or read through each type to see what you can add to—or what problems you might avoid in—adventures you're already planning to run.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- A number of classic adventure types can provide well-tested frameworks around which you can build your own fantastic adventures.
- Adventure types include scene-based, dungeon crawl, infiltration and heist, investigation and mystery, overland exploration and travel, roleplay and intrigue, combat, and defense, as well as mash-ups and undefined adventures.
- The discussion of each adventure type is built around player choice and character agency, and the philosophy that a chosen adventure type should give you the best outcome for the effort you put into the adventure.
- Each of the following chapters details these adventure types, discussing how to prep them, how to run them, what common pitfalls you might run into, and how to avoid those pitfalls.
- Choose an adventure type that fits the scenario you already plan to run, or treat the adventure types as a menu of options when deciding the direction for your game.

CHAPTER 25

DUNGEON CRAWL

In a dungeon crawl adventure, the characters explore locations room by room, facing challenges, foes, and NPCs along the way. The characters often also seek to accomplish a goal while delving into a dungeon, even if that goal is simply to acquire wealth. The inhabitants of a dungeon crawl often include unintelligent creatures, or intelligent creatures operating independently or in small groups. Unlike with an infiltration and heist adventure (see chapter \$), it's usually not important how the inhabitants of a dungeon behave, and the characters likely won't need to engage in continual subterfuge as they explore.

Dungeon crawls offer an excellent combination of a refined area you can focus on with your prep, and an adventure type providing lots of options for the players and characters to choose their path. Adventures of this type also usually feature a high focus on action.

PREPPING A DUNGEON CRAWL

Since a dungeon crawl often focuses on a location, start with a map that fits the theme of the dungeon you're going to run. See "Develop Fantastic Locations" in chapter \$ for guidelines on picking maps and selecting locations, and check out the maps in Appendix \$ to see if they serve your needs.

The map you choose depends on the type of dungeon you're running. The Dungeon Locations table breaks out a number of classic potential dungeon sites.

DUNGEON LOCATIONS

| d20 | Location |
|-----|-------------------------|
| 1 | Ruined watchtower |
| 2 | Decrepit crypts |
| 3 | Crumbling keep |
| 4 | Ancient cairn |
| 5 | Giant statue |
| 6 | Dank caves |
| 7 | Festering sewers |
| 8 | Unholy temple |
| 9 | Forgotten mines |
| 10 | Haunted mansion |
| 11 | Decaying dungeon |
| 12 | Derelict ship |
| 13 | Unstable wizard's tower |
| 14 | Sunken passages |
| 15 | Infested hive |
| 16 | Lightless subcellars |
| 17 | Fetid cisterns |
| 18 | Moldering library |
| 19 | Cramped tunnels |
| 20 | Fallen palace |

To save time and energy, use existing maps instead of drawing your own—but don't spend too much time looking for the perfect map. Instead, grab the first map that suits the theme of the dungeon you plan to run. Consider those with multiple entrances, different ways to explore, and secret passages and rooms.

THE EIGHT STEPS

To support a dungeon crawl adventure, you can customize the eight steps of Lazy GM prep in any of the following ways.

Review the Characters. Think about what each character brings to a dungeon crawl. What traits and features help them deal with the denizens of a dungeon? Do the characters have any features that help them more easily navigate or reconnoiter the dungeon? What might each character know or learn about the dungeon as they explore?

Think about the characters in the context of the dungeon crawl you plan to run as a means of helping you build an adventure that's fun for your whole group.

Create a Strong Start. If you're at the beginning of an adventure or quest involving a dungeon crawl, you can choose any number of ways to start strong and get the characters into the dungeon. Use the Dungeon Crawl Strong Starts table to get your adventure going, or to inspire your own introduction to a dungeon.

DUNGEON CRAWL STRONG STARTS

| d20 | Start |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Denizens of the dungeon attack a local village. |
| 2 | Someone comes looking for adventurers to save a loved one lost in the dungeon. |
| 3 | A premonition brings harrowing visions to one of the characters, showing the dangers preparing to spill out from the dungeon. |
| 4 | The characters find a dead treasure hunter with a map to the dungeon. |
| 5 | A sinkhole opens up beneath the characters, sending them into the dungeon. |
| 6 | The daytime sky turns black and a sage explains that the only thing that can prevent a coming doom is the recovery of lost magic hidden in the dungeon. |
| 7 | The characters receive a letter from a friend describing the dungeon and a quest they need undertaken. |
| 8 | One of the characters has a vision of a powerful weapon found deep within the dungeon. |
| 9 | A local kid dares the characters to enter the dungeon and recover an old coin from its forgotten treasury. |
| 10 | The tormented spirit of an adventurer slain in an ancient ruin begs the characters to undo the corruption of that site. |

A dungeon crawl often runs for more than a single session of play. The In-Dungeon Strong Starts table can be used (or used as inspiration) when the session begins with the characters already in a dungeon.

IN-DUNGEON STRONG STARTS

| d10 | Start |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Monsters attack. |
| 2 | The characters discover a hidden chamber providing respite. |
| 3 | The characters hear creatures lurking nearby that must be avoided. |
| 4 | Part of the dungeon collapses, revealing new passageways. |
| 5 | A lost explorer stumbles into the characters. |
| 6 | The characters witness a nosy spirit. |
| 7 | One of the characters springs a trap. |
| 8 | One of the characters notices frescoes hidden beneath the dust covering a wall. |
| 9 | The characters discover their provisions are spoiling unnaturally quickly. |
| 10 | The characters hear creatures roaring deeper within the dungeon. |

One of the easiest tricks for a strong start in a dungeon is to end the previous session right before a confrontation with enemies. Ending before a fight gives you a clear strong start for your next game and keeps the players excited over what's to come.

Outline Potential Scenes. Trying to outline every possible scene in an adventure isn't useful for a dungeon crawl, because you never know what direction the characters might take while exploring the dungeon. Instead, note the big scenes you know will take place during the dungeon crawl. This might be limited to just the dungeon entrance and the boss's chamber if there is one, but could also include any other major chamber or area critical to the goal of the adventure.

Write down the characters' goal for the dungeon crawl in this step, and reiterate it often so the players don't forget why they're exploring. Dungeons are dangerous places. Smart people wouldn't go into such places without good reason. What's that reason?

Define Secrets and Clues. Secrets and clues add flavor and valuable information to a dungeon crawl. Keeping secrets and clues separate from their method of discovery means you can drop in the right information at the right time and under ideal circumstances, letting the characters explore the dungeon however they choose.

Dungeons offer lots of ways to present secrets and clues, including the suggestions on the Dungeon Crawl Secrets and Clues Sources table.

DUNGEON CRAWL SECRETS AND CLUES SOURCES

| d10 | Source |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Ancient mosaics, reliefs, or frescoes on the wall |
| 2 | Dusty tomes |
| 3 | Whispering spirits |
| 4 | Lost treasure hunters |
| 5 | Crumbling statues |
| 6 | Talkative opponents |
| 7 | Shrines to forgotten gods |
| 8 | Engravings on ancient weapons |
| 9 | The style of armor worn by crumbling skeletons |
| 10 | Inscriptions on sarcophagi or gravestones |

Develop Fantastic Locations. Instead of putting down details for every room in your dungeon, keep a short list of chambers in your location notes. You don't have to fill out every room, but making notes for each major, notable room can be helpful. Even then, two or three interesting features per room is often enough.

For an even lazier approach, jot down a list of potential chambers and improvise each room as you run your dungeon crawl. This saves you from having to identify every room in a large dungeon even as it lets you set out an exciting path as the characters explore the dungeon.

The list of potential chambers by dungeon location in appendix \$ can provide inspiration when you're having trouble thinking up potential rooms in a dungeon.

