THE RPG
HANDBOOK

THE RPG HANDBOOK

Contents

Introduction

Roleplaying games (RPGs) have been around for 50 years. During that time they've fueled the development of the entire videogame industry, played a key role in the use of gaming within businesses and become a part of countless training schemes.

It's not surprising that ideas based largely on tabletop RPGs have been so widely used, as these open-ended, imaginative games ask players to think for themselves and to improvise as they play.

This handbook sets out to provide a basic guide to what these games are about, to describe the benefits offered by such games and to suggest ways for new players to get started.

There is no correct or one true way to play RPGs, but it is possible to draw on the experience of many games designers, players or GMs aka Gamesmasters/ Referees to explore what works well for many groups.

Part 1: Roleplaying Games

What are Tabletop Roleplaying Games?

Roleplaying games (RPGs) are open-ended adventure games based on shared storytelling and imaginary adventures. Some videogames borrow features from tabletop RPGs - but open-ended, player-lead games usually involve playing tabletop RPGs.

There are RPGs for almost every genre or setting imaginable. For example, in a fantasy RPG an adventurer might be a powerful wizard or a hard-as-nails warrior. In a Sci-Fi RPG a player's adventurer or player character (PC) could be a merchant, a space marine or a pilot.

Playing Tabletop RPGs

1. Players take the part or role of an adventurer or player character (PC) and usually roll or create an adventurer. They might, for example, play the part of a spy, a starship officer or a survivor in a post-apocalyptic world.
2. Players then choose and describe their adventurers' actions during play.
3. One player often becomes the Gamesmaster (GM) or Referee, who designs adventures, describes what the adventurers see and interprets outcomes. That includes rolling dice for the non-player characters (NPCs) such as monsters or aliens.
4. Players' adventurers explore imaginary worlds, meeting many different situations in imaginary settings. For example, medieval castles and dungeons or spaceships and unexplored planets.
5. Adventurers gain more skills and experience as they explore, allowing them to meet increasingly difficult challenges in return for greater prizes.
6. The challenges found in adventures can be about exploration, discovery, investigation, crisis management and combat - amongst other options.
7. Over time adventurers' imaginary lives become an interwoven part of the many events that make up their game-world or campaign.

The Basics

1. Select a system with straightforward rules and a genre or backdrop that appeals, e.g. fantasy, SciFi or Western.
2. If you are the GM you will usually find it much easier to sketch-out the adventure first. You can either prepare your own adventures or start out using – and adapting - ready-made adventures.

3. Find some tokens or figures to help to place or locate your adventurers in the game. Extra tokens, chips or figures for the characters and creatures you encounter can also be helpful. Some groups may wish to use floor plans with measured grids; others may prefer to sit round the table and talk through the action.
4. Complete adventurer sheets displaying adventurers' skills, abilities and equipment.
5. Sit down around a table with some dice and start playing. The Internet has plenty of free RPG dice rollers if you don't have any gaming dice.
6. Try not to take the rules too seriously – it's a roleplaying game and the only way to 'win' is for the group to have fun.

Dice

The wide variety of dice used to settle outcomes in RPGs is all about varying the odds and outcomes to fit the circumstances. For example, twenty-sided dice/ D20s make bonuses for rolling a natural 20 occur fairly infrequently; while rolling a D4 for the injuries caused by a dagger fits with rolling a D8 for the injuries caused by a sword.

Common dice shapes include D4s, D6s, D8s, D10s, D12s and D20s. D100s are also fairly common, as an alternative to using two differently colored D10s to roll for percentages. These options are easily covered by cheap packs of plastic dice or free dice apps available for Android devices, iPhones and even Wordpress sites.

A minority of RPGs use uncommon dice such as a D30 or dice showing symbols from the game. These are not as likely to appear in free apps and are usually a bit of a gimmick.

The RPG Handbook's tables stick to the standard dice, e.g. 1-50 is shown as a D100.

Adventurers aka Player Characters aka PCs

Adventurer or character sheets are used to keep records of adventurers' skills and abilities. That includes skills, abilities and possessions made available when an adventurer starts out, as well as those gained during play.

It is usual for common features often shared by all adventurers/ PCs to be grouped first. This is then followed by items and skills that are used frequently during play. Other specialist skills and possessions often come last. That said there is no need for a fixed arrangement and players can easily vary or decorate character sheets.

There are countless variations on character sheets out there and some games, e.g. Treasure, differ in offering options such as character visualization through images or icon sets. Across most of the variants the underlying spine of a character is generally a consistent blend of natural abilities, learned skills and current possessions. Character histories may also be added to some sheets.

Styles of Play

There are so many different styles of play and genres that it's quite hard to categorize RPGs consistently. Broadly speaking RPGs do tend to fall into groupings according to complexity. The complete length of a set of core rules can be a general guide to the likely level of complexity, but this is not always the case as some contain lots more support aka fluff than others:

Lite
These are cut-down or very short RPGs, which are often quick to set-up, but short on support and lifespan. They may be promotional demos of larger systems or quick start gems like Risus. Another familiar approach is the ransom rule set, where a basic or level-limited game is offered in the hope that you will upgrade. These can be fun starter kits, but it's worth keeping an eye on how costs might add up.

Rules Light
Rules light (to medium) RPGs are typically games based around easy-to-learn straightforward rule sets and a variable amount of supporting content or fluff, e.g. tips on running the game, lots of items and examples of play.

This kind of system may lack the tactical nuances of more elaborate systems. However, they often leave room within the rules to be filled by players' imaginations and usually support improvisational play. Rules light RPGs are, essentially, about offering open-ended gameplay and player choice. Traveler and Treasure are examples of RPGs with rules light mechanics allied to rules medium support.

Storytelling Games
Within storytelling games building shared stories takes precedence over the cut and thrust of resolving challenges mechanically - and players may be rewarded by the system for characterization and dramatic roleplaying. This approach encourages players to build stories, but tends to induce the process instead of allowing it to arise, which can be frustrating for players looking for a more self-mediated improvisation.

Goliaths
A rule for everything tends to place simulation over a sense of authenticity, which is probably not helpful in encouraging new players to play RPGs and in helping players to stay in the moment. That said some massive, multi-

volume Goliaths are so extensive that everything can't really join up. These arguably leave the same kind of gaps in the fabric of the game as found in rules light systems, but place them in a rich layer of overlapping rules and sub-systems that can support highly improvisational play through inducing house-ruling/ remixing.

Options and Opportunities for Kids

The ways in which tabletop RPGs can open up opportunities for kids and learners is not going to be of immediate concern to many players – so please feel free to skip this section. That said anyone planning to run a group for kids or to use RPGs in education may find it helpful to have a short outline of the benefits likely to result from playing tabletop RPGs.

The following selection of RPG gameplay options or opportunities is not exhaustive but does sketch out some of the approaches to fun and learning accessible to kids, (and adult learners), through tabletop RPG gameplay:

Fish Tank Gameplay
RPGs make ideal 'fish tanks', where players can try out a limited version of a full game. This allows players to learn the structure of the rules or guidelines using a simplified, and largely consequence free, approach to exploring the gameplay

Sandbox Gameplay
Sandbox games present players with realistic situations and set out to deliver open-ended gameplay, (where players are encouraged to shape their own challenges and make their own choices). Tabletop RPGs are well-suited to sandbox play, because many are designed to allow and encourage open-ended gameplay.

Self-Regulation
Unlike most boardgames, wargames and videogames, tabletop RPGs let players define their own roles and targets instead of setting a fixed finishing line or requiring a 'win-mentality'. Some RPG players do adopt a win-mentality over gaining possessions or defeating enemies in combat. This is sometimes encouraged by games that reward player characters (PCs) largely for collecting loot and slaying opponents.

Fortunately, many RPG players, (and their groups), are much more interested in setting their own goals and prefer self-competition in terms of playing as well as they can. These goals are more likely to concern how players tackle novel situations and in-game challenges than simply acquiring trinkets and power-ups.

Improvisation

Improvising solutions to deal with difficult or complex situations isn't an option within most videogames, as any options the programmers leave out simply aren't available. Well-designed tabletop RPGs invite and foster improvisation, as players can interpret and, even adapt, the rules as players are devising solutions to dealing with difficult circumstances.

Flexible Challenges

By leaving GMs and players to select their own goals RPGs make it easy to set flexible challenges, which can be quite demanding without ever having to be impossible to solve. In other words, if players are increasingly frustrated by a problem, the problem can be revised or set aside to allow play to progress. Equally, if play isn't challenging enough a GM can introduce a few *ad hoc* adjustments to make life a little harder for the players and/ or their characters.

Systemic Thinking

Gameplay and learning take place more effectively when players can see how skills and options combine to form a coherent system. Tabletop RPGs are usually intended to let players, and their PCs, progress and advance in a series of stages – allowing players to develop an understanding of how everything fits together.

Meaning

We tend to draw meaning from personal experiences rather than from shared definitions or scientific principles. The many varied situations encountered during RPG play may assist learning by allowing players to carry out a wide range of actions that contribute to their personal understanding of comparable experiences. For example, PCs might find themselves in charge of evacuating a city or in a rush to repair a sinking ship under very difficult circumstances.

Personalization

Tabletop RPGs are able to open up opportunities to customize and personalize gameplay when making PCs, interpreting rule sets/ guidelines, designing adventures and constructing campaign settings. Consequently, players who may be used to having little or no input into how they play or learn can suddenly find themselves able to take part in deciding how they play and learn.

Design Gaming

The most valued learning skills, (involved in developing the most elusive skills), allow learners/ players to become actively involved in shaping, adapting and re-designing a system/ gameplay. There are widely-used design games, (most obviously Lego), which allow players to set their own goals, design their own solutions and fine-tune gameplay.

Tabletop RPGs make especially good design games, because they're suited to co-design on several levels. Players start design gaming when they customize their PCs, but rapidly move on to co-designing solutions to encounters, roleplaying their characters and negotiating play with GMs and other players.

From there RPG players may also help to script narratives, interpret rules, form story arcs and define long-term goals. (Some RPGs even present options involving complete freedom to edit rule sets, encouragement to design gameplay props and ideas for introducing your own art or media into the gameplay).

Players who become GMs aim to cover all the same ground as players. They also interpret, design and patch the rules, try to promote player choice and, in many cases, construct settings and scenarios which set out to keep players thoroughly entertained for anything from an afternoon to a few decades.

Fun

Everything above is rendered largely worthless if players aren't enjoying the game they're playing. Getting involved in open-ended, improvisational storybuilding can be driven by either immediate or deep motivations. In either case, having fun remains central to staying motivated. If RPG gameplay heads off down a route towards grandstanding, win-mentality gameplay the fun is going to die, as that is not what genuine RPGs are designed to deliver.

Roleplaying Game Fun: Kids

Kids are natural roleplayers and 'let's pretend' is central to early learning games and activities. It's not difficult to tap into their enthusiasm for imaginative play by offering access to a variety of imaginative media and by adapting RPGs to offer the kinds of entertainment that can keep kids interested. For example, while some kids may want nothing to do with rules-based RPGs well after the age of 7, others may well start to ask about adding a few rules to Lego Heroica or trying out a fantasy card game at an earlier stage.

Whatever the exact timing, these novice RPG players are likely to have clear preferences. Young players often prefer broad, (but limited), choices, with enough prompting to help them build up their roleplaying skills. Many may also make a surprisingly strong 'investment' in their player characters (PCs), which can be encouraged through giving PCs a backstory, a few personal traits and some player-determined goals. As a result, the golden rule with young kids and new players is to avoid killing their PCs or their pets. (There may be exceptions for new players as making it tougher to survive is often part of gritty play and injuries are lethal in some hard

science or historical RPGs. In the case of a horror game like Cthulhu half the fun is seeing who can run fastest).

There are plenty of imaginative alternatives, including equipping players with extra protection, supplying convenient lucky-bags, using stunt point systems, (which can include a 'miraculous escape' option), giving players' some 'spider sense' abilities and/ or selling a beaten, but live, PC into slavery. If a player has such options, (working alongside suitable prompts), and then chooses to ignore all 'warnings' in a way that gets the player's PC killed – so be it.

Magical Creatures and Companions
Young players tend to enjoy open-ended games where they can explore fairly standard fantasy and historical or TV tie-in settings. Discovery and novelty are usually valued over combat and solutions can often be negotiated by talking to monsters and working together to solve basic challenges or to escape danger.

Giving PCs some pets, rides or other companions to accompany them on their adventures adds a lot to play for many kids. Pets are particularly helpful, as players are often quite protective of them and they offer a useful way to prompt new players from within the game. (It can simply be taken as said that kids' PCs can talk to pets, rides and monsters without learning a language, but other types of communication, including sign languages and training work well).

Overall, it's important to recognize that young kids, particularly those under 7, will have a very different understanding of many types of gameplay from older players. For example, a 3 or 4-year-old will rarely have an appreciation of good and bad that goes much beyond a distinction between the two.

Consequently, it's worth considering the messages and lessons young kids may take away from games. Avoiding overly scary monsters is a genuine concern while children are too young to make adult distinctions between fantasy and reality. Along similar lines, if kids are encouraged to solve problems with combat and to adopt a standard win-mentality, it's probably more likely they'll look to these kinds of play as they grow older and, possibly, carry such thinking over into other forms of real world problem-solving.

Magical Rewards
Tabletop RPGs differ from most other types of game by leaving the rules wide open to interpretation. However, if a game rewards slaying monsters and collecting gold above other options, (such as rewards for completing challenges or entertaining roleplaying), it's not uncommon for play to focus

on collecting loot and seizing magic items or technologies that help with collecting loot.

Young players may well be unaware of the emphasis placed on combat by some RPG systems. This presents an opportunity to encourage player choice and challenge-focused play right at the start of youngsters' RPG gaming. Doing so involves issuing rewards in the form of surprising or fantastic discoveries, bonuses for players' pets, new equipment for the local Dragonriders' school and, perhaps, the grateful thanks of those the players have saved.

Treasures and player advancement can be part of a wider approach, but young players with no goals other than killing the next monster will either get bored, or adapt to and join, the 'hack and slay' brigade.

Live Action
When playing with youngsters it's not unusual for a certain amount of live action or Live Action Roleplaying (LARP) to start up entirely spontaneously. Plastic figures are easily lifted from the table and brought into play, landscapes built from Lego don't take long to make and NERF darts are as good a way as any to battle with the Big, Bad Guy (BBG). Safety first please on the equipment if mock combat is part of the fun.

Exploration
Young players are busy spending their time exploring novel situations and working out solutions to new problems in real life. It is, therefore, far from surprising to find that they usually enjoy a fair amount of novelty and exploration during gameplay. Fantastic locations, unrelenting villains, bold maps, mystical creatures and other staples which may seem too familiar to older players all work well with youngsters, because kids can often be quite happy spending half-an-hour talking with the first imaginary unicorn they've ever come across.

Discovery
Uncovering a straightforward mystery, finding out how dragons are raised, learning how to mix a potion in a magic laboratory or traveling to an exotic land where the plants communicate are examples of discoveries likely to appeal to young players. Under such circumstances, working out how to make an antidote to a poison that's harming a friendly PC is usually going to be more meaningful and relevant than getting paid 500 gold pieces to kill a monster.

Caricatures
As players get older standard issue PCs and NPCs lack the depth of character and character background required to sustain players' interest. However, for young players a world bristling with pirate captains, brawling fighters and grumpy old sorcerers makes for a welcome start. Apart from

anything else, these caricatures tie-in with similar caricatures found in other media for children, allowing players to take cues from interacting through familiar roles.

Making Player Characters

Experienced RPG players will start a game with a character sheet full of skills, abilities and equipment. The design of a new PC may even be quite a mechanical business involving combat optimization. Kids who don't know or care much about elaborate rules are unlikely to take much from this kind of PC design.

A group of young players is highly likely to be open to making much more of the character-building process. Many can find hours of play in simply exploring their characters' background.

As soon as the parents have been killed off or side-lined, (which seems to be about establishing that a child's PC is independent and free of parental control), young players' PCs will often happily explore their local village, chase-off the school bullies, fix an invitation to wizards' school and/ or set up a home or base. Rules are barely necessary at this stage and the resulting 'adventure ready' PC already has a place in the game when it comes to setting out on further adventures.

Tricks or Traps

The types of subtle tricks and deadly traps set in the way of older, experienced players are, for the most part, fairly unwelcome in games aimed at young players. What appears to be fair play and/ or a tough encounter to an experienced player can easily be interpreted as an unfair bolt from the blue by a novice. GMs can get round this by clearly flagging what players should expect from a trick or trap - and by offering multiple solutions to the problems presented by tricks and traps.

Powers

Powers, skills, abilities and technologies stand in direct opposition to authentic, gritty play if players' PCs are able to wield major or even unlimited powers on a regular basis. Youngsters can usually see the sense in retaining a challenge within a game, but they are likely to be looking to collect rewards involving a combination of frequent minor bonuses/ power-ups and some persistent - and genuinely useful - powers or skills. An occasional touch of the spectacular doesn't do any harm either.

The starting point here can be to make available magic items that give a modest regular bonus, which becomes much more effective when a 'critical hit' is rolled.

Design Gaming, Shared Gaming and Gameplay Design

Co-design and game-related play, such as making-up stories using plastic figures, creating models out of boxes, putting together game-related collages, gaming with Lego, drawing PC sketches and similar activities prime kids for imaginative games and sharing in the design of their own play and learning.

Roleplaying Game Fun: Older Kids

For kids of 7-11 the wafer-thin plots and cardboard cut-out characters that once helped to keep RPG life simple soon start to look increasingly tired. Many such players are already likely to be watching TV shows like Merlin and Primeval, which offer moderately complex characters and plots. At the same time their play and games will be going through a process of social shaping at school, involving a shift from imaginative learning through play towards more structured and procedural activities. As a result, GMs and players who wish to keep kids of 7-13 playing, (or to recruit new players), appear to face a difficult task.

Tabletop games do, however, have a couple of aces up their sleeve. Firstly, a console or a DVD doesn't offer the same social fun as a light-hearted boardgame or RPG session. Secondly, whenever older GMs and other players step in to help to bridge young players' skills gaps, (through encouragement and prompting), the resulting gameplay puts players back in charge of shaping their own gameplay.

The following options suggest a few approaches to adapting play to suit older kids. The style of play offered to older kids, (in terms of not taking the rules too seriously and offering challenges that prompt players to shape play), seems as likely to recruit more players as any number of electric plots or epic characters.

Characters

The trusty steed, the oily thief, the brash warrior and similar PC and NPC staples that often serve well when playing with younger players become ever more worn and clichéd as players get older. Players and GMs generally look to escape such basic PC and NPC stereotypes at a fairly early stage to lend their gameplay greater authenticity.

Rule sets may attempt to cover the whole of PC characterization in a single sweep during PC design/ generation. Unfortunately, this method can rely on characterization through exhaustive PC builds, character optimization and the straitjacket of myriad character classes. For a kid without an understanding of the subtle nuances of characterization resulting from rolling an extra 5% bonus in Truffle Detection this largely mechanical approach is a pretty soulless business.

Introducing simple mechanics that take account of a wider range of skill sets can help to breathe life into PCs and NPCs, as selecting personality traits, customizing PC's clothing and discovering, or uncovering, some kind of past all go some way towards fleshing out a unique character.

Introducing backstories to character design is an even better way to build more compelling characters, because talking or playing through PC and NPC characterization allows players and GMs to shape characters as they're formed. The results are PCs or NPCs which have been self-negotiated to arrive at a good fit between a player's expectations and the types of gameplay that are going to occupy everyone at the table.

Once play has begun characterization can be firmed up and freshened up by keeping accounts of PCs' and NPCs' actions and deeds. Adding visual elements to PC records, keeping logs of adventure maps and diagrams, and recording brief details of PCs' adventures all help to put flesh on the bones.

Players continuously develop a PC's characterization though play, but NPCs don't receive the same attention and can appear static unless GMs form a pool of recurring NPCs who move with the times. For some, such as an old friend who never left the village the PCs grew up in, change may be infrequent and the occasional birth and marriage is enough to keep events in motion. However, for other familiar and favorite NPCs it may be worth keeping a basic timeline of events and updating it whenever players come into contact with the same NPC.

Tricks and Traps
Few players of any age seem to enjoy having deadly traps sprung on them. Older kids are open to adding extra risk to play, but not in ways they consider unfair or completely unexpected. Traps should, ideally, be well signposted, have multiple solutions and only get lethal if players are disregarding the signposting.

Basic tricks can be introduced on a number of levels, including straightforward distractions, delays, bad deals and switching or concealing items. More elaborate tricks, such as pyramid schemes, are not something older kids are likely to be familiar with. In addition, young players may not recognize more complex ploys or schemes as a part of gameplay they are comfortable with until they're used to more basic tricks.

Storymaking
Rounded characters, campaign backdrops, (with geographies, histories and cultures), calendars of events, recurring enemies and plenty of events players can participate in, (e.g. an annual jousting tournament or a Griffin race), are among the elements a GM can layer, mix and weave together to form an immersive game that captures players' imaginations.

It may seem impossible to keep track of all the details thrown up by so many options, but there's no need to try. A GM can start play with a framework or blueprint and only drill-down into finer detail where and when the plots and challenges chosen by players call for further thought.

GMs may find it helpful to work from feature and event rich outlines that prime a setting with plenty of challenges and shared expectations. This approach makes it quicker and simpler to fill the gaps when zooming in on the gameplay of most interest to your players.

Immersion

Older kids are interested in more immersive games with imaginative settings, but few are looking for this to go down the route of simulation gaming. Making play more authentic, more connected and generally grittier, therefore, has to avoid taking away the 'magic dust' or pure imagination offered by RPGs. For example, playing high fantasy with powerful wizards and mighty heroes works well with older kids, but complete flights of fantasy, (where the highly unlikely or inconsistent impacts on play), become increasingly unwelcome.

The Unexpected

A much wider range of encounter settings, plots and challenges, NPCs, tricks and monsters is needed to keep older kids entertained. Bolts from the blue may not be entirely welcome, but thrills and spills, the shock of the new, elements of mystery and investigation, minor conspiracies, a deeper or darker atmosphere, more territory and options to explore different habitats are all likely to be appreciated.

The more subtle the introduction and use of novel and unexpected elements, the greater the chances of them becoming a preferred option within a gaming group. For example, allowing players to research and develop a form of Greek Fire within a fantasy setting is probably going to work well enough, providing the cost of the ingredients balances alongside the destruction caused by the Greek Fire. (It might also be helpful to limit the substance's use as a result of it being very hazardous to transport).

The alternative approach of simply suddenly introducing gunpowder, with all that follows, is less likely to seem novel and unlikely to add anything meaningful to a group's gameplay. Instead play risks being drawn into a technological arms race, which tears away at the expectations and challenges offered by mid to high fantasy.

Design Gaming, Shared Game and Gameplay Design

The design game options available to older kids include many suited to younger kids. However, there's a clear difference in terms of the variety of co-design activities that are both practical to run and also likely to appeal to players. Illustrating PC sheets, drawing detailed maps and building more

complete models can progress to a new level with older kids. New activities might incorporate activities like painting gaming figures, planning and making a fantasy banquet, designing giant PC sheets or using markers to draw A3 dungeon layouts.

Starting out as a GM may also become an option for some kids aged 7 or over. Ideally, players who show an interest will get the chance to help out a GM at a few games, before putting together a small adventure and running a short game. Those who have the opportunity to develop in this way are likely to pick up a wide range of valuable gaming skills without becoming overwhelmed by the work involved.

Roleplaying Game Fun: Young Adults

By the time a player is about to become a teenager some of the more magical or fantastic roleplaying enjoyed by younger RPG players has completely lost its appeal. So much so that such gameplay can be considered deeply embarrassing. As a result, there's a strong incentive for teenagers to move away from story-building gameplay towards supposedly more adult rules systems and/ or games mastery.

This drift towards win-mentality gameplay and wargaming can be tempered by making RPG gameplay genuinely more adult; which frequently involves offering increasingly authentic settings and plenty of realistic in-game challenges.

Adding greater authenticity is about adjusting the balance between the real and the imaginary – rather than getting bogged-down in simulation and re-enactment. Consequently, presenting teenage players with open-ended 'real world' challenges is a very straightforward way to set about introducing more authenticity without abandoning imaginative gameplay.

The options set out below can, hopefully, combine to help Gamesmasters to present campaigns and adventures that balance authentic, gritty RPG play alongside the slightly edgy imaginative story-building suited to the preferences of many young adults.

Personalities
Young adults are ready to move on from standalone characters to characters that operate within networks of relationships. Under these conditions a PC or a NPC might act quite differently when influenced by certain individuals, groups and/ or circumstances.

For example, a NPC might develop from the ever-amiable bard to the companionable bard who is completely hostile and unapproachable once a year. Along the same lines, an employee might behave quite differently when the boss isn't around, while a temperamental wizard could turn out to

be unusually fond of apricot pastries – and very appreciative of someone who went to the trouble to find this out and bring a few round.

Group dynamics allow GMs to go a step further and introduced effects based on the behaviors of groups and communities. For example, the collective mindsets of crowds, fans, rioters, celebrants, zealots, families and organizations are more than capable of influencing, and dramatically shifting, the views and actions of individuals caught-up in group interactions.

Tricks and Traps

Mechanical traps and deadly traps are not of a lot more interest to young adults than other age groups. Tricks offer far more options and solutions to explore. That is not to say that traps serve no purpose, as finding a solution to an elaborate and dangerous trap can prove entertaining if players have to think on their feet. Nevertheless, most young adult players and groups are likely to be more intrigued by tricks, which offer a much wider range of challenges and plot hooks than most traps.

The combination of a trick and a trap also becomes an option with young adults. It is probably worth bearing in mind that even adult players need a gentle introduction to double-edged traps and trickery. Otherwise, they may feel the challenges they're facing aren't sufficiently 'upfront' or fair to give them a chance to come up with solutions.

Creep

It's quite straightforward to make RPG sessions for teenagers a shade darker than games for kids without frightening or offending anyone. Hauntings, ill omens, dark prophecies, seemingly bizarre events, local superstitions, cries in the night, curious rituals and secret ceremonies are all able to lend play a touch of extra suspense. These kinds of events or interactions can also back-up any dark undercurrents waiting to be exposed within ongoing plots.

In contrast, within RPG sessions excessive violence and reveling in gore rapidly loses all impact. A threat to PCs only holds any real suspense while it's a veiled threat and the guiding principle with creep is that less is more.

For instance, a few drops of blood spattered over some leaves, a bloody hand print missing the impression of a ring finger and the discovery of a bloodstained dagger clearly brings more to the table than a gruesome description about a NPC losing a finger.

Appealing to as many of the players' and PCs' senses as possible is very helpful here and the options go far beyond the standard definition of five senses. Intuition, color, texture, physiology, (e.g. tears, torn muscles and perspiration), personal likes and dislikes, emotional reactions, and formal

and informal language may all combine and interact to create tension and play, or prey, upon players' imaginations.

For example, amidst the battle cries and lamentations of a desperate last stand, PCs and players might, respectively, have positive in-game and out-game reactions to the welcome sound of the marching song of a long overdue relief column.

In addition, when games may well involve all manner of wildlife, fantasy creatures and/ or alien species the sensory options get much wider. The electronic detection systems of a Hammerhead Shark may not be something we can easily relate to, but a PC experiencing a shark's senses while underwater might, for example, have access to radar-like images kept unavailable to those without sharks' senses.

Further options include some snakes' heat-seeking vision, dolphins' ultrasound capabilities, certain dungeon-dwellers' night vision and comparable sensory systems, which are in plentiful supply both in the natural world and inside most monster catalogues.

Crisis Management
At times a GM can really pile on the pressure when playing with older players. Crisis management is discussed in more detail when looking at challenges elsewhere in the RPG Handbook. However, the basic principles are straightforward and highly likely to help older players get caught up in RPG gameplay.

In the middle of dealing with difficult opponents, surprises, ambushes and/ or any number of other plot hooks and challenges, there's nothing like the sudden arrival of an all-consuming crisis to shake everything up.

A meteor strike, a massive earthquake, a volcanic eruption or any similar physical or political cataclysm can act as a trigger and players, and their PCs, are suddenly dealing with whatever was going on already amidst a major crisis. Under such circumstances players clearly have to adjust priorities, adapt to new conditions and remain mindful of the world as it was.

Survival
Survival gameplay is also discussed elsewhere in the RPG Handbook, but remains worth mentioning here because older players can become more motivated and more involved in play through the extra demands placed on players and PCs by survival scenarios. Adding a layer of survival gameplay to a game can add authenticity, encourage players to resolve to overcome the conditions, and present a series of dilemmas concerning who survives and how they continue to survive.

It's usually helpful to avoid using either crisis management or gameplay as a simple means to lay PCs low. So, rather than drop the players' favorite bank straight into a caldera full of lava and burying an entire city in ash, it might be more interesting to present players with the realization that they don't have much time to act if they wish to protect their wealth and their health.

Of course, it can still be helpful to use catastrophes as a device to remove the unplayable, unpopular or simply played-out. For example, that much visited kingdom where the PCs are always hailed as heroes may become less hospitable after permanent flooding turns much of the formerly prosperous farmland into a massive swamp.

Design Gaming and Games Design

Safety concerns, mess, costs and commitment can all limit the range of enterprise activities, spin-off hobbies, arts and crafts, gatherings and projects that are easily linked to playing RPGs with younger players. Teenagers still need safe, inexpensive and motivating games and activities, but the gloves are finally off when it comes to design gaming options.

By 11 or 12 many kids are able to begin to make their own games, scenarios, presentations, sketches and modest enterprises. RPGs provide an ideal backdrop for developing such activities and the motivation to sketch a PC or run a gaming group may be just the encouragement a RPG player needs to develop as a graphic designer or as a conference organizer.

RPGs for Kids and Big Kids

This is a selection of RPGs aimed at kids and young people. It's not at all clear if a rule set adds much to roleplaying for younger kids, as they tend to need little more than a few plastic figures and their imaginations to get started. However, for some children a particular genre or style of play can do a lot to encourage an interest in story-building and RPGs.

The appeal of certain genres and styles of play also applies to older kids and young adults who are likely to enjoy learning a basic rule set or beginning to get the hang of a more complex rule set.

That said by 7+ there are many kids who could play perfectly well with a standard or mainstream RPG providing the GM shows a bit of flexibility. Consequently, the list is not intended to suggest that a RPG needs to be tagged as a 'Kids' RPG' to play well with kids. Instead, such games may be of value - to read or to play - simply in terms of helping adults to get inside kids' perspectives on RPG gameplay.

In addition, while genre and multimedia tie-ins, (such as books and TV series), may help to encourage new or young players to pick-up a RPG,

most of these games also help out once players start using the rule set. For example, they often have more straightforward language than full-blown RPG titles; they usually keep character generation short and to the point; and they typically offer accessible page layouts.

Advanced Fighting Fantasy

This title is a shade more advanced than the solo game-books of the same name, but far from complicated. Advanced Fighting Fantasy is available as a glossy book and offers a complete fantasy RPG. The popularity of the game-books seems likely to make it all the easier to encourage young players to try out Advanced Fighting Fantasy.

Adventures in Oz

Time to set off along the Yellow Brick Road for RPG gameplay set in Oz. The book and the film have stood the test of time and it won't be a surprise when movie producers decide to give Oz another try at the box office. Until then Adventures in Oz offers child-friendly gameplay with enough roleplaying options to keep adults at the table.

BASH aka Basic Action Games

What no superheroes? Not a problem as BASH aka Basic Action Super Heroes Ultimate Edition covers all the essentials in a compact rule set that's straightforward and accessible to younger players. The game also looks the part and headlines an extended range of RPG offerings based around the same rules-light - but not sparse - framework.

Buffy

Buffy is a full RPG, which is suited to teenagers rather than kids. It has gone in and out of publication at various stages, but is well worth tracking down. The mechanics aren't particularly complex and the game is well-known for recreating the style and atmosphere of the TV series. There is also a similar RPG from Eden Studios for Angel.

Do: Pilgrims of the Flying Temple

This storytelling game started-out with a very successful Kickstarter scheme. It's a collaborative storytelling game where the players' characters set-out on a fantasy adventure. Strategy and imagination combine to build the story of the PC's journey, but things don't go quite to plan and the adventurers frequently run into trouble. The game's sense of humor is a plus, as is the very appealing artwork. The game plays in a roughly similar manner to Happy Birthday Robot, (shown below), so there's no need for a GM. Kids of 7+, and possibly younger, should have no problem learning the game quickly. An expansion pack called Do: The Book of Letters extends the gameplay.

Faery's Tale Deluxe
Faery's tale is aimed at players of 6+. Players take on the role of fairies, such as a pixie, a brownie or a sprite, and explore Brightwood. The game includes three ready-to-run adventures.

Harvesters
Animals, such as badgers and squirrels, become the heroic characters at the heart of adventures which are otherwise similar to typical fantasy RPG gameplay. In other words, you have character classes like knights, wizards and druids, but they take the form of a variety of wildlife.

Happy Birthday Robot
Young players enjoy shared storytelling as they take it in turns to write the tale of Robot's birthday. While the players decide the what, where, when and how of the Robot's day, they never know how much they'll be able to add during one turn, as the game's key mechanic gives a limited number of words to be used each turn. No GM required, but you do need a bundle of d6s on hand.

Hero Kids
The Hero Kids RPG is a D6 system aimed at kids from 4-10. It combines a very colorful presentation with a child-friendly, class-based fantasy RPG. The game is 37 pages long and arrives with a choice of 10 heroes and 8 monsters. More monsters are included in a series of separate adventures. Both the heroes and the monsters have matching printable stand-up minis to help kids to keep track of what's going on as the action unfolds at the table. Modular map tiles are a worthwhile feature included in, for example, the Maze of the Minotaur Premium Adventure add-on pack.

Kids Dungeon Adventure
Pre-school RPG rules may not be necessary, but Kids Dungeon Adventure goes a long way towards suggesting they can offer plenty of fun. The game offers a very easy, flexible system that works alongside kids' other toys to build adventures. The site is particularly good at showing what the game has to offer, so a visit is highly recommended.

Kids and Critters
This 3 in 1 pack includes a woodland/ wildlife RPG called Tales from the Wood; a jolly kids in ideal England RPG called Lashings of Ginger Beer; and a . . . Prairie Dog RPG. The first is all rabbits and badgers gameplay comparable in some ways to Warrior Cats; the second is all about mysteries and adventures in Scooby Doo takes itself too seriously mode; while the last is . . . unique?

Lego Heroica
The Lego brand and a simple rule set make the Heroica range very appealing to kids of 5+. However, the built-in adventures are a bit

railroading and focused on beating-up on monsters. The game really comes into its own when you start to patch the rules and mix-up the gameplay to build on the basic framework. In other words, it may start out as a dungeon crawl, but there's nothing to stop anyone from turning it into a mix of exploration, roleplaying and some beating-up on monsters.

Lone Wolf Multiplayer Game
Joe Dever's Lone Wolf books are probably the best known solo game-books after the Fighting Fantasy series. The RPG uses the same simple mechanics to encourage players of the books to step up to a RPG. As a result of the success of the books, the game has the added advantage of a fully fleshed-out game-world and plenty of add-ons.

Meddling Kids
There's not a lot of guesswork required to work out the game's theme. Players set off on comic adventures and investigations much along the lines of the TV format. Solving mysteries in spooky locations is central to the gameplay, as is having a laugh about the characters and tropes from the TV series. The game has a lot to offer through its almost universally familiar backdrop - and the expectations that come out of that in terms of suggesting actions and options for players to try out on the basis of their knowledge of the TV shows.

Mermaid Adventures
Mermaid Adventures describes itself as a "RPG of Undersea Fun!" Players take the part of a mermaid and go about forming friendships while taking on sea monsters and solving mysteries. The game is suitable for kids of 4+ and full of very colorful line art. The core book has sample adventures and there's a matching coloring book.

Mouse Guard
Mouse Guard is a beautifully presented storytelling RPG. It has, perhaps, the most complicated rules system among the games shown here. However, the strong support for story-building, the series of popular Mouse Guard books and the setting built around the books make for an excellent game. It's possibly more a game to be run by adults or teenagers - but younger players with a basic idea of how RPGs are played are likely to enjoy the game.

The Princess Game
The players roleplay different parts of the thoughts of a young girl, e.g. her love, her curiosity, her fear and her imagination. They players then set off to see what they can find and imagine in the world. It plays a bit like other easy story-builders such as Happy Birthday Robot and is available under a Creative Commons, non-commercial, attribution license. It would not be hard to also play it as 'The Prince Game'.

Rory's Story Cubes

Roll the dice and tell a story based on the images that turn-up. Rory's Story Cubes are fun, inexpensive, open to all ages, no set-up required and easy to use in schools and libraries. There are now extra packs including Action/ 'verb' cubes for describing actions, the standalone Voyages for epic adventure stories and an iPhone option.

Toon

Toon brings cartoon characters into a RPG which is all about recreating the comic mayhem of classic cartoon heroes. You can make any cartoon character you like and then play through adventures in cartoon worlds where the special powers are those of cartoon comedy, which means characters need never die - because they can always pop back into shape.

The Secret Lives of Gingerbread Men

Players create gingerbread cookies to act as their character sheets and play the part of gingerbread men in this Christmas-themed title. The sprinkles and toppings on your cookie give special powers to play in game and you simply eat the powers as you use them. Injuries are treated in the same manner - just tear a chunk off your cookie and eat it. The game is highly recommended across a wide age range for use in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Warrior Cats

This one's a beautifully produced, short, free RPG based on Erin Hunter's books of the same name. It's suitable for players perhaps as young as 5 and the fiction titles add new, ready-to-run adventures as more books are released. It's also easily adaptable to playing with all manner of animals, including our personal variant Sabretooth.

Witch Girls Adventure

Witch Girls Adventure is a fantasy game about the lives of young mistresses of magic. The Witch Girl books and cartoons provide plenty of support to help to encourage kids to give the game a try. The rules aren't complicated and suit the age range of the popular books, i.e. 7+.