Outline Important NPCs. Make note of any important NPCs the characters might meet in the dungeon. Be sure to include helpful NPCs in a dungeon crawl, not just enemies. Otherwise, the whole dungeon can feel like a slog of one battle after another (see "Upward and Downward Beats" in "The Lazy GM's Toolbox," chapter \$).

Use any of the options from the Dungeon Crawl NPCs table to create potentially helpful NPCs the characters might run into during a dungeon adventure.

WHAT IS A DUNGEON?

This book defines a dungeon as any multiroom environment that the characters navigate room-by-room. Often, dungeons are derelict or decrepit, having been something else before their eventual ruin. The main difference between a dungeon and other multiroom locations, including those in an infiltration and heist adventure, is that the occupants in a dungeon aren't typically all part of the same faction. This means the gameplay in a dungeon crawl typically follows the characters from room to room as they deal with focused challenges, rather than taking an overall stealthy approach toward a larger goal.



DUNGEON CRAWL NPCs

| d20 | NPCs |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Wary ghosts |
| 2 | Wounded allies |
| 3 | Tricky thieves |
| 4 | Turncoats |
| 5 | Intelligent magic items |
| 6 | Talking paintings or statues |
| 7 | Divine voices |
| 8 | Greedy mercenaries |
| 9 | Rival adventurers |
| 10 | Talking books |
| 11 | Friendly intelligent monsters |
| 12 | Pacifist undead |
| 13 | Animated musical instruments |
| 14 | Talking dolls |
| 15 | Illusions |
| 16 | Projections |
| 17 | Psychic intrusions |
| 18 | Escaped prisoners |
| 19 | Lost explorers |
| 20 | Friendly servants |

Choose Relevant Monsters. Write down a list of monsters the characters might encounter during your dungeon crawl. Number this list to create a random encounter table, including friendly NPC encounters as well. Choose monsters who make sense for the environment of the dungeon, with some less powerful

than the characters and some more powerful. Then improvise the number of monsters to suit the situation or the beats and pacing of the game while running it (see “Upward and Downward Beats” in chapter \$, “The Lazy GM’s Toolbox”), or roll randomly for the number of monsters if you prefer.

Monsters tougher than the characters are great as long as that makes sense for the story—and if the characters have options to deal with or avoid them. In many cases, the deeper the characters delve into a multilevel dungeon, the more dangerous the monsters become. See “Dungeon Monsters” in appendix B for a list of common fantasy monsters by dungeon level.

Select Rewards. Make note of treasures and rewards the characters might find in the dungeon. You can place a collective treasure hoard in a single location at or near the end of the adventure, or split the rewards up across several different areas. Feel free to mix up random loot and hand-picked items as desired.

RUNNING A DUNGEON CRAWL

When running a dungeon crawl, begin with your strong start as usual. Then reinforce the characters’ goal and get them into the dungeon. Once a dungeon crawl gets underway, it often features a specific process.

Marching Order. Ask how the characters arrange themselves to travel through the dungeon. Who’s up front? Who’s in the back? Write down a list that all the players can see, or arrange miniatures and tokens so everyone can keep track of the characters’ marching order.

Lighting. How do the characters illuminate the dungeon as they explore? Ask the players what light sources they’re using and who’s carrying them. Make note of which characters can see in the dark, and make the players aware of any penalties they might face while doing so. Even if light is plentiful (and that’s a big if for some RPGs), keep in mind that using light makes it much more difficult to move stealthily in darkness.

Dungeon Turns. You might want to implement a general rule that exploring areas of a dungeon takes place in 10-minute turns. Investigating a door for traps, picking locks, looking for secret passages, searching a room—you can group all of these activities into 10-minute turns. As turns go by, you can tick forward a clock (see “Clocks” in “The Lazy GM’s Toolbox,” chapter \$) or roll for random encounters if desired.

Random Encounters. Whatever system you’re running, you can keep up the pressure on the characters by rolling for random encounters. Rolling 1 on a d6 (for less common encounters) or a 1 or 2 on a d6 (for more frequent encounters) might tell you that something is coming. Maybe this something got wind of the characters,

or maybe it's just stumbling by. Either way, ensure that your list of random encounters isn't just combatants. Include noncombat encounters such as the NPCs you've made note of above, or options from the list of upward beat encounters at "Dungeon Crawl Pitfalls" below.

Exploring the Dungeon. Characters can choose many different paths when exploring a dungeon. Instead of building specific scenes in each dungeon chamber or area, use your lists of locations, secrets and clues, NPCs, and monsters to improvise scenes as they come up. The lists you make while working with the eight steps of Lazy GM prep give you the flexibility to decide how the denizens of the dungeon behave given the actions of the characters, and to choose situations that offer the most fun for your game.

Trap Detection. Understand how your system of choice handles traps and trap detection, and discuss this ahead of time with your players. The lead characters in the party's marching order are likely the ones who will detect traps (one way or another) and searching for traps could take a dungeon turn to complete. Remember that players love discovering traps far more than they love setting them off. As such, traps can be strong vehicles for upward and downward beats. You'll find a trap generator in appendix B.

Resting. Clarify to your players whether they should expect to be able to rest in a dungeon or not. You might explain that shorter rests are possible in safe areas but longer rests are impossible until the characters accomplish their goal. Depending on the goal and the timeline of events in a dungeon, the characters might be able to leave, rest, and return, or they might have to press forward so those events don't get ahead of them.

Boss Chambers. Dungeons often include a boss chamber or area in which the characters face a particularly dangerous foe near the end of their exploration. This scene is worth preparing ahead of time, with an interesting location and useful features for the characters to navigate, multiple types of monsters, possible waves of monsters, and other details to fill it out. For more details on big boss battles, see the "Combat" adventure type in chapter 5.

DUNGEON CRAWL PITFALLS

A few common pitfalls can hinder the success of a dungeon crawl. Being aware of these pitfalls makes it easier to deal with them.

Too Linear. It's tempting to build a dungeon as a series of connected rooms with only one path through them. This limits the characters' options in selecting their own path and removes one of the big advantages of a dungeon crawl—the ability to offer several different paths while still working with a single focused location. Mitigate this pitfall by offering several entrances into the dungeon and several paths to navigate it once the characters are inside.



No Meaningful Direction Choices. Without any useful information, a choice of direction between two different corridors is no real choice at all. If you give the characters the option of three identical doors to move through, that's no different than a single random choice. Instead, make corridors or doors clearly different and give the characters enough information to make meaningful choices about each possible direction.

Any of the options on the Dungeon Crawl Direction Information table can help characters who need to decide which direction in the dungeon to choose.

DUNGEON CRAWL DIRECTION INFORMATION

| d10 | Information |
|-----|---|
| 1 | The air currents are different in each direction. |
| 2 | One direction is warm while the other is cold. |
| 3 | Fresh tracks lead off in one direction but not another. |
| 4 | The walls and ceiling in one direction are falling apart, while another direction is well maintained. |
| 5 | Previous explorers left markings indicating the direction they chose. |
| 6 | Different sounds ring out from different directions. |
| 7 | One path isn't mapped while another is. |
| 8 | Each direction is marked by different lighting. |
| 9 | Strange symbols on the floor mark one direction. |
| 10 | The air smells less foul in one direction than another. |

Too Few entrances. When running a dungeon crawl, include three possible entrances into the dungeon and give the players enough information to locate those three entrances. Then let them decide which entrance they

want their characters to use. Those three entrances might include a guarded front entrance, an entrance higher up that requires flying or climbing, and a hidden entrance full of unknown dangers.

This model of multiple entrances works well for any large location, not just a dungeon crawl. Including three entrances gives the players agency over the party's approach to a dungeon and ensures that you have no predisposed notion to how the characters might make that approach. Multiple entrances also offer the side benefit of reminding you that you have no idea how the adventure is going to go, thus breaking you away from a "railroad" adventure with only one throughline.

Too Many Downward Beats. A dungeon crawl can feel oppressive and frustrating if you run one hard battle after another. The dangerous nature of dungeons makes it easy to inadvertently run a series of downward beats (see "Upward and Downward Beats" in "The Lazy GM's Toolbox," chapter 5). Ensure you include a mixture of easy and hard battles in your dungeon, as well as noncombat encounters. The Dungeon Crawl Upward Beats table offers a number of noncombat "upward beat" encounters that can be worked into any dungeon crawl.

DUNGEON CRAWL UPWARD BEATS

| d10 | Beat |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Meeting a fellow dungeon explorer |
| 2 | Finding an escaped prisoner |
| 3 | Meeting a friendly spirit |
| 4 | Finding a secret chamber useful for a rest |
| 5 | Finding a pool of healing liquid |
| 6 | Getting the drop on some bad guys |
| 7 | Running into weak but overconfident monsters |
| 8 | Locating spyholes looking into other chambers |
| 9 | Finding a hidden cache of treasure |
| 10 | Finding an already-sprung trap |

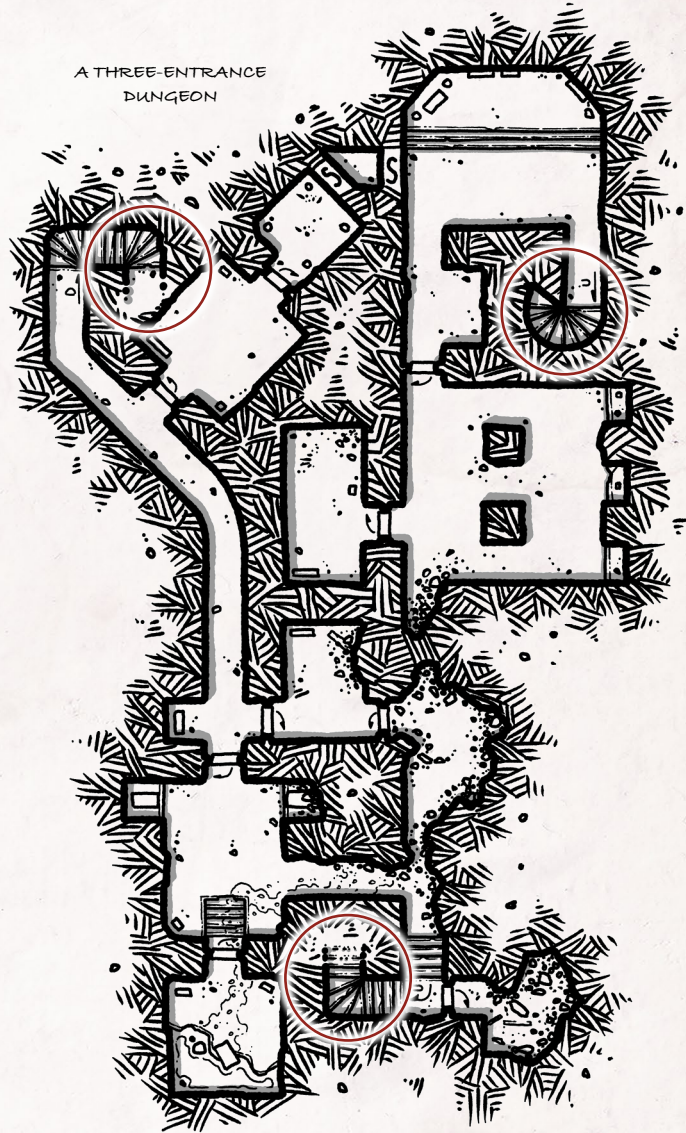
Lack of a Clear Goal. Sometimes players forget why their characters have bothered to go into a dungeon, or feel as if they never had a good enough reason to delve into such a dangerous location in the first place. Ensure that the players and characters have a clear goal and quest worthy of the dangers a dungeon poses, then reiterate that goal. Work it into the beginning of each session, and more often if needed. The "NPCs and Patrons" section in appendix B has a list of possible quest goals.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- Dungeon crawls offer the opportunity for high action, meaningful choices, and a focused design that aids both players and GMs in having a great time.
- "Dungeons" can cover lots of locations, often some sort of derelict ruins. A dungeon crawl adventure focuses on the characters exploring from room to

A THREE-ENTRANCE DUNGEON



room and dealing with individual challenges, as opposed to a larger infiltration-style adventure.

- Dungeons are built on locations. Choose a good map with multiple entrances and multiple paths for exploration. Ensure it includes secret passages and secret rooms to discover.
- Customize the eight steps of Lazy GM prep to fit the dungeon you plan to run.
- Run dungeon crawls with a focus on marching order, lighting, and dungeon exploration turns. Spend extra time prepping the boss's chamber if needed.
- Avoid common dungeon pitfalls such as linear designs, a lack of meaningful direction choices, too many downward beats, and a lack of a clear goal.

CHAPTER 33

QUEST MODELS AND THE SIMPLEST QUEST MODEL

This chapter and the next three chapters discuss quest models. While the adventure types explored in the previous chapters provide a structure around which to build adventures, quest models lead into adventures and help connect them together, as the characters seek out and accomplish goals leading from one session and adventure to the next.

THE SIMPLEST QUEST MODEL

The most straightforward quest model uses the basic setup of having an NPC ask the characters to go somewhere and do something.

Though simple, this classic quest model is extremely powerful. Thousands of published adventures follow this model, whether setting up a single-session adventure or an expansive campaign. Fill out the blanks of this quest model by asking the following questions:

- Who is the NPC?
- What is the location?
- What is the goal?

Though simple, this “Someone asks the characters to go somewhere and do something” quest model is refined enough to help you quickly get set up to run a great, unique adventure. That’s because each of these three questions can easily spawn a longer list of questions and details.

NPC. The NPC might have several traits worth filling in: their name, ancestry, background, affiliation, mannerisms, and goal. Review the “Outline Important NPCs” step of Lazy GM prep (chapter \$) or use the tables in the “NPCs and Patrons” section of appendix B to inspire your creation of NPCs.

Location. Working off the location, you’ll want to find or create a map, then make notes on history, location

WHAT IS A QUEST?

As it relates to fantasy RPG adventures, a quest is any motivation that draws the characters into an adventure. Quests can be as straightforward as an NPC asking the characters to go somewhere and do something (the simplest quest model, described in this chapter). Or they can be as subtle as a rumor overheard at a bar or passed along from a fellow traveler. Quests can derive from the secrets and clues you lay out for the characters. But just as often, rather than predefining a quest, you can simply codify the quests the players come up with whenever they hear a story development and decide to follow up on it.

features, inhabitants, and the location’s place in the world. Review the “Develop Fantastic Locations” step of Lazy GM prep (chapter \$) and use the location-focused tables in appendix B to fuel your ideas.

If the characters are traveling to the quest location, you might want an encounter along the way to reinforce some of the background of the adventure. For example, the party might come across another group of explorers seeking the same goal in the process of being ambushed by relatively weak monsters. See the “Noncombat Situations” section in chapter \$, “Overland Exploration and Travel,” for ideas for potential encounters during the journey.

Goal. For the goal, make notes regarding what the NPC asks the characters to do, using the Quest-Givers table below. The “Set Scene Goals” section in chapter \$, “Scene-Based Adventures,” can also help fill out these details.

QUEST-GIVERS

NPC quest-givers who seek heroes to accomplish some dangerous task are a mainstay in fantasy adventures. Use the table below to determine the quest that such an NPC has to offer. You can flavor this information using the tables of items and locations in appendix B.