The 5e Core

Basic Rules

The basic rules for **D&D 5e** are free to download and cover the essentials of character classes, a selection of races, standard equipment and rules for running combat and roleplaying. As a try before you buy option the download is sufficient to help with making a choice on whether or not to find out more.

The Starter Set

This set offers a practical way to progress from the basic rules as it adds a short adventure and conveniences like character sheets and a set of dice. If you like the look of the basic rules, but aren't sure if you want to commit to buying the full books, there is a lot to be said for making the Starter Set your next step into the game. However, if you have already been grabbed by the whole idea of playing **D&D 5e** the same money could go towards purchasing the three main **D&D** titles.

Player's Handbook

The Player's Handbook is an essential for all players including DMs, as it contains the core mechanics for running play and coverage of all the main character classes and spells. It's also a pleasure to view in terms of the art and design, which helps to express the nature of the game. If you are a player you can and should stop there with the books - apart from considering Xanathar's Guide to Everything as an option once you've been playing for a while.

Dungeon Master's Guide

It is possible for a DM to get along without the Dungeon Master's Guide, but the book is packed with further mechanics, lots of guidance to help with building your own adventures and full details on numerous magic items. If you're going to DM you'll want a copy sooner rather than later.

Monster Manual

Playing any adventure calls for access to monsters' stats and ideally some description and lore concerning the monsters. As with the other core titles the illustrations are entirely complementary and if you wish can be revealed to players at the right points in play to let their characters clearly see what they're dealing with.

Volo's Guide to Monsters

The second collection of monsters for 5e offers a worthwhile collection of background material and lore on some of the signature monsters and races from **D&D**'s past and present. The title also contains lots of additional creatures to fill-out the selection in the Monster Manual and full details of a great many pre-cut 5e NPCs currently peppering most games and scenarios. These ready-builds include several higher level NPCs, which are

very convenient/ largely preparation free for the DM to use. At the same time they can be quickly tweaked through spell choices and/ or magic items and treasure. Volo's is clearly intended for DMs, but has information for the player's side, including some monster classes that some DMs may agree to players using.

Xanathar's Guide to Everything
Extra class options, more spells and suggestions for DMs make for a fun collection of non-essential extras. Xanathar's Guide is suited to experienced DMs and players who have tried many of the existing options within the game and are looking to inject some novelty into their use of 5e.

Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes
Even more monsters may seem overkill, but this collection of over 400 is ideally suited for filling gaps in the options available for higher level characters to take on. It probably adds more to the game than Xanathar's Guide and is the fifth fairly essential title for a long-term DM.

Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide
For those wishing to adventure within the Forgotten Realms setting the Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide digs down into lots of flavour and role concerning one region of the Forgotten Realms. As a result the title can add depth to a campaign focused on embedding itself in the Forgotten Realms setting, but is fairly specific to that particular task. There are some extras in terms of spells and class options, but nothing major.

Summary
The essentials boil down to the Player's Handbook for non-DMs and the Player's Handbook, the Monster Manual and the Dungeon Master's Guide for DMs. Volo's Guide to Monsters and Mordenkainen's Book of Foes become increasingly relevant as a DM runs and/ or designs more adventures.

Adventures

Bought-in adventures are a necessity for many groups, because they reduce the preparation time for DMs and so allow regular games to happen. Official adventures may be shaped by the imaginations of the designers, but you can change whatever you like to suit your game and designing your own 5e adventures straight away is quite a heavy lift if you're a new DM.

The range of full-blown adventure campaigns released with 5e are consistently based on revisiting opponents and situations drawn from distinctive campaigns that appeared in earlier versions of D&D. However, the new titles generally go quite some distance beyond the originals in terms of scale and plotting, which ensures there is plenty that is fresh in all of them.

Tales from the Yawning Portal is something of an exception, as the title provides a compilation of 5e re-runs of classic adventures, such as Against the Giants, the Tomb of Horrors and White Plume Mountain. These classic adventures work in 5e but, if you've played a 5e Against the Giants and then go to Storm King's Thunder, there's going to be a certain amount of overlap.

The titles mentioned below have all been well-received and are proven in terms of plenty of groups of players having tried-out what the campaigns have to offer.

The Hoard of the Dragon Queen

This early in-house 5e adventure delivers familiar D&D gameplay with the players' characters pitched against a dragon cult intent on releasing the fearsome, five-headed dragon goddess Tiamat into the world. Play runs from 1-15th level and it's an enjoyable outing with plenty of touchstones connecting to D&D tropes.

Curse of Strahd

The pocket world of Barovia hosts longstanding D&D super villain and vampire Strahd, who runs a kingdom suffused with dreadful curses, ceaseless lamentations and more than a few gory deaths. The horror isn't really very full on, but the environment as a whole has its own set of sub-rules, which go a long way towards putting across the impression PCs are genuinely dislocated from their usual reality and under threat from the supernatural.

Princes of the Apocalypse

Princes of the Apocalypse is another early 5e outing and an extended excursion into the classic Underdark environment where alien landscapes operate alongside an evil worldview. The adventure is both challenging and packed with incident. Of the earlier official offerings this is possibly the top pick in terms of taking you into a classic D&D environment that has been built upon under 5e to become engaging and quite fresh - despite such extensive use of the drow in every version since they first appeared.

Storm King's Thunder

Dungeons, formidable opponents and giants on the rampage. There's both consistent plot development and increasing challenge in what can safely be said to be one of the most widely appreciated official campaigns. It's definitely a good candidate for a first campaign for a new or relatively new group of players and/ or DM.

Tomb of Annihilation

The updated Tomb of Horrors redone as a full 5e campaign offers a particularly enjoyable overland adventure with lots of factions to encounter and some emphasis on survival. This is followed by a quite relentless

journey into the trap-laden tomb, which is often deadly unless PCs are both quite well-equipped and cautious.

Waterdeep: Dragon Heist

An urban adventure where a hoard of 500,000 gold pieces, here 'dragons', is missing and the PCs have to investigate where it's gone to and get there before the villain. Though structured the adventure still operates as something of a sandbox and a city-based adventure set-up for 1st-5th level is a worthwhile addition to the official titles.

Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage

The Undermountain dungeon lies beneath the Yawning Portal tavern in the city of Waterdeep and contains 23 levels of the dungeon lair of the Mad Mage, Halaster Blackcloak. Traps, monsters and treasures set-up fairly traditional style dungeon exploration peppered with a few underlying mysteries. The adventure offers a straightforward progression from Waterdeep: Dragon Heist and caters for 5th-20th level PCs.

Part 2: Getting Started

Roleplaying Games

Dungeons and Dragons
The first and, by some distance, the most popular RPG was put together by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. It now exists in many forms, including the official D&D brand owned by Wizards of the Coast, which is currently preparing to move to a new edition. The branded rules have become progressively longer and more detailed up to and including the 4th Edition.

However, the latest version appears to be taking a step back towards a more straightforward core game – allied to optional add-ons that offer more tactical complexity. Variants include clones based around every official edition released to date, including ideas drawn from the 4th Edition.

Call of Cthulhu
The game is largely based on the works of 1920s fantastic horror author H.P. Lovecraft and focuses on dealing with the minions and manifestations of hideous, over the top evil deities. Play is not about collecting treasure or slaying monsters. Instead Call of Cthulhu emphasizes atmosphere and build-up. It's fairly typical to adopt an investigation and revelation approach, where characters are, for the most part, concentrating on surviving against the odds.

GURPS aka General, Universal Roleplaying System
Multi-systems aim to allow players to use the same skeleton key core rules across multiple RPG genres. GURPS allows play across dozens of genres and is also known for emphasizing realism. As a result combat is often deadly and quite authentic.

Pathfinder
This Open Gaming License based clone of Edition 3.5 of Dungeons and Dragons has made a major success of embedding the game in a rich campaign world and now rivals and at times outstrips the official Dungeons and Dragons brand.

Swords & Wizardry
Among the many clones of earlier versions of Dungeons and Dragons, Swords & Wizardry re-captures much of the essence of early, improvisational gameplay. It is also a well-supported game with whole books of extra creatures and numerous scenarios available to players. Thistle Games' clones Corruption and Renegade use similar mechanics and are part of a much wider pool of readily or immediately compatible rules-light games.

Traveler

The cut-down booklet form of the original Traveler SciFi RPG made for a dramatic change from the spells and heroics of Dungeons and Dragons. Before starting play characters went through a careers millstone, which gave them skills at the expense of numerous risks and considerable aging. Combat was also deadly and, while recent versions tend to be more forgiving, the game remains popular for most styles of SciFi RPG gameplay, e.g. Space Opera and hard SciFi.

World of Darkness

The supernatural World of Darkness titles concern vampires, werewolves and such like. Vampire: the Requiem and Mage: the Ascension are the two best known titles released under the system. The games are not everyone's idea of fun and can be unsettling for some players. Nevertheless, WoD proved popular for a time and placed horror RPGs into a more gritty, (marginally), less over the top backdrop than Call of Cthulhu.

Rogue Trader

Dark Heresy, Deathwatch, Only War and Rogue Trader are all part of a series of related 'space marine' RPGs. They have a very detailed, dark, dystopian backdrop and more rules than you can shake a stick at. However, they are examples of rules-heavy RPGs that can be played in a flexible, quite improvisational manner once players have invested time in reading and playing through the rules. This is particularly true of Rogue Trader, which is all about massive, interstellar starships trading over vast stretches of extremely hazardous space. The trading angle within Rogue Trader encourages gameplay that opens up into a wide range of roleplaying options, so espionage, trade and diplomacy get a chance to shine.

Flashing Blades

This is a fairly rules-light, historical RPG with a Three Musketeers meets the dastardly Cardinal Richelieu theme, which extends into areas covering the Duelists and Napoleonic adventures. The rules invite some patching, but there's a lot of fun in a system where characters are mortal, yet able to pull off plenty of swashbuckling heroic stunts.

Corruption

Corruption is an example of an Old School take on the original RPG rules by Dave Arneson and Gary E. Gygax. The idea of most clones is to revisit the rules light, improvisational gameplay found in early RPGs. For some this means re-shaping the rules; while for others – including Corruption - it's about introducing a new emphasis, e.g. theming games and campaign design. Clones are generally an inexpensive way to play RPGs and systems such as Swords & Wizardry, Renegade and Corruption are easy to translate in and out of the Original Game.

[Wikipedia keeps a very long list of tabletop RPGs](#).

Roleplaying Game Genres

There are thousands of RPGs to choose from and at least one or two for almost any genre imaginable. The genres and games listed here are just a short selection of the available options:

RPG Genres Table

No.	Genre	Examples
1	Cyberpunk	Shadowrun
2	Espionage	Blowback or Spycraft
3	Fantasy	Dungeons and Dragons, Corruption or Swords & Wizardry
4	Historical	Flashing Blades
5	Horror	All Flesh is Eaten or Call of Cthulhu
6	Modern	Spycraft, Blowback or D20 Modern
7	Multisystem	Savage Worlds and GURPs
8	Post-Apocalypse	Gamma World
9	Sci-Fi	Traveler, Rogue Trader, Dark Heresy or Deathwatch
10	Space Opera	Traveler or Star Wars RPG
11	Steampunk	Space: 1889
12	Superhero	Marvel Roleplaying Game
13	Supernatural	Buffy RPG or Dresden Files
14	Western	Aces and Eights or Deadlands

Wikipedia has an extensive list of RPGs arranged by genre.

Roleplaying Game Props

Adding a few props to a tabletop RPG game can be a lot of fun. Most are best used fairly sparingly, as props tend to lose their effect if the GM turns up looking like an extra from yet another Harry Potter movie.

Boardgames

Boardgame accessories, counters and pieces are an excellent source of props. Dice, wooden counters, plastic counters, casino chips, coins and plastic tokens are just some of the inexpensive extras available from specialist suppliers. Some boardgames that you already have in your games collection may even lend themselves to this, e.g. Dread Pirate is a simple introductory boardgame, which trades almost entirely on its piratical look and feel.

Bricks

Jenga and Lego are the top picks here for fairly obvious reasons, i.e. very flexible, unbreakable and both are probably sitting around the house

anyway. By far the cheapest way to buy lots of Lego is on eBay by the kilo or pound. It's even cheaper still to ask around and see if anyone has a box or two stuck in the attic. In either case there's a fair chance the whole lot will need a good clean in soapy water.

Candy

There's candy and there's serious candy. A few skull-shaped milk gums are OK but there's a lot more on offer out there if you look around. Bleeding hearts, exploding jelly skulls and large edible spiders are all highly recommended. We wouldn't advise too much at one go and it takes a bit of searching to get more interesting or unique items. Candy Warehouse, home to Candy Blood Cherry Liquid Bags and the classic Apple Flavored Green Candy Warts, is a good place to start, (with a categories search), but don't show the kids - this is extreme candy!

Counters

It's possible to play RPGs without maps, figures or counters. However, many players find it easier to get involved and to know what's going on if there's a rough 'floor plan' map on the table.

Spending a little extra cash to get some painted fantasy figures to show where PCs are on the map is money well spent. Some players also pay for and paint metal figures to represent NPCs, monsters and items like treasure chests. This looks great, but figure painting is a hobby in itself, and new players can be left wondering how they'll ever get their game to look as good.

Counters, (such as colored stones, glass beads, casino chips, boardgame counters and plastic RPG counters), provide a very easy, and inexpensive, way to show what's going on and to make the table look good.

Alea Tools magnetic counters arrive in various packs and can be placed on the table as monster, treasure and condition markers when there aren't enough figures to go round. The markers can also be placed beneath figures to indicate their current status, e.g. stunned, confused, or fireballed! Combining Alea's counters with magnetic boards is a further option that lets mapping move on to the wall.

Inexpensive counters such as Tracker Tokens are good for keeping track of what's going on at the table and making the tabletop a rich source of information during play, i.e. attention grabbing.

The tokens, counters and other gadgetry made by Dapper Devil help out in much the same way as other counter collections, but they offer some unusual/ extra options.

Dice
There are many different types of colored, shaped game dice available to buy. Have fun choosing.

False Documents
Making realistic, but not too realistic, blueprints, passports, currencies and coded messages is more about being able to access a computer and printer than needing to buy props. Homemade documents made by yourself can be specific to your campaign and offer players a hands-on slice of authenticity. Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons can be particularly helpful as sources of raw materials, as many out-of-date official documents, stamps and images are available for download.

Fantasy Maps
Get the colored markers and a few large sheets of paper out and ask the kids to design parts of the RPG setting and adventures. As kids get older they may want cleaner/ more polished maps, so sketch, review, copy and link as required. The place names don't need to be particularly clever and the drawing can be pretty ragged, so long as there's plenty of color involved.

Adding glitter and stickers isn't going to suit every young player, but a lot of that depends on the decoration on offer. If the glitter comes out of a gel pen and the stickers feature a bunch of monsters, chances are the kids will enjoy slowly turning a basic map into a collage.

Adults may prefer to skip on the glitter and choose from a wide selection of ready-made maps that can be bought online.

Figures and Scenery
Counters add visual clarity, typography and status updates at the table, but they aren't nearly as rich a visual medium as miniature figures. It is, therefore, quite helpful to have figures to represent player characters. I.e. it doesn't matter whether you're positioning a character on a battle grid or simply lining-up a party of characters in marching order; figures immediately add to a tabletop game's sense of authenticity.

Painted, metal miniatures are the standard option for most players, but younger players may enjoy playing with larger plastic figures. For example, widely available Papo, Safari and Schleich figures are not cheap, but the size, weight, sculpture and painting all add up to an eye-catching line-up for younger players. Collecting enough of these figures to line up a party of adventurers is not that expensive and counters can then help to show monsters and what's happening on the tabletop:

Cardboard figures are an inexpensive option, which work well if you look around for high quality artwork and durable card.

Scenery depends on what you can make and/ or afford. Dwarven Forge have produced remarkable dungeon and outdoor scenery for years, but everything from chopping-up cardboard to 3D printers gets used and many games never use scenery.

Floor Plans and Card Scenery
The paper-cut scenery offered by Fat Dragon Games is known for offering good quality and decent value. For those who prefer floor plans the sets from Inked Adventures are good examples of what's available.

Horrible Food
Serving up some 'horrible' or at least questionable looking food during breaks goes down a treat - so long as the food actually tastes good. The Celebrity in the Jungle Bushtucker Trial approach is not good, because making players eat mustard and chili powder isn't really that funny. Leave the poisoning up to the celebrities and serve up a tasty Orcs' Stew or a Devil's Cheesecake as a mystery meal.

Markers
Floor plans and scenery are great if you can afford them and like that style of play. However, large sheets of paper and some decent marker pens can be very effective for presenting basic layouts/ building maps and then zooming in as adventurers explore by annotating and doodling on the map. Let the group jot damage taken, opponents met and similar details on the sheet and the maps will end-up like a sketch report of the session.

Puzzles
The Happy Puzzle Company is an excellent source of learning games for UK players. There are some gameplay gems among the candy-coated learning. For example, the Scrambled Egg Silhouette Puzzle could be used to give players who construct certain shapes a selection of optional extra powers. Perhaps not something you'd want in every session but potentially amusing if your players like occasional puzzles.

The Happy Puzzle Company also has books which specialize in particular types of puzzles. It's generally not a good idea to make completing puzzles either central to play or 'mission critical', but 'Brain Boosting Lateral Thinking Puzzles' and 'Brain Boosting Sequence Puzzles' can add a bit of variety to general gameplay.

Swords and Shields
Making your own armor and weaponry is going a bit far for most adult players. However, cardboard shields, carton roll swords, adhesive darts, web sprayers, foam string blasters and a few Halloween masks can make for a pretty overexcited outdoors game session. Add a few Treasure Hunt

and basic wide-game or Alternate Reality Game (ARG) elements and, so long as you keep it safe, there's an inexpensive party or two in there.

Temporary Tattoos

Most players can put on temporary water-based tattoos without any problems. Sharks, serpents, pirates, monsters and legendary creatures are among the options. Kids love them and they can last a few days if you put them in the right places, e.g. the inside of a forearm. Rather obviously, any instructions need to be followed and it's best not to stick six on one child until you've checked that the first one doesn't cause a rash. Beyond two or three days it's generally advisable to wash them off.

Touch Tablets

The iPad, recent Android phones and a swathe of touch tablets on the way from Amazon, Google and others are starting to show their worth. GM utilities and character-building apps are beginning to appear; rule sets are getting passed around the table in PDF and web browser formats; and many mobile phones already have dice apps built in.

The range of dedicated RPG apps is mixed at this stage, but access to browser features, PDFs and online services like Dropbox are already demonstrating that tablets can be more of a help than a hindrance around the table.

Treasure

Handing out 'real' loot to players as they adventure adds an amusing touch to the entertainment. Inexpensive plastic coins, gems and ingots are available in many toy and novelty stores. For those with lots of cash there are also specialist suppliers of metal coins of various weights and emblems.

Wands

Buying an expensive remote-control device to run presentations on projectors is hardy necessary for a typical group of players. However, Friendly Local Game Store (FLGS) owners, clubs looking to recruit or those running games for kids' parties and such like could use one of these wands to run gaming events, including orchestrating entire events from the comfort of the GM's chair.

Finding a Game

Family and Friends

Friends and family may not rush to sign up for a full-blown RPG to start with, but they may be up for it if the options start out with a boardgame like Talisman or a very 'quick start' RPG like Risus. Special occasions can be a good time to try this, e.g. we've played Monopoly every year - let's give

something else a try'. It may help to go in steps, e.g. from Monopoly to Zooloretto - and then on to Dread Pirate and Dominion.

Friends and family are also sources of plenty of friends of friends. You're going to have some background information on players from this group, so it's well worth asking around. Online friends and online games are an option, but your local network of clubs, friends and potential friends offer a clear route to playing face-to-face on a regular basis with people you already know about.

Clubs and Societies
Established clubs and societies are a good option and UK college and university campuses in particular have a longstanding record of running active RPG clubs. It is, however, a club, so testing the water and mapping out the inevitable clan factions calls for a certain amount of caution.

Forums
As with any other remote media it's not easy to be sure who you're really dealing with in a RPG forum. It follows that meeting someone face-to-face for a game through an online forum carries the same concerns as any random gathering. Over time it may be possible to track signature links to RPG companies or blogs and find out more about a poster. However, that only becomes more certain if there's a named owner and it's a company site rather than a personal site. Forums are of more use when arranging to meet in public as part of a group of players or when looking for online games.

FLGS
Friendly Local Game Stores are comparable to clubs and societies. They can provide a safe place to try out a good variety of games. Shops with enough room to run a few games at the same time, (which also run starter games and events for beginners), are likely candidates.

Groups
Traditional online RPG forums are hidden away in quiet corners of the Internet and this lack of visibility tends to encourage trolling, grandstanding and the formation of in-crowds. Larger social platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, certainly seem to present fewer concerns, as social connections linked to gaming tend to bleed over into other topics and the scale of these global platforms appears to make visitors much less likely to troll or grandstand. In addition, the transparency of social connections and the wider sharing of personal information on a platform like Facebook makes it easier to find out a bit more about other players' backgrounds and gaming interests before any face-to-face meetings. There is still a need to be careful, as deception and identity theft can occur on any platform. That said by connecting, (and possibly playing), online before meeting up players can build up a good impression of whoever they're

planning to meet. This is not about screening or profiling other players; but is about sharing the same safe social space and forming the basis of friendships.

<u>Meet-Ups</u>
Using social networking sites specifically aimed at connecting people on a face-to-face level, including Meetup itself, has brought together lots of players. A large group set-up on a high profile site can be similar to a club or society, often running events that are large enough and sufficiently public to make it safe to go along.

Actual Plays

The following Actual Plays are typical of rules light fantasy gameplay where the rules are kept in the background, i.e. the engine's running but you can barely hear it.

They demonstrate games played with relatively low numbers, as these tend to offer the most rewarding and compelling approaches to play. It's also significantly easier to design, to recruit and to keep the attention of players who are frequently taking an active part in the gameplay instead of waiting for their next turn to come round.

Working with groups of 8 or 10 players at the table can be fun, but is clearly harder to set up and sustain over weeks and months. It's also difficult to run such games as anything more than straightforward, often linear, adventures - because zooming in on a particular character's role keeps other players waiting in a queue. This effect is reinforced by the focus on an individual character's turn resulting from the 'social distance' between characters and players that is created by slicing each character's involvement into an isolated slot in a queue.

The Actual Plays shown are both quite combative and use fairly breathless pacing, but this is easily mediated by the Old School style of play used in both examples. The adventurers' lives are in constant peril and the players have to think on their feet. However, there are solutions to the genuine threats to PCs' lives to be found in both their skills and in the situations they encounter. Players who try to grind out 'results' under such circumstances will be killed more often than not, until they realize that there are times when it's better to take to their heels and to live to fight another day.

Seven Times the Color of Fire

This is an Actual Play from a 1:1 freeform game of RPG Treasure. The game could as easily have been run with a rules-light version of Dungeons and

Dragons or as a SciFi or fantasy scenario using the free version of the rules for Traveler.

The section shown below includes the rolls made during play to illustrate where the game's mechanics are stepping in and out of the gameplay:

<u>Lead-In</u>
Coco has already knocked-out a couple of goblins; then wounded, healed and befriended a timber wolf; before dueling with a goblin shaman. During interrogation one of the goblins has told her it's safe to drink from a fountain, but Coco refused the invitation and evaporated some of the water from the poisoned fountain to form a blade venom.

<u>#1</u>
After tipping her arrows with poison Coco checks out three frayed tapestries with large white skull logos painted over them. She tears one down, revealing a doorway, and decides to wash the cloth in the poisoned water. The paint fades and a fleur-de-lis crest emerges. The second tapestry hides another doorway and a tapestry with twin fleur-de-lis crests.

Two goblins enter through the first doorway. They try to rush Coco as she lifts her bow. 2D6, 12, multipliers kick in, the arrow tears through the first goblin's armor and stops him dead. The second raises his mace but the (goblin-hating) wolf behind him has first roll. 2D6, 7, the wolf's fangs catch the goblin on his trailing leg. The goblin strikes at the wolf. 2D6, 7 but he's off balance. He catches the wolf a glancing blow. The wolf pins the goblin to the ground.

Coco binds and gags the surviving goblin and searches both goblins. She keeps a gem, a mace and a spare dagger. The new dagger gets a layer of poison on the blade. There's a stop to heal the wolf's bruises and teach it basic commands. It learns to follow simple gestures for sit, wait and go forward, back, left or right and attack before there's a shout from the hall beyond the first doorway.

The shout isn't in a language Coco understands. As she advances down the hall a large, heavily-armored ogre steps out of a doorway. He turns, sees her and runs towards her. Coco moves away, turns and fires her bow. 2D6, 4, the arrow only hits the familiar flaming skull design on the ogre's shield. The wolf, now known as Flame, 2D6, 6, chews on the ogre's chainmail without causing any damage.

The ogre strikes at Coco. 2D6, 11, bruises her ribs and knocks the wind out of her. Sore one! Coco lets the wolf go first and, 2D6, 8, it catches the ogre, which twists round. Coco goes for a quick backstab, 2D6, 9, the damage multiplier helps out and the ogre is badly wounded. Then the poison on the dagger kicks in.

Despite the cost Coco has to heal herself properly, as another similar injury would kill her. Poor rolls see four of the five gems carried by the ogre used up right away.

The doorway the ogre emerged from leads to a cell block with signs of just one recent prisoner. A further door leads to a large, dimly lit chamber. A fire in a grand hearth provides most of the light, but there's a musty, moldering smell in the air. Flame is reluctant to go in. The furnishings include a very long oak table cluttered with cartons, boxes, bunches of dried herbs and flowers, potion bottles, crucibles, and pestles and mortars.

When Coco moves forward the only occupants come into view at the far end of the chamber. Two figures 'stand' before a granite throne. One is hooded, cloaked, crowned and using one arm to lift the other from the ground by the throat. The second is a young, raven-haired man gasping for breath as the skeletal hand jutting from the cloak chokes him.

The hooded figure hears Coco enter and turns to investigate, without releasing the youth. Light falls across the figure's star-spangled cloak and its skeletal, hollowed-out husk of a face. Coco recognizes her enemy and fires her only enchanted arrow. 2D6, 10, the arrow catches the Lich at the wrist, sending up a shower of fragmented bone. Poison has no effect but the creature casts the youth aside.

2D6, 8, and a bolt of lightning screams through the air, catching Coco at the shoulder. The shock burns deep into her flesh and she cries out in pain. A single spell has brought her near to death.

Coco runs out of the chamber and back towards the long stairway that led to this level. She can't see the Lich when she pauses for breath. Flame tries to stop its progress. A wave of a hand and the wolf lies whimpering in a corner. Coco keeps running and gets to the stairs. The Lich can move faster than her and is gaining ground. By the time she gets close to the top of the stairs it's near to catching her.

Out of breath, Coco turns to face her attacker. He advances to within a few yards, leaving Coco with only enough time for a single action. The girl draws two daggers but doesn't strike out. Instead she throws herself straight at the Lich.

2D6, 9, she hits the Lich, knocking it and herself over and down the stone steps. Coco tries to catch both daggers between the lattice of bones and bandages forming the Lich's chest. 2D6, 11 and 3. One catches and Coco is able to use the Lich as a sledge while they both glide down the steps. The bone-jangling ride rattles the Lich's spine over half the distance of the steps.

Both Coco and the Lich roll to see if they can stop their fall. 2D6 for the Lich, 5 and Coco, 8. Coco can let go of the dagger and fall off but opts to stay on and continue the ride. The pair sledge on down the rest of the stairs, with the Lich's bones cracking and crunching all the way. There's a wretched, snapping sound just before they both tumble out into the room below.

Coco is still smoldering, badly wounded and stunned. She seems to slip in and out of consciousness. Until a warm, rasping tongue licks her full in the face. Flame's alive!

. . . and the Lich? Its broken body is twisted back on itself at the snap in its spine. Eyes that burnt like white hot coals are now cold and dim. Coco has broken Seven Times the Color of Fire.

Sure, she knows he isn't gone for good, but his soul has to seek out a new host and that buys her time. As for the beast's crown, dared she even touch it?

#2

Coco picks herself up and listens for sounds of trouble. Everything is quiet, apart from the occasional muffled complaint from the captured goblin. She places the Lich's bones in the poisoned water in the fountain. The water fizzles and froths around the bones; then churns until the bones dissolve away. A sweet, sickly odor fills the air.

The Lich's star-sprayed robe and the jeweled crown feel unnaturally cold to the touch. Coco puts the crown in her backpack. Coco's wolf Flame, and Coco herself, need healing but the raven-haired youth stumbles through the first doorway before she gets started. He looks washed out and still blue in the face. He sees the robe on the floor and says, 'Impossible!'

[No one has triggered an alarm but there's an opportunity to turn up the heat/ roleplaying]

The second doorway opens almost immediately and a tall man with the facial tattoos of a Lich's disciple looks into the chamber. He gazes at Coco, the youth and the robes lying on the flagstones and says, "Impossible!"

Coco turns to the sorcerer and calmly states, "I came here to be your minion."

The puzzled sorcerer replies, "My minion. Like a henchman?"

"More a henchgirl," answers Coco.

The youth says, "You can't do that!"

The sorcerer asks, "What do we do with him?"

"Lock him up. We can find something to do with him later," replies Coco.

2D6, 8. The sorcerer fires a successful Web spell at the young man and shouts for two goblins to take him away. The sorcerer also asks about the crown and Coco explains that it went into the water with the bones; and how everything turned frothy until the bones and the crown dissolved. She's shown to the 'apprentice's' chambers and told she'll be invited to visit the sorcerer in the throne room later.

The room is a lantern-lit, cluttered mess of scrolls, papers, books and filthy plates. One wall is completely covered with shelves containing a strange collection of dried rodents, foul-scented plants and jars full of insects. Flame goes to rest in the cot set in an alcove at the far end of the chamber but soon thinks better of the idea.

Coco checks outside and smiles briefly at two goblins guarding the entrance, before going back in. Despite the shambles she searches the room thoroughly. 2D6, 3. She finds nothing. 2D6, 2. She finds nothing and knocks over a jar of dried frogs, which smashes on the floor. The goblins look in and Coco gestures for a brush and shovel. They don't want to come in and go back to guarding the doorway.

Coco has another try. 2D6, 8. She finds a secret compartment hidden behind a stack of rotten books. 2D6, 9, there's a poisoned needle trap. Coco tries to disarm the trap, 2D6, 11, then unlock it, 2D6, 4. She can't get in.

A Shatter spell, 2D6, 8, takes the hatch off and Coco final gets her hands on two scrolls and a bag of, 2D6, ten gems. The gems fuel her spellcasting and each successive, successful casting increases her chances. 2D6, 5, 7, 10, 6. Three of the spells work and she's about to heal the wolf when the door opens.

The two goblins flank the sorcerer, who's wearing the Lich's robe and holding an ornate sacred dagger. "I'll need the crown now. I've checked the Lich's papers and it can't be dissolved!"

After casting three successful spells in a row, Coco is charged with magic (+3). She targets her only ritual at the corridor and rolls, 2D6, 7. Just enough, a Fire Storm explodes in the corridor, consuming her opponents in sheets of flame. The two goblins are toppled in the blast and the sorcerer stands smoldering. The Lich's robe is untouched but the rest of his clothes

and his hair are largely gone. Flame leaps forward, 2D6, 12, the sorcerer takes a savage wound - but it's his turn now.

2D6, 7, not quite enough to get Coco! Coco is now on a +4 bonus to cast a spell or ritual and sends a Snowball shooting at the Lich. 2D6, 6, enough with her bonuses. The 2D6 damage doesn't finish him off but he's committed to a hand-to-hand attack next turn. Flame attacks, 2D6, 4, and misses.

The furious sorcerer advances with his dagger in hand and rolls 2D6, 9. The dagger tears at Coco's arm, though it's less damaging than the Meteor she might have expected. Coco considers holding off for a backstab but she's now on a +5 spellcasting bonus and still has some gems left. A second Snowball, 2D6, 8 – and the sorcerer lies unconscious . . .

Frankincense

This is an actual play run with clone Corruption. It would have played out in the much the same way using early Dungeons and Dragons, Labyrinth Lord or Swords & Wizardry:

The Party
Frankincense - 7th Level Paladin played by Mandy
Thunderstruck - 8th Level Cleric played by Al
Kiss - 9th Level Elf Magic-User played by Jenny
Stick - 6th Level Drow Renegade aka Thief played by Rob

Actual Play
The player characters (PCs) agreed to be hired as neutrals to carry-out a hostage exchange in return for a generous payment of 500 gold pieces/ head. Unfortunately when they arrived at the rendezvous the emissaries acting for the neighboring nation were found lying dead on the ground. The hostage the PCs were supposed to collect has vanished and they now seem to be stuck with the prisoner they were meant to hand over.

The wounds on the bodies of the six dead escorts are identifiable as spear injuries and they appear to have been struck at high impact. Quite messy! There are no obvious signs or tracks from any kind of cavalry.

The players were instructed to keep a sack over the prisoner's head throughout the journey, but a muffled voice wants to know what's happening.

Frankincense: I reach over and untie the sack to see what he has to say.

Stick: Hold on. Could be a reason why the bag's on the head.

Kiss: Yeah, like a Medusa.

Frankincense: I look away, tear the sack off and look at her reflection using the polished inside of my shield.

Kiss: I wasn't serious.

Thunderstruck: I'm praying and looking at the sky.

GM: A young woman with red hair and a coronet of all things looks at the corpses strewn on the ground and screams.

Thunderstruck: Pop the sack back on?

Frankincense: Certainly not. I tell her she's safe.

GM: Her expression is one of horror. But she calms down and composes herself.

Stick: I ask her what she knows about the escort - and the other prisoner. Who did this?

GM: Despite being bound she jumps from the horse and then looks around. After 10 or 15 seconds she says, 'Here!' and uses a foot to tease a glistening strand of spider silk out of the long grass.

Kiss: I get my wand ready. This time I'm almost serious.

Frankincense: I ask what kind of spider uses a spear and doesn't wrap its prey.

Thunderstruck: Spiders with saddles.

Stick: The other prisoner?

GM: She spits and says, 'He's a war criminal called Adrack Helm.' You know him by reputation. In the nation you are working for he's a famed and much decorated war hero.

Frankincense: We can't work for war criminals.

Kiss: Don't start. She's probably making it up and we won't get paid – again!

Frankincense: I try to detect good in her.

GM: Good – with a twist of chaos.

Frankincense: We must find and expose the war criminal.

Stick: Is there a bounty?

Thunderstruck: How about we find out what's going on? I pray to my god to allow me to speak with one of the dead - the one with the best armor.

GM: The leader's body opens its eyes. She looks a mess - deep wounds to the neck and chest. There's no spark of life in the bleak stare that comes out of her eyes.

Thunderstruck: OK – I'm sorry for waking you but I could do with help catching your killers . . . I ask if her attackers were her employers.

GM: The corpse shakes her head – a few teeth fall out.

Thunderstruck: . . . or their allies?

GM: The corpse nods its head.

Thunderstruck: . . . were there more than ten attackers?

GM: The corpse nods her head and blood starts to trickle from the mouth.

Thunderstruck: . . . did they go north?

GM: The head remains still.

Thunderstruck: Thank goodness for that. Did they arrive from the north?

GM: The head shakes. Not a lot of teeth left and the wound on her neck opens wide.

Thunderstruck: Did they arrive from the south?

GM: The head nods a bit too hard, there's a short tearing sound and the head rolls off into his lap. The hostage shrieks!

Thunderstruck: Eh, I cover the body with my cloak. I get my spade. We'll bury her.

GM: The hostage is not used to seeing battlefield wounds. But she's not spineless and quickly settles down.

Kiss: If we take her to her home we might get a reward. If we take her back we still get paid.

GM: The prisoner says, 'That thing with the guard – gross. We won't make it halfway in either direction. The exchange may have been in the name of peace, but it's a set-up.'

Stick: Chances are we're being framed. That leaves ditch the girl and go northwest or head south and catch up with Adrack Whatshisname?

Frankincense: South!

Thunderstruck: Why not – south it is!

Kiss: Oh go on then.

About an Hour Later

GM: Your caution is well-advised. You find plenty of cover in the shadows all the way until you're almost at the entrance. This gives you a clear view of the large cavern. It's dimly lit by half-a-dozen large oil lanterns set into raised alcoves and there's a lit brazier in the center of the chamber. The place is obviously the holding area for the giant spiders.

Two spiders and their goblin guards are mounted up in the middle of the floor space, with an ogre barking out instructions they've to follow on patrol. There are also eight iron portcullises set into alcoves at regular intervals around the walls. Four of the large niches contain giant spiders held behind these gates.

A stock of a dozen spider wraps - silk-wrapped humanoid spider victims - lies in the far corner on the left. The casings look full and you think you can see the odd motion as living victims writhe inside the deadly cocoons. It's hard to tell for sure as the cave is quite gloomy in the corners.

Stick: Are there enough shadows for me to hide in if I go in?

GM: The shadows aren't as deep as in the tunnel, so you have your normal chance of hiding in the shadows.

Stick: I tug twice on the string to signal for the others to follow and try to creep into the cave.

GM: Roll under your target score.

GM: Good roll. You make it into the shadows without being detected by the goblins or the ogre. However, the spiders are sensitive to vibrations in the ground and do start to become agitated. What's everyone else up to?

Frankincense: I make sure the armor's locked-down, draw my sword and go to find Stick.

Thunderstruck: Shield, flail – me too.

Kiss: I give Azinth a dagger, tell her to stay on look out and advance cautiously. I stick 30' back from the others and begin to prepare a spell.

GM: OK – the spiders' attention turns to the bold advance of the two warriors. This gets the ogre and the goblins interested and the ogre directs them to attack the party. The ogre then turns and starts to head for an exit at the back of the cavern.