You can also use this table to come up with long-term motivations for NPCs, intelligent monsters, villains, and factions, or short-term motivations for one-off encounters with intelligent creatures.

QUESTS

| d20 | Quest |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Find an item |
| 2 | Kill a villain |
| 3 | Rescue an NPC |
| 4 | Uncover a secret |
| 5 | Clear out monsters |
| 6 | Protect a monument |
| 7 | Protect an NPC |
| 8 | Steal an item |
| 9 | Return an item |
| 10 | Close a planar gate |
| 11 | Open a planar gate |
| 12 | Activate the hidden magic of a monument |
| 13 | Disable a magical relic |
| 14 | Recover an item |
| 15 | Convince an NPC of something |
| 16 | Awaken a monster from magical slumber |
| 17 | Put a monster into a magical slumber |
| 18 | Conceal a secret |
| 19 | Discover a lost monument |
| 20 | Dig up a relic |

QUEST MOTIVATION

A final component needed to fill out the simplest quest model is the characters' motivation. What drives the heroes to want to accomplish this quest? For most fantasy RPG games, three big motivations might apply:

Greed: The characters want money, treasure, or other tangible rewards.

Wonder: The characters want to explore the unknown and uncover the world's secrets.

Heroism: The characters want to protect the weak and make the world a better place.

If you include hooks for one or more of these motivations, most characters should have a solid reason to accomplish the goal of the quest. Additionally, the best quests are often driven by more personal motivations, including those in the Quest Motivations table. You'll notice some similarity between quest goals and character motivations, which sometimes directly overlap one another.

QUEST MOTIVATIONS

| d20 | Motivation |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Protect people |
| 2 | Destroy a dangerous evil force |
| 3 | Get revenge |
| 4 | Acquire a powerful magic item |
| 5 | Protect a village, town, city, region, or world |
| 6 | Earn money |
| 7 | Gain political power |
| 8 | Build an alliance |
| 9 | Lay the dead to rest |
| 10 | Rescue someone |
| 11 | Kill a villain |
| 12 | Depose a tyrant |
| 13 | Destabilize a tyrannical government |
| 14 | Establish a new leader |
| 15 | Recover lost lore |
| 16 | Uncover powerful magic |
| 17 | Gain control of a location |
| 18 | Prevent the rise of an evil force |
| 19 | Escape from somewhere |
| 20 | Learn the truth by uncovering a mystery |

MORE COMPLICATED QUEST MODELS

Other quest models aren't as simple as the classic NPC quest-giver. Chapters \$ through \$ cover several resilient quest models, producing quests that give characters agency in the story while still giving you a framework to focus your GM prep. At the same time, some quest models appear solid but often break down in actual play. Chapter \$ talks about those fragile quest models and why you should be wary of them.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter covers the following key points:

- Quest models differ from adventure models, with quest models linking adventures together and drawing the characters from one adventure to another.
- The simplest quest model follows the format of “Someone asks the characters to go somewhere and do something.”
- Quests need character motivations, addressing the question of what drives the characters to accomplish a quest.
- More complicated quest models give characters agency to decide their course but still provide a structure to focus your prep.
- Fragile quest models can seem workable but often break down during play.

CHAPTER 39

THE LAZY GM'S TOOLBOX

Every GM has their own personal GM's toolbox—a collection of ideas, tricks, hacks, and techniques we use to prep and run our games. The tools in your GM's toolbox can take on many forms. They might be ideas you keep in your head, things you jot down in your notes, or even physical tools you keep on hand to run your games.

This chapter presents a number of Lazy GM tools that you can add to your personal toolbox. Usable with many RPGs, these tools are designed to make your life as a GM a little easier and to enhance the enjoyment of your games for your players. Additionally, you'll find lots of additional options for your toolbox in appendix B, "Random Tables."

HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

Because there's no perfect way to categorize the tools in this chapter, they're presented alphabetically. To get the most out of the toolbox, have a look at the reference list below, then give the whole chapter a solid skim read to familiarize yourself with what it contains.

You might already recognize—and even use—some of the tools you'll find here. But reviewing them can help reinforce their place in your own GM's toolbox. Other tools in this chapter might be new to you. Read their descriptions so you know what they cover and can get a sense of whether they might work for you.

ALARMS AND TIMERS

As GMs, we often fall into a state of "flow" when running games, where we're so fully engaged in the game that we easily lose track of time. Yet time is important when you're running a game on a schedule. Keeping track of the passage of real-world time in your game helps you maintain the pace of the game, keep things moving forward, and include all the material you want to include in your session.

Set alarms and timers to remind you how much time has passed when running your games. A little hourly chime might be enough, or an alarm set when you think it's time to take a break—perhaps 90 minutes into a session. If your session includes a big boss battle, set a

LEARN, RUN, EVALUATE

A good way to use the Lazy GM's toolbox is to find tools that grab you, try them out in a game, and then evaluate how well they worked for you. Most of these tools can be tested to let you get a feel for them before you have to make a large commitment, letting you continually sharpen and refine the contents of your own GM's toolbox to run great games.



timer for 10 or 15 minutes before you plan to run that battle, reminding you to get things moving and leave you enough time for the characters to enjoy the final confrontation.

CAMPFIRE TALES

Every so often, when the characters take a rest for the night or in a safe location in a dungeon, you can ask the players to describe what their characters are thinking, feeling, or discussing among themselves. Such campfire tales serve many purposes:

- They can help you and your players relax after high-action scenes.
- They offer an opportunity for roleplaying between players.
- They show you what your players are thinking about the game from the point of view of their characters.
- They can give you ideas for future adventures.
- They draw players further into the fiction of the game.

Campfire tales work best when you prompt the players to answer specific questions, rather than simply asking, "What are you doing?" Choose one or two of the following questions to seed the conversation:

- What previous event in your life does your mind wander back to?
- What do you think about events to come?
- What are you looking forward to in the future?

- What frightens you about events to come?
- What memory of your family comes back to you?
- What troublesome memory of your past enters your mind?
- What worries you about recent events?

Start out by asking the players if anyone wants to jump in with an answer. Then work through each of the players to make sure everyone has a chance and has time to think about it. Don't push a player too hard if they can't come up with anything. Not everyone is comfortable whipping up in-world narrative on the spot.

DOMAINS

A list of the theological domains of your campaign lets you roll to add random religious flavor to items, monuments, locations, NPCs, quests, and any other part of your game. You can use the following common list of domains as a model for the gods of your campaign, or use it as a baseline to which you can add your own domains.

DOMAINS

| d20 | Domain |
|-----|-----------|
| 1 | Light |
| 2 | Dark |
| 3 | Life |
| 4 | Death |
| 5 | Nature |
| 6 | War |
| 7 | Trickery |
| 8 | Knowledge |
| 9 | Tempest |
| 10 | Harvest |
| 11 | The Hells |
| 12 | The Abyss |
| 13 | Fire |
| 14 | Water |
| 15 | Earth |
| 16 | Air |
| 17 | The Sea |
| 18 | Undeath |
| 19 | Magic |
| 20 | Creation |

FACTIONS

Set up custom factions in your campaign to tie people, places, objects, and events to specific power groups in the campaign setting, whether published or homebrew. Factions can represent gods, governments, criminal organizations, secret societies, cults, mercenary companies, or any other identifiable group.

Use the following list of generalized factions to inspire custom factions for your own campaign or world.