Frankincense: We'd better charge, before they get up enough speed to run us through.

Thunderstruck: Charge!

Stick: The spiders are after them and the ogre's back's turned to me?

GM: Good opportunity – I'll roll for surprise on the ogre. Result - you can try a backstab in a moment. The rest of you should roll for initiative.

GM: Not so great for the guys. The spiders and riders get initiative and – ouch – Thunderstruck takes 9 damage from a spear. The other one misses Frankincense, by a mile. Stick, go ahead and roll to hit – and anyone else who's up for it.

Stick: Yes!

GM: Roll damage and multiply.

GM: Wow! – the ogre crumples to his knees beneath the unexpected blow. He won't be getting up again. He was running for a lever on the far wall.

Frankincense: I'm going for the spider. Hah! And . . . 9 and the sword and the strength.

GM: You've wrecked the spider and the goblin on it can't unsaddle and gets his legs caught under the body.

Thunderstruck: 2 – uh! Have I got to change dice already?

Kiss: Magic and missile should fix it. I target the surviving spider. D4s please.

GM: It's still alive and all but on top of Thunderstruck. Someone want to roll initiative?

GM: The spider attempts to sink its fangs into Thunderstruck. I'm afraid it nicks you - only does 3 damage, but one of the fangs has injected poison. Roll a saving throw.

Thunderstruck: 15 – no problem.

GM: The prisoner appears for a moment at the entrance you used to come in. Only to be snatched from behind by a pack of six ogres. They grab her and haul her off into the darkened tunnel.

Kiss: I knew it the minute I left her. We can't let them get away – they'll bring the whole place down on us.

GM: The hostage is fighting back with the dagger you gave her, but they'll be gone in a moment.

Kiss: Can I see past them?

GM: Not really.

Stick: I light a fire arrow and send it in there.

GM: Mmm . . . it's a bit of a rush. Roll a d20 to see if you light the arrow and a d20 for firing it.

Stick: I get more than one missile a round, so I'm fast.

GM: But your bow wasn't ready. Let's see what happens?

GM: That's plenty. Arrow's all fired up, take aim.

GM: There's such a bundle of them that you hit. One of the ogres now has a flaming arrow stuck in his leg and Azinth is struggling to get free.

Kiss: I plant a wall of ice just behind the Ogres.

GM: Now you're all locked in together . . .

Thunderstruck (to Frankincense): Shall we?

GM: As you advance it's plain to see that one of the ogres is some kind of sorceress. She's all cloak of furs and white on black war-paint. There's also a necklace with an elf's bleached skull hanging from it. A couple of chunky sapphires are jammed in the skull's eyesockets.

Where is everyone? . . . Initiative . . . You're in luck.

Kiss: I cast Haste on Frankincense and Thunderstruck.

GM: OK – assuming they're attacking you have just enough time to target them.

Frankincense and Thunderstruck: We're attacking!

Stick: I go and look at the exit. What's there?

GM: The entrance is about 25' high. It's not well lit, but you see a portcullis in the shadows and a metal lever.

Frankincense: I roll to hit the first ogre – 4 . . . 20 . . . I must've killed it!

GM: Unconscious on the floor and bleeding out.

Thunderstruck: Next . . . 16?

GM: Yes . . . damage noted and again . . . no chance.

Stick: Is the lever connected to the spiders' cages?

GM: It's a mechanical device. Roll for it . . . Right, the lever connects to a heavy, rusty chain inside a hollow running up the wall. You'd need all your strength to pull it. The spiders' cages are more basic devices. Chains hanging on either side of each cage lift the portcullises by brute force.

Pull it right now or wait till next round. It's getting into the ogres' turn.

Stick: Why not? I pull the lever as hard as I can.

GM: Your muscles are about to give in when the lever clicks and the chain triggers a weighted mechanism that starts to raise the large portcullis.

At the other end of the cavern one of the ogres punches Azinth - knocking her out. The sorceress is muttering a spell and the remainder try to strike Thunderstruck and Frankincense with iron-banded clubs.

At which point it becomes completely dark around the entrance to a distance of 15'. Only Stick and Kiss can see what happens next, but they might want to warn the other two. A large, huge, massive spider emerges from the tunnel behind the large portcullis. You probably killed some of its young a few minutes ago. The fangs are so full with a greenish venom that it's dripping on to the stone floor - where it kind of fizzles for a while.

Roll initiative . . . not so good . . . the immense spider gets through the gate and there's a rising scuttling sound as thousands of younger spiders stream down the walls. The vents or tunnels they are using to get in are hidden in shadow.

The ogres sound as if they're battering at the wall of ice, but can't be seen. The immense spider needs to manoeuvre into the room to corner Stick, so it doesn't get an attack, but has placed itself between you and the rest of the party.

Thunderstruck: How many thousands? And how young?

GM: Roll a d4 each and we'll find out?

Stick: No!

GM: You can only guess at the full numbers but there must be the best part of 10,000 spiders pouring down the walls. On average their bodies are a couple of feet long.

The adventurers are clearly in big trouble and the approach of battling with the enemy until they buckle - common in more rules-heavy gameplay - isn't an option. If the players try to slug it out with these opponents their characters have no chance. The easy way out is to go back through the sheet of ice made by the party's sorcerer and to head for the nearest stairs.

Organizing a Game

The practicalities of organizing a regular RPG session are easy to arrange with a few texts and/ or a chat.

Costs can be an important consideration for some players - for many reasons. Tabletop RPGs offer remarkable value when compared to, for example, a trip to the cinema that is over and done with inside a couple of hours.

Obviously premium RPGs with subscription fees and/ or 'massively multi-volume' rule sets can be expensive – especially with costs across a group. However there are many mainstream options that cost significantly less.

It's certainly well worth comparing features and prices, e.g. at the time of writing a standard PDF of one clone system costs $24.99, while other full clones are priced as low as $3.99. On a feature for feature basis it's not entirely clear what is gained from spending the extra £21.

Organizing Games Table

No.	Options	Details
1	Breaks and food/ snacks	
2	Costs	
3	Dice rollers/ dice	
4	GM/ s: designated or hot-seat	
5	Limiting distractions and interruptions	
6	Location	
7	Maps or grids	
8	Numbers	
9	Rule sets	
10	Ruler, paper and pencils	
11	Setting and/ or scenarios/ adventures	
12	Sufficient space	
13	Tables	
14	Tablets, phones and netbooks	
15	Timing	
16	Transport	

Setting Up a Game

Tabletop RPGs involve more effort and collaboration than most videogames, as players have to get to the game in the first place and then get along face-to-face. In addition, while a videogame usually has fixed rules, tabletop RPG players are constantly involved in interpreting rules and novel situations. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that disagreements can interrupt play and slow down the game.

Fortunately, there are a number of approaches to setting up play which can head off or resolve most disagreements.

Permissions
It's essential to check that any regulations and agreements that need to be sorted out are dealt with as early as possible. Parents and carers are likely to want to be told about the arrangements for games involving kids. (Transport arrangements for kids require particular care). Anyone running a youth club type game might also have to go through police checks. At the same time, players may wish to negotiate for a better playing area or peace from younger siblings.

Boundaries
Concerns about behavior at the gaming table can cause extra complications if players don't raise any likely difficulties early on. For example, if some players aren't happy about the choice of rules it's simpler to discuss that before playing rather than struggle on with disgruntled players during games. Agreements about using mobile phones/ Internet at

the table, the length of games, shared goals for the party and what happens when someone can't turn up may be helpful.

Interruptions
The fewer the distractions the better the gameplay, as players can stay 'in-game' without having to refocus repeatedly. Permissions and boundaries help to limit some interruptions, but games are often slowed down by players during the game. For instance, if players are using mobile phones at the table it may be because they're waiting for something to happen. Other players may be rolling-up new PCs or discussing the rules in lengthy detail. Preparation before play, (such as having some ready-rolled PCs handy and clearing up interpretations of the rules between games), should keep gameplay at the heart of each session.

Peace Talks
Agreeing how to resolve simple disputes during play often cuts out tiresome disagreements. Occasional time-outs allow players to pop out of actual play to consult the GM about the options open to them. These can be replaced or complemented by an agreed and limited number of rules challenges where the PC asks the GM to consider a particular interpretation of the rules.

Conversation
Shared planning of a group's gameplay is increasingly common, as a straightforward discussion of what players would like to get out of a series of adventures or a campaign setting helps GMs to deliver enjoyable play. For many groups this simply involves a chat about the types of environments, opponents and situations players are likely to find interesting.

Campaign Sketching or Outlining
If players are planning a long campaign they may wish to use profiles of players' gameplay preferences and/ or short campaign planning sessions to ensure the action centers on the types of gameplay that the players are interested in pursuing. Options for player profiles and campaign planning are detailed later.

Questionnaires asking players to set out a wide range of campaign and gameplay preferences can go too far in terms of defining play to a point where it loses some of its capacity to surprise. On the other hand, if players aren't really sure about the types of options open to them, (or one or two players are controlling a discussion), questionnaires offer a good way to give everyone a chance to have their voices heard and to contribute. A six page hand-out is, perhaps, taking player choice too far; but a page covering the setting as a whole and the types of challenges players wish to meet may be quite useful.

The same applies to meetings or chats aimed at campaign planning, where a sketch or framework can be helpful providing it doesn't drill down into too much detail.

Feedback

Feedback, either between game sessions or during play, offers opportunities to fine-tune play. Highlighting and rewarding good play, commenting on ideas that made a game run well or letting the GM know that you want more of the same can all contribute to future sessions. Negative feedback, including comments which don't propose any alternatives, is likely to be less helpful and quite disruptive when used in-game.

Player Choice

Most of the points raised above concern various approaches to increasing player choice. This isn't about letting players do entirely what they like, when they like. The GM is there to interpret the rules and to make play entertaining for players, so it's pretty essential to negotiate with, rather than against, the GM.

When players communicate with the GM it becomes much easier for the GM to design settings and scenarios to suit everyone at the table. Put another way, giving players more choice at the planning stage works well providing players' choices are more about adding options rather than excluding them.

Supporting New Players

Regular RPG players will arrive at games with much of the following already in mind or easily put in place. However, new players may well have a very limited awareness of what they are actually going to get up to during play:

1. Players typically find it helpful to be clear of their roles in all activities. Class-based games help with this through outlining a primary role, e.g. in terms of a cluster of related combat or stealth capabilities. This can result in cardboard cut-out stereotypes, so new players may also benefit from a few words on filling out and individualizing characters on character sheets and at the table. Ambiguity of roles is often best avoided.
2. Players will find it easier to concentrate on play if they have been assigned their roles, and given relevant 'scripts' or 'models', (e.g. actual plays), well in advance of the game.
3. A player's background or prior experience should really be considered in role assignments to ensure they will be comfortable with their role/ s.
4. Players are likely to appreciate being given enough time for preparation.

5. Players should have some basic familiarity before roles are decided to allow players to be able to recognize the player behind the character – and as common courtesy.
6. Short, constructive feedback presented by the GM and players immediately after play is likely to be welcomed providing it sticks to a 'two stars and a wish' approach, i.e. two definite positives and one area that could have gone better/ be developed.
7. The roleplaying activity needs be organized around players' interests and readiness.
8. The number of players should be reasonably manageable.
9. Players tend to appreciate having a clear understanding of the criteria or rubrics for advancement and effective play in the context of the game they are playing, i.e. if the game rewards storytelling the players are going to want to know that.

Settling Outcomes

Younger players are sometimes unsure about using dice to settle outcomes. They may see 'taking chances' as getting in the way of imaginative play and also as surrendering player choice. It is possible to make them more familiar with taking calculated risks by introducing a range of random factors through a selection of quick games.

These options can easily be introduced to and become part of play through in-game encounters. For example, an opponent may offer a PC the chance to resolve a disagreement or impasse by offering to settle the matter with a quick game of Jacks or Stone, Paper, Scissors.

Settling Outcomes Table

No.	Outcome	Variants
1	Cards or coins for best of three	
2	Connect 4	
3	Roll 2d6 for the first double	
4	Indoor skittles	
5	Nerf guns	
6	Jacks	
7	Jenga	
8	Stone, Paper, Scissors	
9	Top Trumps	
10	Water guns	

Part 3: Colorful Characters

Fleshing Out a Player Character

An adventurer or PC can be a casual, sometimes short-lived, acquaintance – defined mainly by the skills set built-up during character generation and the default style of play for such a character within a rule set.

Alternatively a PC can have or build up a past; develop a place and a dynamic within the game-world; and form future prospects and shifting expectations. Many RPGs tend to try to deliver the impression of an authentic character background either with a fairly broad brush or by drilling down into sets and subsets of increasingly specific skills.

RPG Traveler is well-known for quickly stepping new characters through an eventful pre-game career. So a fairly streamlined, event-driven character generation can go a long way towards sketching out an individual, if not unique, character.

Nevertheless, there is nothing quite as authentic or unique as a character background built-up during gameplay. Whether or not a player wishes to start with a clean slate, a mere handful of adventures are usually sufficient to flesh-out a character's place in events and how the character fits into the game-world as a whole. For many players this can rapidly deliver a sense of ownership and investment in an adventurer's lifestream - aka the combination of actions, events, in-game relationships and campaign ties that snowball during play.

The content that follows does not attempt to replace a particular system's built-in character generation; but does suggest a range of informal options for varying, developing and/ or self-selecting character traits and backgrounds.

Prior Experience

Making compelling PCs and NPCs is an essential RPG ingredient, as much of a game's action and intrigue is centered round PCs' interactions with NPCs.

There are a number of common ways of going about character generation:

1. Using a character class which outlines a profile of skills and abilities.
2. Spending an allocation of points on building a PC based on skills and abilities.
3. Guiding a character through a prior career or life story that accumulates skills and abilities.
4. Devising a background story/ character history.

Some or all of these elements may be combined and players sometimes have quite firm preferences, e.g. players who enjoy writing up a character history as compared to players who would rather start with a blank canvas and use the game and the PC's gameplay to form a compelling character during play.

There is no need for rules and/ or GMs to define which steps are involved, as it's really quite easy to accommodate character customization and personalization in many ways - providing the standard approach of not seeking to gain an unfair advantage is accepted round the table.

It's certainly well worth taking a little time to offer options, because players will be more engaged with their characters and, therefore, the game as a whole if they are able to feel that they have a sense of ownership over the characters they play.

So, if a player wants a background story or a slightly quirky character class – why not. The story behind, for example, the scar on a character's forehead, an embarrassing tattoo or a childhood spent on the run can only help to give characters and campaigns more texture and purchase.

Equally, GMs may wish to take a look at how practical it is to build-up information on NPCs. For example, recurring enemies, old comrades at arms and opponents with an eye for an escape route are worth developing as they can be used, and evolve, time and again.

It may seem time-consuming to expand on a game's character generation rules or to roll a PC through career history tables. Nevertheless, doing so turns cardboard-cutout stereotypes into authentic characters. These PCs are likely to have networks of relationships that can dovetail with events and campaign-wide challenges to constantly refuel RPG campaigns.

Some of the options available for adding detail to characters' backgrounds are set out below. The list is not exhaustive, but players and GMs may wish to identify and outline those that appeal to them before starting character generation.

The list is presented through three tables to make it easy to incorporate the basic ideas straight into play with balanced outcomes, i.e. a roll for Good Times is balanced out by a roll for Bad Times. This approach can be adjusted to allow players to choose their own level of risk by ordering outcomes by severity and allowing players to select how many dice to roll and then applying the same number to each table.

This should result in a sketchy, relatively uneventful background for those rolling fewer/ lower dice and a more dramatic story for those rolling across

a range that can reach the highest scores, i.e. the most severe outcomes on each table.

Hard Times Table

D20	Background	Details
1	Battle Fatigue	
2	Battlefield Injury	
3	Betrayed	
4	Demoted	
5	Disease	
6	Embarrassing Tattoo	
7	Enslaved	
8	Exiled	
9	Gambling Debt	
10	Imprisoned	
11	Indebted	
12	Injury	
13	Life Force/ Energy Drain	
14	Marooned	
15	Outlawed	
16	Press-Ganged	
17	Recurring Enemy	
18	Scar	
19	Vendetta	
20	Wanted	

Lifestreams Table

D20	Background	Details
1	Accident	
2	Betrothed	
3	Bolt Hole	
4	Business Opportunity	
5	Expulsion	
6	Graduation	
7	Headquarters	
8	Inheritance	
9	Invasion	
10	Killing Time	
11	Laid-Off	
12	Lease	
13	Legacy	
14	Narrow Escape	
15	Natural Disaster	

D20	Background	Details
16	Practice	
17	Promoted	
18	Property	
19	Sanctuary	
20	Voyage	

Good Times Table

D20	Background	Details
1	Battlefield Promotion	
2	Battlemaster	
3	Benefactor	
4	Comrade-at-Arms	
5	Epic Party	
6	Hallowed Ground	
7	Heroism	
8	Last Stand	
9	Lucky Win	
10	Magical/ Digital Tattoo	
11	Magical/ Technology Item	
12	Mentored	
13	Minor Magical/ Technology Item	
14	Miraculous Event	
15	Sponsor	
16	Sporting Triumph	
17	Tournament Win	
18	Tutored	
19	Valuable Item	
20	Victorious	

Of course, there is nothing to stop players from adding a further layer of detail/ personalization with sub-options under each heading. However, the tables shown above offer plenty to work with while leaving lots of room to float a story on top of any specific bonuses, or penalties, attached to each option.

Making a mini-game out of rolling on custom tables can appeal to players all the more if they're involved in customizing the tables' options and outcomes/ effects.

Using tables quickly puts more flesh on the bones of raw characters. However, for those who wish to go further or take a less random approach there are lots of factors that could contribute to a backstory.

Character Backgrounds Table

Background	Details
Celebrations	
Childhood Experiences	
Childhood Memories	
Costume	
Dark Secrets	
Deeds	
Enemies	
Equipment	
Favorite Locations	
Flaws	
Friends and Enemies	
Holidays	
Locations	
Military Service	
Passions	
Pastimes	
Personality	
Pets and Companions	
Preferences and Pet Hates	
Physical Features	
Relationships	
Secret Missions	
Sidelines and Secrets	
Superstitions	
Traditions	

If GMs and players wish to turn this into a largely mechanical process it can be helpful to allow a certain number of 'nudges' where the player can select an option one place higher or lower on a table. Occasional 'tilts' where the player is allowed a re-roll may also help to arrive at a balance between random elements and a PC with characteristics a player is interested in play. The following table expands one type of background.

Sidelines and Secrets

These kinds of detail are likely to be hidden or sleeper talents that may come to light during the course of play.

Sidelines and Secrets Table

D20	Sideline or Secret	Details
1	Assassin	
2	Collector	
3	Conspirator	

D20	Sideline or Secret	Details
4	Cultist	
5	Embedded Reporter	
6	Forger	
7	Gambler	
8	Gardener	
9	Hunter	
10	Murderer	
11	Pickpocket	
12	Revolutionary	
13	Secret Agent	
14	Secret Police	
15	Secret Society	
16	Serial Killer	
17	Sleeper	
18	Veteran	
19	Warlock	
20	Witch	

Some players will want none of this, but for others it helps to make characters and gameplay more fully-realized. Whether or not the story or lifestream is randomized to various degrees through rules sets and/ or emphasizes a personal or group story is up for negotiation.

Skills

Negotiations and diplomacy are typical of areas of RPG gameplay where rushing to apply a dice roll to arrive at a fixed outcome can undermine the gameplay. It is, therefore, often best to hold back - and sometimes blur the line between players' skills and the skills or attributes their adventurers possess - until an event or situation invites a decisive dice roll.

Checks for success and failure may take account of a mix of characters' natural attributes, their learned skills and players' skills. The type of basic skills system outlined below demonstrates a flexible approach that allows both PCs and NPCs to gain and use a wide variety of specializations.

The system shown is very straightforward and based on adding a skills system to Old School takes on Dungeons and Dragons. It serves to outline an approach to offering players the option of highly customized characters without applying skill checks to the point where the rules exclude the use of players' own skills.

For straightforward and obvious tasks no check is needed, e.g. chopping firewood or climbing a ladder. However, more difficult tasks, (including the

specialist skills of some followers), may suit a skills check involving a quick chat over which modifiers might apply – followed by a GM's ruling.

When a roll is used success results from gaining a total of 20 or more on a d20 roll – and any additional modifiers the GM considers relevant.

A natural roll of 20 usually allows a successful attempt at using the skill at the baseline level required to succeed in tasks requiring professional or specialist expertise. Rolling a natural 1 usually results in an automatic fail.

The standard of work is expected to be professional in the same manner as a Ranger or a Fighter is a professional warrior. Skills can be tested close to the limit in attempts to achieve spectacular results – and there is no reason why skills could not be tested for miraculous results.

Specialist Skills Table

Skill	Professional	Spectacular	Guide Price
Alchemist	Prepare acids and alkalis, or ready a potion for enchantment	Prepare a magic item for permanent enchantment or a material, such as glass	1,200gp/ month and a 1,000gp laboratory
Animal Trainer	Train pets or animal companions	Train monsters such as war elephants and Worgs	400gp/ month and cages
Archer	Fires bows quickly and accurately at short or medium range	Fires bows quickly and very accurately at short to long range	75gp/ month
Armorer	Produce good quality weapons and arm	Produce weapons suitable for enchantment	200gp/ month and a 200gp forge
Artisan	Produce saleable soft goods and furnishings	Produce luxury goods	75gp/ month and materials
Battle Triage	Stop an unconscious, wounded humanoid from losing blood while unconscious	Stop an unconscious, wounded monster from losing blood while unconscious	25gp/ month
Blacksmith	Produce good quality metalwork	Produce high quality metalwork	20gp/ month and a 200gp forge

Skill	Professional	Spectacular	Guide Price
Brigadier (1 for every 600)	Capable of conducting battlefield operations with command of up to 600	Capable of conducting battlefield operations with command of up to 6,000	Twenty times the cost for a soldier*
Captain (1 for every 60)	Command five squads of 10 soldiers and 2 sergeants in combat operations	Rally your troops and take temporary command of up to 600 troops	Six times the cost for a soldier*
Charioteer	Race chariots - and fire from chariots and wagons in battle	Control and fire from war elephants and similar moving platforms	120gp/ month and chariot with horses
Cook	Cook a fine meal for twenty guests	Prepare a lavish feast for up to 50 guests	30gp/ month or higher
Diplomat	Negotiate a regional political stalemate	Negotiate a compromise in a regional political crisis	1,500gp/ month and a 5,000gp entourage/ mission
Escapologist	Slowly untie a single knot or binding	Escape a single set of chains	Its own reward
Explorer	Outdoor navigation, survival, hunting, shelter and tracking	Outdoor navigation, survival, hunting, shelter and tracking in extreme conditions	60gp/ month or higher
Herald	Signal using flags, banners, beacons and smoke signals	Signal using codes, tattoos, wildlife and sign language	40gp/ month or higher
Interrogator	Use leverage to gain a confession or admission	Use persuasion to extract useful information/ secrets	150gp/ month or higher
Jeweler	Cut and set gems and jewels to +10% value	Cut and set gems and jewels to +20% value	400gp/ month or more
Lieutenant (1 for every 20)	Command two squads of 10 soldiers and 2 sergeants in combat operations	Rally your troops and take temporary command of up to 60 troops	Three times the cost for a soldier*

Skill	Professional	Spectacular	Guide Price
Merchant	Trade or value at a fair and accurate price over a local area	Trade in luxury goods across borders, using caravans, shipping or other forms of transport	500gp/ month or more – and transport
Miner	Dig and maintain safe mines and tunnels	Dig and maintain safe underground rooms and chambers	25gp/ month or higher
Pioneer	Improvise basic defensive devices, traps and barricades	Construct substantial defensive positions and prepare battlegrounds	60gp/ month or higher
Sage	Able to interpret sections of ancient texts and familiar with most magic items	Able to interpret ancient texts with some accuracy, advise on the construction of rare magic items and comment on most unique magic items	2,500gp/ month and a 2,000gp library
Sailor	Operate the sails and steerage of a boat or galley	Operate the sails and steerage of an ocean going ship	12gp/ month
Sergeant (1 for every 10)	Organize a squad of soldiers and fight with a variety of weapons	Raise squad morale and fight with any weapon	Three times the cost for a soldier*
Servant (Domestic)	Carry-out duties effectively and gossip	Carry out duties effectively and avoid gossip or scandal	2gp/ month
Ship's Captain	Maritime command, navigation and sailing	Maritime command, navigation and sailing in stormy weather	350gp/ month and a ship
Siege Engineer	Design and build a siege catapult or short bridge	Design and build a trebuchet or similar device, organize mining operations or prepare a battlefield	1,200gp/ month and siege engine repairs and upgrades

Skill	Professional	Spectacular	Guide Price
Soldier	March and fight according to orders and with good morale. Use a limited range of weapons	Fight in formation, with solid morale and using a variety of weapons	2gp/ month in camp or castle*
Spy	Gather information about troop positions and meet contacts with local information	Intercept messages and extract reliable information. Create a convincing disguise	25gp/ month and 500gp or more/ mission
Steward	Oversee the operation of a castle or a similar stronghold	Oversee the operation of a royal court, a region or a city	400gp/ month
Torchbearer	Underworld navigation, open doors and entrances, and identify common and uncommon monsters	Underworld cartography, dismantle doors and entrances, and identify rare monsters	2gp/ day and basic equipment
Treasurer	Interpret local trading, currency and property rights and customs	Understand and negotiate local trading, currency and property rights	700gp/ month

* - Soldiers based in a secure castle or fortification cost 1gp/ month. On the march or at war the costs increase to 6gp/ month for infantry, 10gp/ month for archers and 20gp/ month for cavalry. Mercenaries cost twice as much and may cost significantly more if they are to stay loyal under difficult circumstances.

The cost of training from 1st level is twice as many XP for each extra level or + gained, i.e. 250XP, 500XP, 1,000XP, 2,000XP, 4,000XP, 8,000XP, 16,000XP, 32,000XP and 64,000XP to 10th Level. There is no fixed limit to skill levels, but a roll of 1 typically remains an automatic fail when using a D20.

Players can gain skill levels using combinations of cash and XP. This can be done through building on their existing skills and by taking opportunities to practice their new skills. For example, a Fighter that regularly works at fixing armor or a Magic-User who cooks the party's meals every night.

These skills may be assumed to be present for characters working in/ with experience in practicing a skill as their 'day job' at +10, i.e. 10th Level. Players can seek XP through working on skills as their 'day job', but the pay/ XP will be low until they reach roughly 10th Level. At that stage a

craftsperson or professional has a high basic chance of success - but this can be modified by a number of factors:

Skills roll calculations include:

1. Skill modifiers for levels gained in a skill.
2. Below 5th Level instructions can add +2 to rolls.
3. Below 5th Level help from a more skilled instructor adds +5 to rolls.
4. A match between the skill and an adventurer's class gives a +2 class bonus.
5. A matching ability score of 15+ gives a +2 ability bonus.

Deductions may also include:

6. Rushed work on tasks that take time and care alters rolls by -5.
7. Substandard materials or equipment reduces rolls by -5.
8. Trying for spectacular results alters rolls by -5.

This basic system uses what's known as an unopposed roll, which means there are no fixed factors such as an opponent's armor to check. Instead modifiers are applied on an *ad hoc* basis, i.e. striking a heavily armored, lethal opponent starts out as a spectacular task.

Skills Table

Skill	Level Bonus	Class Bonus +2	Ability Bonus +2	Rushed Work
Alchemist		Magic-User	Intelligence	-5
Animal Trainer		Ranger	Wisdom	-5
Archer		Thief	Dexterity	
Armorer		Fighters	Strength	-5
Artisan		Bard	Intelligence	-5
Battle Triage		Cleric	Wisdom	
Blacksmith		Fighters	Strength	-5
Brigadier		Fighters	Intelligence	
Captain		Fighters	Wisdom	
Charioteer		Thief	Dexterity	
Cook			Wisdom	-5
Diplomat		Bard	Charisma	-5
Escapologist		Thief	Dexterity	-5
Explorer		Ranger	Constitution	
Herald		Ranger	Intelligence	
Interrogator			Charisma	-5
Jeweler			Dexterity	-5
Lieutenant		Fighters	Charisma	-5
Merchant			Charisma	-5

Skill	Level Bonus	Class Bonus +2	Ability Bonus +2	Rushed Work
Miner			Constitution	-5
Pioneer		Thief	Dexterity	-5
Sage		Magic-User	Intelligence	-5
Sailor			Constitution	-5
Sergeant		Fighters	Constitution	
Servant			Charisma	-5
Ship's Captain			Wisdom	
Siege Engineer		Fighters	Intelligence	-5
Soldier		Fighters	Strength	
Spy		Monk	Intelligence	-5
Steward		Bard	Wisdom	
Torchbearer		Fighter	Strength	
Treasurer			Intelligence	-5

Clearly, the class-based elements can be adapted or stripped away to provide the basic game engine required to run most RPGs.

Nominate a Skill

There is no reason why a player can't nominate other specializations - so long as these don't eclipse any overlapping skills or abilities. For example, if a player wished to learn to prospect for gold and gems the GM and the other players could discuss the types of 'professional' and 'spectacular' outcomes that might be linked to the new skill.

Playing To Win?

In many videogames, most wargames and the majority of boardgames playing successfully is defined by the rules as playing to become the sole winner or king of the castle. That's a fairly narrow definition of success, which breaks down if a player uses rules knowledge to win, e.g. the adult who bludgeons a kid at the Monopoly table, because the kid doesn't know the most effective tactics.

RPGs simply don't work like that and gameplay that claims to be RPG-based while promoting a simplistic win-mentality disconnects players from long term motivations, fully-developed characters and becoming caught up in storybuilding.

RPGs work more like free running, where 'winning' is about pushing your own limits, sharing ideas and having a laugh. In other words, open-ended RPG gameplay focused on player choice is not so much about winning, as about winning in style.

There are plenty of suggestions on running gameplay spread through the text, but these key points may be helpful for new players:

1. If your character isn't in the same place as the action you're not able to pitch in – unless magic or technology helps out.
2. Equip your characters with the attributes to operate as an adventurer, i.e. give them enough intelligence to be able to survive as an adventurer.
3. Trust your GM to balance play. A few bad calls by the GM are not a deal-breaker and a poor GM can show you what to look for in other GMs and/ or what to avoid as a GM.
4. Play off the other players, i.e. if someone comes up with an interesting idea help them to run with it.
5. Build your own story and feed the events in that story into your character.
6. Don't be too quick to kill off a worthy opponent. The next one may not be quite so interesting.
7. Connect to the people, places and events your PCs encounter. Have them buy a property, go home for Midwinter every year, bump into an old flame at an awkward moment, . . .
8. The GM is a player too and the easiest way to avoid a railroad is to set out options and boundaries before a campaign starts.
9. You're a 14th level Paladin/ Assassin multi-class Half-Orc with a +3 Frostbrand – it might be hard, but you can still try to share the limelight.

Pets and Animal Companions

Pets and animal companions play a part in many tabletop RPGs. The most common animal companion has probably always been the trusty mule, which serves as an inexpensive option for transporting large amounts of gold out of dungeons. War hounds are another familiar choice, as they can do a lot to increase the chances of survival for a party of new PCs.

Clearly these very practical pets or companions can be of considerable immediate value to players. Otherwise, interest often ends as players find more convenient ways to move goods around or stay alive. This seems an inevitable process, because players prefer to concentrate on roleplaying their character and any hirelings rather than paying attention to animals which can't progress in the game.

The generally low use or lowly status of pets at mid- to high levels of RPG play is hardly a problem, as there's more than enough going on to keep players busy. In addition, it's also often simpler all round to lend a party a flight of griffins to take them on a journey instead of presenting them with a litter to stable, raise and train.

At the same time it seems worth keeping pets and companions around as an option, because they can become as central to a character as a character class or a comrade-in-arms. For example, pets can be very helpful when it comes to encouraging kids to take part in basic, story-focused RPG play. This is in part because kids generally like pets, but also because GMs can use a pet to prompt younger players without repeated direct interventions from the GM.

Pets or companions can have even more to offer if kids or young adults are playing in any kind of school, apprenticeship or college type scenarios. For instance, the competitions, rivalries, wizardry and aerial combat training that might be found in a school for PCs learning to ride dragons is one obvious way to upstage Harry Potter's broomsticks and griffins.

There's no need to introduce a raft of new rules to start making more use of pets, as most RPGs have basic rules for the speed and range of a wide variety of creatures. If a particular player's preferred pet or companion isn't among them, just look for the nearest equivalent and base your version on that.

Special powers, such as a chameleon's tongue or a dragon's breath needn't be problematic, as few players can argue for a companion that gives an overwhelming advantage compared to other characters' options. Equally, if everyone wants a powerful dragon it's going to be pretty obvious that it's necessary to either limit the dragons' power or scale-up the opposition. Pets which can easily be given abilities and/ or training include:

Pets and Companions Table

No.	Pet or Companion	Details
1	Birds of Prey	
2	Chameleons	
3	Dolphins	
4	Dragonflies	
5	Giant Spiders	
6	Hunting Dogs	
7	Magpies	
8	Timber Wolves	
9	War Hounds	
10	Watch Dragons	
11	Wildcats	
12	Wolves	

Advancement is the commonest way to turn PCs' abilities into a series of steps and the same technique works well with most pets and companions. A chameleon might be particularly good at concealment and collecting items, but only able to learn a few simple commands. Alternatively, a

wildcat might be trained to follow several commands, while remaining prone to cutting loose and savaging other peoples' pets or livestock. Key commands which players might try to teach to most pets probably include the following:

Training Pets and Companions Table

No.	Command	Details
1	Attack	
2	Call	
3	Fetch	
4	Follow	
5	Hide	
6	Hunt	
7	Leap	
8	Search	
9	Stay Away	
10	Stay Put	

More complex creatures like a dragon or an intelligent familiar are harder to limit. Equally, a pinch of magic dust might be needed to explain how a dragonfly could manage to learn commands. Nevertheless, with a bit of negotiation players can usually end up with an amusing and, at times, useful companion; without GMs having to reshape the overall balance of play.

For younger players it's quite easy to trade durability for special powers. This suits everyone, as neither the GM nor the players want the pets to come to any harm. Older, more cynical players can be more pragmatic and it's probably necessary to offer a relatively useful and bright companion if you want to avoid watching a succession of pets being fed into traps.

Niche pets can be particularly useful if players are seeking a reasonable advantage, as a hawk capable of mapping out wildlife across a wilderness through the prey it returns is spider bait in an underground tomb. A mighty war elephant stacked with war drums and archers offers a similar option. The expense could be justified by the animal's value when exploring jungle or scrub land wildernesses, but you're not going to want to march it across a swamp.

Pets are no more a requirement than any other RPG option. However, they can be especially useful for young players and groups of players without enough numbers. They also lend adventures and campaigns an extra layer of familiarity and authenticity. With that in mind the following selection of rare transport options might be found in any major fantasy city's animal bazaar. Clearly, rare creatures with valuable skills would be expensive to buy and keep, so rental might often be the best option:

Rare Creatures Table

No.	Creature	Details
1	Chariot Horses	Chariots for 2 or 4, with optional scything blades
2	Dragons	Legal restrictions on using breath weapons
3	Griffins	Fast, fierce and hard to tame
4	Hippogriff	Fast but limited to carrying a single passenger
5	Mammoths	Slow, steady and able to carry large weights
6	Nightmares	Fast and impressive, but very demanding
7	Pegasi	Offer speed and maneuverability
8	Spiders, Giant	Brave, agile and temperamental
9	Unicorns	Offer speed, loyalty and, possibly, magical powers
10	War Elephants	Slow but almost unstoppable with armor on
11	War Horses	Fast, resilient and capable of trampling opponents
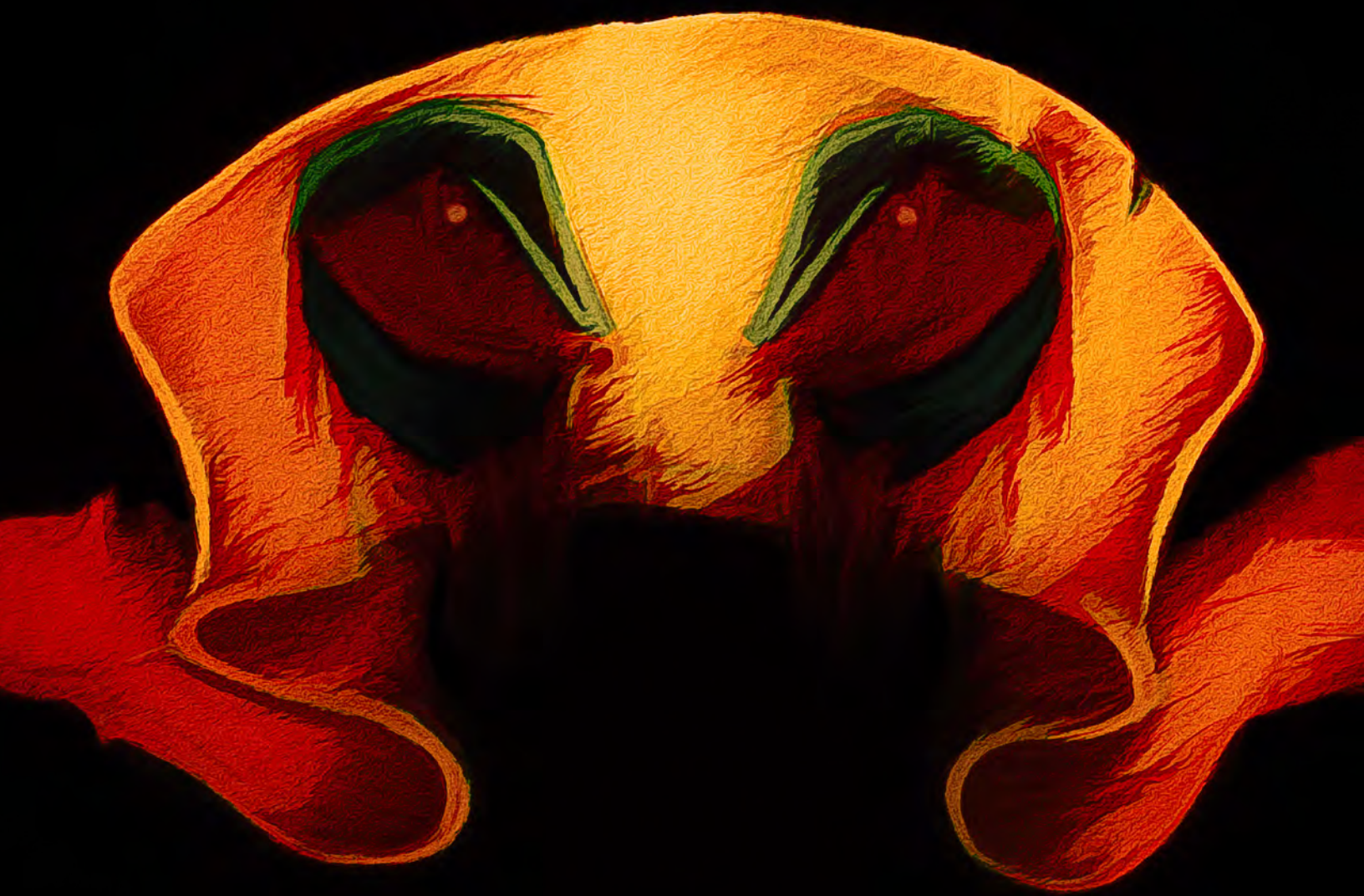
Part 4: Running Play

Ready-To-Run Adventures

The RPG Handbook goes on to look in detail at the steps involved in designing your own adventures and campaigns. This homebrew approach can, however, seem a daunting task for a new GM and it's helpful to have a few ready-made examples to look over before getting started.