FACTIONS

| d20 | Faction |
|-----|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Demon or devil cult |
| 2 | Apocalypse cult |
| 3 | Followers of the undead |
| 4 | Mercenary company |
| 5 | Assassins' guild |
| 6 | Thieves' guild |
| 7 | Sinister mages' guild |
| 8 | Political guild |
| 9 | Elemental cult |
| 10 | Dragon or serpent cult |
| 11 | Followers of nature |
| 12 | Followers of agriculture |
| 13 | Knights of honor and justice |
| 14 | Followers of love |
| 15 | Followers of light |
| 16 | Sages of knowledge |
| 17 | Order of prosperity and governance |
| 18 | Benevolent monarch |
| 19 | Guild of trade and travel |
| 20 | Adventurers' guild |

You can roll on your customized faction table to tie factions to items, monuments, NPCs, locations, and more. Faction connections can tie otherwise random story elements to the themes of your campaign, giving every item or encounter a context the characters can understand.

HANDOUTS

Physical handouts help players better connect to the in-world fiction of your game. Such handouts can include orders from a boss to a flunky, a secret message between two factions, a scroll written in ancient times, or any other sort of written information of potential value to the characters. Print out notes using fancy fonts on copper-colored resume paper to give them an authentic look. Tear off the edges of the page to make a document look handmade.

Such handouts help to draw players into the fictional world, and can help you focus down your story to the material in the note, create a tangible record of events in the game, and help you clarify important points that the players might otherwise forget. A good handout is a valuable accessory whenever you have the time to create one and the in-game situation is right for one.

LIGHTNING RODS

As GMs, we sometimes find ourselves building encounters designed to thwart the powerful features of the characters in our games, often by using monsters who ignore or counter those features. Instead, consider building encounters by including monsters who lean in

TOOLBOX REFERENCE LIST

The following tools are described and explored in this chapter.

- Abstract Distances
- Alarms and Timers
- Blank Battle Mats
- Book Tabs
- Campfire Tales
- Cheat Sheets
- Clocks
- Dials of Monster Difficulty
- Dice Averages
- Domains
- Dreadful Blessings
- Escalation Die
- Factions
- Flashbacks
- Handouts
- Heroic Spark
- House Rules
- Index Cards
- Initiative Systems
- Killing Blows
- Lightning Rods
- Luck Points
- Map Keys
- Maps and Terrain
- Mashing Up Multiple Random Encounters
- Milestone Leveling
- Miniatures
- Minus 3 Plus 1d6
- Monster Stats by Challenge Rating
- Monster Tokens
- Music
- NPC Portraits
- Oracle Die
- Page Numbers
- Physical GM Kit
- Player-Defined Monster Characteristics
- Player Roles
- Previous or Upcoming Random Encounters
- Published Campaign Settings
- Quick Monster Stats
- Random Names
- Random Online Generators
- Reskinning Monster Stat Blocks
- Repurposing Maps
- Roll on Multiple Tables
- Single Target Number
- Single-Use Magic Items
- Solo Games
- Status Effect Replacements
- System Cheat Sheets
- Upward and Downward Beats
- "X" and "/" for Damage Tracking
- Zone-Based Combat

toward powerful character features. These "lightning rod" monsters are meant to be targeted by potent powers and effects, letting players feel good about the things their characters can do. As well, lightning rods can give you a better handle on controlling the overall threat of an encounter when desired (especially for boss battles where multiple waves of encounters are used to control the flow of combat).

When building encounters, the following common lighting rod monster setups are worth thinking about:

- Lots of small or medium-sized monsters in a tight formation, each of which has fewer hit points than a *fireball* or other common area attack can deal.
- Big monsters who have poor defenses against mental attacks, making them easily charmed, dominated, stunned, or banished.
- Medium-sized monsters with poor defenses against magic who are easily crowd controlled.
- Big monsters with lots of hit points who have lower-than-expected defenses, making them perfect for single-target, heavy-hitting characters.
- Undead and fiendish monsters vulnerable to the power of clerics and paladins.

At the "Review Your Characters" step of the eight steps of Lazy GM prep, think about what sorts of monsters and encounters can showcase the players' favorite character features, magic, and combat styles. Then consider including those monsters and encounters in your game.

The lightning rod concept shouldn't be overused, though. RPGs often work well when the threat level of monsters goes up and down, whether determined randomly or based on the situation as it unfolds during the game. But particularly in more character-focused high-fantasy RPGs, designing encounters around the capabilities of the characters can help showcase those

characters and make the game more enjoyable for your players.

ORACLE DIE

Many solo RPGs include a concept known as the "oracle die" that helps determine how the game unfolds. As a GM running a game for other players, you might use oracle dice to answer possible "yes/no" questions when you want randomness to be a factor. Using a six-sided die as a simple oracle die lets you answer lots of questions, not just yes and no.

You can often use an oracle die to determine random effects without using an actual table, by having lower numbers represent less extreme results and higher numbers represent more extreme results. For example, you might use an oracle die for game elements such as:

- Weather (lower numbers mean the weather is more clement)
- Distance (lower numbers mean that whatever the characters are seeking—or whatever seeks the characters—is closer)
- Behavior (lower numbers represent more benign behavior)
- Hostility (lower numbers indicate less-hostile creatures)
- Awareness (lower numbers mean a monster or NPC is less aware)

You can also use oracle dice to determine which player character a creature targets in combat when two or more targets are in reach. Rolling for targets ensures that you're not subconsciously playing favorites or picking on any particular character.

PREVIOUS OR UPCOMING RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Not every random encounter has to happen *now*. Some might have happened in the past, while others might be coming in the future. Rolling for past or future encounters helps make overland travel or dungeon locations feel alive.

Just roll on your random encounter table to determine if an encounter has already occurred at the location the characters are approaching, giving the characters signs to explore or a potential path if they want to follow the creatures from this previous encounter. Likewise, you can roll to determine if an encounter is on the way. For example, if your random encounter table comes up with a giant, you can have that giant moving toward the characters' current location with plenty of time for them to decide what to do. Rolling for previous or upcoming encounters helps fill out location-based scenes, and gives the characters agency as they choose how to respond.

SINGLE-USE MAGIC ITEMS

Depending on your chosen RPG, you might have the option to include single-use magic items as a type of reward. Such items are usable by any character, allowing that character to cast a spell or perform some other magical effect just once. Once expended, the item loses its magic.

Many game systems feature spells or powers suitable for single-use magic items. "Single-Use Magic Items" in chapter 5, "Select Rewards," provides a list of objects that make good single-use items, plus a list of common fantasy spells. To customize a single-use item further, roll on the Condition, Description, and Origin tables in appendix B. You can also roll on your own custom faction table (see "Factions" earlier in this chapter) to connect a single-use item to one of the factions in your campaign.

Single-use items containing magic significantly more powerful than the characters' own power level can be great fun—and they shouldn't break your game as long as the item holding them can be used only once. Items with lower-power magic might be usable once per day, or even at-will for cantrips and other effects whose power is minimal compared to the characters' power level.

UPWARD AND DOWNWARD BEATS

Games run best when they provide a mixture of upward and downward beats—good things happen, then bad things happen, then good things happen, and so on. These oscillating beats shouldn't be perfectly symmetrical. But you want to avoid scenarios providing too many upward beats in a row, making the game boring, or too many downward beats in row, making the game frustrating. Mix upward and downward beats throughout your adventures as you run them to ensure that the players feel a blended mix of excitement, worry, and eventual relaxation.

The Upward Beats and Downward Beats tables highlight some of the more common high points and low points for a fantasy campaign.