In addition, it is often useful for any GM to have some decent, good-to-go adventures on hand when simply too busy to prepare anything and too tired to run a largely improvisational game.

After half-a-dozen attempts at setting-up their own adventures few GMs will look back as – unsurprisingly - the fun and freedom involved in shaping your own worlds is generally more rewarding than acting as a milk monitor overseeing someone else's rules and plot lines.

This is in part because designing and co-designing adventures and campaigns can shift RPG gameplay away from sticking to the largely fixed narratives involved in passively playing through others' imaginative content.

Without this shift player-focused, imaginative storybuilding remains shackled to the original designers' landscapes, societies, characters and stories.

Does that suggest almost all shrink-wrapped scenarios and campaigns should be set aside? Not really as GMs and players' imaginative input needs to be fuelled by new ideas and inspiration. As a result, most homebrew GMs become magpies – frequently looking for new angles and variants to breathe life into their homebrew worlds.

Players may also be more than happy to take on board a brand, theme or narrative that appeals to them as a platform on which to build the rest of play. This can save time and helps to lead to the conclusion that less good quality, ready-made adventures and campaigns doesn't necessarily lead to more homebrewed gameplay.

Instead a steady shift in emphasis or balance is more likely to encourage GMs to homebrew. For example, a GM could start by changing a few items and monsters inside a shrink-wrapped adventure. The same GM might then take a basic dungeon adventure that's easy to beef-up and try adding a couple of extra plot hooks, some new traps and a handful of dynamic events, e.g. another party of adventurers in the same dungeon or deforming the dungeon when, for instance, a large explosion brings the levels above down into the gap formed by the blast.

The following short selection of scenarios present examples of some of the options players may wish to check out if they're thinking of trying out as a GM:

1. Dyson's Delve is a well-presented, free dungeon-crawl that could easily be developed to include NPC details and basic plotting.
2. The Classic Dungeons and Dragons page at Dragonsfoot has a selection of free D&D scenarios available as PDFs.
3. The selection of generic Dungeons and Dragons adventures on Wizard of the Coast's Original Adventures page includes over 50 titles by established authors such as Monte Cook, Bruce Cordell and Gary Gygax. The available downloads include two classic dungeon adventures, (The Tomb of Horrors and White Plume Mountain), which are good examples of traditional dungeon crawls. Other later titles on the same page offer adventures that present a wider range of challenges.
4. Mongoose Publishing make available two free Traveler campaigns – Secrets of the Ancients and The Pirates of Drinax.

There are many other free scenarios available on the Net, but the style and quality of them can vary greatly. Those shown present basic examples of some of the types of adventures players can easily build for themselves as starting points for their own designs.

More recent adventures and campaigns are much more likely to involve societies with an ecology and a pattern of ongoing events. I.e. the characters are embedded within a culture that probably includes earning a living, getting caught-up in the events around them and having birthday parties.

It is well worth trying to run some straightforward, standalone dungeon and village adventures before trying to scale up to cities and nations. Approaches to designing and co-designing living dungeons/ worlds are discussed again later in the text.

Gamesmaster (GM) Skills

There is no one way to GM and no right way to GM. There are, however, some helpful approaches to running games which crop up time and again in RPG blogs, forums and magazines. Experienced GMs may well find nothing new in this section, but new GMs will come across options that have been tried and tested by many GMs over many campaigns.

Pacing
Pacing is one of the first areas a new GM may wish to look at, because adjusting the pace of events in a game can build tension, make play less

predictable, allow rest and recuperation, open-up sub-plots and side-quests, and/ or up the tempo both 'in-game' and 'out-game'.

One of the easiest ways to adjust pacing is through encounter selection. The type of encounters players are presented with, and the order in which they come across them, operate much like a throttle. Combat encounters, NPC encounters and PC conflicts tend to open the 'throttle', as player interactions come thick and fast because PCs are dealing with what's in front of them at the time.

Challenge-focused encounters, PC meetings, tricks and traps, urban encounters, and more, can be delivered at pace, but players are often being asked to take a step back from the 'here and now' to consider solutions and future options. Under these circumstances players deserve time to weigh up and co-ordinate their options.

Offering a good selection of different types of encounters and challenges within an adventure or a campaign setting can build pacing into settings and scenarios at the design stage. This is easily done without compromising player choice by signposting challenges and plots that players have previously identified, (by word or action), as contributing to enjoyable gameplay.

In other words, if players enjoy exploration and discovery point them in the direction of a ship and give them a map to 'the Wilderness', 'The Savage Lands' or the 'Endless Ocean'. Then encourage them to head straight off into the unknown. The game's pace will then be dictated by and open to manipulation through exploration, hazards, discovery, encounters and combat; rather than the relentless grind of the combat encounter.

Alternatively, re-mixing combat encounters to streamline cumbersome rules, allow a greater degree of combat choreography, including pacing, and a greater range of hazards can make combat-focused play more variable.

Change

Authentic gameplay involves game-worlds that change over time and react to events. This is most obvious when PCs return to an area months or years after their last visit. There will probably be new seasons, and a seasonal climate, NPCs that have aged and 'moved on', projects that were underway which have now reached completion and such like. In addition, a new regime may be in place, the area might have undergone sweeping change and attitudes towards the PCs may have altered while they've been away.

The manner in which events seem to progress or move forward is part of recognizing change. However, stagnation and deterioration are just as much a part of taking account of ongoing events. The collapse of buildings

over time, a failure to patrol border lands adequately or the destruction of a city's water supply can all suggest different types of deformation within a game-world.

Substantial or global changes tend to overshadow and impact on local conditions and events. Nevertheless, the smallest event can trigger all sorts of different outcomes and it is just as valuable to incorporate change on a local level as across a whole campaign setting. A fort which the players left ruined just days before may have been reinforced, reconstructed and set on alert when players want to take the same route home. Along similar, but more destructive, lines the effects of using high impact magical forces within a dungeon are likely to become significant. Shattered glass or broken doors might be all that needs to be recalled. On the other hand, tunnels may start to collapse, rocks may become dislodged and crumbling walls could turn single chambers into a huge gallery. Burst containers and industrial processes may then present as particular threats or unleash and/ or re-define threats which were previously of little concern.

Easy Come, Easy Go
Many new players will set off with the intention/ belief that their PC will somehow become better/ more interesting/ capable of bossing the game by pursuing every magical or advanced technological device out there. However, simply possessing an item or a device can easily unbalance a character, because the characters' material possessions start to eclipse the character's other attributes, including the lifestream of adventures, events, contacts and highlights that fuel the development of fully-realized player characters.

At the same time there's a lot to be said for giving PCs access to wealth and devices that can help them to meet and develop the challenges they encounter. In addition, when linked to challenges, rather than individual PCs, such devices can drive plots, offer tempting prizes and engage players in moments of discovery.

The most straightforward approaches to achieving a balance involve devices that are limited or expended in some way, i.e. they only operate under certain conditions, they have charges or doses and/ or they become obsolete after serving a purpose.

These methods work well, as the availability of devices can be linked to the needs of the PCs within an adventure or a campaign instead of the imagined need to have an all-powerful PC.

Dealing with cash calls for slightly different methods, as PCs can accumulate great wealth, which may then be used to help PCs to become what appears on the surface to be better/ more interesting/ capable of bossing the game. Some players and groups may not follow this line, but

it's best to be prepared with a few options. For example, offer to sell PCs expensive items that help with challenges, charge taxes and tolls, and provide access to luxury goods that are only likely to be used occasionally/ kept at home. Taking account of wear and tear, accidents and mishaps or damage to items during combat are other options which soon part a PC from her/ his gold.

If all else fails, it's possible to use events within the gameplay to remove cash from a game's economy, e.g. warfare might involve devaluations, revolution and even currency consuming magical or engineered viruses.

As in the real world, faster transport, luxury entertainment, elaborate protection and collecting information about your adversaries are areas where PCs, if not players, often pay out. Simply ask the PCs whether they wish to travel by cart or speed along in a designer chariot – then show them some of the optional extras that come with the better chariot. Will they care that much of the adventure that follows takes place in a swamp requiring them to park any chariots? Probably not, as the chariot waits ready to take them to other locations. (Unless, of course, they left a chariot with wooden parts next to an uninvestigated termite mound – which might call for new wheels if nothing else).

Listen Up

It takes time and encouragement for new RPG players to 'find their voice'. GMs can help such players to start taking more of a lead, to begin suggesting gameplay options and to think in terms of working as a team by making space for new players' voices. Straightforward approaches to this include:

Giving players time to outline their experience of events as they happen, (e.g. a player describing what the player's PC buys in a clothes or weapons store).

Supporting the challenges your players and you prefer, (e.g. players interested in investigation and deduction during play will find it hard to develop 'a voice' within combative adventures which aren't in tune with their gameplay expectations).

Loosen Up

Even the most skilled GM can't keep an eye on all of the possible actions and interactions likely to occur in any given adventure. About the best anyone can hope for is to stick to the key strengths that are known to work within a particular group. Help is available through scenario and settings design geared towards supporting players' imaginative thinking - and freeing-up GMs to focus on the game as a whole.

However, the easiest ways to take a lot of the pressure off are to negotiate a few compromises at the table, build as close a match as possible between player choice and the features of your game; and, effectively, allow yourself some basic errors.

Forced-Feeding

If there's a mismatch between the challenges a GM presents, (and all the locations, plots, subplots, NPCs, items and more which follow from there), and the challenges players regard as building enjoyable gameplay, there's little to be gained from force-feeding players your own preferences/ whatever comes to hand.

You may be able to cobble together a game without agreeing shared approaches to your game's challenges, but the gameplay will rattle along like a wagon with a broken axle. Each 'wheel' will end up pulling away in different directions as each player forms a different take on the game.

GMs can drag everything forward through sheer willpower and enthusiasm, but the game is unlikely to gel. Under these conditions the GM may be tempted to fall back on cheap thrills, aka the lowest common combat denominator, to try to compel players to persist. At its worst this involves sending players into encounters which they can't avoid, despite them previously making it fairly obvious those particular types of encounters don't offer the challenges the players want to take on.

No Post-Mortems

Feedback from comments made at the table, noticing when players are enjoying particular types of play and reflecting after the game are all likely to help to get a better match between the gameplay and players' hopes for the gameplay. However, that does not extend to recriminations over details, showdowns over inconsistencies in the rules and extensive post-mortems about what went wrong.

Player Dynamics

Some players get on, others don't. It's not up to a GM to mediate between warring parties, but there's a lot to be said for taking opportunities to blend contrasting or opposing styles during play. On an obvious level, a player's knight may show contempt for another player's thief - right up to the point when the thief steps out of the shadows and saves the fighter.

Straitjacketing

Roughing out a PC for a new player to get play started quickly is often a major timesaver if everyone else is good to go. The tricky part is remembering to make the ready-rolled PC appeal to most new players without coming across as a cardboard cut-out.

It's important to give players the chance to invest in their PCs by personalizing and customizing them, which means taking the time to either offer a selection of start-up characters or to return to the PC design stage with the new player at the earliest opportunity.

If a GM starts handing down PCs and defining PCs for their players on a regular basis, a significant part of the players' investment in their PCs is gone. This loss of engagement can be worsened by systems which already pre-define PCs through strict character classes and exclusive skill paths, as there's not a lot left for a player to construct when the rules, the GM, the setting and the challenges a particular class can deal with are all in place.

In addition, the player can hardly go on to shape the destiny of a PC towards their own model or characterization if the 'die have been cast' before the player even picked up the character sheet.

Metagaming
Striking a balance between allowing players to apply their own skills to play and maintaining both characterization and authenticity during play is easier to handle in-game if a few basic agreements have been reached beforehand.

Clearly, if a PC is held in a distant location and sealed off from communicating with other PCs there's going to be a breakdown in shared expectations and any sense of authenticity if the imprisoned character starts suggesting how other characters might act.

On the other hand, presenting PCs with a puzzle the players could solve, only to declare that none of the characters is sufficiently intelligent to understand the puzzle, dispenses with a gameplay option that some players may enjoy and might have requested.

More often than not grumbling on this point is down to players looking to optimize by neglecting soft skills like intelligence when making a PC and then assuming, or expecting, the player's skills/ intelligence to fill any gaps. Many new players won't even realize that this falls into the category of seeking an unfair advantage. So, unless a player actually wishes to play a character that is going to struggle to plan or puzzle, the simple solution is for PCs to pay up enough for an at least average intelligence.

Skills checks are already used to define characters' class and combat skills and they can be extended to mechanize countless other areas of gameplay. However, it doesn't take long to reach a point where skills creep becomes counterproductive. Players need room to maneuver in terms of look for novel solutions in situations as they unfold. Without engaging player skill in this way the distance between the player and the character gets in the

way of the sense of ownership and individuality that becomes attached to a much-loved character.

Instead, a randomly generated character playing with options and solutions defined by the rules becomes a representative of the game rather than an avatar focused on the player's interest and RPG gameplay.

If it player doesn't feel able to trust a GM to exercise the required balance there probably isn't much of a basis for an enjoyable game anyway, which it is probably better to know at the outset.

Monsters Have Brains

Monsters and other NPCs who follow entirely predictable routines don't present much of a threat and usually require some sort of added ingredient, such as a trap or difficult terrain, to make them more interesting to play against. Allowing monsters to use their instincts and intelligence to vary their actions makes play more authentic and gritty.

Contrary to some popular belief, it is possible for monsters to run away, plan an escape route or fall upon their knees begging for mercy instead of always fighting to the death.

Setting Events in Motion

Providing a living, breathing game-world which feels both fantastic and credible is hard work. Building from scratch is particularly time-consuming, while adapting shrink-wrapped game content invites a certain amount of compromise.

Using real world events to add detail, atmosphere and a sense of setting a campaign in motion cut back on the time required to prepare well and the compromises involved in working from one size fits all materials. Landscapes, architectures, legends, maps and calendars are easily borrowed and adapted from readily available Internet sources. These can be combined and re-mixed to sketch out settings and scenarios at speed and with authenticity.

With limited Internet research a wide selection of recurring events, larger than life characters, epic landscapes and awesome architecture can be mapped out in minutes or hours rather than weeks or months.

Sidelining

From the point of view of players they are only fully 'in play' when sharing in the action and decisions at the table. Every time there's a pause to check a player's rules query the rest of the players are sidelined. The same applies when one PC regularly grabs the narrative limelight, when a PC is significantly more powerful than the rest of the party, when props hinder rather than help, and when solutions to challenges have to be rules-based.

Some sidelining can be useful, e.g. when a quick rules query helps out or someone goes to fetch the snacks. However, it will be harder for PCs to act as a team and some players are going to feel sidelined unless the GM is aware of sidelining and, where necessary, ready to use prompts to balance players' access to the gameplay.

Mapping and Cartography

RPGs don't always need maps, as there are RPGs which use very straight-forward zonal movement and storytelling games that make no use at all of tabletop layouts. Nevertheless, a majority of games will benefit from mapping

Four options for carrying out mapping are:

1. Leave mapping to the players and let the PCs get lost if the maps aren't accurate. This is well-suited to dungeon adventures, where a certain amount of disorientation may add to the fun - now and again.
2. The GM presents players with maps to save time and speed play along. These maps can be left largely free of features, which will be added as adventurers explore. They are well-suited for showing overviews of regions, cities and landscapes – but may well give players information ahead of time when used in dungeons.
3. GMs can use treasure maps and access to architectural blueprints to form a mixed approach, i.e. the GM maps some areas and then switches mapping back to the PCs for other areas.
4. Shared mapmaking combines GM and player-led approaches and doesn't have to involve switching methods constantly. By working on large sheets of paper, (or a digital equivalent), GMs and players can use marker pens/ colored pencils, (or a digital equivalent), to build a map as play unfolds. When players enter a room the GM adds obvious features, but further contributions only get added, by the GM or the players, when play zoom-ins on particular areas in more detail, e.g. a table with plates spread over it can be seen from the entrance to a room, but the food on the plates and the silver cutlery only get added if PCs explore in greater detail.

A mix of these approaches can help to vary the presentation of a game. For example, colorful, professionally made regional maps might be used along with encouraging players to participate in marking local maps and/ or ongoing situations.

Getting players involved in marking or doodling on to a shared map is an excellent way:

1. To keep players occupied while others are taking their turn.

2. To keep players' attention focused on the action.
3. To offer a 'control panel' that tracks the situations players are dealing with.
4. To review what has already happened and what is going on elsewhere.

Another advantage of getting everyone round the table used to mapping features and some details of ongoing gameplay are the records/ memento/ artwork left at the end. A mix of cavern or room outlines, physical features, monsters' positions, hit points lost, actions and doodles or sketches makes for an entertaining summary. This adventure or campaign record can then be used to review how a campaign went or to quickly give new players a clear idea of the kind of gameplay to expect within your group.

For rooms and caverns it's already very easy to use a cheap 10" tablet, a free copy of touch Autosketch on Android and a standard PC monitor to pass floor plans round, annotate or sketch on them and then rapidly send the results to the monitor via social media.

Amongst other positive effects the results of this approach include more multi-sensory gameplay, more participative gameplay and blending in-game fun alongside meta-game fun, e.g. having a laugh at everyone's first attempts at touch sketching.

The types of mapping available to players fall into a number of categories. When deciding which type/s of mapping to use it's often worth considering how much variety to trade off against consistent styling. Options include:

1. Sketching maps quickly with little concern for how things look. This works extremely well, as quick, dynamic maps will end up representing events as they happen.
2. Using topographical maps to save time and put ideas across quickly, i.e. they're good for instant dungeon layouts, communications networks and rough cross-sections.
3. Making hand-drawn maps, which means taking a little time and care with the line-work. With practice these will often start to appear in place of early doodles and sketches.
4. Digital mapping that involves turning drawings into digital images or designing maps entirely on computers. There's a lot to be said for a digital workflow, as it makes it much easier to clone and vary work you've already done. For some cartographers further options open up, such as wrapping a map round a globe. Specialist software such as Campaign Cartographer can be used for those who want a dedicated solution. Painting software like Photoshop or GIMP; drawing software like Illustrator, Inkscape or CorelDraw; and 3D software - including SketchUp - tend to reward time spent learning to use the software/ building-up libraries of re-useable objects.

5. Using infographics to present information to players might involve anything from a fancy menu to charts and logs found in a starship. There are countless data visualization sites on the Net to help out, but pen and paper can produce quick and effective results on the spot.

Prompts and Interrupts

Much of a GM's contribution to RPGs involves serving-up short descriptions and narrative options that spur players' imaginations and present choices. As part of that process most GMs offer a certain amount of prompting to help players to explore the options open to their PCs.

For experienced players prompting may be limited to a few subtle clues and hints offered up through the characters and situations presented by the GM. That's ideal for experienced players who will easily, and almost automatically, consider all of the information and options available to their own PC and the party as a whole. However, new and/ or younger players are often going to be unaware of the full range of choices open to them and how to go about selecting the best options.

Gamesmasters can help players to gain experience and to enjoy play by offering a wide variety of prompts either directly to players or through their PCs. The idea is not to advise or instruct players in how to run their characters, but to present information in ways that help new players to get as much out of the game as experienced players.

Prompts can also be used to interrupt play. For example, if a player is hogging the limelight - or going for an Oscar - it can be helpful to prompt them to move along. Equally, a player that's lurking on the edge of the game can be encouraged to participate with as little as a reference to the character class or skills their character is using.

Experienced GMs will already be experts at calling upon many of the possible prompts shown below. However, some GMs may find it helpful to become more familiar with a wide range of prompts. Most of the options under discussion are about either re-framing or varying the presentation of the information to help players to coming up with their own ideas and solutions.

Player Choice
One of the most helpful ways to prompt players is to discuss and negotiate how the GM and players wish to play the game before a campaign or adventure starts. This doesn't need to involve specific or detailed planning, but it does allow players to feed into the prompts served-up by the GM during play.

Rephrasing
It's quite easy for an experienced GM or player to explain play or the rules in terms which are quite hard to understand. For example, 'roll 2D4' means little to most of the general population.

Revised Presentation
If the information presented to players results in blank expressions and requests for a better explanation it is often useful to either simplify or re-frame the way the information is being put across. For example, breaking information down into key steps or using a diagram instead of the spoken word generally helps.

Reviewing Skills
Reminding a player about a PC's abilities and skills can encourage players to reconsider the options open to them in terms of making best use of what a PC has to offer.

Reviewing PCs' Motives
GMs can help players and their PCs to focus by asking them to consider how a situation contributes to the characterization and long-term goals players have set their PCs. Placing a character's current situation in the wider context of a campaign, quest or lifetime may also motivate players to persist.

Snapshots
Reviewing ongoing events within an encounter by listing what PCs are dealing with is a quick way of encouraging players to consider their characters' options.

Reminders
Simply reminding players of a clue, event or insight learned earlier in a series of adventures or encounters may shine a light on information that players already have, but aren't considering while caught up in current actions and events.

Reviewing Options
For new players it's often quite important to prompt them by running through choices that offer solutions. For example, a new player may not realize that using a magical missile to release a catch or lever, which drops or pours a liquid over opponents, is a good alternative to simply firing a missile at a single opponent.

Exploring Options
Experienced players may not need or appreciate prompting under most circumstances. However, it's usually possible to encourage them to look around or zoom in by hinting at alternatives. For instance, a GM might simply say, 'that's an option but there are others'. The player is thereby

given a 'stick or twist' choice, but not aided in identifying or selecting the best options.

Reconnecting

Taking players back to a situation which sheds some light on a current predicament or challenge offers an unobtrusive approach to prompting. This might involve suggesting that player characters have faced similar problems before and managed to find a way out on those occasions. This type of prompt is similar to a reminder, but players are being left to make their own connection to past encounters and events.

Overall, prompting is about building an awareness of options and moving away from leaving fixed rules and GMs' personal expectations to shape play. With prompting less is definitely more in terms of stepping away from directing players and encouraging them to improvise. However, without prompting new and novice players are going to find it hard to bridge a skills gap that limits their gameplay by restricting the range of options open to them during play.

Hack and Slay or Remix and Play

A full range of RPG gameplay options can include stealth, investigation, mystery, construction, characterization, planning, intrigue and all manner of ongoing challenges, missions and quests. These options, (and the list is far from exhaustive), open up opportunities for a wide variety of open-ended tabletop roleplaying and design gaming. At the same time, sooner or later, even the most plot or challenge-focused adventures are likely to involve direct confrontation.

There are plenty of ways to roleplay conflict, but players and/ or plot will often call for raised shields and a handy Longsword. The standard approach to varying RPG combat is through the many abilities of monsters, aliens and other lifeforms. However, the novelty wears off as soon as players become familiar with their own and most of the monsters' abilities.

From there on combat can become predictable as the gameplay concentrates on matching players' abilities to each monster's weaknesses. Some RPGs end up trying to introduce greater excitement, if not variety, by making the player/ s and their opponents as closely matched as possible. This adds risk, but can make players feel they're under the cosh. This can bring with it the danger of being sucked into heated debates about the rules, as outcomes, (on many levels), may hang on interpreting a clause within the rule set.

Adding a dramatic backdrop in terms of a combat's place in the plot or some novel circumstances offers a partial solution, as player characters'

motivations, (and meaningful 'in-game' consequences), can add tension and give a combat a wider resonance across the rest of the gameplay.

Fighting over different prizes, possessions and passions may vary the meaning of a combat within the game as a whole, but it seems necessary to go further to make the most of what combat can contribute to play. In particular, it seems worthwhile to go beyond the limits of static rules sets.

Rule sets usually take account of a selection of basic options, including fighting while wading, on horseback or in the dark. This can be extended in countless directions.

Combat Options Table

No.	Fighting . . .	Details
1	Amidst lava streams	
2	At sea	
3	In a swamp	
4	In a tar pit	
5	In battle	
6	In explosive/ destructive locations	
7	In labyrinths	
8	In quicksand	
9	On ice	
10	Over bridges and chasms	
11	Underwater	
12	While becoming ill or poisoned	

These, and many more choices, can be varied again by deformation of the terrain and/ or events, i.e. conditions may deteriorate, (or emerge), as things 'fall apart'. Modern and SciFi settings are all the better, with an endless array of readily available environmental hazards to choose from, ranging from planetary conditions to invasive nano-bots.

The choice of combat variants available to players is clearly far beyond knowing the difference between a Storm Giant and a Stone Giant. Except there's a problem: how can even the largest rule sets provide combat mechanics for handling each and every possible situation? Fortunately, there appear to be a few possible approaches which might help:

1. Consider what the existing rules have to offer and what might be added in terms of simple combat modifiers that don't unbalance play.
2. Extend the rules to provide fuller consideration of the situation and add tables to vary possible effects. Modifying magical or physical effects to suit the environment might well add authenticity.
3. Take account of knock-on effects and ongoing events, including deformation and the emergent properties of the situation.

4. Populate the 'combat zone' with environmental combat options, e.g. items, physical features and other 'solutions', available to the observant and opportunist without highly specialized skills.

5. Use story-focused fighting and freeform GMing to take account of new conditions as they emerge during play. This is a tiring option, but it does allow the rules to move with the territory and seamlessly fade into the background. That can, in turn, bring the plot and players' characterization into the foreground.

Overall, combat can deliver some of the most exciting gameplay available in videogame RPGs, tabletop RPGs and design games. There's not that much a player can do about videogame combat. You get the combat and combat settings which come in the box. More opened-ended, imaginative tabletop games can do better, as GMs and players are able to vary, shape and remix the design and play of combat encounters to much greater imaginative effect.

Mixed Messages

There are a great variety of codes, messages, secret codes, warning signs and similar communications which can be used to make information available to players in varied and original ways. These are some of the options open to GMs and players during play:

D100	Medium	Variants
1	Alchemical Transformations	
2	Architecture	
3	Astrolabs and Astroclocks	
4	Beacons	
5	Candles	
6	Color	
7	Cosmetics	
8	Costumes	
9	Expressions	
10	Fireworks	
11	Flags and Banners	
12	Flowers	
13	Gestures	
14	Hairstyles	
15	Hand Signals	
16	Headwear	
17	Inks	
18	Invisible Ink	
19	Jewelry and Accessories	
20	Kites	

D100	Medium	Variants
21	Knots	
22	Labyrinths	
23	Lanterns and Lenses	
24	Lighthouses	
25	Maps	
26	Masks	
27	Mazes	
28	Missiles	
29	Mosaics	
30	Playing Cards	
31	Prows	
32	Reliefs	
33	Reliquaries	
34	Rockets	
35	Sacred Architecture	
36	Scents and Perfumes	
37	Sculptures	
38	Sign Languages	
39	Signposts and Signage	
40	Sky Discs	
41	Smoke Signals	
42	Stained Glass	
43	Sundials	
44	Tapestries	
45	Tattoos	
46	Trophies	
47	Typography	
48	Uniforms	
49	Vanitas	
50	Wildlife	

Making Monsters

Designing intriguing or fearsome monsters for PCs to take on isn't straightforward. Many options are already covered by existing categories found in plenty of tabletop RPGs and it takes a bit of thought to come up with something novel.

New monsters, tribes and races can't rely on physical appearances to entertain players. They have to present a genuine threat and require players to use some thinking to escape from, win over or defeat the new adversary.

Many monsters, tribes and races are based around countless variations on mythological creatures, which have all been used time and again. Adding bizarre or highly exotic creatures often doesn't fit either, as players are often unfamiliar with the concept or mythology and may, therefore, find it difficult to find the monster or the threat it presents anything other than a 'bolt-on'.

So where can GMs find some credible, fearsome monsters that players can easily identify as both threatening and intriguing? As it happens, real world wildlife provides a good source of plenty of dangerous creatures, which are easily adapted to present particular difficulties for players to overcome:

Asian Ants include a species which can explode their abdomens and release toxins over their enemies. The odd group could add danger to an encounter where PCs meet them for the first time, while large numbers of these walking bombs would be a major problem if controlled by pheromones/ scents held in the hands of a sinister opponent.

Basilisk Lizards are well-known for feet that move so fast that they can run on water at up to 3.3 mph (5.4 km/h). Walking on water, (and the other attributes of lizards), make these reptiles a stand-out as a humanoid race or tribe, because of the combination of maneuverability, toughness and speed they offer. Players might find them very difficult opponents unless they can find ways to cool down the overall environment, or the lizards, until the lizards become lethargic.

Bees are always a good option for sending players into a panic as they search for water, or other escapes, from swarming attacks along the lines of African Killer bee attacks. A less predictable, but potentially very damaging, approach is to take account of the figure of 300 stings, which is usually enough to kill a human. Intermittent encounters with bees across a setting could lead to a tally of bee stings, which kicks-in with a number of side effects as players accumulate more stings over weeks and months. Some of the effects might offer temporary benefits. PCs can be drawn in by optional, incidental contact encounters, e.g. help a NPC to remove a hive, follow a Honey Badger to a hive or rescue a kid standing dangerously near to a swarm.

Hummingbirds need to eat every ten minutes and consume as much as 2/3 of their body weight in a single day. A flight of beautiful, but deadly, hummingbirds could present a real barrier to PCs, until the players realize they have to disrupt the hummingbirds' food supply to disable them.

Mimic Octopuses can change color, shape and texture almost instantaneously. This allows them to mimic a Flounder, a Sea Snake or a Lionfish. A natural mimic, capable of disguising itself as something harmless, something to be avoided and something to fear, (without even

revealing its true form), lets players unwrap the challenges the monster presents as an increasing threat. Which works particularly well when the forms taken are broadly similar and players aren't observing the dramatic shifts of form involved in polymorphing magic.

Tomato Frogs are able to secrete glue as a defense. A wide range of disruption and danger could easily result from encountering such creatures. Pools of glue left in their trail could get on the PCs, weapons might stick to the frogs, (or a comparable 'glue monster'), and PCs could try to collect and use the glue.

These options demonstrate a few of the choices available for varying monsters and races. Exploding ants add a new, unusual weapon; Basilisk Lizards are highly adaptable; bee stings can wear PCs down; Hummingbirds can encourage players to be less direct; Mimic Octopuses are heavily disguised; and Tomato Frogs offer options for a bit of chaos and confusion.

There are lots more real world creatures that serve-up ideas for novel monsters, races and tribes. By considering them in terms of weaponry, adaptability, impact, challenges, subterfuges and novelty it's easier to bring together a combination of features that intrigues and/ or unsettles PCs and their players.

There may be other criteria to add to the list presented here, but relatively few creatures seem likely to add much to play unless they can tick a few of these boxes.

Killer Traps

Out of the Blue
Traps are part and parcel of many tabletop RPG adventures and have been for a very long time. Certain types of scenarios and encounters might reasonably be expected to contain dangerous traps, (e.g. an ancient tomb or an Assassin's den). The traps placed in such locations can present threats, offer challenges and put the PCs through the mill.

Where there's an expectation of damaging traps players can think through possible precautions and counter-measures they might wish to take with them. Players are then aware of the risks, to some extent prepared and clearly making a choice to participate in an adventure where the stakes may well be high.

Traps that appear completely out of nowhere and undermine players' imaginative expectations or simply slaughter much-loved PCs 'for a laugh' are a different matter. This seems particularly clear when a GM makes a trap that's consistently deadly.

The disadvantages of using lethal traps in tabletop RPGs often outweigh the benefits traps can offer:

1. Players may feel cheated if traps arrive completely out of the blue.
2. If there is too much warning most players will keep PCs well clear.
3. Players may spend the next game year checking round every corner.
4. Players' nerves can get stuck on edge; making it hard to lower and raise tension.
5. The party of PCs may become unable to continue a long-running adventure or quest.
6. Players could feel cheated if the lethality relies on limiting possible solutions.
7. Traps that aren't authentic or able to fit the context may be seen as contrived.
8. Outright kills can seem unreasonable if capture or confinement would be more effective.

Having one or two of these factors eating into the entertainment is problematic. Taking all of them on at the same time is, perhaps, a bit of a recipe for demoralizing players. Nevertheless, while alternatives to outright kills are available, on occasions when a lethal or potentially lethal trap is called for it's a compromise to remove much or all of the risk.

One way of sidestepping potential difficulties is to make it relatively easy for survivors to raise or resurrect fallen comrades. This approach works up to a point, but falls flat when conveniently restoring PCs to life becomes either straightforward or routine.

Traps as Encounters
It seems more eventful and demanding to keep the risks high, while presenting lethal traps more as open-ended encounters than as random outcomes. In other words, instead of triggering traps and rolling a saving throw to survive, players will, ideally, 'unpack' a trap which evolves as PCs make choices and take actions that determine whether or not the trap proves lethal.

The original version of the notorious classic D&D adventure, The Tomb of Horrors, presents good examples of traps which demonstrate the distinction between the random and the resolved. On a number of occasions a PC, or even the whole party of PCs, is told that a deadly trap has been triggered and a quick saving throw roll soon decides the fate of a PC or PCs. On other occasions the traps are open to solutions, which may not save the PCs but do turn each trap into an encounter involving choices and actions.

In the original Tomb of Horrors adventure there's a particularly good 'choker' trap which contains all the elements of a classic trap, (i.e. it's

basically a flooding pit), and an encounter. Players are handed a deteriorating situation and have to uncover a series of choices that make sense in terms of saving the party there and then. However, it's hard for players to do so, as the solutions are made counter-intuitive by obviously endangering the party at a later stage.

Players are put under plenty of pressure by the flooding element of the trap, while having to find unappealing solutions and, very rapidly, select the best of a bad lot. Those who react quickly and thoughtfully probably survive; those who dither or opt for the more costly solutions either die there and then or continue much weakened.

The key elements of such a trap are the deteriorating situation, the risks, the need to investigate, the choices open to players and the actions their PCs carry out, which decide and feed into the encounter's various outcomes. These should leave room for creative players to offer solutions from outside the box.

Outcomes

Here are a couple of lethal traps aimed at pulling together the components of a trap which functions as or within an encounter. Solutions open to players may include disarming, containing, re-purposing or running away from the trap:

The PCs are involved in the construction of a large ship set in blocks near to the shoreline. Shortly before the vessel is complete the lashings holding it in place fail and the whole ship begins lurching towards the water. The PCs, some small children and/ or a visiting ambassador find themselves in the path of the ship; and all but the players either don't notice or are rooted to the spot.

The PCs could lose their lives, the ship, the goodwill of the locals or even witness the start of a war if they don't come up with some decent solutions, and fast. The time available to players is easily adjusted to allow players a few opportunities to intervene by following a sequence from the snapping sounds of the lashings as they break, to the slow lurch forward as the ship starts off and, finally, the blur of motion as the ship gains speed and approaches the water. During that time PCs' actions may slow or accelerate the process, as players consider their priorities, select actions and react to ongoing outcomes.

Moving indoors, it's not difficult to find a similar combination of open-ended gameplay using everyday occurrences. For example, dense clouds of grain dust are usually released from rice, corn and wheat crops when they're winnowed, threshed, decanted, elevated or spilt. In an enclosed space it takes no more than a spark for these clouds to explode in highly incendiary air-bursts, which are often fatal.

By introducing crop dust to an enclosed area, (whether through breaking a container, harvesting or deliberate spillage), the use of metal weapons, torches and fireballs all become potentially lethal. The risks may vary, but fighting, spellcasting or closing a door might all contribute to increasingly dense concentrations of dust in the air.

Those who avoid activity and don't send out any sparks may hardly notice the dust. However, those who stir up the dust are going to feel a bit choked up, start to see 'Will-o-the-Wisp' like bursts of flame near torches and lanterns, and, if they keep going, trigger a full-blown explosion.

There are any number of potential triggers and solutions which, critically, come down to players making choices. For example, water will quickly prevent the dust from rising but may leave the PCs and the chamber coated in a layer of porridge, which might, through the players' actions alone, result in a more deadly trap than that presented by the original threat. For instance, any snap frost effect directed at a porridge-coated PC is likely to result in a serious loss of mobility as the PC is, at least temporarily, converted into a stumbling cereal bar.

Lethal traps that simply deliver random outcomes, therefore, appear to take choices away from players and to serve only to deplete PCs' resources. Potentially lethal traps, which offer players a range of options and actions, (linked to variable outcomes), seem to be able to turn traps into complete encounters, with all the gameplay options associated with an encounter rather than a mere mechanical trap.

In addition, traps with solutions are, perhaps, more authentic. It might seem to make sense, or seem consistent, to put largely unavoidable traps in a secret tomb. However, when such traps are mixed with more complete traps that are open to being solved, the 'deadly' tomb model loses its internal logic, i.e. why would there be any chance of surviving if the sole purpose of the exercise was to seal the tomb absolutely and forever.

Perhaps it's more entertaining, and forgiving, to design a tomb containing knowledge or wealth only available to 'the worthy', i.e. those capable of navigating and negotiating the dangers, rather than those fortunate enough to roll their saving throws.

What Kind of Player or GM am I?

There are a few 'what kind of player or character class are you?' quizzes available to players. These are typically part magazine quiz, part guidance and part nonsense. Sure it's amusing to match your style of play into categories such as a Fighter or an Assassin. However, in doing so a quiz is

starting to define your character through the available classes within a game.

For example, if you select b) three times you might be advised to play, for example, full-on fighters. The fact that you also ticked d) twice for wanting to be stealthy generally doesn't come into it.

In other words, such quizzes are usually trying to run a pop quiz for a laugh, while pouring players' characters into a genre and/ or game specific mold. Considering what is actually most likely to appeal to an individual is a slightly different exercise, which involves taking a quick look at what we, as individuals, wish to put into and get out of RPG gameplay.

Player/ GM Profiles

Add your own options to build up a larger list and compare players' records to identify common ground for campaigns and areas to avoid or research more.

Broad campaign-wide challenges are outlined in more detail elsewhere, but it is helpful for players to use rough headings at the planning stage. This leaves room for the GM to offer plenty of surprises and to discuss options in general terms without play becoming predictable as a result of players going into a lot of detail.

Genres You Might Like
Grade 1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5 - 5 is the highest score

No.	Genre	1	2	3	4	5
1	Cartoon					
2	Comedy					
3	Cyberpunk					
4	Dark Fantasy					
5	Detective					
6	Espionage					
7	Fantasy					
8	Historical					
9	Horror					
10	Modern					
11	Multi-Genre					
12	Sci-Fi					
13	Science Fantasy					
14	Steampunk					
15	Urban Fantasy					
16	Western					

Preferences
Grade 1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5 - 5 is the highest score

No.	Preference	1	2	3	4	5
1	Bought-In Adventures					
2	Difficulty: PCs					
3	Difficulty: Players					
4	Fast Turns					
5	Fine-Grained Detail					
6	Freeform					
7	Guidelines					
8	Homebrew Scenarios					
9	Improvisational					
10	PC Death					
11	RPG Sandbox					
12	Rules					
13	Rules Heavy					
14	Rules Light					
15	TPKs					
16	Under Pressure					

At the Table
Grade 1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5 - 5 is the highest score

No.	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	Battle Grid					
2	Counters					
3	Dice: Digital					
4	Dice: Precision					
5	Dice: Real					
6	Drawn Maps					
7	Dungeon Tiles					
8	Feedback					
9	Figures					
10	Laptops					
11	No Tabletop					
12	Online Chat					
13	Online Tabletop					
14	Phones					
15	Projector					
16	Props: Novelty					
17	Sticky Notes					
18	Tablets					
19	Terrain					

Enjoyable parts of the gameplay?
Grade 1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5 - 5 is the highest score

No.	Gameplay	1	2	3	4	5
1	Action					
2	Authenticity					
3	Combat					
4	Comedy					
5	Cut Scenes					
6	Deceptions					
7	Discovery					
8	Enterprise					
9	Escapes					
10	Exploration					
11	Grime					
12	Grit					
13	Improvising					
14	Investigation					
15	Mysteries					
16	Negotiations					
17	Quick Turns					
18	Pursuits					
19	Roll With The Punches					
20	Setbacks					
21	Simulation					
22	Spinechillers					
23	Story					
24	Surprises					
25	Suspense					
26	Tactical Combat					
27	Thinking On Your Feet					
28	Traps					
29	Tricks					
30	Troubleshooting					

As a whole, the text of this guide favors authenticity over simulation. However, there are games, often played by practiced players, which, for example, combine very authentic SciFi simulation alongside imaginative gameplay.

Which of these campaign/ campaign-wide challenges appeal to you most?
Suggestions on what each of the campaign challenges listed here might involve are set-out later. However, there's no need to look at those at this stage, as it can be more helpful to think in terms of how you might define these challenges for yourself – if only in general terms.

Grade 1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5 - 5 is the highest score

No.	Challenge	1	2	3	4	5
1	Conquest and Colonization					
2	Counter Insurgency					
3	Crime Fighting					
4	Disasters/ Crisis Management					
6	Dawn of the Undead					
7	Enterprise and Commerce					
8	Espionage and Infiltration					
9	Internecine Warfare					
10	Marine Life					
11	Massive Meteor Strikes					
12	Mysteries and Investigations					
13	Research and Experimentation					
14	Revolution					
15	Survival Scenarios					
16	Warfare and Sieges					

Interested in any of these RPGs Extras
Grade 1/ 2/ 3/ 4/ 5 - 5 is the highest score

No.	Extra	1	2	3	4	5
1	Campaign Blog					
2	Campaign Wiki					
3	Chat Meetings					
4	Coloring Sheets					
5	Figure Painting					
6	Online Sessions					

Part 5: Campaign Planning

Signature Events

Designing scenarios and campaign settings for tabletop RPGs puts GMs in the tricky position of trying to balance players' existing expectations alongside the degree of novelty required to make each adventure or campaign seem fresh.

For many GMs the starting point for a necessary compromise between the familiar and the novel is the standard RPG or fantasy trope. These trusty staples may include anything from rescuing princesses from castles through to battling legions of the undead.

While rescuing princesses is so tired and overused that it's only likely to appear, (with remarkable regularity), in videogame titles; many RPG tropes are not necessarily bad. Used with care and a twist or two, they often serve as the very bedrock of a fantasy setting. For example, a Dark Age setting without evil warlords, miserable peasants and violent conflict isn't going to be very dark or aged.

Nevertheless, there's a danger that, over time, a reliance on too many staples becomes tired, as yet another Orc war-band runs off with a few more captured Halflings. This can get to the point where players shrug their shoulders and abandon the plot, along with any Halflings, in the hope of finding more novel gameplay.

One partial solution that helps to prevent campaigns growing stale is to mix and re-mix the tropes. Under this arrangement 'the evil warlord' becomes 'the evil witch'; the 'miserable peasants' become 'mesmerized peasants'; and the violent conflict focuses on a different form of violence or assault.

In the hands of an inventive GM this retouching of tropes may work well and can both mask the underlying tropes and extend the viable life of a campaign. If a GM then blends in different styles of play, (such as exploration, discovery, mystery and investigation), a game can be based around a wide 'repertoire' without straying far from the basic fantasy model.

At the same time, both GMs and players become, and remain, aware that they're working within a series of compromises. For the most part these involve overlooking a certain amount of repetition in return for accessing the gameplay as a whole. This is not an ideal situation, but sufficient to sustain many a campaign where radical alternatives would clash awkwardly with the tropes that form the foundations of a setting. For instance, a wide

range of expectations can change by simply making gunpowder available within a swords and sorcery campaign.

Fortunately, there's an alternative option when designing scenarios and settings, which effectively negotiates between the familiar and the novel. The basic notion is for GMs and groups to strike a balance by developing your own 'signature' tropes.

These signature events consolidate some of the tropes that appeal to particular groups of players and provide a platform for delivering the familiar look and feel suited to a game's genre and players' preferred styles of play. At the same time they can also introduce novelty and engage players' interest by making the revised trope 'belong' to the players' game.

For example, most campaigns have a few Big Bad Guys, (BBGs), working both upfront and behind the scenes. Rolling out a succession of demon princes or a few vampires with a bit of extra grind, aka 'PC wear and tear', is a fairly standard approach to varying BBG scenes. This places the resource management of successive combats to the fore and gives players a rather one-dimensional role in BBG encounters.

If we not only modify but revisit the basic BBG trope a lot more options open up. For instance, taking a classic Lich as our leading BBG brings useful expectations in terms of a powerful, undead creature with the appearance of physical fragility and a reputation for manipulation and dark magic. The Lich could simply operate tactically, and typically, as a devastating form of 'close air support' available to its minions.

Alternatively, the Lich might be reclusive, with a seemingly legal body parts business and few clues to anything more. Over time, and possibly more than one campaign, players could, perhaps, come upon the young people with white hair and money who've worked for the Lich. They might also stumble upon what happens to some of the swapped organs and, eventually, close in on the Lich's secrets.

Our BBG can, therefore, move in and out of events on many levels, while always mindful of keeping an escape route open - until the gameplay becomes more about discovering what the Lich is up to and its motives rather than another kill.

Other tropes which easily 'evolve', and/ or 'explode', when used as signature events can include old comrades, significant landmarks, secret organizations and the most prized of magical items. A certain Crown of Corruption, once worn by the aforementioned Lich, has been snapped from the bony fingers of an ancient king, been found rusting in a bazaar and, most recently, been dredged up in fishing nets – over three campaigns. This is not because of a shortage of ideas for magic items, but at the

request of players who find the insidious crown very tempting, despite the dreadful consequences.

Further signature events in use within the Treasure and Corruption campaigns that are going on just now include:

Sieges
Over a few years there have been infiltration sieges, 'going over the top' sieges, maritime sieges, mining sieges and war machine sieges. Players seem to enjoy coming up with the ingenuity required to arrive at new ways to either assault or defend sites.

Day, Night and Twilight
Different phases of the day favor different activities and factions. Day enhances the magic weapons and strength of those born above ground. Night improves the speed and intelligence of nocturnal creatures. While during twilight the world is oxygen rich – a time for over-sized insects and reptiles to feed. Dragons are 'frenzied' at this time and hunt without loyalty or favor.

Roses
A black rose signifies base matter, a white rose indicates whitening, a red rose signifies reddening, a white rose and a red rose denote perfection; and a blue rose reveals the impossible. The roses relate to 'phases' comparable to the alchemical phases the symbolism is based on.

Brecbennach
A Brecbennach is a Scottish reliquary once carried into battle by Scottish kings. The imaginary reliquary takes saints' bones just like the original. Unlike the original, the RPG version also enchants just about any set of bones thrown into it, so long as it's being carried into battle by a king at the time.

There are other signature events in use, including birds of good- and ill-omen, an NPC who casts no shadow, a blade which cuts stone and an angel with a broken wing.

Clearly, many potential signature events may already crop-up during play, either as tropes or as isolated incidents. This kind of adaptable gameplay is often treated as throwaway, i.e. there usually won't be another siege or a Crown of Corruption in play until the same options are re-used, (often in much the same way), much further down the line. This seems a bit of a waste, as signature events that are developed and catch on can help to turn a game from 'a fantasy story' to 'our group's fantasy story'.

A good share of any credit for this approach goes to the Final Fantasy videogames. They've been known for using a form of signature events to

'texture' in-game roleplaying, (and distinguish their RPGs from the competition), for many years.

Die-hard tabletop RPG players may question the contribution of videogames – and they'd be right up to a point. Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax built a number of signature event options into early D&D. Spells and magic items bearing the name of the PC that researched or enchanted them are one example. Signature D&D monsters that now receive IP protection have proved equally persistent, while the Greyhawk setting is, in itself, a signature event.

Signature events do not, of themselves, make a campaign, but one of those mentioned – sieges – easily crosses over from acting as a signature event to outlining a much broader challenge that is open to providing a cluster of related events and situations that can form the basis of campaigns.

Player Choice, Campaign Challenges and Campaign Planning

Delivering player choice and shared ownership of the gameplay in a RPG session is influenced by several factors that have already been mentioned, e.g. styles of play, genres and characterization. By shifting from particular events like signature events to broader campaign challenges GMs are often able to open-up choices/ horizons for players by matching players' gameplay preferences to the world/ s the players explore.

These campaign challenges influence gameplay by outlining campaign worlds that offer shared expectations without zooming in on every detail. For instance, a major event like the colonization of a continent carries a shared but unstated set of expectations as soon as such an event is brought into play.

Many experienced players are well aware of this and continually exchange and sample new ideas that feed into new campaigns and new games. For those who make a point of planning campaigns quite thoroughly, a discussion or campaign planning session along the following lines is easily done and may well happen spontaneously:

Player's Choice
Rob: "I want to get out of Medieval Europe."
GM: "Anywhere special?"
Rob: "New weapons, meaner monsters, explore new territory . . . stuff."

Campaign Challenge: Conquest and Colonization
'Frontier life' encourages plenty of novelty and exploration during play. Mapping territories, encountering exotic creatures, (unique to an island or continent), making contact with dramatically different cultures and coping with unusual environmental hazards are all part of the fun.

Player's Choice
Mark: "Surprise me!"
GM: "Do my best."
Mark: "My PC eats nothing made by anyone else - whole campaign!"

Campaign Challenge: Massive Meteor Strikes
Modest meteor strikes and similar impacts make a good basis for a series of scenarios. Apart from play concerning the actual strike event they can offer survival gameplay and other situations linked to knock-on effects such as civil disorder and long term boundary changes.

Player's Choice
Jenny: "I've just got my wizard's lab going."
GM: "How about rare, exotic ingredients from abroad? Kind of stuff the finest magic items are made from?"
Jenny: "When do we leave?"

Campaign Challenge: Research and Experimentation
Magical research, terraformation, climate change, hybrid diseases, brainwashing, mass manipulation, finding a cure, inventing a new technology or starting a research division takes adventures into a further area of novelty and player choice.

In other words, a short discussion between players can act as a platform for a whole campaign providing players and GMs are open about their expectations.

Clearly, an obvious pre-requisite for a successful planning meeting is to have a good understanding of each other's expectations as you go into planning a campaign and putting the GM to work on designing a setting. If players aren't clear about what they hope their characters will get up to it is likely to be a good idea to prepare player profiles in advance.

Campaign Challenges and Adventure Playparks

Ask any tabletop RPG Gamesmaster (GM) what kind of game they'd like to run and the answers that come back are likely to include some or all of the following:

1. A game with a rich, authentic and immersive game-world.
2. Gameplay focused on a variety of challenges and compelling plots.
3. A sense of emotional and creative involvement.
4. An atmosphere of collaboration and an appreciation of the spontaneous and intuitive.

Unsurprisingly, while all of the above sounds great, it's quite a tall order for any GM to design and deliver on most of these desirable options. To do so, a GM somehow has to:

1. Invent a jaw-droppingly good campaign packed with exciting adventures.
2. Present a variety of open-ended challenges in evolving contexts.
3. Appeal to the range of gameplay enjoyed by all the players in the group.
4. Bring everything together at the table on-the-fly.

The list of skills the GM has to learn and then marshal grows with each condition. Consequently, it's hardly surprising when GMs reach for off-the-shelf solutions instead of designing their own gaming materials.

Regrettably, someone else's design can't feed off your imagination, (or your players' imaginations), as readily as custom campaign settings and scenarios. Other GMs' materials may be of mixed quality, ill-suited to the preferences of your group and, altogether, quite cumbersome to adapt. Nevertheless, at the end of the working week, and as the next game approaches, it can seem essential to fall back on shrink-wrapped products.

Options

The alternative is to find a way to support your own design and gameplay on a number of levels. These include help with:

1. Devising settings.
2. Constructing challenges.
3. Supporting player choice.
4. Improvisation.

There are, no doubt, some GMs who can come up with snappy, off-the-cuff descriptions and narratives almost at will. However, even they are likely to become caught between the contrasting limitations of improvisation and elaboration when their game departs from fixed narratives and GM-directed play.

Approaches to making GMs' lives easier often offered as design solutions in the past include random encounter tables, all-encompassing campaign packs and the purchase of endless volumes of material in the hope of unearthing a few half-decent ideas.

These 'options' do little to help a GM develop a living, dynamic world of her/ his own and/ or the gameplay offered by richer, authentic settings. As a result, it's very easy for games to be hemmed in and limited by convenience.

Adventure Playgrounds

So what are we looking for here? Basically, a means of making it easier for GMs and groups to rapidly construct and easily run action-packed settings and adventures. Not any old settings and adventures, but adaptable, dynamic games capable of allowing players to play in their element.

We could use any number of analogies to explore these goals, but it may help to frame RPGs in terms of open-ended imaginative 'adventure playgrounds'. Much like any playground, the features of the playground as a whole dictate many of the behaviors within the playground.

A concrete playground with no supervision or 'boundaries', few play facilities and lots of litter everywhere is likely to lead to repetition, boredom and bullying. While an attractive, soft-surfaced play area; offering suitable oversight and equipped with playground games and challenges, is likely to lead to shared play and co-operative relationships.

Consequently, RPG GMs are, perhaps, looking for ways to design 'playgrounds' with key features that are going to act as triggers for and support to enjoyable, improvisational gameplay. These features are, ideally, thrown into the mix at the outset and, generally, present players with access to campaign challenges, i.e. the adventures players wish to access and enjoy.

In-game features or events that deliver campaign challenges lend themselves to presenting opportunities for plenty of task or mission-orientated challenges, lots of credible adventure hooks, consistently strong characterization and spontaneous narration.

These elements can, perhaps, be found in campaign-defining features and/or events, which amount to campaign challenges. Such features are not simply a blank continent waiting to be colonized or a generic fantasy city; but rather a platform for supporting dynamic, improvisational gameplay.

Siege Warfare

By way of an example, we can look at a city under siege and identify several features of a siege which can help gameplay to go beyond the standard fantasy city model. The type of features or framework underlying these elements of a campaign challenge can be set out through the aims already put forward:

- a game with a rich, authentic and immersive game-world

For example, dramatic architecture and fortifications, the battlefield, the battlements, beneath the city, deformed and re-constructed landscapes, oceans of troops, invading armadas and a sense of grand affairs played out on a grand scale.

- gameplay focused on a variety of challenges and compelling plots

For example, armed assaults, defending battlements and salients, convoying, delivering regime change, arms trading, breakouts, arms races, rationing, smuggling, internal and external plotting, betrayals, mining, spying, sabotage, and battles or skirmishes conducted on, above or below ground.

The framework set out by these components makes for a very flexible range of gameplay options. Despite that, there's still a great deal left for the GM to prepare and improvise before it's easier to go it alone and target a fully-realized, dynamic game.

Fortunately, sieges excel as an example of how a carefully selected campaign challenge can go beyond outlining a structure and, hopefully, bridge the creative gap between a fairly typical genre-based event and an imaginative RPG adventure playground.

Returning to our original aims:

- a sense of emotional and creative involvement

Sieges are ideally suited to emotional engagement on any number of levels. They can easily involve playing for high stakes, moral or ethical dilemmas, bouts of cabin fever or mutiny, cause for despair, perilous cliffhangers, devastation and ruin, victory and triumph, or simply grinding attrition.

Players have plenty of options to get involved in high fantasy or intrigue involving the siege itself or may prefer to focus on the daily life of a besieged city or a besieging army.

At the same time, our familiarity with battles and sieges provides more than enough opportunities to call upon players' creativity by presenting a rich improvisational environment that brings together the gameplay framework, or architecture, and the 'decorative' gameplay texture or fabric.

A city under siege is seething with sights, sounds, tastes, textures, odors, colors, diseases, heraldry, fears and ambitions, status, commerce, the 'fog of war', battle fatigue, plans, escape plans, scoundrels, and all the social and economic effects of war. Consequently, there's a detail or an easily constructed improvisation at GMs' fingertips almost all of the time, e.g. the GM doesn't have to invent costumes from scratch, as the conditions of a siege immediately suggest uniforms and ration clothing.

- an atmosphere of collaboration and an appreciation of the spontaneous and intuitive

Highly adaptable campaign challenges, which support the rapid frameworking and texturing of dynamic campaign settings or scenarios, appear to engage and foster improvisation and creativity; making them likely to deliver RPG adventure playgrounds. From there, collaboration and appreciation of the spontaneous hopefully follow.

Of course, sieges alone aren't sufficient. Over enough games even the most epic siege is going to grow tiresome. Especially if there's a siege in every campaign or game you sit down to. With that in mind, the next step would seem to be to isolate the elements that combine to construct campaign challenges/ form RPG adventure playgrounds.

If we then try to apply those criteria to more mundane basic game features or events, with a bit of luck, the end result might offer a formula for rapidly constructing immersive, improvisational RPG settings, scenarios and gameplay.

Campaign Challenges and Adventure Holidays: Part 1

Adventure Playparks

Populating RPG games and campaign settings with key in-game RPG challenges, or campaign challenges, (which form easily unpacked RPG adventure playgrounds), aims to make it easier to:

1. Design authentic settings
2. Construct enjoyable challenges for players
3. Support player choice
4. Improvise

These benefits appear to result from playing within game-worlds where feature rich combinations of familiar genre locations, events, challenges and personalities combine to prompt more flexible gameplay opportunities. This involves building on a game's basic structure or framework, (as defined by the rules and genre), through designing evocative adventure playgrounds, which place a rich set of psychological and cultural expectations at GMs' and players' imaginative fingertips.

The types of expectations and prompts campaign challenges are looking to present as a coherent whole seem likely to include numerous elements. These will, ideally, be consistent with a game's rules system and genre, while leaving plenty of room for GMs and players to easily add to, and vary, not simply a blank canvas, but a prepared canvas which has already been primed and toned.

Campaign challenges should, therefore, include a wide variety of distinctive features, challenges and personalities that evoke both a shared authenticity

and the freedom to revise and re-shape the backdrop and the gameplay based upon the backdrop. Typical elements which could be largely pre-defined by a campaign challenge might be expected to include:

- Architecture
- Art, decoration and design
- Costumes, uniforms and body decorations
- Crafts and industries
- Customs, calendars and traditions
- Daily life and nightlife
- Flora and fauna
- Governance
- Individuals
- Landscapes and scenery
- Organizations
- Seasons
- Sights, sounds, tastes and smells
- Textures
- Transport systems

This list is far from exhaustive. However, it seems to demonstrate just how much is involved in trying to create a campaign completely from scratch and, hopefully, how a cluster of gameplay features working together can help players to arrive at a shared connection to both the familiar and the resulting opportunities to explore the unfamiliar.

Floating Cities

The following 'floating cities' options appear to offer examples of campaign challenges that can easily be applied to many games:

A city with canals has different hazards, transport, trade and combat options from a landlocked city. Amsterdam and Venice are good models, but the 'sights and sounds' of the Mexica, aka Aztec, capital Tenochtitlan suggests a sun-drenched, tropical RPG playground. I.e. from the outset gameplay adapted from this example is going to be influenced by brightly painted buildings, feathered costumes, exotic foods and intense flavors.

A persistent, swarming armada that pulls together tightly or disperses under seemingly vague conditions or circumstances presents a very wide range of challenges and lots of options for intrigue or treachery. The Barbary Pirates offer a good example of what might be involved, as their slave trade brought together fleets large enough for vast stretches of the Italian and Spanish coastlines to be almost entirely abandoned by their inhabitants.

Adventure Holidays

It's at this stage that it becomes increasingly apparent that the qualities we're looking to introduce through campaign challenges are, ideally, already set in motion, i.e. a campaign challenge should allow a setting to take on a life of its own. Doing so involves drawing on sequences of events, and sparking ideas and improvisation through helping players to set events in motion.

Our playpark analogy describes a fairly static setting, which is set in motion by the action of the kids and the availability of basic equipment. However, when in use real playparks often have a life of their own, as shown by the behaviors resulting from seasons, calendars, traditions, rituals, personalities, development or deterioration, and many other factors. It may, therefore, be worth revising the analogy from RPG adventure playparks to RPG 'adventure holidays', as these consistently deliver a series of events, entertainment and novelty.

Many types of festivals make good campaign challenges, so an example based around such an event can, perhaps, describe an adventure holiday. For example, the Mardi Gras seasons in New Orleans and Rio offer sequences of events and expectations involving astonishing riots of color with plenty of other clear-cut expectations. However, a GM running a gritty Dark Ages fantasy campaign may be looking for something more down to earth – but far from mundane.

A game session including a bunch of PCs wandering into a tumbled down village looking for clues during a pursuit, or just for re-supply, could simply mean a quick visit to the local store. Introducing some sort of seasonal or harvest festival, (that players may choose to skip or pursue), offers a fast way to open up lots of options. There are numerous approaches to this, but our example is an annual Jam Festival.

For a few days a year the village bursts into life, as the inhabitants and hundreds of visitors collect ripe cloudberries from the forest and preserve them before they over-ripen. The jam has to be made quickly, as the fresher the fruit the greater the value of the exquisitely tasty and highly-prized preserves.

Players immediately have opportunities to harvest jam, start a jam factory, trade in jam or find out what's going on in the dark underside of the jam trade. At the same time a whole network of expectations are already set in place. Village life suddenly has color, aromas, flavors, bustling industries, interested parties, social networks, a nightlife and, when the jam muggers and wasps arrive, danger. The GM is then free to concentrate on developing the gameplay, perhaps through a trade in illicit jams or by introducing competing factions. For example, the forest might contain ferocious hornets, human-sized Tarantula hawk wasps, equally large parasitic

Ichneumon wasps, local eco-warriors or Treants, (that get riled on a rising scale when fireballs are used to take-out the wasps' wings).

Following the switch in our definition of RPG campaign challenges from adventure playgrounds to adventure holidays, the next step involves considering how GMs and players can rapidly shape expectations and gameplay on a national, continental or global scale. The task of inventing entire worlds and cultures, which aim to fit together seamlessly, is usually limited to skilled fantasy and Sci-Fi authors.

Campaign Challenges and Adventure Holidays: Part 2

Cutting the Cloth

While every Gamesmaster (GM) might be tempted to plan, prepare and deliver roleplaying adventures by sitting down and cutting the cloth for their own campaign settings and scenarios, in practice this doesn't always work for two reasons.

Many GMs don't have the time and/ or energy to design everything from scratch. In addition, GMs' designs are typically based on the mix of rule sets, prior experience, cultures and player choices that feed into any design, so a GM is really aiming to get players involved in cutting the cloth.

It, therefore, seems necessary for GMs who wish to rapidly construct and run their own adventures and campaigns to find ways to streamline and structure their designing to lighten the workload - and to take account of player choice. (This is especially true if GMs wish to spend less time re-inventing the wheel and more time shaping their gameplay).

Notably, bringing a campaign or adventure to life is often more about re-designing familiar situations than trying to completely depart from the key elements of particular genres and different styles of play.

Compromises

GMs can simply fall back on shrink-wrapped scenarios and settings, but doing so involves a great many compromises. These constraints include cultural preconceptions and gameplay models imported through any rules system attached to shrink-wrapped settings and adventures.

Further limitations associated with many off-the-shelf products include the boundaries imposed by the sparse backdrop provided by most settings and a tendency to expect players to pick up on, and enjoy, gameplay challenges described more by a system-driven design team than by the players.

Consequently, a setting will often arrive with maps, adventure locations, an ill-defined genre-based culture, (such as a 'medieval' city), and lots of ready-rolled opponents. It will not, however, pitch players into the midst of a

living, breathing game-world where ongoing events, local customs, sensory experiences and other immediate references to the fabric of a city's life are on tap to trigger and support more imaginative gameplay.

Sure, a pre-packed setting may cover a few ill-defined local gods and the layout of their temples, but that gives little sense of 'the fear of god' familiar to the occupants of many real medieval cities - or the ceremonies and rites carried-out in the names of such gods over a full year. Equally, there may be some references to local heraldry in terms of displaying banners or using flags to identify NPCs, but, (even as full time developers), few shrink-wrapped scenario designers have time to explore the social status, historical records and personal attributes recorded in medieval heraldry.

Adventure Playgrounds and Adventure Holidays

Possible approaches to faster, more authentic and distinctly open-ended design have been suggested in terms of basing settings and scenarios around campaign challenges. These feature-rich bundles of gameplay options immediately set in place a whole series of familiar expectations and natural progressions, while also offering opportunities for players to select from a wide range of gameplay challenges.

Campaign challenges can be discussed in terms of equipping an adventure playground with a combination of exciting apparatus, suitable playing surfaces and level-headed supervision. On that level a campaign challenge, such as a city at war or the colonization of a new continent, goes a fair way towards putting in place a framework upon which GMs and players can construct their own gameplay.

Extending the same analogy from adventure playgrounds to adventure holidays suggests that it's also relatively straightforward to set in motion, or animate, a campaign setting or an adventure. This can be done through selecting campaign challenges which incorporate persistent and recurring features, (such as records of past events, seasons, calendars, local and regional customs, costumes, legends and similar living and breathing elements).

This overall approach is not so much about taking short cuts, as making more time available for developing gameplay, adding your own twists to the familiar and carefully selecting settings that open up gameplay opportunities.

Many of the features of a fully-developed RPG adventure holiday can be 'imported' then grafted together to form a coherent whole by drawing on historical, legendary and current events, which feed on and extend players' expectations. For example, the early colonization of the Americas presents a particularly rich campaign challenge, which can predefine many of the

features likely to be encountered in a colonization, e.g. limited resources, disease and starvation, the need for certain types of shelters and settlements, clashes between two or more cultures, and extreme climates with extreme bugs.

The Hidden Shrine

Of course, borrowing from history, legends or current events is hardly new to RPGs. Not least, because the most common genres, (i.e. fantasy and SciFi), are largely based on vague definitions of, respectively, medieval Europe and Star Wars movies. The effect of this kind of model on RPG gameplay can be illustrated with reference to an old AD&D scenario called The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan.

The Hidden Shrine of Tamoachan was billed as an adventure with a Mexican or Mesoamerican flavor and there were a number of short references to Mesoamerican deities, (plus a handful of monsters roughly based on creatures from Mesoamerican mythology), alongside the monster stats and traps.

As a result, players largely bypassed Mesoamerican history and culture, which served as a sugar-coating set on top of a dungeon adventure. (A decent enough dungeon adventure as it happens). Between the rules set and the design there wasn't a great deal to lend a more authentic feel to the gameplay; or to open up access to the pleasures and misfortunes of a fantasy world based around a vast and enduring set of ancient cultures.

Checking out a few pages on whatever served as the Wikipedia of the day might have allowed the same Mesoamerican theme to touch on the dazzling pageantry and underlying horror at the heart of the Aztec/ Mexica and Mayan cultures.

Constructing Campaign Challenges

Constructing campaign challenges from flexible components is not, therefore, about wrapping existing approaches to play in shiny, new paper or locking play into a particular time or place and trying to model every aspect of the same culture or history. Instead, campaign challenges are about planning and integrating combinations of features that support imaginative, open-ended gameplay.

For example, there are plenty of gameplay options to explore in the European medieval tournaments where knights regularly bludgeoned each other in the interests of improving their social standing. These events make for a good starting point, but most players already know what to expect in a purely medieval context.

The Mayan principalities extraordinary system of internecine warfare concentrated on an elite responsible for conducting raids and skirmishes in

accordance with the supposed actions of the gods, (i.e. constellations), seen warring across the night skies. These original 'star wars' centered on taking high prestige captives, who were treated much as knights or bishops within a deadly serious game of celestial chess, which was believed to exist both on the ground and in the skies. Consequently, a captive would be held for sacrifice at auspicious moments in the celestial calendar. These events often called for sporting competitions and elaborate rituals.

By drawing on just a few of the Mayan options it's not hard to see how a blend of the medieval and the Mayan could combine to offer a more novel approach to tournaments. For example, it would be quite straightforward to revise and extend the traditional medieval tourney by tying the conduct of tournaments to religious rituals, sacrifices and a stellar calendar.

So, using plenty of sources, re-mixing the key elements within those sources and devising campaign challenges should introduce greater originality and player choice within any setting or adventure. In so doing, such challenges should prime a setting with plenty of shared expectations, which encourage players to explore, adapt and extend their own expectations.

It's entirely possible to move towards thoroughly authentic campaign settings and adventures, which track the exact course of events within historical or current affairs. For some groups of players this is an excellent way to add authenticity and save time, but it can be limiting to force the gameplay to follow a predictable pattern of events. Not least because this may dilute the very player choice that campaign challenges set out to deliver.

Any such difficulties can usually be countered by being quite selective about what to include and what to skip over whenever a campaign challenge is put in place. For instance, simply borrowing a framework from accounts of a historic city under siege might be all that's needed to help out with a medieval city; which a GM goes on to develop in terms of events and encounters. However, throwing in a different, difficult climate and/ or a short sequence of events from an intriguing episode in history, or legend, might well reduce a GM's workload and set up further ready-made layers of expectations and knock-on effects.

Exploring Campaign Challenges

The examples of possible campaign challenges presented here are likely to support an extended series of adventures. New characters can start out with a relatively lowly role in greater events and, in time, become caught up in shaping major events within the game-world.

There are a lot of instantly available shared expectations on tap for GMs to reference within each of these campaign challenges. These expectations can build authenticity, while leaving plenty of room to serve as a platform for unique adventures and campaigns. Spreading a few such campaign challenges across a game-world, (or combining different campaign challenges), rapidly speeds up the process of adding terrain, settlements and landmarks. This is because campaign challenges will often suggest or 'paint-in' many features suited to the types of campaign challenges the adventurers are tackling.

GMs may wish to limit the number of campaign challenges encountered by adventurers to leave space for adding further campaign and gameplay options as play progresses.

Conquest and Colonization
Frontier life encourages plenty of novelty and exploration during play. Mapping territories, encountering exotic creatures, (unique to an island or continent), making contact with dramatically different cultures and coping with unusual environmental hazards are all part of the fun.

Forging a new nation, clearing major threats, establishing bases and forts, seeking out resources and surviving hardships are typical examples of elements of conquest and colonization suited to underpinning or refreshing a campaign setting.

Counter Insurgency
Counter insurgency presents a theme that's ready-made for adding in betrayals, intrigue and mystery. Adventurers can undertake 'chasing their tail' missions as they try to deal with threats from outside and within; before trying to seize the initiative. Obvious scenarios include trying to prevent an assassination, trying to contain a rebellion, investigating the causes of an insurgency and trying to reveal the culprits.

Campaigns based on counter insurgency benefit from a claustrophobic atmosphere fostered by surprises, reverses, mild horror and red herrings. Adventurers might, for example, get involved in setting up a network of informants, distributing propaganda, running covert operations and being framed.

Crime Fighting
Crime fighting, getting caught up in crime, fighting crime with crime and bounty hunting are sources of adventure hooks that can easily cast adventurers in the role of righteous heroes and/ or start asking questions about complicity and compromise. Investigating art thefts, uncovering insider trading, going undercover inside a criminal organization, staging a jailbreak and countless other crimes are easy ways to encourage players to make choices that have consequences for themselves and others.

Campaign settings benefit from taking account of crime, as there are few cultures which don't have both crime and specialized codes for categorizing, investigating and dealing with crime. Consequently, the crimes and punishments of a tribe of primitive barbarians are likely to vary considerably from the crimes and punishments of a sophisticated race such as Elves or Dark Elves. This variety creates lots of opportunities to let players get drawn into difficult situations where there are no straightforward answers.

Disasters and Crisis Management
Introducing dramatic events and unexpected emergencies during play can form the basis of standalone adventures or add an extra level of challenge to a campaign. Players suddenly find themselves having to find solutions to the dangers and complications delivered by the adventure they set out on, while also dealing with underlying, ongoing events such as a volcanic eruption, an army of zombie creatures, a flood or a revolution.

At the scenario level the immediate effects of disasters and efforts to regain control let GMs add surprises and novelty, while asking players to improvise. Within campaigns ongoing or unfolding disasters and necessary crisis management may change both the situations players encounter and how adventurers react to them. For example, a major flood can immediately set players a series of mission options such as feeding refugees, building a dam in dangerous territory, coping with invasion from the sea or saving sunken treasures.

Dawn of the Undead
Campaigns where the personalities within the culture think entirely differently from standard behaviors or 'mind-sets' are something GMs often consider in terms of how an alien race or a monster might think. A variant along such lines can be illustrated by reviewing what could be involved in a fantasy campaign where adventurers all become undead of some kind. The motives assigned to these undead needn't be vile. Instead they might seek to right an ancient wrong or wish to complete a ceremony that lets them change form.

However, their perceptions, how they approach problems, the value or lack of value they attach to other undead, (and the corporeal), their 'powers' and the way they go about shaping the game-world is open to a wide range of interpretations.

Enterprise
No need to reach for the calculators and spreadsheets. Adventurers can get involved in any number of missions based around business interests and trading. Escorting convoys, making trade deals, smuggling, wrecking and claiming rights to new territory are just a few of the options for scenarios.

Creating a business or an invention, running a profitable Thieves' Guild, operating a fleet of ships for exploration or hire, taking control of or disrupting an economy, funding major constructions and similar projects all offer approaches to placing adventurers in immersive campaigns.

Espionage and Infiltration

It's possible to run games which draw on source material from genuine spies involved in deep cover operations, civil and military sabotage, resistance operations and assassinations. Adventurers might have to demonstrate their loyalty to the group they're trying to infiltrate, make and pass on equipment to contacts, gather information about enemy agents or installations, flush out a double agent or recruit new operatives.

Campaigns that play on the uncertainties and fears inherent in spying and deep cover operations don't have to set player against player or adventurer against adventurer, as fellow adventurers may be among the most reliable allies available in a campaign involving spies and saboteurs.

Internecine Warfare

Internal conflict which sets brother against brother, involves trading off rival camps and means never being able to sleep in the same place from one night to the next keeps adventurers under pressure. As events escalate players might get involved in missions linked to such conflict. These could involve trying to defuse the situation, fanning the flames, coming under pressure to take sides and/ or looking to protect others from the conflict.

A campaign centered on warring factions might see a party having to switch sides, getting caught by their former allies, possibly deciding to set up their own faction or even seeking a peace settlement.