UPWARD BEATS

| d20 | Beat |
|-----|---|
| 1 | Facing off against weak foes |
| 2 | Finding a healing fountain |
| 3 | Discovering treasure |
| 4 | Finding a valuable clue |
| 5 | Rescuing a beloved NPC |
| 6 | Identifying and disarming a trap |
| 7 | Learning an exciting piece of lore |
| 8 | Surprising foes |
| 9 | Avoiding a hazard |
| 10 | Meeting a friendly ghost |
| 11 | Acquiring a map |
| 12 | Finding a secret passage or path |
| 13 | Discovering a safe room in which to rest |
| 14 | Learning who the culprit is |
| 15 | Gaining favor with a powerful NPC |
| 16 | Receiving accolades |
| 17 | Sneaking undiscovered through enemy territory |
| 18 | Stealing something valuable |
| 19 | Winning over a hostile or dangerous NPC |
| 20 | Finding a villain's weak spot |

DOWNWARD BEATS

| d20 | Beat |
|-----|--|
| 1 | Fighting a difficult battle |
| 2 | Springing a trap |
| 3 | Having the party's food spoiled |
| 4 | Being discovered while sneaking |
| 5 | Stepping into a hazard |
| 6 | Getting lost in a dungeon |
| 7 | Being attacked by wall-phasing ghosts |
| 8 | Having a boss take on a new form during combat |
| 9 | Getting trapped behind enemy lines |
| 10 | Losing track of a mystery |
| 11 | Having an enemy escape |
| 12 | Being captured |
| 13 | Having a beloved NPC die |
| 14 | Having a character die |
| 15 | Having enemies break the party's defenses |
| 16 | Having a more powerful foe arrive |
| 17 | Having noise alert nearby enemies |
| 18 | Getting lost during overland travel |
| 19 | Being surprised |
| 20 | Losing something valuable |

It's often best to improvise upward and downward beats rather than trying to plan such situations ahead of time. You don't need to constantly keep track of upward and downward beats, but keep the concept in mind and shift beats if it starts to feel like your game is pushing too far to one side.

CHAPTER 40

ADVENTURE OUTLINES

This chapter contains \$ adventure outlines organized around the eight steps of Lazy Gamemaster prep, and built using the adventure types in chapters \$ through \$. These adventure outlines serve several purposes:

- They provide an idea of what prep notes might look like while following the eight steps.
- They show the kind of material that goes into each step based on the kind of adventure you're planning to run.
- They can inspire your own similar adventures.
- Put together, these adventure outlines can create the skeleton of a small campaign.

These adventure outlines follow the lore of the high-fantasy sourcebook *City of Arches*, but this lore is easily reskinned to suit a published setting or your own homebrew world.

These scenarios aren't meant to be a perfect example of the notes you might make for your own games, as they include more information than you likely need for those games. Your own notes need only focus on the material you need to run your game, but these examples have to include enough information to fully set up the adventure they describe.

Additionally, instead of the typical "Review the Characters" step, this section includes character prompts to inspire you to fill in specific details for the characters in your campaign. To run these scenarios, use the prompts to help you fill in specific character details in your own notes.

These adventures make use of the maps found in appendix \$, though they're not keyed room-by-room as a published adventure would be. Instead, they offer loose location descriptions as described in chapter \$, "Develop Fantastic Locations."

These adventures are written to be system agnostic. They use typical fantasy trappings and refer to 5e monsters, spells, and items, but can be easily modified to suit your RPG of choice.

THE CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

Each of these adventure outlines follow the characters as they infiltrate and dismantle a relic-smuggling network known as the Midnight Maul, operating within and around the City of Arches. If you use these outlines to create your own adventures, change the setting and any other details to suit your game.

As each adventure unfolds, the characters dig deeper into the smugglers' operations and thwart their plans before a final confrontation. In that climactic adventure, the characters face demons summoned using powerful magical relics recovered by the smugglers.

Eight Steps Director's Cut. For this first scenario, you'll find additional subsections like this one, describing

where to learn more about the specific steps of Lazy GM prep (tying to chapters \$ through \$ where each step is described in detail) and what sorts of ideas you can bring to each step to fill it out during your prep.

SCENARIO 1 (SCENE-BASED): THE RELIC

In this scene-based adventure (see chapter \$), the characters follow the path of a stolen relic carried by a thief working for a mysterious group of relic collectors. This scenario is intended for novice characters.

REVIEW THE CHARACTERS

Do the characters know any of the NPCs in this scenario? What do the characters know of the Midnight Maul smuggling operation or the criminal guild known as the Black Hand? Are characters aware of any legal issues regarding the hunting, discovery, and smuggling of magical relics? What might motivate the characters to get involved and investigate the thefts?

Character Secrets. As described in chapter \$, there are lots of things you can reference when considering the characters. Maybe you just focus their names to get the characters into your head. Maybe you jot down notes on the characters' classes or backgrounds. Ask yourself the question, "What could draw this character into the scenes, situations, or lore in this next session?"

CREATE A STRONG START

At a bazaar in the city, the characters witness an elf thief named Polyx Gemfinger stealing a set of ancient magical pipes from an old gnome scholar named Evenos Greenwillow. If the characters get involved, they are attacked by several bandits hired by Polyx to create a distraction. However the situation resolves, Evenos wants to hire the characters to follow the thief, find out who hired him, and retrieve the pipes if the theft was successful.

Inspiring Your Strong Start. "What happens?" is the catalyst question for a strong start. The NPCs in this adventure's strong start were generated using the random tables found in appendix B. Bandits make sense for the situation, and the scenario has several different ways for the characters to respond to and deal with it.

OUTLINE POTENTIAL SCENES

This scenario plays out through the following scenes:

- From information gathered at the bazaar, the characters follow the thief's intended escape route through the alleyways behind the bazaar. Spies and bandits might watch the route, which leads to a ruined



fountain where Polyx intended to sell the relic to a hired tough named Ward Bluebane.

- At the ruined fountain, Ward Bluebane and several bandits wait for Polyx, intending to kill him and take the pipes. The characters might fight, intimidate, trick, or follow Ward and the bandits. However the fight unfolds, the characters then learn that Ward plans to take the relic through the Lost Cisterns—an area of subterranean waterways and sewers below the city—to a forgotten shrine outside the city walls.
- While traveling through the Lost Cisterns, the characters face scurrying swarms of rats fleeing from a mutated crocodile. Later, rushing water threatens to chew the party up in a huge, rusty, whirling sluice gate.
- As they exit the Lost Cisterns, the characters face the cult fanatic Gorvan Shadowcowl and several bandits, who wait for Ward to hand the relic over. In the aftermath, the characters learn that a well-organized criminal network seeks relics in and around the City of Arches.

From Point A to Point E. In a scene-based adventure, the “outline potential scenes” step breaks out how the characters get from the beginning to the end of the adventure. The scenes connect the paths and throughlines from NPCs to locations to NPCs, ensuring the characters get what they need to get to the next step—and eventually to the next adventure. However, each scene can play out in many different ways.

DEFINE SECRETS AND CLUES

Drop in any of the following secrets and clues at a point you choose:

- Several magical relics have been stolen from the bazaar recently, and merchants dealing in magic have been hurt or killed. Many believe the Black Hand is to blame—the organized crime ring that operates out of the caverns of the Lower Reaches beneath the City of Arches.
- Shady treasure hunters found the ancient pipes in a lost vault in the mountainside necropolis known as the Cliffs of the Dead. They then sold them to Evenos.
- The pipes date back to a primordial age older than even the earliest mortal civilizations.
- The Magistrate of Tombs in the City of Arches forbids the sale or transfer of illegally obtained magical relics. Agents of the magistrate believe the recent thefts to be the result of illegal tomb raiding in the city.
- The thief Polyx doesn’t know who gave the order to steal the pipes. He was told only where to drop them off. Likewise, Ward Bluebane was told only to take the pipes through the sewers to an old shrine outside the city.
- Thefts are common enough in the bazaar, but the theft of the pipes had a level of coordination beyond casual thievery.
- The cult fanatic Gorvan Shadowcowl follows the forgotten god Nightwhisper. He was ordered to bring the pipes to a fallen priest named Xevex Graycowl, an agent of the Midnight Maul, in the center of the marketplace of the City of Arches.
- The theft of magical relics is being conducted by the Midnight Maul, a well-funded group of relic collectors operating in and around the City of Arches.