Marine Life

It's not unusual to come across underwater, marine or maritime adventures where players try out a couple of scenarios in underwater settings or hop in and out of an ocean broken up by a few small archipelagos. Doing so can be amusing, as spells and weapons may work differently, physical features like tides and currents can influence events, and adventurers will encounter new races.

The same process can be taken a lot further by, for example, getting rid of the land altogether or making any land difficult to survive on. At that point, play goes 'aquatic' on several levels and GMs are asked to think about events, adventures, commerce and encounters conducted well below the waves. For instance, many festivals and celebrations are likely to concern events such as fishing, periodic tides, algae blooms and deep sea currents; rather than land-based ceremonies about seasons or harvesting.

Threats and hazards are also likely to become focused on adapting to an aquatic world. For instance, an undersea volcanic eruption is hugely different from a volcanic eruption on land.

Massive Meteor Strikes

Modest meteor strikes and similar impacts make a good basis for a series of scenarios. Apart from play concerning the actual strike event they can offer survival gameplay and other situations linked to knock-on effects such as civil disorder and long term boundary changes.

A fairly modest lump of rock is enough to have a regional impact, but it's possible to go a whole lot further by scaling the meteor and, possibly, giving the meteor a 'payload'. For example, a planetary fracture that removes perhaps a fifth of the planet and creates a moon is going to change local gravity, oceans and weather systems for good. Throw in a race of invaders, a parasitic virus or a powerful, corrupting lodestone embedded within the meteor and players have a lot of new options to play out.

Mysteries and Investigations

Disappearances, unsolved crimes and murder mysteries can add an extra dimension to play. Perhaps the most important element of asking adventurers to solve mysteries is to provide sufficient clues, as players and adventurers don't have the GM's inside knowledge of the situation. It can be helpful to present clues more than once, to present a clue in a different way, to offer clues which refer to other clues and to 'let it go' if players really aren't catching-on.

Research and Experimentation

Magical research, terraformation, climate change, hybrid diseases, brainwashing, mass manipulation, finding a cure, inventing a new technology or starting a research division takes adventures into a further area of novelty and player choice.

Tracking down rare or repugnant ingredients, scouring ancient libraries for details of lost technologies and researching new forms of magic all provide self-contained adventure hooks. These can be brought together to sketch out an open-ended campaign. Alternatively, research and experimentation can be placed at the center of campaign events by making the outcomes of research critical to major events across much of a setting.

Revolution

Freedom fighting, raising a rebellion, releasing enslaved tribes and turning the tables on oppressive regimes are all good options for a campaign. Elements of spying and infiltration, containing counter insurgency, major disasters and corruption are easily brought into revolutionary gameplay.

In addition, players will be faced with plenty of difficult decisions about whom to trust, where their loyalties should lie and, possibly, what happens after a revolution or regime change. Scenarios can give adventurers a role in making a revolution happen, while a campaign arc focused on a revolution lets adventurers cover a wide selection of gameplay and plotting.

Supervolcanoes

It's almost always worth considering players' views before making massive changes to the cornerstones of a campaign. However, if, or once, everyone is good with a particular plan there are many global or world changing options out there. Supervolcanoes are involved in reshaping continents and a campaign set through the lead up to a supervolcanic event, the first eruptions, the wider eruption pattern and the aftermath of a supervolcanic event should be enough to keep most groups on edge.

Some obvious options include flaming rocks falling from the sky, rivers and lakes of lava, desperate survivors and survivalists, broken and emerging political structures, and breakouts from underground races driven to the surface.

Survival Scenarios

Survival scenarios can act as an aside to a campaign in need of a break or trigger expeditions into exotic lands populated by alien cultures. The fish out of water situations involved in day-to-day survival may be central to a series of survival scenarios before adventurers escape back to the campaign as a whole. Otherwise, survival events may lead to discoveries mapping out a campaign defined by clear differences from standard medieval and Dark Age settings.

Introducing new races, different customs, new spells and new technologies through a complete culture/ s should vary play and help players to make their own choices about adapting to the differences during gameplay.

Of course, it wouldn't be survival without going gritty, so there's no harm in calling up a tropical storm, leaving carnivorous plants all over the place, starving the adventurers until they learn to hunt the local way - or having them prepared as ingredients for a cannibal tribe's next recipe.

Warfare and Sieges

Battles, raiding, invasions and siege warfare are solid bets for most fantasy games. The options for both open conflict and less direct approaches are numerous. Preparing for war, controlling the arms trade, military policing, besieging a fortress, defending a fortress under siege, patrolling hostile territory, fighting battles and holding-the-line all fit straight into campaigns either as optional scenarios or as part of the fabric of a setting.

Warfare can be characterized by victories, defeats, attrition, shock, terrain, theatres, collateral damage and personal injury amongst many options. Mixing these elements effectively makes it possible to get involved in combative campaigns without resorting to repetitive skirmishing. Realistic massed combat games call for specialized rules, but a focus on character involvement, outcomes linked to the existing rules and roleplaying can make for immersive play.

A couple of campaign challenges can generate enough ideas and options to rapidly map out the basis of a campaign. For example:

Sieges
Aerial Assaults
Battlements
Deformation
Mining
Night Attacks
Rationing
Relief Columns
Siege Engines
Skirmishes

Internecine Warfare
Assassinations
Covert Operations
Feudal Factions
Flare-Ups
Sabotage
Sleepers
Sleeping Partners
Torn Loyalties

Many GMs will be happy to develop a campaign using just a few campaign challenges and the adventure builder that follows. For those who prefer to prepare games in plenty of detail, to run setting-wide solo or team games or to design campaigns during play - the world builder that follows the adventure builder presents a ready-reference and the means to quickly design your own completely custom campaigns.

Part 6: Adventure Builder

Campaign challenges can be used to quickly style a setting, to shape gameplay and to outline a game-world. However, much of the actual play focuses on what's directly in front of the players as they explore.

As a result, it helps to have access to quick step-by-steps for constructing and detailing the adventures that build campaigns. This saves time and can help the GM to match the more predictable encounters and situations within RPG gameplay to the challenges and expectations preferred by the GM and players.

The following adventure builder doesn't cover every possible option. Instead it is intended, (like the campaign challenges outlined above), to make it quick and easy to bring together, remix and put an original spin on the core components of rules-light RPG gameplay.

Designing Adventures

The typical starting place for playing the Original Game is an underground dungeon with levels that get harder and harder as players descend. The classic dungeon adventure makes for a good start, because it rapidly introduces many of the key features of RPG gameplay, e.g. encounters, monsters and advancement. It also presents some obvious opportunities for players to start making their own choices. For example, a party of adventurers can either take it easy exploring the upper levels of a dungeon or go deeper in search of higher rewards - that carry greater risks.

Designing an Adventure
Putting together a basic adventure is quite straightforward. Firstly, consider what is going to happening in terms of the types of locations, NPCs and monsters adventurers will meet. These may be drawn from a campaign world and/ or campaign challenges. Alternatively, they can amount to no more than a general idea of the type of adventure you're looking to build.

Missions

Choosing Missions
With a rough idea of the allies and opponents adventurers will encounter during the adventure GMs can move on to considering the type/ s of actions and missions, (possibly linked into quests), that players want their adventurers to play through.

Starter Missions
The missions outlined here make a good starting point for straightforward adventures, which can be linked directly to awarding experience points/ XP. GMs may wish to offer more missions and linked XP awards of their own.

These should, ideally, be one-off awards for challenges that a PC has not carried out before.

Starter Missions Table

D12	Mission	Details
1	Bounty hunting	
2	Capture a fort or dungeon stronghold	
3	Capture an enemy leader	
4	Complete negotiations	
5	Escort a convoy through danger	
6	Establish a fortified base	
7	Explore and secure part of a wilderness	
8	Make a cross-country escape	
9	Recover a specific enchanted item	
10	Rescue prisoner/ s from a dungeon	
11	Scout and spy on enemy positions	
12	Transport fragile goods	

Plots

Plots

Plots provide the circumstances, motivations and backdrops for missions, quests and campaign challenges. There is no need to have a particular plot set in place, as ongoing events may allow plots to develop during play. However, they can help to drive players' involvement in missions, quests and campaign challenges.

The options set out below can form the basis of many plots, which are easy to slot into adventures and larger, campaign-wide challenges.

Plots Table

2D12	Plot	Details
2	Adventure Holidays	
3	Ancient Prophecies	
4	Bitter Rivalries	
5	Blackmail Scenarios	
6	Burning Ambition	
7	Convoy Duty	
8	Crimes of Passion	
9	Defending the Innocent	
10	Diplomatic Missions	
11	Downfall of a Dynasty	
12	Forgery and Counterfeiting	
13	Involuntary Crime	
14	Jailbreaks	

2D12	Plot	Details
15	Kidnappings	
16	Last Stands	
17	Messiah	
18	Psychological Manipulations	
19	Religious Schisms	
20	Renaissances	
21	Rescues	
22	Reverse Dungeon	
23	Revolts and Revolutions	
24	Tournaments	

Sub-Plots

Sub-plots may present unnecessary complications for new players and their characters. However, as players become more experienced sub-plots can be used to vary play or as counterpoints to major plot lines. A sub-plot is generally thought of as a fixed subordinate to a major plot. However, the sub-plots shown below could as easily serve as full-blown plots and there is no reason why a sub-plot cannot swap places with a major plotline.

Sub-Plots Table

2D12	Sub-Plot	Details
2	Accident	
3	Blight	
4	Carnival	
5	Extreme Weather	
6	Fair	
7	Festival	
8	Forgeries	
9	Hauntings	
10	Holiday	
11	Industrial Accident	
12	Jailbreak	
13	Marketplace	
14	Monster Market	
15	Pickpocket	
16	Pitfight	
17	Public Execution	
18	Riot	
19	Robbery	
20	Sporting Event	
21	Street Artist	
22	Theatre Company	
23	Traitor	
24	Triumph	

Meetings

How do adventurers get together in the first place? Here are a few of the many options:

Meetings Table

D12	Meet Over	Details
1	Common Enemy	
2	Conscripted/ Press-Ganged	
3	Debt	
4	Hand-Picked by Employer	
5	Matching Invitations	
6	Relatives	
7	Righteous Oath	
8	Rivalry	
9	Shared Upbringing	
10	Shared Work Background	
11	Survivors	
12	Thrown Together	

Triggers

How do characters get drawn into events? Adventurers' involvement in plots, missions, quests and campaign challenges can be triggered in many ways. These starting points for getting adventurers caught-up in events may arise through the players' ongoing activities and affiliations, or completely out-of-the blue.

Triggers Table

2D12	Trigger	Details
2	Accident or Circumstance	
3	Betting	
4	Blackmail	
5	Confrontation	
6	Desire	
7	Duty	
8	Eavesdropping	
9	Envy	
10	Fame and Fortune	
11	Friends or Family	
12	Hiring and Firing	
13	Idleness	
14	Matter of Honor	
15	Moral Dilemma	
16	Promise of Rich Pickings	

2D12	Trigger	Details
17	Revenge	
18	Righteous Anger	
19	Rumors	
20	Sense of Adventure	
21	Shared Threats	
22	Spirit of Competition	
23	Test or Trial	
24	Treasure Map	

Locations

Mapping Out an Adventure

So far, planning an adventure has included:

1. Considering possible locations, NPCs and monsters.
2. Evaluating and selecting missions/ quests.
3. Selecting a suitable plot and any sub-plots.
4. Working-out how the party meets-up and how they might get drawn into an adventure.

The next step is usually to select a specific location and to prepare a rough map with a legend and/ or a few details describing each area on the map. This involves:

1. Selecting a suitable adventure location for a dungeon adventure.
2. Identify key NPCs and monsters that fit your choice of campaign challenges, missions and locations.
3. Laying-out the rooms and caverns where the characters and monsters live.
4. Adding relevant furnishings to the rooms and caverns.
5. Adding a range of tricks and traps which will vary play.
6. Placing extra details aka dungeon accessories.

Adventure Locations

There are many possible sites for dungeon adventures of one kind or another. The classic dungeon isn't too concerned with a place in wider events or with thinking in terms of dungeons as societies or ecologies.

GMs may choose to begin to add greater variety, different hazards and a place in the world through changing the types of dungeons adventurers will explore.

Locations Table

D100	Location	Condition and/ or Contents
1	Armory	

D100	Location	Condition and/ or Contents
2	Castle or Citadel	
3	Catacombs	
4	Crypt or Tomb	
5	Dungeon	
7	Encampment	
8	Factory or Workshop	
9	Grotto	
10	Haunted House	
11	Hill Fort	
12	Laboratory	
13	Labyrinth	
14	Military HQ	
15	Mine	
16	Monastery	
17	Outpost	
18	Palace	
19	Pavilion	
20	Pyramid	
21	Ship or Aircraft	
22	Shrine	
23	Stronghold	
24	Tower	
25	Town	

Local Conditions

Locations, chambers and various items may default to a reasonable state of repair or reflect local conditions. The range of conditions available will depend on the circumstances, so the following list is better suited to selecting options than rolling. Where rolls are used the condition of larger structures such as a city or a castle will tend to cascade down on to lesser structures, e.g. a rundown city is likely to have few gleaming new structures within the city walls or boundaries.

Many structures will present more than one condition at a time and GMs can select combinations that might be expected to go together and/ or highlight unusual options.

Conditions Table

D100	Condition	Details
1	Alien	
2	Brickwork	
3	Buried	
4	Busy	
5	Buttressed	

D100	Condition	Details
6	Camouflaged	
7	Cobbled	
8	Collapsing	
9	Corroded	
10	Decorative	
11	Demolished	
12	Derelict	
13	Domed	
14	Dusty	
15	Earthwork	
16	Enchanted	
17	Exclusive	
18	Exotic	
19	Expensive	
20	Frosted	
21	Gilded	
22	Glass	
23	Guarded	
24	Haunted	
25	Inexpensive	
26	Ironwork	
27	Irradiated	
28	Laidback	
29	Luxurious	
30	Mosaic	
31	Neglected	
32	New	
33	Opulent	
34	Organic	
35	Painted	
36	Petrified	
37	Plasterwork	
38	Plated	
39	Prosperous	
40	Quiet	
41	Renovated	
42	Roofed	
43	Royal Warrant	
44	Ruined	
45	Rundown	
46	Stonework	
47	Thatched	
48	Tiled	

D100	Condition	Details
49	Waterlogged	
50	Weathered	

Rooms, Caverns, Furnishings and Accessories

Combining a room or cavern with a selection of furnishings and accessories is a very quick way to sketch out a location. There may be other grander or more magical features and furnishings in a room or cavern, but these will usually be accompanied by some standard items. A selection can be chosen from below.

The items shown are those that might offer a quick description to accompany whatever the GM choses to place within an encounter. Clearly, contents such as lamps, towels and knives may occur in many locations, so particular items of this type are only included where they might well serve as a feature.

Using the table that follows gives a GM a head start with setting up many encounters, but the examples given are based on human societies where design is a mix of utility, prestige and invention. Other societies are likely to have different takes on those priorities and to have alternatives of their own. As a result, GMs can do a lot to make their own worlds more fully-realized by looking at a culture's likely priorities and adapting locations, chambers and encounters to reflect the circumstances, e.g. a tribe of tree-dwellers might make rope bridges or treetop walkways using hollowed bone - for the advantages of weight, strength and durability.

Catering for different genres is quite straightforward, as these are some of the more predictable variants, e.g. a fantasy tavern and a Wild West saloon are likely to serve similar functions. Equally, the medieval, bioluminescent or magical light sources in a dungeon setting are easily revised for Cyberpunk or SciFi gameplay with modern, designer lighting systems and/ or more futuristic options.

Further considerations when quickly sketching chambers include varying players' and characters' opportunities to interact with the contents of each chamber; while zooming the action in and out of focus – as mentioned in the section on mapping.

For example, an encounter in a kitchen might switch from, 'it's the kitchen and the chef is advancing with a meat cleaver at the ready,' to ,'you smell fried food as you enter and see a couple of ovens with hotplates set near the door. At the other end of the room a young chef is standing at a sink scrubbing filthy pans. As you go in she steps away from the sink and eyes a half-filled knife rack set on the workbench behind her. The rest of the

knives are stuck dead center in a poster glued to the back of the door you've just used to enter. '

The second version of the encounter invites players to take the chef seriously, to ask what's on the poster and to consider using the knives pinned to the door. It would be hard work to build that into a description without keyword lists to help – and easy to consider writing elaborate descriptions that are more forced narratives than playmakers.

Rooms and Caverns Table

D100	Rooms	Typical Contents
1	Apartment	Lockers, pill boxes, hourglasses, calendars, lamps, candles, coat racks, chests and trunks, clocks, clothing, baskets, jugs, chairs, tables, cabinets, bookshelves, sofas, art, trophies and medals, rugs and carpets, vases, collections, snacks and luxury foods, goblets, pets and familiars, books and games
2	Aquarium	Tanks, pipes, filters, rare and exotic species, nets and netting, feed and chemical treatments, heating and fuel
3	Arcade	Corridor, archways, vendors or exhibits, stalls, decorative features, fountains and pools, performance and display
4	Arena	Triumphal arches, podium, balcony or verandah, lectern, heraldry, flags and banners, pits and traps, braziers, branding irons, chains and manacles, sand and blood, bandages, trophies and body parts
5	Armory	Forge, furnace, fuel, weapon racks, armor and shields, shelving, lockers, secure doors, communications and briefing rooms, drill grounds and weapon ranges, hammers and tongs, anvils and matting
6	Assembly Room	Benches, tables, goblets, jugs, trays and platters, weapons and armor, heraldic banners and wineskins
7	Aviary	Caged or glass enclosures, feed, paths, trees and exotic plants, walkways, benches, statues, fountains and gloves or gauntlets
8	Barracks	Beds, linen, blankets, clothing, personal possessions, lockers, chests, trunks and bunks
9	Bathroom	Toilet, basins, bath, shower, soaps, perfumes, make-up, hairbrushes and combs, oils and lotions, personal jewelry, mirrors and leaves or paper

D100	Rooms	Typical Contents
10	Chapel or Chantry	Altars, archways, columns, pillars, domes, frescoes, statues, curtains, gilding, enamel inlays, stained glass, carvings, icons, paintings, benches, pews, screens, vestries, confessionals, lamps, lanterns, censers, incense, tapestries, offerings, reliquaries, fonts, pedestals, pulpits, podiums, idols, oils, perfumes, cushions, thrones, books, scrolls, and holy or unholy symbols
11	Court Room	Judges' bench, screens, iron bars and cages, heraldry, dock, witness stand, gavel, robes and hats or wigs
12	Courtyard or Foyer	Tiling, walkways, arches, clocks or sundials, bystanders and statues, stocks and pillories, gibbets, executioners' blocks and reliefs or tapestries
13	Crypt, Vault, Tomb or Ossuary	Coffins, urns, caskets, skull racks, body parts, skeletons, dust, cobwebs, grime, personal possessions, sacrificial victims, petrified food and drink, mummified remains, altars, treasures and slain adventurers
14	Dining Room	Tables, comfortable chairs, napkins, goblets, plates, serving dishes, food and drink, candelabra and chandeliers, decanters and jugs, tablecloths, portraits, statues and trophies
15	Dressing Room or Wardrobe	Mirrors, clothes, footwear, screens and curtains, cupboards and closets, chests of drawers, coat and clothes racks, shoe racks, hats and costume accessories, sewing equipment, perfumes and creams
16	Dungeon or Cell	Straw and pallets, stool, manacle, torture instruments, writing or recording materials, skeletons and body parts, chains and manacles, prayer book and beads, bloodstains and rope
17	Forge	Fuel, ore, forge, furnace, anvils, hammers and tongs, fonts or troughs
18	Gallery	Art, pedestals, framed pictures, niches and alcoves, lighting effects, balconies, mezzanines, catwalks, columns and screens.
19	Games Room	Games, dice, miniatures and models, masks, costumes, cases, boxes, baskets, chests, screens, curtains, art, artists' materials, benches, bookshelves, chair, cupboard, cushions, tables, desks, lamp, books, carpets and rugs

D100	Rooms	Typical Contents
20	Garden	Plants, fungi, insects, earth, gardening tools, fertilizer, flowers, walkways, bandstands, ladders, saws, statues, podiums, lakes, islands, fountains and waterfalls
21	Great Hall	Hearth, hounds, goblets, flags and banners, trophies, braziers, smoke, food and drink, spits and tongs, tapestries, statues, paneling, frescoes plates and cutlery, pans and jars, and singing
22	Guard Post or Guardhouse	Brazier, weapons, chairs or stools, cards, dice, chains, lanterns, beer and spirits.
23	Gym	Benches, ropes, weights, boxing rings, mats, apparatus, bars, balls, towels, footwear, strips and cubicles or lockers
24	Hall or Foyer	Benches, hearth, chairs, tables, flags, banners, heraldic carvings and armorials, trophies, musical instruments and rolls of honor
25	Harem	Beds, couches, alcoves, garments and footwear, jewelry, pools, fountains, curtains and screens, pedestals, jewelry boxes, musical instruments, art, furs and skins, candles, chandeliers, books, lanterns, pets and familiars, perfumes, carpets, covers, rugs and throws.
26	Kitchen or Galley	Ovens, grills, spits, stoves, cookers, tables, towels, pots, pans, cutlery, utensils, chillers, knives, plates and cutlery, serving dishes, urns, vases, jugs, brushes and brooms, mops, jars, food and drink, herbs and spices, kitchen gloves, dressers and cabinets
27	Laboratory	Workbenches, cauldrons, beakers, crucibles, flasks, pliers, wire, scientific apparatus, vials, spills, dishes, decanters, fountains, scales and weights, lenses or microscopes, astrolabes, lanterns, fuel and tinderboxes
28	Library	Shelving, chairs, desks, tables, books, manuscripts, lanterns, magazines, catalogues, directories, atlases, lenses, bookmarks and paperweights
29	Map Room	Large table and chairs, wall charts, knife, quills, ink pots, parchment, maps, map case and seals
30	Maze	String, skeletons, ritual walkways, weapons, hazards and traps
31	Museum or Trophy Room	Displays, trophies, medals, cups, portraits, weaponry, armor, stuffed and mounted wildlife, collections, treasures, traps, secure locks and doors, secure containers or alarms

D100	Rooms	Typical Contents
32	Observatory	Magnetic, astronomical, zodiacal, alchemical/ chemical or meteorological apparatus, charts, records and archives, scrolls, writing materials, flasks, fonts, psychoducts, astrolabes and skydisks, statues, magnets, mercury, vials and decanters, candles, lamps and lanterns, tinder boxes, torches, dishes, trays, scales and balances, instruments, maps and star-charts
33	Office	Seals, papers, writing materials, records and archives, desks, tables, chairs, bins, trays and screens
34	Outhouse or Barn	Hay, straw, buckets, hammers, saws, axes and hand-axes, timbers, feed, straw, hay, grain bins, buckets and spades, pickaxes or drills
35	Pool	Swimming pool, sauna, spa, waterslides, towels, filters, diving boards, steam chambers and cubicles
36	Refectory or Mess Hall	Tables, benches, goblets, plates, serving dishes, food and drink, lanterns, braziers, decanters and jugs, tablecloths, portraits, statues and trophies
37	Reservoir or Cistern	Water, chemical treatments, salts, sand, overflow, mud, leaks and spills, slurry piping and waste
38	Safe Room	Secure doors, portcullis, weapons, traps, decoys, body doubles, escape pods, solid structure, fireproofed and alarmed
39	Scullery	Pots, pans, basins, rags, towels, sinks and basins
40	Shrine	Altars, columns, pillars, frescoes, statues, curtains, gilding, enamel inlays, stained glass, carvings, icons, portraits, benches, screens, vestries, lamps, lanterns, censers, incense, offerings, reliquaries, fonts, pedestals, pulpits, podiums, idols, oils, perfumes, thrones, books, scrolls, and holy or unholy symbols
41	Stables or Bestiary	Cages, enclosures, stalls, hay, straw, harnesses, bridles, feed, weaponry, traces, combs and brushes, footwear, manure and clothes
42	Star Chamber	Tables, chairs, charts, maps, stained glass, ornaments, expensive art, statuettes and figurines, counters and tokens, heraldic emblems and ritual or cult items
43	Storeroom or Warehouse	Crates, boxes, cartons, crowbars, buckets and water, fire alarms, goods and commodities, stores and caches, archives and apparatus or equipment

D100	Rooms	Typical Contents
44	Tannery	Pools, chemicals, leather, human and animal waste, lime or woodash, rawhide, hide, skins, needles and cord, stretching frames, buckles, hammers and saws, planes and chisels, timber, glues, oils and resins, rivets and nails
45	Temple	Colossus, gargoyles, idols, holy or unholy symbols, offerings tables, censers and incense, smoke, braziers, gongs, drums, fire pits, relics and reliquaries, human remains, skull racks, fonts, pedestals, pulpits, podiums, oils, perfumes, cushions, thrones, books, scrolls and holy or unholy symbols
46	Throne Room	Throne, pedestal, pillars, columns, domes, scepter and crown, lanterns and chandeliers, tapestries, statues and statuettes, friezes and reliefs, gilding, heraldry and reliquaries
47	Treasury	Traps, secure doors, secure locks and bolts, decoys, chests, treasure, coinage, ingots, false treasure, false treasury
48	Well Room	Well, rope, buckets, ladder, trolley, basins and churns
49	Workshop	Workbenches, tools, apparatus, raw materials, fuel, safety equipment, lenses, overalls, dust and shavings, nails and screws, pile-drivers and mallets, drills and anvils, cauldrons or boilers, ovens, hotplates, rags, glues and resins, dust and oils
50	Zoo	Large enclosures, cages, wildlife, rare and exotic species, nets and netting, feed, stabling, pasture, stalls and exhibitions, displays and booths, fountains and waterfalls, pools and outdoor aquariums

Furnishings Table

D100	Furnishings	Details
1	Altar	
2	Aquarium	
3	Bas Relief	
4	Basin	
5	Bath	
6	Bed	
7	Bench	
8	Cabinet	
9	Canopy	
10	Carpet	

D100	Furnishings	Details
11	Casket	
12	Chairs	
13	Chest or Trunk	
14	Closet	
15	Couch	
16	Columns	
17	Cupboard	
18	Curtain	
19	Desk	
20	Easel	
21	Fountain	
22	Lamp	
23	Lantern	
24	Idol	
25	Manger	
26	Meal, Fresh	
27	Meal, Half-Eaten	
28	Meal, Rotting	
29	Mirror	
30	Mosaic	
31	Murder Hole	
32	Painting	
33	Pond	
34	Rugs	
35	Screen	
37	Shelving	
38	Shrine	
39	Sink	
40	Stained Glass	
41	Statue or Statuette	
42	Stocks	
43	Table	
44	Tapestry	
45	Toilet	
46	Toys	
47	Tray	
48	Wardrobe	
49	Wine Rack	
50	Workbench	

Accessories Table

D100	Accessories	Details
1	Bandages (Bloody)	

D100	Accessories	Details
2	Bones (Bleached)	
3	Bones, Fresh Tribal	
4	Bones, Monster's	
5	Clothing	
6	Cobwebs	
7	Corpse (Humanoid)	
8	Corpse (Monster)	
9	Coins	
10	Dirty Dishes	
11	Dust	
12	Game	
13	Grime	
14	Firewood	
15	Flints	
16	Kindling	
17	Firewood	
18	Leftover Food	
19	Mildew	
20	Mirror	
21	Mirror, Broken	
22	Musical Instrument	
23	Mushrooms	
24	Parchment, Torn	
25	Pet/ s	
26	Rags	
27	Rats	
28	Robes	
29	Rubble	
30	Sawdust	
31	Scorch Marks	
32	Scum	
33	Slain Monster (Fresh)	
34	Slain Monster (Rotting)	
35	Slime	
36	Skeleton, Humanoid	
37	Skeleton, Monster's	
38	Skeletons, Monsters'	
39	Skull, Humanoid	
40	Skull, Monster's	
41	Tinderbox	
42	Tools (Butchery)	
43	Tools (Carpentry)	

D100	Accessories	Details
44	Tools (Jewelry)	
45	Tools (Metalwork)	
46	Tools (Weaponry)	
47	Uniform	
48	Vase	
49	Veil	
50	Weaponry	

Treasures Table

3D20	Treasure	Details
3	Animals, Pets and Familiars	
4	Ankle Chain	
5	Anklet	
6	Armband	
7	Armor	
8	Bangle	
9	Belt	
10	Bracelet	
11	Bracelets	
12	Buckle	
13	Carving	
14	Chain	
15	Chalice	
16	Chatelaine	
17	Choker	
18	Circlet	
19	Clasp	
20	Coffer	
21	Coins	
22	Collar	
23	Comb	
24	Coronet	
25	Decanter	
26	Diadem	
27	Earrings	
28	Fabric	
29	Figurine	
30	Flowers and Foodstuffs	
31	Furnishings, e.g. Throne	
32	Gauntlets	
33	Goblet	
34	Manuscripts	
35	Mask	

3D20	Treasure	Details
36	Medal	
37	Medallion	
38	Necklace	
39	Orb	
40	Painting	
41	Pearls	
42	Pectoral	
43	Piercing	
44	Pin	
45	Pottery	
46	Reliquary	
47	Scepter	
48	Sculpture	
49	Seals	
50	Stamps	
51	Statuette	
52	Tapestry	
53	Tiara	
54	Torc	
56	Transport	
57	Trophy or Award	
58	Utensil	
59	Weapon	
60	Wristband	

Tricks and Traps

Basic Tricks and Traps

As adventurers move on to deeper dungeons, underground cities, outdoor wildernesses and other options the novelty value of common monsters or simple chutes will wear-off to be replaced by smarter opponents and greater challenges. Nevertheless, it's worth keeping the following elements in the mix at all times, as a collapsing floor or a standard guardhouse can still prove entertaining when used infrequently.

Including tricks and traps in an adventure adds extra hazards, unexpected surprises and a touch of the magical to any adventure. As discussed earlier, non-lethal traps, (which delay adventurers, encourage players to find novel solutions or snatch something from adventurers' grasp), usually offer more entertaining gameplay than complex puzzles or traps that deliver an instant kill. Where traps cause damage it is helpful to scale the damage to the level of the adventure; unless characters insist on entering areas where they are inviting extra risk. Where there are specific suggested outcomes these aim to indicate that most tricks and traps needn't cause serious harm. For

horror-based games and games which use realistic damage systems more serious outcomes might be expected than suggested by typical D&D-type values.

All of the basic tricks and traps listed are easily adapted to different circumstances and to result in slightly different effects. Most present some kind of hazard or obstacle that characters can avoid or escape through inventive solutions. These tricks and traps are also suited to being placed fairly logically, i.e. while choices can be made by rolling on the table, the most effective options are those selected to fit the circumstances. For example, the heart of an ancient tomb or a treasury might reasonably be expected to have some heavy-duty defenses; while a trap located near a mess hall where drunken soldiers stagger back and forth is less likely, because the trap would do the soldiers as much harm as any intruders.

Without placing tricks and traps where they are flagged by the level of security likely to be found in particular areas, there's a risk that players will decide to inch their way round every corner and/ or tire of the use of basic tricks and traps.

Tricks and Traps Table

D100	Title	Effects
1	Aerial Runway	An aerial runway can place adventures in a line of fire, drop them into a slide or come to an end over a hazard. If the end of the runway or runways is out of sight players are more likely to be tempted
2	Altars	Altars are suited to delivering a range of magical effects. Some may heal or offer a blessing, while others may threaten to explode or crumble - releasing deadly occupants
3	Arrow Trap	Triggering such a trap causes a basic 2D6. Save for half damage
4	Brain Drain	Activating a device or accessing an area calls for a sacrifice in experience, skill and/ or ability
5	Breath Activated	The only way in is through a breath activated door –dragon or gorgon breath would present a few problems
6	Chasms	Crumbling bridges and rope bridges risk major damage or delay
7	Chutes	A chute usually leads adventurers into more dangerous areas, but might also serve as an escape route
8	Collapsing Ceiling	The area's occupants all take 4D6. Save for half damage

D100	Title	Effects
9	Corrosive Pool	This pool, large puddle or stream of muddy water stings flesh very slightly, but also slowly corrodes metals. A saving throw at -1/ round allows most adventurers some chance of realizing what's happening. Rust shows on the surface of damaged metals and will start to color the water
10	Crimson Glow	This lightly fragranced cloud of mist is absorbed by contact and is known to deplete magic or psychic powers. Individuals will lose D4 spells of choice/ round spent in the mist; while enchanted or psychically charged items lose their powers while inside the mist and for five minutes after it clears
11	Dart Trap	Triggering the trap causes D4 x D4. Save for half damage
12	Decoy	A convincing straw man, scene or diorama can offer guards a good opportunity to stage an ambush
13	Deformation	The consequences of damage caused by characters and their opponents can set-up a wide range of traps, such as collapsing roofs, crumbling bridges and chemical or molten metal spills. These can be devised to tempt characters to trigger outcomes and become all the more effective when used as chain reactions
14	Drums	Drums can carry sound over a wide area if there's nothing in the way, so they make for dangerous alarms
15	Falling Blade	Triggering the trap causes 4D6. Save for half damage
16	Falling Cage Trap	Anyone caught by a falling cage trap is confined by the cage until someone unlocks the cage or the cage takes 40 damage
17	Fountains	The waters in fountains often have a magical effect. This effect may be curative, magical, energizing or otherwise helpful. There is something to be said for giving PCs one place of sanctuary and safety – not to make life easy, but to contrast with the uncertain world they will soon return to
18	Gaze Activated	The only way in is through a gaze activated door – a Medusa's gaze
19	Glue	Have fun ☺

D100	Title	Effects
20	Gong, Temple	These may be heard over a considerable distance and are likely to act as an alarm if out of sequence with any regular/ ceremonial use
21	Hand Bell	Hand bells make very useful short range alarms
22	Ice Bridge	A large, possibly towered, bridge or crossing is covered in a thick coating of ice that makes it very difficult to make progress, e.g. iced portcullises at each end and glassy surfaces throughout. Fire and lightning can make dents in the ice and allow incredibly slow and expensive progress – at some risk of blasts causing much of their effect in the area directly in front of the ice. The ice can be melted slowly by lighting fires, ovens and lamps within the same overall area or structure. Once started, any melting can be speeded up by making large bonfires and/ or sending fire and lightning into fissures that begin to appear in the ice
23	Iceberg	A painting of a frozen waterfall or an icy ocean scene starts to melt as a result of exposure to heat and/ or light. Unless stopped/ refrozen the water stars to overflow and then flood out – eventually carrying any boats, fish or the like out of the picture
24	Jaw Trap	An affected creature takes 3D6 and is unable to move until released; unless it has a Strength of 15 or higher
25	Magnets	Metal weapons become strong magnets, which attract metal items of up to the same weight from up to 10' away
26	Melting Pool	This pool, fountain, large puddle or stream releases odorless fumes when leather enters the water. There is no other obvious effect apart from all leather melting after two rounds in the water
27	Mercy Stones	These large blocks or tablets of stone show one or more items such as wands, rings and/ or weapons. An item of the general type shown, possibly including magic items, has to be placed on the rock – and stay there – to access another area
28	Net Trap	A weighted net falls over an area of 20' x 20'. The net can take 30 from sharp weapons or magical attacks before breaking

D100	Title	Effects
29	Oracles	An oracle give good predictions on certain topics, but not on others
30	Pit (Flooded)	Any creature falling into a flooded pit has to swim to escape. Those that are burdened must shed items or take 2D6/ round as they drown
31	Pit (Trapdoor)	Any creature falling into a concealed pit takes 2d6 from the fall and has to climb back out of the pit
32	Poison Gas	Natural gases and vapors can be explosive, corrosive or highly flammable
33	Pools	Pools may hide monsters or contain liquids with magical effects. A series of pools presents opportunities to coat adventurers, and others, in successive 'washes'
34	Pressure Plates	Multiple pressure plates that need to stay down to prevent a harmful effect and/ or to access an item or entrance
35	Red Mist	This slightly acrid cloud of mist is absorbed by breathing the vapor. Those unable to make a saving throw successfully become more aggressive and hostile each round. The effects are to temporarily lower any charisma, persuasion or negotiation based skills by -1, (or equivalent), every round. Physical attacks and damage done increase by +1, (or equivalent), each round, but defenses/ armor class decrease by the same amount. The effects continue for five minutes after leaving or clearing the mist
36	Scything Blade	Any creature triggering the trap must make a successful saving throw or take 4D6
37	Secret Doors	Secret doors are often used to conceal treasure, for staging ambushes and as escape routes
38	Sensitivity	Condition sensitive materials may include explosives formed by soaking up water, food or drink that becomes highly acidic after heating above a certain temperature and/ or skeletons exposed to sunlight
39	Shifting Walls	Moving walls can be used to baffle adventurers or as barriers
40	Sliding Stairs	These chutes often have an unpleasant surprise at the bottom
41	Stairs	Stairs often indicate a change in level or risk
42	Statues	Statues may animate and attack or reward certain actions

D100	Title	Effects
43	Tar Pit	Those caught in such a pit need to spend D4 rounds pulling themselves out
44	Teleport	There are many possible teleport traps, but a teleport into confinement and/ or observation can be unsettling for players
45	Transplant	A body part, such as the heart or eye is swapped with those of another creature. This lends both recipients some of the physical and/ or skills and abilities usually possessed by the other. This may or may not extent to the recipients' personalities
46	Tripwire	Tripwires may trigger a trap and/ or an alarm
47	Troll Bait	Crush the statue of a troll to stop the creatures in the chamber from regenerating
48	Welded	Metallic items come into contact with a surface and bond with it on a molecular level. The items have to be coaxed off, torn off or abandoned
49	Whistles	Whistles can be useful for summoning more guards – especially animals like dogs and wolves
50	Zombie Wash	The water in this pool, fountain or spring heals wounds up to a point, but makes flesh look increasingly zombified. After a couple of uses a character still looks familiar, but with the flesh, flesh wounds and facial expressions of a zombie

Non-Player Characters aka Monsters and Aliens

Deciding which NPCs, (including monsters and aliens), go where is often an ongoing process. Players and GMs may decide they are keen on including particular creatures at the adventure or campaign planning stage - and those selected can then play a central role during play. At the other end of the scale, solo or team players usually prefer to flesh out locations and to sketch out chambers before finally revealing any monsters at the point when an encounter happens.

The lists of traits and of general fantasy creatures shown below provide a general guide to the types of creatures found in most fantasy RPGs. GMs and players can revise and split these tables to suit their preferences and to re-mix the creatures their characters encounter.

Many creatures can cut across or be adapted to different RPG genres. However, the key ingredient with many NPCs is to give them a place in the world, including a past, a network of relationships and a personality. As a result, GMs may wish to develop major and/ or recurring NPCs along the lines of the options suggested for PCs in the section on colorful characters.

Traits

Players can lose much of the freedom to decide how characters' personalities develop during play if too many details are filled in beforehand. This is not such a concern with NPCs run by the GM during play, because the majority of NPCs – including monsters - are likely to call for no more than quick character sketches and few details - unless players choose to zoom in.

All of the background details set out earlier for PCs can, therefore, apply to a NPC. However, in many cases the most immediate or helpful details to have to hand will be those that put across traits, attitudes and some idea of how the NPC fits into the gameplay. The following tables set out to help GMs or solo players to identify the types of traits or personal qualities a NPC might present during first or early encounters with PCs.

Character Positive Physical Traits Table

4D10	Trait	Details
4	Active	
5	Adept	
6	Adroit	
7	Agile	
8	Attractive	
9	Beautiful	
10	Brawny	
11	Charming	
12	Dainty	
13	Dapper	
14	Delicate	
15	Dexterous	
16	Elegant	
17	Exquisite	
18	Fair	
19	Fascinating	
20	Good-Looking	
21	Graceful	
22	Handsome	
23	Hardy	
24	Immaculate	
25	Lively	
26	Lovely	
27	Muscular	
28	Neat	
29	Nimble	
30	Pretty	

4D10	Trait	Details
31	Ravishing	
32	Robust	
33	Shapely	
34	Skillful	
35	Spirited	
36	Stalwart	
37	Strong	
38	Sturdy	
39	Vivacious	
40	Winsome	

Character Negative Physical Traits Table

2D12	Trait	Details
2	Awkward	
3	Clumsy	
4	Decrepit	
5	Emaciated	
6	Feeble	
7	Frail	
8	Ghastly	
9	Graceless	
10	Grotesque	
11	Hideous	
12	Homely	
13	Horrible	
14	Loathsome	
15	Odious	
16	Repellent	
17	Repugnant	
18	Repulsive	
19	Sickly	
20	Slovenly	
21	Thin	
22	Unkempt	
23	Weak	
24	Ugly	

General Character Traits Table

D100	Trait	Trait	Trait	Trait
1	Able	Doubtful	Intolerant	Resolute
2	Active	Dull	Intrepid	Resourceful
3	Admirable	Dutiful	Irresolute	Responsible
4	Adventurous	Eager	Irresponsible	Responsive

D100	Trait	Trait	Trait	Trait
5	Affectionate	Earnest	Jealous	Restless
6	Afraid	Easy Going	Kindly	Reticent
7	Aggressive	Eccentric	Lackadaisical	Rich
8	Alert	Efficient	Laconic	Rough
9	Altruistic	Egotistical	Lazy	Rowdy
10	Ambitious	Eloquent	Leader	Rude
11	Angry	Embarrassed	Lethargic	Ruthless
12	Annoyed	Eminent	Liberal	Sad
13	Anxious	Encouraging	Listless	Safe
14	Apathetic	Energetic	Lively	Sanctimonious
15	Apologetic	Enthusiastic	Lonely	Satisfied
16	Aristocratic	Envious	Long-Suffering	Saturnine
17	Arrogant	Erratic	Loving	Saucy
18	Artificial	Evil	Loyal	Scared
19	Artless	Excited	Lucky	Scrupulous
20	Assiduous	Excruciating	Magnanimous	Scurrilous
21	Attentive	Expert	Malicious	Secretive
22	Audacious	Fair	Malignant	Sedate
23	Avaricious	Faithful	Mature	Self-Centered
24	Average	Fastidious	Mean	Self-Impassive
25	Awkward	Fearless	Mediocre	Self-Indulgent
26	Bad	Fickle	Meek	Selfish
27	Benevolent	Fierce	Melancholic	Self-Reliant
28	Blue	Flippant	Mercenary	Sensitive
29	Boastful	Foolish	Merciful	Serious
30	Bold	Forbearing	Messy	Sharp
31	Bored	Fortunate	Mischievous	Short
32	Bossy	Foul	Miserable	Shy
33	Brave	Fresh	Monstrous	Silly
34	Bright	Friendly	Moody	Skillful
35	Brilliant	Frivolous	Mulish	Slothful
36	Brutish	Frugal	Munificent	Sly
38	Bumptious	Frustrated	Mysterious	Smart
37	Bungling	Funny	Mystical	Smug
39	Busy	Garrulous	Naïve	Sneaky
40	Callous	Generous	Natural	Sober
41	Calm	Gentle	Naughty	Solemn
42	Candid	Ghastly	Neglectful	Sorry
43	Capricious	Giving	Nervous	Spoiled
44	Careful	Glamorous	Nice	Squeamish
45	Careless	Gloomy	Niggardly	Staid
46	Cautious	Gluttonous	Noble	Steadfast
47	Chaotic	Good	Noisy	Stingy

D100	Trait	Trait	Trait	Trait
48	Charitable	Graceful	Nonchalant	Stoical
49	Charming	Greedy	Obdurate	Strange
50	Cheerful	Grouchy	Obedient	Strict
51	Childish	Grumpy	Obnoxious	Strong-Willed
52	Circumspect	Guilty	Obstinate	Stubborn
53	Clever	Gullible	Odd	Sweet
54	Clumsy	Happy	Old	Sympathetic
55	Coarse	Harsh	Oppressive	Taciturn
56	Compassionate	Hateful	Ordinary	Talented
57	Complacent	Haughty	Overconfident	Tall
58	Conceited	Headstrong	Parasitic	Thankful
59	Concerned	Healthy	Parsimonious	Thoughtful
60	Confident	Helpful	Patient	Thoughtless
61	Confused	Heroic	Peaceful	Thrifty
62	Conniving	Hilarious	Pensive	Timid
63	Conscientious	Honest	Perfidious	Timorous
64	Conservative	Hopeful	Persevering	Tired
65	Considerate	Hopeless	Persistent	Tolerant
66	Conspiratorial	Humane	Persuasive	Touchy
67	Contemptible	Humble	Pert	Traitorous
68	Contemptuous	Humorous	Petty	Treacherous
69	Cooperative	Hypocritical	Philanthropic	Truculent
70	Courageous	Ignorant	Philosophical	Trusting
71	Cowardly	Illustrious	Picky	Trustworthy
72	Coy	Imaginative	Pleasant	Unaffected
73	Craven	Imaginative	Plucky	Unambitious
74	Creative	Impatient	Polite	Uncompromising
75	Critical	Imperious	Pompous	Unfriendly
76	Cross	Imperturbable	Poor	Unhappy
77	Cruel	Impetuous	Popular	Unreliable
78	Cultured	Impolite	Positive	Unruly
79	Cunning	Imposing	Precise	Unstable
80	Curious	Impressive	Prejudiced	Upset
81	Dangerous	Imprudent	Proper	Useful
82	Daring	Impulsive	Proud	Vain
83	Dark	Incoherent	Punctual	Valorous
84	Decisive	Incompetent	Quick	Venal
85	Demanding	Inconsiderate	Quiet	Vindictive
86	Demure	Inconsolable	Quixotic	Violent
87	Dependable	Independent	Radical	Voracious
88	Depressed	Indifferent	Rash	Warm
89	Determined	Indiscreet	Rational	Wary
90	Diffident	Indomitable	Reactionary	Weak

D100	Trait	Trait	Trait	Trait
91	Dilatory	Indulgent	Rebellious	Wearisome
92	Diligent	Industrious	Recalcitrant	Well-Bred
93	Discouraged	Inefficient	Reckless	Whimsical
94	Discreet	Influential	Refined	Wicked
95	Disdainful	Ingenious	Refractory	Willful
96	Dishonest	Innocent	Reliable	Wise
97	Disrespectful	Insensitive	Religious	Witty
98	Distinguished	Insidious	Remiss	Worried
99	Dogmatic	Insignificant	Reprehensible	Worthless
100	Domineering	Intelligent	Reserved	Zealous

Preferred Actions

Preferred actions offer a very straightforward way of varying the reactions of NPCs and other creatures encounter during adventures.

This approach allows for the use of a range of modifiers, which can include taking account of factors like a mild-mannered character having a bad day. Along the same lines, more deadly and naturally hostile creatures on the lists of fantasy creatures that follow may appear charming at times, but that doesn't set aside the underlying reality.

The intention is not to give creatures without the capacity to express themselves in certain ways the ability to act beyond their skills, nature or intelligence. Instead the terms chosen are open to different interpretations in different contexts. So, for example, a pack of wolves might behave coercively by trying to herd adventurers into an area better suited to attacking as a pack.

The same wolves might attempt to be persuasive by howling, snapping and snarling to encourage adventurers to stay out of their territory. Equally, they might be more 'diplomatic' in terms of allowing entry to their territory, but shadowing the adventurers' progress.

Obviously, alien, supernatural or undead creatures may not have a typical 'vocabulary' of reactions - and a single factor may be enough to turn an otherwise calm individual into a seething pool of rage. This can be accommodated by extending, adjusting or replacing options within the table, while adding any necessary modifiers. For example, hunger will affect most hunting animals' behaviors and a hostile, hungry wolf that is given food by a party of adventurers may well start acting differently.

Using preferred actions with a GM running play offers a quick range of options to help the GM to map the types of reactions players may meet in slightly more detail than the common fight or talk options. The basic

approach shown here could be used quite mechanically, but it is only intended as a guide unless there is no GM. In the absence of a GM players can use solo mechanics, including preferred actions, to introduce a greater variety of gameplay options and/ or to make play less completely random.

Preferred Actions Table

2D6	Creature	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Deadly	Demand	Demand	Attacks	Attacks	Attacks	Tricks
3	Devious	Demand	Attacks	Attacks	Attacks	Tricks	Insults
4	Furious	Attacks	Attacks	Attacks	Tricks	Insults	Warns
5	Combative	Attacks	Attacks	Tricks	Insults	Warns	Quizzes
6	Hostile	Attacks	Tricks	Insults	Warns	Quizzes	Recruits
7	Coercive	Tricks	Insults	Warns	Quizzes	Recruits	Parleys
8	Difficult	Insults	Warns	Quizzes	Recruits	Parleys	Parleys
9	Diplomatic	Warns	Quizzes	Recruits	Parleys	Parleys	Parleys
10	Welcoming	Quizzes	Recruits	Parleys	Parleys	Parleys	Gifts
11	Friendly	Recruits	Parleys	Parleys	Parleys	Gifts	Gifts
12	Samaritan	Parleys	Parleys	Parleys	Gifts	Gifts	Blesses

Obvious modifiers to such tables might include taking account of how threatening monsters or aliens are within a game. For instance, an extremely dangerous creature could role at -2 in the vertical column, while a lethal creature might roll at -3.

Solo and Team Play

The steps involved in building a solo or team adventure/ campaign using the adventure builder and/ or the world builder are often about working through each builder from top to bottom using the dice indicated. The results will inevitably be top-down and fairly random, but there are ways to make play more varied and less completely random:

Customization
Players can adjust the contents of the tables to suit the genre and types of encounters they want to use to populate the game. Start by trimming the tables to take out things you don't want. Then replace or add any features that you would like to include as part of a still random selection by dice rolls, e.g. if you want a Lost World adventure full of dinosaurs pack the monster tables with dinosaurs.

Nudges and Tilts
When making selections based on a dice roll it's easy to hand back some player choice by allowing yourself the option of spending a supply of luck/ fate/ fortune points - perhaps collected during play - on nudges. A nudge is a single move up or down one row from the result shown on the dice. A character's roll might also allow a tilt – i.e. a complete re-roll to get a different result.

How characters gain these luck points and how much they cost in one form or another is more involving if they're available through some kind of challenge or long-term goal.

Preferred Actions

There is a tendency for solo play to boil down to a lot of random combat encounters. This can be offset by alternative checks against other kinds of skills or abilities. In addition, it is possible to look at presenting a short convincing narrative – either to modify a skill/ ability check or to deliver an outcome.

Preferred actions are one way of setting up a variety of gameplay options, while keeping play fairly random and, therefore, less predictable.

Laying Out Solo and Team Adventures

The tables that follow allow the rapid outlining of team or solo adventures.

Solo or team play can be run by working from top to bottom through the adventure builder tables. These are arranged to start with a mission and a location - and to leave the NPCs/ monsters as one of the last features to be unwrapped during play. This usually suits solo and team play, because it keeps what is often the riskiest part of an encounter until the end.

The steps involved in preparing an adventure are affected by the way in which the encounters areas/ rooms are laid out and revealed to players. Options include:

1. Setting out the encounter areas/ rooms by rolling them as they're encountered.
2. Setting out the general types of encounter areas in advance, e.g. tunnel, room or cavern.
3. Setting out the types of encounter areas in advance, e.g. kitchen or crypt.

Some players will prefer to discover everything as they explore, while others may prefer to concentrate on what's inside the encounter areas during play. Clearly, the more a layout is prepared in advance the quicker it will be to play through.

Random Layouts Table

D6	Type of Chamber	Entrances	Entrance
1	Passageway	1	Closed Door
2	Empty Room or Cave	1	Locked Door
3	Occupied Room	2	Open Door
4	Occupied Room	2	Cave Mouth
5	Occupied Cave	3	Portcullis

D6	Type of Chamber	Entrances	Entrance
6	Roll Again	D6	Concealed or Secret Door

To end up with a useable layout the players need to spread areas out when more than one or two chambers are connected to a single chamber. This can be done by lengthening, re-orientating or reshaping connecting tunnels.

With a layout in place or emerging during play the tables for furnishings and accessories, tricks and traps, encounters and treasure can be added. These may be drawn from the tables, but the stats and outcomes are going to be those of your RPG of choice.

These solo options typically involve the following steps:

- Make a PC for the RPG of your choice and add any details from the colorful characters' section that suit the game-world/ are of interest.
- Decide how many nudges and tilts a PC is allowed and how/ where they can get more from.

Campaign Level

- Decide how many nudges and/ or tilts can be spent at each level, i.e. while campaign building, while adventure building and when adventuring. A D6+6 might be a good starting point for nudges/ tilts at each level.
- Select the level you want to start at in the world builder, e.g. campaign challenges, terrain or locations - and work down.

Adventure Level

- If you have used the world builder to identify adventure locations use those locations as you transfer to the adventure builder.
- Select the level you want to start at in the adventure builder, e.g. missions or those for filling out the contents of dungeon - and work down.
- Use a Random Layouts Table like the one above to map the dungeon before rolling the contents on the tables in the adventure builder.
- Reach for your rules system or use a Preferred Actions Table to judge the likely actions of the occupants of the location you are exploring.
- Use your rules system or even the basic lists of fantasy monsters and our skills checks to arrive at clear outcomes.
- Grab any loot, experience or extra nudges/ tilts your PC has earned.

Solo and team play will run faster if a Random Layout Table and a Preferred Actions Table are set aside beforehand.

Creatures

The fairly typical set of fantasy creatures that follows offers a ready-reference for GMs to select and keep track of various monsters and NPCs. They may also be used to randomly select creatures of various levels of difficult for solo or team gameplay. Having rolled or selected a creature the specific stats from players' RPG system of choice can be dropped in.

Alien species and races are less clearly familiar to most players with the exception of a few obvious movie-stars. Races from a series like Star Trek are probably not going to slot into SciFi campaigns that don't use Star Trek staples, so it is generally easier to take fantasy creatures - such as Orcs or Dark Elves - and to translate them across. Porting creatures in this way works well on worlds comparable to the worlds described in human mythologies, but a lot can be done to make alien species more unique and varied by taking account of the physical and psychological impact of the conditions and situations that define their lives.

Where a role or rank is described GMs or players may wish to roll the dice more than once to establish the type of creature or race serving as, for example, soldiers. It might also be useful to add classes for PCs and NPCs for games that use character classes.

Dangerous Creatures

Dangerous Creatures Table

2D20	Creature	Details
2	Ants, Giant	
3	Badgers, Giant	
4	Bats, Giant	
5	Beetles, Giant	
6	Bears	
7	Centipedes, Giant	
8	Crocodiles, Normal	
9	Dark Elves	
10	Demons, Base	
11	Devils, Base	
12	Dwarves	
13	Elves	
14	Ghouls	
15	Gnolls	
16	Goblins	
17	Hobgoblins	
18	Human, Berserkers	

2D20	Creature	Details
19	Human, Outlaws	
20	Human, Sergeants	
21	Human, Soldiers	
22	Human, Workers	
23	Kobolds	
24	Lizardmen	
25	Mermen	
26	Nixies	
27	Orc, Sergeants	
28	Orc, Soldiers	
29	Rats, Giant	
30	Rays, Giant	
31	Skeletons, Animal	
32	Skeletons, Humanoid	
33	Skeletons, Monster	
34	Wasps, Giant	
35	Wolves	
36	Wolves, Timber	
37	Zombies	
38	Roll Twice	
39	Roll Twice	
40	Roll Thrice	

Very Dangerous Creatures

Very Dangerous Creatures Table

2D20	Creature	Details
2	Ants, Giant (Warriors)	
3	Badgers, Honey	
4	Bats, Giant	
5	Bears, Giant	
6	Boars, Wild	
7	Carrion Creatures	
8	Centaurs	
9	Centipedes, Giant	
10	Crabs, Giant	
11	Crocodiles, Giant	
12	Demons, Minor	
13	Devils, Minor	
14	Dogs, Phantom	
15	Dryads	
16	Gargoyles	
17	Harpies	

2D20	Creature	Details
18	Hippogriffs	
19	Hornets, Giant	
20	Hounds of Hell	
21	Hounds, Hunting	
22	Lions	
23	Lycanthrope, Wereboars	
24	Lycanthrope, Wererats	
25	Lycanthrope, Werewolves	
26	Minotaurs	
27	Ogres	
28	Ogres, Mountain	
29	Pegasi	
30	Rats, Giant	
31	Shadows	
32	Spiders, Giant	
33	Spiders, Giant Wolf	
34	Squids, Giant	
35	Unicorns	
36	Wights, Burial	
37	Wraiths	
38	Roll Twice	
39	Roll Twice	
40	Roll Thrice	

Extremely Dangerous Creatures

Extremely Dangerous Creatures Table

2D20	Creature	Details
1	Ants, Giant (Queen)	
2	Banshees	
3	Basilisks	
4	Cockatrices	
5	Demons, Minor	
6	Devils, Major	
7	Devils, Minor	
8	Dragons, Yellow	
9	Dragons, Black	
10	Dragons, Green	
11	Dragons, Red	
12	Dragons, White	
13	Elementals	
14	Treants	

2D20	Creature	Details
15	Erinyes	
16	Fish, Giant	
17	Ghosts	
18	Giants, Mountain	
19	Giants, Rock	
20	Griffins	
21	Hounds of Hell	
22	Hydrae	
23	Lich	
24	Lycanthrope, Werebears	
25	Manticores	
26	Medusae	
27	Mummies	
28	Ogres, Storm	
29	Pools, Deadly	
30	Salamanders	
31	Scorpions, Giant	
32	Specters	
33	Squids, Giant	
34	Succubi	
35	Trolls	
36	Vampires	
37	Wyverns	
38	Roll Twice	
39	Roll Twice	
40	Roll Thrice	

Lethal Creatures

Lethal Creatures Table

2D20	Creature	Details
2	Banshees	
3	Chimeras	
4	Demon Prince or Lord	
5	Demons (2nd)	
6	Demons (3rd)	
7	Demons (4th)	
8	Demons (5th)	
9	Devils, Noble	
10	Dragon Turtles	
11	Dragons, Black	
12	Dragons, Blue	
13	Dragons, Gold	

2D20	Creature	Details
14	Dragons, Green	
15	Dragons, Red	
16	Elementals	
17	Treants	
18	Genies	
19	Giants, Air	
20	Giants, Flame	
21	Giants, Ice	
22	Giants, Thunder	
23	Golems, Battle	
24	Golems, Metallic	
25	Gorgons	
26	Hydrae	
27	Liches	
28	Nagas	
29	Rakshasas	
30	Rocs	
31	Sea Monsters	
32	Sea Serpents	
33	Snare Beasts	
34	Titans	
35	Vampires	
36	Will-o-the-Wisps	
37	Worms, Giant	
38	Roll Thrice	
39	Roll Twice	
40	Roll Twice	

Tricks

While traps can become more elaborate and damaging at higher levels, it's often trickery involving NPCs that contributes more towards providing a darker setting and greater entertainment.

Ciphers

Code-breaking falls into the area of puzzles rather than trickery. However, the means by which codes are carried, the value of the information they carry and the possibly multi-layered meaning of a coded message is open to plenty of tricks and deceptions. For instance, a part of a map drawn with hidden ink on torn canvas could present adventurers with a lot of possible places to search for more pieces. Ships' sails, artists' canvases and knights' pavilions might all get checked; but will the players notice the sails on the large model in a shop window.

Daylight Robbery

Allowing players to notice something unusual about the otherwise usual can reveal a wide range of seemingly innocent activities, which may be trying to look almost too ordinary. Coin-clipping, false repairs, weighed-down wagons or pack animals, short measures and similar discrepancies allow players to either investigate or collaborate with criminals, law enforcement agencies, victims and politicians.

Feigning Injury

Faking injury or presenting yourself as being weaker than an opponent might expect is a common trickery. For example, a tented field hospital full of bandaged and bloodied warriors could easily serve as a trap, which might be foreshadowed by a bucket of pigs' blood sitting outside the back of the tent. Equally, a young dragon may be acting as bait for a trap set by and watched over by its parents. Perhaps the players' will show enough compassion to encourage the dragons to let them pass; perhaps not.

Forgeries

Forgeries are a favorite for many GMs, as just about anything from a stamp to a costume can be forged. Gold coated in copper paint, valuable coins and stamps, works of art of all descriptions, metals which have been melted down and reshaped, counterfeit goods, genuine and not so genuine holy relics, food containing fake saffron or truffles, drinks made from revolting ingredients and similar deceptions usually work well.

Glue

Bark resins, tomato frogs, honeycomb, melted rubber, melted glass, tars, treacle, syrups, conserves and boiled bones are among the sticky options available for tricks. Gluey tricks can, for example, be used to introduce some sticky slapstick, to delay adventurers and to act as extra hazards.

Goo

Ooze, gel, slime, mud, grease, lard, fungi and several other kinds of generally disgusting goo all have properties which can be used along the lines of glue tricks. Ooze and gel-based monsters have been around in RPGs for a long time, but there are plenty of variants that easily fit into most games either as dungeon cleaners or through having an effect which slots them into ongoing events. For instance, if only three-quarters of the specially imported healthy mud going into Spa treatments is there when clients leave, where is the other quarter going; and what is it getting up to?

Gremlins

Gremlins and gargoyles are the commonplace mischief makers known for triggering mechanical failures and mishaps. These supernatural troublemakers are suited to their role, but there are lots of natural or mechanical 'gremlins' that can be brought into play.

Magpies snatching items, squirrels chewing through cables, termites destroying wood and wasps chewing leaves or paper, all offer entirely natural 'gremlins' that are good at destroying evidence.

Wear and tear caused by weight, friction or corrosion may also cause problems, which can be compounded by various accidents and knock-on effects involving spills, sparks and similar dangers.

Industrial Processes and Espionage

Laboratories, production lines, shipyards, distilleries, building sites, smelting works, kilns, chemical stores, mines, tanneries, (and most other industrial processes), are open to introducing more trickery. Adventurers can deal with others' industrial tricks, (or get involved in the trickery for themselves), by playing through the changing conditions and circumstances involve in industry, industrial processes and industrial mishaps. Sabotage, 'data' theft, insider trading, the theft of commercial rights, counterfeiting operations, fraud, substandard processes and the events surrounding industrial accidents are among the choices available to GMs and players.

Loaded Dice

Cold readings, spiritualist hoaxes, fixed races and fights, an expensive set of loaded dice, and maps or messages, (which have been opened, read, possibly revised and probably resealed), are among the slightly infuriating cheats that can be used to leave adventurers looking for the culprits and/or stuck in the lurch.

Mix-Ups and Muddles

Other confusions involving mixed or confused messages offer plenty of ways to keep players on their toes. A missing word or undelivered dispatch that alters battle plans could be the starting point for a series of knock–on effects and confusions. For example, an order to retreat might arrive in the hands of a single courageous adventurer who feels motivated to fight on. Does the adventurer choose to trick the rest of the party by keeping the news private - or come clean but insist they stay? Equally, a verbal message between two kings might be misheard and carry an unintended insult; leaving the adventurers to either insist it's a mistake or to fan the flames.

Moonshine

Illicit commodities of all sorts are open to tricks involving every stage of the production, treatment, storage, distribution, marketing and criminalization of such goods. Moonshine and the Prohibition Era offer an example of the type of atmosphere of double-dealing and bribery that can help to shape a setting where players keep an eye on their wallets and their backs.

Obvious narcotics and intoxicants are far from the only options. If the goods are low volume and high value then stamp collecting or rare flowers can stir up just as much backbiting and volatility as a more predictable drugs laboratory. A player who took her/ his adventurer into trading in exotic creatures or monsters is an example where the adventurer might expect to end-up handling some particularly unpredictable goods.

Pyramid Schemes

Commercial scams and stings of all kinds are available as tricks. Unfinished building work and shoddy repairs to weapons or chariots might present short sub-plots or a single adventure. However, it's easy to take opportunistic frauds much further.

One of the most common, but successful, major scams is the pyramid scheme. Adventurers may get invited into a scheme, set up a scheme or lend money to someone joining a scheme. Any way round, everyone will be smiling and credible until the bubble bursts and lots of investors lose loads of money.

Out and About

After exploring a few dungeons many adventurers will be ready to step outside and try their luck in wildernesses, enchanted forests, haunted castles and, eventually, whole nations or worlds. This can be done through drawing together a series of dungeons and using a few wilderness encounters to liven up the journeys between dungeons. For example, adventurers are likely to come across various outdoor hazards on their travels. These can be rolled or selected, but may have to be adapted to the terrain and any ongoing events, including selecting or adapting hazards to suit journeys through underworld regions.

Wilderness Encounters Table

3D12	Encounter	Encountered
3	Ambush	Ambushes usually take advantage of the local terrain. It is reasonable to allow adventurers some warning, such as birds taking flight from woods, though this may arrive late in the day unless adventurers have been scouting
4	Bounty Hunters	Adventurers who are avoiding arrest, hiding in political exile or caught-up in a feud can expect to run into problems now and again
5	Convoy	Escorting, defending and looting convoys are all seemingly straightforward options, which are likely to have knock-on effects

3D12	Encounter	Encountered
6	Dead End	Dead ends are either frustrating delays or not what they claim to be. It is relatively easy to encourage a party to take risks if the only alternative is a 50 mile delay
7	Equipment Failure	A wagon's axle breaks, the horses' saddles snap or any similar minor mishaps may delay and endanger parties
8	False Trail	Misleading signposts, false tracks and other misdirections easily add delays or draw adventurers into traps
9	Flash Flood	The force of sudden flooding is sufficient to sweep away camps, break up formations and serve up a local emergency
10	Flocking	Aerial creatures may gather in unusually high numbers and start hunting in flocks of 5D10 or more
11	Marsh	Marshlands have their own subset of monsters and plenty of obvious hazards for unwary adventurers. Making them more dangerous at night or during high tides can introduce changes of pace
12	Mercenaries	Bands of 2D8 troops are what they claim to be. Pay them more than the opposition, (allowing for their risk), and they will follow orders – while it pays
13	Merchants	Merchants may range from rag traders through to hugely wealthy caravan owners protected by plenty of bodyguards
14	Military Patrol	The size and approach of the force will reflect the circumstances. In peace time 2D6 troops might be usual. During a war numbers are likely to be closer to 4D6. Adventurers caught in hostile territory can expect to be questioned or interrogated
15	Militia	Militia units of 4D4 troops can either become valuable allies with local knowledge to share or particularly dangerous opponents
16	Monsters	Monsters of all kinds work just as well out-of-doors. They can be introduced separately from or alongside other hazards
17	Nemesis	An old enemy, now in a position of power, comes across the group in circumstances where the enemy at least appears to have an major advantage

3D12	Encounter	Encountered
18	Obstacle	Chasms, ravines, steep slopes, rivers and crags are among the delays and ambush opportunities available to GMs
19	Old Friend	Someone at least one of the players knows turns up. This may be to a weakened party's advantage or place a burden on an adventurer or party
20	Outlaws	Outlaw bands of 4D8 may seek to find out if they share any common cause with a party. Otherwise they are likely to assault and / or kidnap adventurers
21	Poacher	Poachers have inside knowledge of the landscape, local folklore, rumors and wildlife. If threatened in any way they have a Renegade's ability to Hide in Shadows and Move Silently while escaping
22	Poisoned Wells	Poisoning wells is an easy way to slow an enemy's advance. Animal carcasses and barrels of salt can poison wells
23	Pranks	Kids, drunks and mischievous creatures may revel in playing seemingly harmless jokes on travelers. Glue on a rope bridge, sparks in a crop dust cloud or a stone hurled through a clue embedded in a stained-glass window can all present complications
24	Prospectors	Most prospectors are going to welcome company, but they may be paranoid about their claims
25	Rivals	Rivals in most forms of conflict are likely to travel along major thoroughfares. Anything from a scouting party to an entire army may appear on the horizon
26	Rock Falls	Tumbling boulders, collapsing embankments, avalanches of all types and crumbling masonry can provide plenty of danger and anxious moments
27	Ruins	These may be re-occupied or simply provide a place of shelter where there might be some extra equipment lying around. Alternatively, the ancient ruins of an entire civilization may lie buried just below the ground

3D12	Encounter	Encountered
28	Scorched Earth	Destroying orchards, crops, settlements, livestock and bridges are among the steps available to retreating armies and vandals. Magical traps, poisoning, curses and mass destruction are more likely if there is no intention of reclaiming the damaged land
29	Shortcut	Shortcuts usually involve taking risks to move faster. However, they can also be introduced to speed a journey along.
30	Swarm	Swarms of flying insects and crawling bugs may be mere distractions or prove as deadly as mosquitos. Swarms of monstrous insects may sometimes gather in groups of 4D4 or above
31	Tolls and Taxes	Taxes on goods, individuals and even groups are likely to crop up fairly frequently. Especially where any level of protection is offered or where money has been spend to provide a service, e.g. a bridge
32	Tourists	Tourists might be out enjoying themselves or find themselves completely out of their depth in a wilderness area
33	Vapor	Fumes, mists, dews, vapors, gases and exhalations can be weakening, corrosive, curative or magical. Ideally, adventurers will have the opportunity to limit or reduce the effects
34	War Party	As many as 5D10 humanoids form a band of warriors with D4 Fighters of 2D4 levels. A Cleric, Ranger or Paladin of 2D4 levels will usually accompany the group
35	Water Hazards	A lot of transportation takes place along or across waterways, which opens up the use of aquatic monsters and maritime threats. Water hazards can occur inland, as a deep puddle is enough to break a chariot wheel or conceal a creature
36	Wreckage	Shipwrecks, smoldering villages and abandoned cargoes can be used as plot devices or dungeon sites

Part 7: World Builder

With a handful of campaign challenges in place it becomes very easy to rapidly build campaigns and adventures that fit into your group's plans as outlined during campaign planning/ by player profiles.

World building can start at any level within the tables that follow. So a dungeon can be made and the world may develop from bottom to top. Alternatively, cosmology, physics and metaphysics can deliver a top down approach, which shapes a physical world that is then detailed through further levels including people, places and the events they generate.

The earlier step-by-step on building adventures is laid out with a top down approach, but any of the tables can be taken as a starting point. The GM can then build in any direction and still connect-up different levels within a logical hierarchy.

The same applies to campaign building and designing a campaign could start with anything from an interstellar effect like low gravity that has massively widespread effects to starting with a piece of bloodstained cloth and building upwards from there.

Creating worlds that are reasonably authentic tends to be easier using a top-down approach. However, it's a lot quicker to try out a regional map and then use what comes out of that to consider global effects as a region turns into a world.

Players/ GMs can take any starting point, but the approach and order suggested here is to place campaign challenges at the heart of campaign designs, before adding other more global and more detailed levels of description.

This method places players' preferences - in terms of what they wish their players to do or get involved in - as a spine running through the design of the campaign. This is not intended to be a rigid arrangement, as apart from anything else players' preference may stray across any boundaries a GM tries to set, e.g. we'd like to play through a war on an ice world.

Nevertheless, by placing campaign challenges - and the events and expectations they generate - ahead of physical environments or economic conditions the game-world is fitting the players' plans rather than vice-versa.

Instead of trying to construct a campaign or adventure from the ground-up or top-down, GMs can take the group's overall plans and easily select cosmologies, climates, cultures, places, events and characters that are consistent with the campaign challenges selected by players.

In addition, having selected a campaign challenge, such as warfare, a lot of what follows at other levels or layers becomes largely self-selecting. For instance, wars typically involve defensive structures, widespread hardship and desperate measures.

With much of a setting or campaign outlined in this way a GM is free to concentrate on adding her/ his own unique, challenge-focused gameplay to the challenge-based framework.

There are whole books of world building lists available, so the following tables are not exhaustive. These lists do, however, offer plenty of choices without becoming overwhelming.

Campaign Challenges Table

No.	Campaign Challenges	Details
1	Conquest and Colonization	
2	Counter Insurgency	
3	Crime Fighting	
4	Disasters/ Crisis Management	
5	Dawn of the Undead	
6	Enterprise and Commerce	
7	Espionage and Infiltration	
8	Internecine Warfare	
9	Marine Life	
10	Massive Meteor Strikes	
11	Mysteries and Investigations	
12	Research and Experimentation	
13	Revolution	
14	Survival Scenarios	
15	Warfare and Sieges	

Landscapes

The dramatic physical locations chosen as backdrops for RPG campaigns and adventures are frequently based on real world landscapes and landmarks. For example, spectacular mountain ranges, huge underworld grottos, temperamental volcanoes and treacherous swamps seem to be particular favorites among GMs.

GMs will often try to vary physical locations by presenting an exaggerated version of a familiar terrain, by adding complications such as extreme weather and/ or by overlaying magical effects. These approaches can be very helpful, as they take play beyond the limits of real world locations without requiring everyone to learn how to operate in and identify with a completely alien environment.

The range of options opened up by a certain amount of remixing can be considerable. For example, unusual but fairly authentic outcomes can result from placing a city on a ship, situating a volcano on the shores of an ocean or simply filling a swamp with enchanted gel.

Players generally find it easy to adapt their PCs' play to take account of an unusual twist on familiar landscapes and terrains. More complete or outlandish locations are, perhaps, better used sparingly, as clashes between the underlying physical laws of the game-world and players' understanding of those laws may undermine a game's sense of authenticity or internal consistency.

GMs can easily introduce further variety by linking gameplay to dynamic features of the physical landscape. This already happens quite frequently when, for example, the gameplay assumes that night follows day or that the seasons match those in the real world.

There's really a very wide range of climate variations, infrequent events and deforming landscapes for GMs and players to explore. Shifting glaciers, avalanches, seasonal tides, flash floods, lahars, monsoon conditions or mudflats aren't going to feature constantly, but they are typical of the kinds of physical features and events that can halt an advancing army or sweep a convoy off a mountain trail.

When it comes to putting a GM's own spin on cosmologies physics/ metaphysics, climates and landscapes it is usually much simpler to add specific effects instead of trying to map out or calculate a wholly accurate simulation. For example, the following 'Night and Day' environment offers up opportunities to explore contrasting worldviews.

The planet or world is split between permanent night and day. This alone sets up two sets of social, political, economic and ritual worlds, which offer plenty of dramatic contrasts on land, in the air or beneath any waves. The resulting climate and terrain, social structures, vegetation and wildlife – along with a good many other conditions - are going to be focused on or specialized around contrasts between diurnal, nocturnal and, possibly, crepuscular or magical lifestyles. Anyone looking for extra options can easily throw in a twilight region.

Given the extent of the influence the landscape can have on play, it is clearly possible for GMs to get a tighter match between physical locations and ongoing quests or plots by linking quest and plot development to the changing features of the landscape.

Different RPG genres and settings are suited to different physical environments, so the landscapes that fit with fantasy games are likely to be

quite distinct from, for example, those that fit into Sci-Fi games. Whatever the genre, the same principles apply in terms of trying to latch on to the familiar, while introducing novelty and variety.

For instance, a GM designing a Sci-Fi setting is probably going to deliver a fairly compelling setting simply by reading a few pages on the incredible environments of the solar system and exo-planets.

A GM who prefers to try to come up with something entirely out of the blue every time out is, perhaps, going to find that the effects of the physical conditions are difficult to apply consistently.

Gazetteers

Before continuing on to step-by-step campaign design it is worth mentioning that compiling a basic gazetteer is a helpful way to set out some of the more obvious and widely known features of a setting or campaign. The example presented here tries to illustrate how quite a short summary of local conditions can quickly sketch out the basic landscape and politics of a region.

There are many possible ways to enhance a gazetteer very quickly. These might include adding images showing similar terrain, adding campaign notes or including tables such as the Wilderness Encounters Table shown earlier.