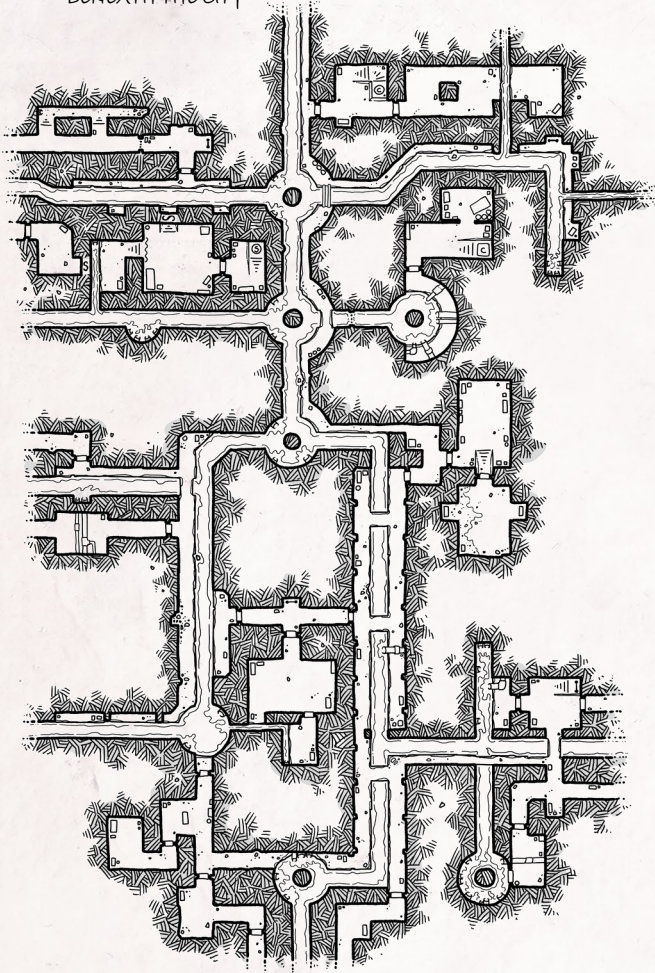
Connective Tissue and Lore. Like the outlined scenes in a scene-based adventure, your secrets and clues help ensure the characters get the info they need to move through the adventure. Secrets and clues also let you establish interesting lore and set the stage with background information.

DEVELOP FANTASTIC LOCATIONS

Work up the following locations and their details as the adventure unfolds:

- **Bazaar:** Ramshackle booths, precarious rooftops, carts filled with strange fruit
- **Alleyways:** Rotted piles of refuse, crates stacked too high, hidden shrine used by thieves
- **Ruined Fountain:** Cracked statue of a faceless hero, oily bubbling liquid, sewer grate and entrance
- **Sewers:** Stinking passages, rushing waters, huge sharp sluice gates
- **Old Shrine:** Shrine to a forgotten god, slippery walls of mud, pool of poisonous water

EXAMPLE MAP OF SEWERS
BENEATH THE CITY



Big Set-Piece Backdrops. Because this isn't a site-based adventure with many individual chambers or other areas, these fantastic locations focus on big set-piece areas with a few interesting features. This setup helps get your imagination going when you play, and gives the characters something to interact with in each scene. The sewers might be a bit of a dungeon (perhaps making use of a map such as the one above, found in appendix C), but they don't need to be. In this case, each location is designed to be a backdrop for a scene rather than a large, complex area to explore.

OUTLINE IMPORTANT NPCs

The following NPCs are important contacts and foils for the characters:

- **Evenos Greenwillow** is an old gnome sage selling relics in the city's bazaar. He wants to find out who's stealing relics from the vendors of the bazaar.
- **Polyx Gemfinger** is an elf thief who steals the primordial pipes from Evenos. He doesn't know who he's working for and just wants a payout.
- **Ward Bluebane** is a freelance enforcer waiting for Polyx. Like Polyx, he doesn't know who he works for, and has been ordered to kill Polyx and bring the primordial pipes to an old shrine outside the Lost Cisterns. Like Polyx, he's eager for a payout.
- **Gorvan Shadowcrowl** is a cultist fanatic of the forgotten god of bloodshed and assassins known

as Nightwhisper. Gorvan hopes to prove his worth to Xevex Graycrowl, an agent of the group of relic collectors known as the Midnight Maul.

Key People. In a scene-based scenario, NPCs often drive the characters to the next location to deal with the next set of NPCs. If you don't have NPCs already in mind, you can always generate them on the fly. You get to decide how much information you need to jot down to help you run an NPC at the table, and in general, the less information, the easier the NPC is to run.

CHOOSE RELEVANT MONSTERS

The following monsters are a good fit for this adventure:

- Bandits
- Cult fanatics
- Toughs
- Swarms of rats
- Crocodile

Lists of Adversaries. In a scene-based adventure, you can usually get away with a list of monsters, ideally with page numbers so you can easily look them up in the monster book they come from. Some GMs like to copy all the stat blocks for a session or adventure into their own document or folder for easier reference, but you might find that's more trouble than it's worth.

SELECT REWARDS

The following items and valuables make excellent rewards for the characters' success in this adventure:

- **Primordial Pipes:** This set of fine syrinx pipes allows their wielder to play them in order to cast *thunder wave* and *hypnotic pattern* one time each. (The pipes don't need to be played well to use their magic.)
- 563 cp, 385 sp, 249 gp
- Sapphire gemstones (7 × 10 gp)
- Dangling platinum earrings set with huge opals (50 gp)
- *Potion of greater healing*

Potential Loot. Even if you're not planning to hand out treasure during a specific session, it's worth having treasure notes on hand. Different systems handle loot in different ways, so you might not need to prepare rewards if you're rolling randomly for treasure at the table. But having a short list of coins and gems, a single-use magic item, and a permanent magic item ready to go means you can drop them into the adventure easily if the timing and pacing are right.

APPENDIX B

RANDOM TABLES

This appendix features more than \$ random tables you can use to flesh out your adventures and campaigns, both during prep and while you play.

When you use these tables, you can adjust and combine them as you wish. Roll multiple times on a single table to make results more distinctive, or join different tables together to build unique results that fuel your imagination.

You can augment these tables with random tables tailored for your own chosen game system, and with custom tables of your own featuring details from your campaign. For example, creating a custom faction table (see chapter \$) makes it easy to connect those factions to locations, treasures, NPCs, and more.

NPCs AND PATRONS

NPCs bring our game worlds to life. Use the tables in this section to generate NPCs and their characteristics.

ANCESTRY

Ancestry can often be the most memorable feature of an NPC, especially if that ancestry is unusual. Rolling on this table using a d20 gives you a wide range of common and uncommon fantasy ancestries, or you can roll using a d10 to focus on common options.

ANCESTRY

| d20 | Ancestry |
|-----|-----------------------|
| 1 | Human |
| 2 | Elf |
| 3 | Dwarf |
| 4 | Halfling |
| 5 | Orc |
| 6 | Gnome |
| 7 | Tiefling |
| 8 | Dragonborn |
| 9 | Fey |
| 10 | Goblin |
| 11 | Construct |
| 12 | Celestial |
| 13 | Ghost |
| 14 | Wizard's familiar |
| 15 | Talking animal |
| 16 | Avian |
| 17 | Lizardfolk |
| 18 | Catfolk |
| 19 | Lycanthrope |
| 20 | Sapient magical relic |

BEHAVIOR

Rolling randomly for an NPC's behavior can provide you with quick and easy hooks for roleplaying.

BEHAVIOR

| d20 | Behavior |
|-----|---------------|
| 1 | Enthusiastic |
| 2 | Flighty |
| 3 | Shifty |
| 4 | Optimistic |
| 5 | Paranoid |
| 6 | Well spoken |
| 7 | Superior |
| 8 | Haughty |
| 9 | Pessimistic |
| 10 | Suspicious |
| 11 | Worried |
| 12 | Greedy |
| 13 | Brave |
| 14 | Stern |
| 15 | Sly |
| 16 | Wise |
| 17 | Reserved |
| 18 | Cheery |
| 19 | Opportunistic |
| 20 | Soft spoken |

LOCATIONS, MONUMENTS, AND ITEMS

The multipart tables in this and the next section let you quickly create distinctive story elements to fill out quests and adventures. The first table features a number of classic fantasy locations, monuments, and items, while the second table generates a condition, description, or origin to flavor any of those things.

Additionally, you can customize a location, monument, or item by tying it to a faction using your campaign's custom faction table (see chapter \$).

SOME OF MY FAVORITE TABLES

The Locations, Monuments, and Items, table and the Condition, Description, and Origin tables are some two of my personal favorites. I keep them on hand all the time to flavor monuments sites the characters discover on their journeys or the items and relics they pick up along the way. Each table works independently or they can be mixed together, even and you can roll ing on the same table more than once, to inspire your ideas. Keep these tables close by and as you fill out the world around the characters as while they explore it.

LOCATIONS, MONUMENTS, AND ITEMS

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

CONDITION, DESCRIPTION, AND ORIGIN

Condition, description, and origin can make any location, monument, item, or other piece of campaign dressing feel distinct.

CONDITION, DESCRIPTION, AND ORIGIN

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

DUNGEON DECORATIONS

A number of different styles of decoration can help flavor the walls, ceilings, and furnishings of dungeons, fortresses, castles, and other adventure locations.

DUNGEON DECORATIONS

| d10 | Decoration |
|-----|--------------------|
| 1 | Relief |
| 2 | Frieze |
| 3 | Mural |
| 4 | Fresco |
| 5 | Mosaic |
| 6 | Runic carvings |
| 7 | Encaustic painting |
| 8 | Gilded engravings |
| 9 | Marouflage |
| 10 | Sgraffito |

Encaustic Painting. This style of painting uses heated wax to apply pigments to a surface, often wood or canvas. The wax might be melted away to reveal other decoration underneath.

Fresco. A fresco is a vivid painting applied directly to freshly laid plaster. Fresco plaster might break away to show other decorations on the wall underneath.

Frieze. A long horizontal stretch of painted or sculpted decoration, a frieze typically appears at the upper edge of a wall or an object such as a sarcophagus. Frieze decorations might not be noticed at first glance, but a perceptive character might pick up interesting clues from one with a keen eye.

Gilded Engravings. A thin coating of gold can be placed over another surface, sometimes inlaid within a carving. Such engravings might conduct electricity or activate a trap if peeled off.

Marouflage. A painted canvas is attached to a wall with an adhesive such as plaster or cement. Marouflage decorations might hide secret doors behind them.

Mosaic. A mosaic is a pattern or image created by inlaying small pieces of stone, glass, or ceramic in a layer of plaster. Individual pieces of mosaic material might be infused with magical light or embedded spells.

Mural. Graphic artworks painted directly on a wall or ceiling, murals can depict great wars, images of gods, or rulers of old. Murals might peel away, revealing layers of older murals beneath them.

Relief. Relief carving is the projection of an image in which the stonework around the image is carved back, leaving the image protruding forward. Styles include low (bas), high, and sunken relief. Relief stonework might reveal lost histories or forgotten knowledge.

Runic Carvings. Whether recording language or ideographs, runic carvings often adorn rock slabs or tombstones. A character with a knowledge of history might uncover the meaning of such carvings.

Sgraffito. A sgraffito is an image created by scratching through the surface of one layer of pigment to reveal another layer of pigment underneath, usually of a

contrasting color. Scratching away further might reveal older decorations.

ADVENTURE LOCATIONS

The first table in this section presents a list of common adventure locations, then breaks out some of the specific rooms or chambers found in those locations. The section for each room or chamber includes a short list of area features to help you improvise the details of hallways or smaller rooms.

Use these locations, rooms, and chambers to fill out larger adventure sites or to inspire your own ideas for such sites. Any location or chamber can be further fleshed out with details from the other tables in this appendix.

LOCATIONS

The following adventure locations are broken out in the tables that follow.

LOCATIONS

| d20 | Location |
|-----|------------------|
| 1 | Academy |
| 2 | Castle |
| 3 | Caverns |
| 4 | Derelict ship |
| 5 | Dragon's lair |
| 6 | Forgotten vaults |
| 7 | Grove |
| 8 | Manor |
| 9 | Mines |
| 10 | Monster's den |
| 11 | Necropolis |
| 12 | Prison |
| 13 | Sewers |
| 14 | Sunken grotto |
| 15 | Theater |
| 16 | Thieves' den |
| 17 | Tower |
| 18 | Unholy temple |
| 19 | Village |
| 20 | Wizard's lair |

CAVERNS

The following types of caves and chambers are often found as part of a cavern complex.

Features. Deep cracks, underground streams, big mushrooms, thick roots, crumbling rock, sharp stalactites, howling wind, long-dead corpses, signs of battle, embedded fossils

MORE LOCATIONS!

Two of the adventure locations presented on the table are detailed here, but the full version of *Rise of the Lazy Gamemaster* will explore all twenty location types.

CAVERNS

| d20 | Caves and Chambers |
|-----|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Waterfall |
| 2 | Large pool |
| 3 | Natural columns |
| 4 | Animal's den |
| 5 | Deep shaft |
| 6 | Underground rift |
| 7 | Chasm with natural stone bridge |
| 8 | Crystal chamber |
| 9 | Spiraling steps |
| 10 | Mushroom grove |
| 11 | Forgotten statue |
| 12 | Lava pools |
| 13 | Insect nests |
| 14 | Stone rings |
| 15 | Crumbling sinkhole |
| 16 | Abandoned village |
| 17 | Acidic stalactites |
| 18 | Petrified victims |
| 19 | Hall of bones |
| 20 | Primeval shrine |

MANOR

Manors and mansions are most often encountered as the dwellings of rich folk.

Features. Dumbwaiters, family portraits, coats of arms, display cases, weapon displays, regal statues, ornate lanterns, glass windows, servants' passages, hunting trophies

MANOR

| d20 | Rooms and Chambers |
|-----|-----------------------|
| 1 | Main foyer |
| 2 | Master bedroom |
| 3 | Guest bedrooms |
| 4 | Kitchen |
| 5 | Dining hall |
| 6 | Study |
| 7 | Library |
| 8 | Servants' quarters |
| 9 | Treasury |
| 10 | Pantry |
| 11 | Bathing room |
| 12 | Guards' quarters |
| 13 | Servants' dining room |
| 14 | Greenhouse |
| 15 | Master closet |
| 16 | Art gallery |
| 17 | Menagerie |
| 18 | Hidden library |
| 19 | Family altar |
| 20 | Hidden safe room |

BACK THE KICKSTARTER!

SLY FLOURISH'S
☪ **RISE OF THE** ☪
LAZY GAMEDMASTER

- PREP FAST WITH THE EIGHT STEPS — EACH EXPANDED FROM YEARS OF FEEDBACK
- EASILY PREP ADVENTURES FOR ANY RPG OR STYLE OF PLAY
- WORKS ALONGSIDE YOUR OTHER LAZY GM BOOKS
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