There is no need to present players with information in advance or to spend time on a detailed gazetteer. However, it doesn't take long to prepare one using a template such as the Eaglesridge Gazetteer and they can be useful for GMs interested in having a core document that pulls together the key features and events of a campaign as play progresses. Clearly, including rough maps and images of the landscape and/ or locations will make for a more complete presentation.

The Eaglesridge Gazetteer

The Eaglesridge region is secure territory equipped with good quality roads. Four bridges span the two major rivers that cut down through the center of the countryside. These bridges shorten journeys between the settlements to regular distances of roughly 20 miles.

The Countryside
Those exploring throughout much of the Eaglesridge region can expect to encounter travelers near the major crossroads marked on the map as jewels. Some caution is urged when journeying further from Eaglesridge, as this is frontier territory and a variety of monsters can be encountered in overgrown or wilderness areas.

The Territory

Chapter
Chapter is an area of woods and grasslands gifted to an order of knights for their part in the capture and defense of Eaglesridge and Ravenswharf at the point when the region was first torn from the wilderness.

The land produces grain and orchard fruits through the efforts of monks and householders attached to the knights' holy order.

At present relations between the Overlord of Eaglesridge and the knights are strained to such an extent that the order will not fight in defense of the Overlord's territory.

Eaglesridge
The prosperous merchant city of Eaglesridge holds some or all territorial rights over most of the surrounding region. Almost 20,000 humans live inside the city walls.

The city rests on the top of a long line of hills, which form a continuous ridge from north to south. The site enjoys panoramic views over the local landscape, but few eagles soar over the crags and outcrops, as they were considered a nuisance and fed poisoned bait until most died.

A hereditary Overlord, Ascaric, owns the surrounding region by right of arms. He wrested the holding from the wilderness 27 years ago. His grip over the region is secured by a force of 1,500 mercenaries. The Chapter Knights, who were instrumental in the capture of the once dragon infested land, have become a much weakened force in recent times.

Foundry
Local iron deposits and silver from the Sapphire area are melted-down and forged in the Overlord's foundry. The workshops produce a wide range of goods, including weapons, armor, farming equipment, mining equipment and many household and luxury goods.

Orchid
Orchid is an area of grasslands and orchards. The orchards produce pears, apples and peaches, which sell for good prices throughout the region and beyond.

The territory gained its name from the varieties of orchids which once thrived there. The orchids were prized by the dragons and the land was cleared of orchids to discourage their visits.

The current landholder is the sister of the Overlord of Eaglesridge. Ironically, the self-styled 'Lady Orchid' personally supervises the removal and destruction of any orchid stems starting to grow within the area.

Ravenswharf
Ravenswharf is a frontier port packed full of explorers, merchants and pioneering families seeking freeholds. The current population ranges from 15,000 in winter to 25,000 in high summer.

Sapphires, silver, fruits, wheat and timber are exported through a busy harbor, which imports gold, spices and alchemical supplies.

The city has grown rapidly in recent years. This is largely the result of rich merchants supporting a burgeoning middle class, which provides services and luxury goods for the wealthy few.

The city and its surroundings are controlled from Eaglesridge, with a Harbor Master looking after much of the day-to-day running of the city and its harbor.

Royal Lodge
The Royal Lodge area is a wooded, craggy estate used for hunting deer and wilder animals. That includes monsters hiding in lairs to the southwest. The territory gets its name from a complex of hunting lodges and cabins known as The Royal Lodge, which belongs to the Overlord of Eaglesridge. He uses the complex to impress important visitors and to charge the wealthy for expensive hunting holidays.

The 'royal' tag is not sanctioned by any recognized kingdom, but serves to emphasize the luxury accommodation and, perhaps, the Overlord of Eaglesridge's wish that he should be declared king – turning the region from a territorial confederacy into a fully-fledged nation state.

Sapphire
Much of the wealth used to build Eaglesridge and Ravenswharf came from the region's sapphire mines. These are deep mines, which require a lot of investment to access the rich veins of sapphire and silver buried far below ground.

Tunneling operations have created countless abandoned mineshafts and pitheads, which are quickly occupied by creatures suited to the underground conditions. It would be expensive to protect the whole area against bandits and monsters, so defensive fortifications are built around working pitheads.

Shadowcaster

Shadow caster is a remote area and for the most part the domain of a magician who somehow came to hold rights over this section of the Eaglesridge region. Small villages and cottages are dotted over the more southern parts of the area; and these are administered by Eaglesridge. However, the more mountainous north is largely deserted and home to a sorcerer's tower.

Travelers have encountered monsters within the Shadowcaster area – but few, if any, seem to break out into areas inhabited by humans. Travelers' rumors and speculation also talks of some kind of ruins or ancient relics located to the north, but the rumors are unconfirmed. Most talk on the subject simply warns against wandering into the area.

Thornwood

Thornwood is a dense forest, which supplies much of the timber for building in Ravenswharf and Eaglesridge. There is also a high demand for timber to support the mining activities in the Sapphire area.

Several small settlements on the edge of the forest house woodcutters and wagon teams. These are all positioned on the northern edge of the forest and no one enters the forest unnecessarily. It is widely believed that Thornwood is haunted and those who venture in only do so in groups of a dozen or more.

The workers' fear is, perhaps, part superstition, part self-fulfilling prophecy - as any accidents, mishaps or animal attacks are invariably blamed on or linked to 'ghosts' and 'monsters'. However, there is much talk of a cursed field of barrows hidden deep inside the forest. Others claim to have come upon friends left dying from terrible claw and pincer wounds inflicted by creatures of the forest.

The Build

A few campaign challenges and a rough idea of the nature of the physical world is enough to start to build a campaign by selecting or rolling options that set out more detail. There is no need to use the tables in a particular order and GMs may well get used to moving around and between different layers or levels of description.

Exotic and Alien Worlds

The easiest default world is an earth-like planet in a solar system with oceans, continents and relatively mild weather systems. However, effects can be applied that are unlikely to accurately simulate exotic or alien environments, but which can shape play through fairly obvious and recurring physical and psychological outcomes.

Less is often more with these widespread effects, as anything unusual that gets included typically has to be applied consistently - without surrendering the player choice derived from players' gameplay preferences/campaign challenges or interrupting the flow of play.

New or relatively new GMs may be making running play significantly harder for themselves if they rush to move away from quite standard/ Earth-like worlds.

Exotic and Alien Worlds Table

D12	Landscape	Possible Effects
1	Atmospherics	An adjustment such as an oxygen-enriched atmosphere can be applied at a planetary - or more local - level without getting into any further complications. Its influence within the game might be as limited as greater strength or stamina and significantly larger birds and insects. Alternatively, the widespread effects could be extended to consider the effects of all that extra oxygen on fires, explosions and other chemical reactions. Other obvious options include widespread or planetary weather systems
2	Continental	Continents are going to appear in many campaigns and are included later as part of detailing physical landscapes. They can, however, also serve as cut-down versions of exotic or alien worlds. They are typically boundaries for plagues, crops, wildlife/ creatures, weather systems, catastrophes, migrations and terrain. It is relatively straightforward to try to use quite authentic science to describe continents, but for fantasy worlds it's quicker to apply uniform effects across a continent, such as a Snowball or Volcano World approach
3	Exo-Planetary	Less is known about planets located around distant planetary systems. However, data has started to pour in and could help to suggest new kinds of planetary systems and/ or imaginative options
4	Galactic	At this level effects are still spread across vast areas and large, but local, conditions might be open to unusual forms of radiation that mutate or water with strange properties

D12	Landscape	Possible Effects
5	Ice World	Covering everything with ice, snow and blizzards works in much the same way as a volcanic setting. The physical environment has a strong influence across the setting and, in the case of an Ice World, the conditions are well-suited to gritty, survival scenarios
7	Intergalactic	An entire region of space and everything in it can form a pocket environment within a universe where further adjustments to conditions operate. Alternatively, large regions may be effected by different conditions, e.g. regions with amplified solar winds that disrupt communications
8	Metaphysics	Completely magical worlds are an easy way to simplify campaign building. If castles sit happily on clouds or you want to turn PCs into cartoons a magical solution is the quick option. Some players may question the internal consistency of such settings, but a little negotiation can usually offset that
9	Night and Day	As mentioned above, the planet, solar system or even galaxy is split between permanent night and day. This alone sets up two sets of social, political, economic and ritual landscapes, which offer plenty of dramatic contrasts. For example, worship of the stars might predominate in the dark zone, while solar religions operate in the daylight zone
10	Planetary	Working on a planetary basis sticks with the familiar solar system model, while inviting the use of effects based on activity on the planet. Distorted global weather systems, seas that act as chemical lakes and life-forms adapted to such environments are obvious options. Conditions on planets and moons across the solar system can contribute to campaigns – along with theories on how these conditions might work in-game
11	Universal	Effects that act across an entire universe are good for adjusting physics and/ or metaphysics, e.g. unusual gravity or alternative magnetism. This usually forks from known physics

D12	Landscape	Possible Effects
12	Volcano World	Whether imagined or based on scientific principle a highly volcanic world offers a great variety of local and global adjustments to the physical environment. Lahars, pyroclastic clouds, dust, blasts, seismic disturbances and lava lakes become the order of the day. This can be is applied to a planet, a continent or a world sat on a coin that gets flipped by a giant every now and again. The volcanic conditions effectively zoom-in on gameplay that involves dealing with a hazardous environment, which can in itself be enough to flavor a campaign with cultures highly adapted to dealing with the conditions

Using Signature Events

We can add similarly large-scale/ regional/ global customizations with genre specific effects in the form of magical or high technology landmarks and locations. These can be seen as a form of signature events, i.e. possibly recurring, probably significant plot elements and/ or campaign themes. These are seeded within a campaign at the upper levels or layers of design – either before or after deciding on terrain and landscapes.

The exotic and alien worlds in the table above are in effect a type of signature event and players of Corruption will be familiar with signature events in the form of **Seeds of Corruption** and **Seeds of Wonder**; which rapidly drop thematic landmarks, events, items and monsters into campaigns.

Ultimately it's how a signature event is used – to add continuity and customization – that defines the term rather than the particular form of the event. They are worth emphasizing at an early stage in campaign planning and design, because they form part of the fabric of a campaign/ s and are much easier to integrate and work with when introduced at roughly the same time as campaign challenges.

Put another way, the various tables can be arranged into a consistent order – which may mean putting what players want to spend time on and recurring favorites at the very top of the system or stacking climate and terrain above them and working down.

Alternatively, as a GM becomes more familiar with moving around and between levels it gets easier to treat the tables not as a hierarchy, but as a system where adventures and settings can be constructed by moving freely between the different levels.

Signature Events Table

D6	Landscape	Possible Effects
1	Armada	For most of the year the slave and pirate ships that form the Armada are scattered along the trade routes they prey upon. They far-flung fleet gathers in full strength twice/ year. In late summer they form a massive raiding fleet to plunder harvests and in winter the ships are lashed together in for a winter tryst. Several hundred full-ships, of galley or larger size, act as a loose confederation and differences between factions are settled at the winter trysts – as part of the entertainment. The mix of criminals, pressed-men, slaves and servants makes life very cheap during trysts and the Armada as a whole uses a dragon standard to warn those they order to surrender that no quarter will be given to those who refuse
2	Blackwash	The world, continent or region under exploration is a massive subterranean swamp where life is lived in tunnels and fortified crannogs. These offer some protection against huge creatures lurking within the swamp
3	Night and Day	This option appears again to emphasize that the same effects can be applied on different levels/ scales. One half of the territory is always in night, the other always in day. The night side is highly adapted to very low light in the manner of creatures living in the absolute darkness of deep oceans and/ or bioluminescent life. The other side is adapted to constant daylight, e.g. plant life may produce less CO_2 and oxygen levels could be raised as a result
4	Passion Flowers	The region has seasonal displays of colorful blossoms which litter the ground and make their way into the water supply soon after flowering. The petals dissolve in rivers, streams and uncovered wells. Those drinking the water across the whole region become unusually emotional. The type of emotion affected seems linked to the color of the flowers that have bloomed most recently. Red blossom makes creatures fearless, while yellow blossom makes them cowardly. Green blossom brings on jealousy, while purple blossom leads to extremes of passion. Other colors may have unrecorded effects as a consequence of those effects

D6	Landscape	Possible Effects
5	Secret Garden	These labyrinthine gardens have magical fountains, orchards bearing restorative fruits and enchanted sundials - among other features. The standard benefits are mild, but those who bury treasure in the garden soon find they gain greater benefits from the enchanted items. If enough treasure is buried magical effects may become persistent or permanent. The garden's roots consume treasure as soon as it's buried
6	Treetops	The trees in these forests are tall enough to offer different environments at different altitudes. The forest floor might be a largely gloomy level where fallen branches and foliage form a landscape of dried and twisted sticks and leaves. Above that tree-houses - linked by walkways and chariot paths - may support large communities that harvest nuts and fruit from the trees. The currency here might be some form of ivory or tusk large enough to use to make incredibly light chariots with enchanted carvings

The following examples are more complete options which suggest ways to design your own selection of signature events to build continuity, i.e. ensuring players' preferences and characters' histories are carried forward on a regular, if sometimes infrequent, basis.

Eldritch Battlefields

Ancient battlefields where colossal armies have met in vast conflicts that raged over many miles and many years sometimes etch themselves into the landscape. The remains of such a battle that were not plundered at the time lie fairly close to the surface and present a series of hazards:

Slaughter pits that seep blood on to the surface can form ghoulish quicksand traps where victims will flow down into the ghastly residue of torn bone and partly petrified flesh lying below.

Bridges within such regions may be built or formed largely of flesh and bone, which can react to the presence of the living by animating as swarms of skeletons, ghouls and zombies.

Plants growing over the battlefield are likely to be affected; yielding an acidic, black sap which makes them inedible. Boiling the plants down eventually yields a concentrated sticky residue that is able to rapidly corrode wood and non-magical metals in the manner of an acid – providing it's fresh.

Wells may appear to have clear water at the surface, but buckets lowered deeper into a well are likely to become tangled in the honeycombed

latticework formed by the many skeletons of those packed into the bottom of the well. Drawing water from these wells appears to have no unusual effects unless the water is allowed to form a standing pool or puddle of twice the width of the top of the container used to draw the water. At that point the water will turn red then blacken, as a creature of the night emerges from the surface and attacks those nearby.

Getting rid of such a beast is fairly routine, but one will appear each round until the water is mopped-up or broken-up to form a smaller surface area. Unfortunately, trying to freeze the water forms an icy version of the creature, which has its defense improved by D6 as a result of the layer of ice that forms over it. Adding fire to try to burn off the water is as bad, because the creatures become immolated in flames and cause an extra 2D6 when inflicting wounds. Even those making hand-to-hand attacks take a D6 extra damage from an immolated creature of the night.

Paradise

These coral reefs are thought to form in locations where an evil being or item, such as a devil or a forbidden libram, has been buried in an ocean in the belief that doing so will permanently banish the evil. Regrettably, over many years the living coral formed around such sources of intense evil start to act as a conduit for the essence of the despicable creature or reliquary imprisoned beneath the waves.

During daylight hours the water and the reef will typically be astonishingly beautiful with corals displaying rich colors and supporting a wide variety of marine wildlife. Those diving or fishing during daylight hours can take their pick from a bountiful harvest of rare fish and rich oyster beds. Natural predators, including sharks and barracuda may appear, but they are consistently docile during daylight hours.

Unfortunately, as soon as it gets dark the reef's colors darken and black, dark green and purple veins start to appear within the coral - where they seem to connect and pulsate. This brings out the savage nocturnal inhabitants of the reef, which have the features, including in some cases the bioluminescent trickery, of marine life usually found in much deeper waters. Whether these vile creatures have lain hidden during the daylight, are only made manifest at night or are altered forms of the daytime creatures is not known for certain.

The creatures may well include species of Devil Fish, Angler Fish and similarly otherworldly predators. These appear alongside more familiar dangers such as Lionfish, sharks and octopuses, which are likely to have senses adapted to hunting at night.

It is easy enough to steer clear of immediate dangers simply by staying out of the water, but the coral won't stop growing if left unattended. Beneath

the surface the reef will increase its radius by as much as 10' per week. Once it hits land the pace slows to 5'/ week, but the effects become deadlier. When rain or flowing water meets the coral on land it liquidizes patches of the dry coral. This releases clusters of marine predators capable of living on land or in the sea, e.g. octopuses and giant crabs.

Attacking the coral itself can slow the advance, but an established colony will usually grow faster than it gets worn down. The only firm solution is to locate the item or creature petrified within the reef and to remove it. This then presents the problem of dealing with the source of evil once it has been released, as it will usually only have been lying dormant. Once released such creatures are likely to be aggressive.

Climate and Terrain

Coastlines, river systems, forestation and other features of the landscape are suggested by choices of climate and terrain. Certain types of landscapes easily fit particular campaign challenges. For example, trenches are most easily dug in farmland. Alternatively, a GM may wish to select a combination of climate and terrain which is then adapted to the campaign. For instance, trenches might be carved into a glacier.

Climate and Terrain Table

D100	Landscape	Variants
1	Archipelago	
2	Arête	
3	Atoll	
4	Beach	
5	Bog	
6	Bridges	
7	Brush	
8	Caldera	
9	Cape	
10	Causeway	
11	Cave	
12	Caverns	
13	Chemical Lake	
14	Chemical Lake	
15	Chemical Pools	
16	Chemical Streams	
17	Cliffs	
18	Cloudforest	
19	Coastline	
20	Continent	
21	Corrie	

D100	Landscape	Variants
22	Couloir	
23	Cove	
24	Crater Lake	
25	Currents	
26	Delta	
27	Desert	
28	Drumlins	
29	Dunes	
30	Dustbowl	
31	Escarpment	
32	Estuary	
33	Fields	
34	Fjord	
35	Flatlands	
36	Flood Plain	
37	Forest	
38	Geyser	
39	Glacier	
40	Glade	
45	Grotto	
46	Hills	
47	Island	
48	Isle	
49	Isthmus	
50	Jungle	
51	Lagoon	
52	Lake or Loch	
53	Lava Field	
54	Levee	
55	Magical Landscape	
56	Maritime	
57	Marsh	
60	Mountains	
61	Mudflats	
62	Oasis	
63	Ocean	
64	Orchard	
65	Pasture	
66	Peninsular	
67	Polder	
68	Polluted Land	
69	Pool	
70	Prairie	

D100	Landscape	Variants
71	**Quarry**	
72	**Rainforest**	
73	**Rapids**	
74	**Reef**	
75	**Reservoir**	
76	**Ridge**	
77	**Rock Pavement**	
78	**Salt Flats**	
79	**Salt Lake**	
80	**Sand Bar**	
81	**Savanna**	
82	**Sea**	
83	**Seamount**	
84	**Shore**	
85	**Sinkhole**	
86	**Stream or Burn**	
87	**Swamp**	
88	**Table Mountain**	
89	**Taiga**	
90	**Terrace**	
91	**Terraces**	
92	**Tides**	
93	**Trench**	
94	**Tundra**	
95	**Volcano**	
96	**Volcanoes**	
97	**Waterfall**	
98	**Weather System**	
99	**Whirlpool**	
100	**Woodland**	

Characters and Creatures

Deciding who to use to populate a game-world is discussed in more detail when looking at NPCs. The same topic comes up while commenting on colorful characters and in the tables at the end of the adventure builder, which cover a range of fantasy monsters. Selecting and detailing specific NPCs can happen at any stage in the design process, so the table here is simply for adding a general indication of the type of creatures that might be encountered in a region.

It is not really intended for rolling outcomes, as there may be more than one type of creature in an area and some creatures aren't going to fit into all worlds, e.g. there's nothing wrong with monsters and aliens, but most

players keep SciFi and fantasy separate, as you typically end up with two sets of physics/ metaphysics.

In most cases this is one area where the world builder hands-off to a particular rule set with a wide range of monsters and the stats to accompany them.

Characters and Creatures Table

2D6	Type	Details
2	Aerial	
3	Aliens	
4	Aquatic	
5	Deities	
6	Humanoids	
7	Humans	
8	Monsters	
9	Races	
10	Tribes	
11	Vegetation	
12	Wildlife	

Worship

The influence of campaign challenges and hazardous climates and landscapes may be key factors in shaping the myths and realities of a culture or a world's creation. It's often hard to say which among many factors, (including forms of worship/ philosophies, physics/ metaphysics, territorial boundaries and governance), drives the others.

Consequently, the tables looking at these factors can be approached in any order and matched to fit both campaign challenges and the physical landscape. It may also be helpful to combine a number of effects or outcomes, e.g. to arrive at a culture which sees their salvation in worshiping war and death.

Forms of Worship Table

2D12	Worship	Details
2	Agnostic	
3	Atheistic	
4	Chaos	
5	Death	
6	Elements/ Elemental	
7	Ennead	
8	Evil	
9	Good	

2D12	Worship	Details
10	Harvests	
11	Heretical	
12	Heroes/ Celebrity	
13	Law	
14	Life	
15	Messianic	
16	Nature	
17	Pantheon	
18	Sabianism	
19	Salvational	
20	Shamanic	
21	Triad	
22	Villains	
23	Warfare	
24	Weather	

Era/ Technologies

Eras and Technologies Table (Chronological)

2D10	Eras	Details
2	Savage Age	
3	Hunter Gatherer or Nomadic	
4	Stone Age aka Neolithic	
5	Tribal Age	
6	Bronze Age	
7	Iron Age	
8	Supernatural or Magical Age	
9	Dark Age	
10	Feudal or Medieval Age	
11	Alchemical Age	
12	Renaissance	
13	Industrial Age	
14	Steam Age	
15	Digital Age	
16	Nuclear Age	
17	Ion Age	
18	Fusion Age	
19	Plasma Age	
20	Telepathic Age	

Territories

Territories Table

2D12	Territory	Details
2	Annexation	
3	Barony	
4	City State	
5	Colony	
6	Confederation or Federation	
7	De-militarized Zone	
8	District	
9	Duchy	
10	Empire	
11	Frontier	
12	Hunting Grounds	
13	Landscape	
14	Nation	
15	National Park	
16	Pasture	
17	Principality	
18	Republic	
19	Royal Forest	
20	Sacred Ground	
21	Secure Zone	
22	Sheikhdom	
23	Tribal or Clan	
24	Wilderness	

Boundaries

Boundaries Table

2D10	Boundary	Details
2	Canyon	
3	Desert	
4	Dhrystone Dykes	
5	Fencing	
6	Fields	
7	Forest	
8	Fortifications	
9	Glacier	
10	Kill Zone	
11	Mountain Range	
12	No Man's Land	
13	River	
14	Secure Zone	
15	Sheikhdom	

2D10	Boundary	Details
16	Stockade	
17	Tribal or Clan	
18	Trophies	
19	Walls	
20	Wilderness	

Governance

Systems of government can shape many of the features of a culture. As a result they make a good starting point for fitting together campaign challenges and nation states, city states or empires. A city ruled by a military junta might, for example, make a good fit with a campaign challenge involving adventurers in an ongoing revolution.

Governance Table

D100	Governance	Details
1	Aliens	
2	Anarchy	
3	Angels	
4	Aristocracy	
5	Barbarians	
6	Children	
7	Civil Servants	
8	Clerics	
9	Conquerors	
10	Corporations	
11	Demons	
12	Devils	
13	Elders	
14	Ethnic Group or Race	
15	Fallen Angels	
16	Foreign Ruler	
17	Foreigners	
18	Guilds	
19	Heroes	
20	Holy Men	
21	Inexperienced Rulers	
22	Infant Ruler	
23	Judges	
24	Junta	
25	Magicians	
26	Men	
27	Merchants	

D100	Governance	Details
28	Merit	
29	Military	
30	Mobs or Crowds	
31	Money	
32	Monsters	
33	Nobility	
34	Paramours	
35	Plantation Owners	
36	Prophet	
37	Religious Law	
38	Revolutionary Committee	
39	Secret Police	
40	Secret Ruler	
41	Slave-Owners	
42	Slaves	
43	Specific Class or Race	
44	Thieves	
45	Tyrants	
46	Wealth	
47	Whim	
48	Women	
49	Words	
50	Workers	

States and Nations

With campaign challenges; the physical environment; and a cultural framework in place it is up to a GM to decide how much further to drill down in advance. Trying to cover all of the possible features of even a small state is quite a task. However, the levels or layers that are already put in place can provide expectations or knock-on effects that are open to self-completion.

For example, staging a war involving the dark side of a planet half shrouded in perpetual darkness alongside a broadly European Iron Age culture, is going to call for agriculture, commerce, events, customs and much more - all adapted to fit the campaign challenges, landscape and cultural outline already set in place.

As a result of cascading effects a quite general take on the major forms of agriculture, finance and commerce are all that's called for unless a player's character chooses to zoom-in.

History

History Table

2D12	Episodes	Details
2	Apocalyptic	
3	Bohemian	
4	Cataclysmic	
5	Civilized	
6	Colonial	
7	Cosmopolitan	
8	Creative	
9	Dynastic	
10	Enslaved	
11	Frontier	
12	Imperial	
13	Impoverished	
14	Inventive	
15	Magical	
16	Mercantile	
17	Militaristic	
18	Monarchist	
19	Parliamentary	
20	Religious	
21	Revolutionary	
22	Scandal Ridden	
23	Tyrannical	
24	War-Torn	

Currencies

Currencies Table

2D12	Currency	Details
2	Barter	
3	Bird Eggs	
4	Blood Money	
5	Bloodletting	
6	Coinage	
7	Digital Currencies	
8	DNA	
9	Gems	
10	Gold Coin	
11	Gold Dust	
12	Gold Standard	
13	Grain	

2D12	Currency	Details
14	Ivory	
15	Jade	
16	Jewelry	
17	Kills	
18	Meat	
19	Paper Money	
20	Pearls	
21	Property	
22	Secrets	
23	Slaves	
24	Virtual Currencies	

Festivals

Customs, Festivals, Rituals and Superstitions Table

2D20	Event	Details
2	Alien Languages	
3	Beer Festival	
4	Bland Food	
5	Bloodletting	
6	Carnival	
7	Chanting	
8	Cheese Chase	
9	Competition	
10	Country Fair	
11	Draconian Laws	
12	Dueling	
13	Feast Day	
14	Foreign Languages	
15	Harvest	
16	Jam Festival	
17	Labyrinth Walking	
18	Lottery	
19	Midsummer	
20	Midwinter	
21	Military Law	
22	New Fire	
23	New Year	
24	Night of the Dead	
25	Pitfighting	
26	Polluting	
27	Procession	
28	Public Executions	

2D20	Event	Details
29	Religious Law	
30	Sacred Dance	
31	Sacrifice	
32	Sacrifices	
33	Spartan Existence	
34	Spicy Food	
35	Sporting Championship	
36	Springtide	
37	Stocks	
38	Tombola	
39	Wicker Man	
40	Witchhunting	

Weather and Sky Events

Weather and Sky Events Table

D100	Event	Details
1	Afterglow	An afterglow is a high, wide arch of whitish or rosy light appearing in the sky due to fine particles of dust suspended in the high regions of the atmosphere. They can appear above the highest clouds as twilight deepens or be reflected from mountain snowfields well after sunset
2	Airglow/ Nightglow	This is a weak light emitted by a planetary atmosphere
3	Alexander's Band	There is a dark region between the two bows of a double rainbow. Light which is reflected by raindrops in this region of the sky cannot reach the observer
4	Auroral Light	
5	Blizzard	
6	Cloudseeding	Chemical, magical or nano-cloudseeding
7	Cold Snap	
8	Comet	
9	Constellation	
10	Crepuscular Rays	
11	Cyclone	
12	Dew	
13	Diamond Dust	Diamond dust is a ground-level cloud or mist made of minute ice crystals. It forms under clear or nearly clear skies and can occur anywhere with a temperature well below freezing

D100	Event	Details
14	Double Rainbow	
15	Downpour	
16	Dust Whirls	
17	Earthquake Lights	Such lights have shapes like the auroras, with a white to bluish hue, but can have a wider color spectrum. The light is seen for several seconds, but may last for tens of minutes
18	Eclipse	
19	Enchantment	
20	Fire Whirls	
21	Fog	
22	Frost	
23	Gales	
24	Glories	This effect forms a spectral figure in mist or cloud
25	Hail	
26	Halo or Nimbus	Halos are colored or white arcs and spots in the sky made of ice crystals. They are usually near the sun or moon but can appear elsewhere, including the opposite part of the sky. They can form around artificial lights in cold weather when diamond dust is floating in the air
27	Hurricane	
28	Intergalactic Collision	
29	Lightning Storm	
30	Meteor Shower	
31	Meteorite	
32	Mirage	
33	Mist	
34	Moon Pillars	These light pillars are formed by reflection from ice crystals with roughly horizontal faces. The light pillar is most visible when the Moon is low or lies below the horizon.
35	Planetary Conjunction	
36	Planetary Shadow	The shadow that a planet may cast on its atmosphere. This shadow is often visible from the surface as a dark band in the sky - near the horizon around the times of sunset and sunrise
37	Rain	
38	Rainbow	
39	Sandstorm	

D100	Event	Details
40	Shower	
41	Sleet	
42	Smog	
43	Snow	
44	Snowstorm	
45	Storm	
46	Sun Pillars	These light pillars are formed by reflection from small ice crystals with roughly horizontal faces. The light pillar is most visible when the Sun is low or below the horizon
47	Supernova	
48	Thunderstorm	
49	Tornado	
50	Whirlwind	

Transport and Communications

Transport and Communications Table

2D10	Type	Details
2	Aerial Runways	
3	Aerial Walkways	
4	Aircraft	
5	Border Post	
6	Canal	
7	Canal Boat	
8	Chariots	
9	Coaches and Carriages	
10	Highways	
11	Lanes	
12	Mines, Tunnels and Sewers	
13	Roads	
14	Spaceships	
15	Starships	
16	Tolls	
17	Trains	
18	Underground	
19	Wagons	
20	Yacht	

Weaponry

Weaponry Table (Chronological)

2D20	Conditions	Details
2	Bones	
3	Stones	
4	Daggers	
5	Catapults	
6	Bows and Arrows	
7	Axes	
8	Swords	
9	Cavalry Lances	
10	Gunpowder	
11	Musketry	
12	Pistols	
13	Guns	
14	Pikes	
15	Cannon	
16	Poison Gas	
17	Machine Guns	
18	Armored Vehicles	
19	Military Aircraft	
20	Aircraft Carriers	
21	Rockets	
22	Nuclear Devices	
23	Helicopters	
24	Tactical Nuclear Devices	
25	Golem Dust	
26	Robots	
27	Drones	
28	Designer Viruses	
29	Nano-Bots	
30	Ion Devices	
31	Fusion Devices	
32	Plasma Devices	
33	Cloaking	
34	Light Sabre	
35	Jump Ships	
36	Tactical Spacestations	
37	Strategic Spacestations	
38	Interstellar Ships	
39	Mass Gravity Technologies	
40	Interstellar Spacestations	

Commerce and Major Industries

Commerce and Major Industries Table

4D10	Conditions	Details
4	Aggregates	
5	Arms Trading	
6	Colonization	
7	Conquest	
8	Construction	
9	Education	
10	Entertainment	
11	Espionage	
12	Farming	
13	Fishing	
14	Forestry	
15	Gambling	
16	Gathering	
17	Hemp	
18	Herding	
19	Hunting	
20	Magic	
21	Metallurgy	
22	Military	
23	Minerals	
24	Mining	
25	Orchards	
26	Prospecting	
27	Racketeering	
28	Raiding	
29	Salt Harvesting	
30	Shellfish	
31	Shipbuilding	
32	Slavery	
33	Sport	
34	Strip Mining	
35	Technology	
36	Textiles	
37	Tourism	
38	Transport	
39	Warfare	
40	Whaling	

Entertainments

Entertainments Table

D100	Conditions	Details
1	Amusement Parks	
2	Archaeology	
3	Art Exhibits	
4	Boardgames	
5	Bookkeepers	
6	Busking	
7	Casinos	
8	Circuses	
9	Comedy Clubs	
10	Concerts	
11	Dancing	
12	Drama	
13	Dueling	
14	Exhibitions	
15	Extreme Sports	
16	Fairs	
17	Fight Clubs	
18	Films and Cinema	
19	Fireworks	
20	Hunting	
21	Jousting	
22	Magazines	
23	Magic	
24	Museums	
25	Music	
26	Newspapers	
27	Nightclubs	
28	Operas	
29	Parades	
30	Performance Art	
31	Pit Fights	
32	Plays	
33	Promenading	
34	Puppet Shows	
35	Radio	
36	Recordings	
37	Roleplaying Games	
38	Sailing	
39	Snow Sports	
40	Spectator Sports	

D100	Conditions	Details
41	Sports	
42	Stand-Up Comedy	
43	Street Theatre	
44	Stunts and Escapology	
45	Television	
46	Theatre	
45	Theme Parks	
46	Trade Shows	
47	Travelling Exhibitions	
48	Variety Show	
49	Video Games	
50	Wax Museums	

Landmarks, Buildings and Premises

Adding specific locations and local detail to a campaign now breaks down into identifying and populating suitable locations.

Unlike the earlier Locations Table for dungeon adventures the range of options is more extensive. By this stage in a campaign design it becomes clear that adventure design within a campaign setting can loop back into the basic adventure design step-by-step set out earlier. The range of locations, landmarks, events and missions found there is more than sufficient to outline countless scenarios. However, campaigns often thrive on variety and experienced players need novelty to help to keep the gameplay fresh.

By noting down details of various landmarks, buildings and premises consistent with your campaign challenges it is easy to quickly sketch-out large fortified or urban settlements, which combine to map-out whole nations in sufficient detail to support open-ended play and lots of player choice.

As in other areas, options that fit a typical fantasy setting or a space opera SciFi campaign may need to be adapted slightly to suit different genres. The largely generic options presented below can, therefore, be adapted slightly, e.g. a port or harbor can become an orbital spacestation, while a shipwright may act as an expert in designing and repairing starships.

Alternatively, take the next option down on the list until you get a suitable result. If that takes you over the end of a table just go back to the start.

Landmarks, Buildings and Premises Table

3D100	Structure	Conditions
3	Amphitheatre	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
4	Apartment	
5	Apothecary's	
6	Aquarium	
7	Aqueduct	
8	Arcade	
9	Arch	
10	Architect's	
11	Archway	
12	Arena	
13	Armorer's	
14	Armory	
15	Arsenal	
16	Art Gallery	
17	Asylum	
18	Aviary	
19	Bakery	
20	Balcony	
21	Bank	
22	Bar	
23	Barbican	
24	Barge	
25	Barn	
26	Barracks	
27	Barrow	
28	Barrow	
29	Basilica	
30	Bathhouse	
31	Baths	
32	Bazaar	
33	Bell Tower	
34	Bivouac	
35	Blacksmith's	
36	Brewery	
38	Brick House	
37	Bridge	
39	Broch	
40	Bunker	
41	Butcher's	
42	Cabin	
43	Cafe	
44	Cages	
45	Cairn	
46	Campus	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
47	Canal	
48	Candlestick Maker's	
49	Caravan	
50	Carpenter's	
51	Cartwright	
52	Casino	
53	Castle	
54	Catacomb	
55	Cathedral	
56	Causeway	
57	Cave	
58	Cavern	
59	Cellar	
60	Cellar, Root	
61	Cellar, Storm	
62	Cemetery	
63	Cenotaph	
64	Chandler's	
65	Chantry	
66	Chapel	
67	Chapter House	
68	Church	
69	Circus	
70	Citadel	
71	City	
72	City Gate	
73	City Hall	
74	Clubhouse	
75	Coliseum	
76	College	
77	Colossus	
78	Column	
79	Combat Arena	
80	Concert Hall	
81	Confectioner's	
82	Conservatory	
83	Consulate	
84	Convent	
85	Cooper's	
86	Coppersmith's	
87	Cottage	
88	Courthouse	
89	Crannog	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
90	Croft	
91	Crypt	
92	Dairy	
93	Dam	
94	Debt Collector's	
95	Decorator's	
96	Depot	
97	Derelict Building	
98	Distillery	
99	Docks	
100	Dormitory	
101	Dressmaker's	
102	Dry Docks	
103	Dungeon	
104	Embassy	
105	Encampment	
107	Execution Chamber	
106	Exhibition	
108	Factory	
109	Falconer's	
110	Farm	
111	Farmhouse	
112	Farrier's	
113	Field Hospital	
114	Fish Market	
115	Fletcher's	
116	Flotilla	
117	Forge	
118	Fort	
119	Fortress	
120	Forum	
121	Foundry	
122	Fruit Market	
123	Funerary Temple	
124	Galley	
125	Garden	
126	General Store	
127	Goldsmith's	
128	Granary	
129	Grand Pavilion	
130	Graveyard	
131	Greenhouse	
132	Grotto	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
133	Guard House	
134	Guard Tower	
135	Guildry	
136	Gymnasium	
137	Hamlet	
138	Harbor	
139	Harem	
140	Hay Loft	
141	Haymarket	
142	Headquarters	
143	Henge	
144	Herald's	
145	Hide	
146	High Temple	
147	Hill Fort	
148	Horse Inn	
149	Hospice	
150	Hospital	
151	Hostel	
152	Hotel	
153	House	
154	Houseboat	
155	Hut	
156	Ice Ring	
157	Igloo	
158	Inn	
159	Ironmonger's	
160	Jail	
161	Jeweler's	
162	Keep	
163	Kiln	
164	Laboratory	
165	Labyrinth	
166	Library	
167	Lichway	
168	Lighthouse	
169	Livery	
170	Livestock Market	
171	Lumber Yard	
172	Magazine	
173	Magic/ Technology Shop	
174	Manor	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
175	Mansion	
176	Marina	
177	Market	
178	Mausoleum	
179	Memorial	
180	Memorial Chapel	
181	Mezzanine	
182	Military Headquarters	
183	Mill	
184	Millwright's	
185	Milner's	
186	Mines	
187	Mint	
188	Monastery	
189	Monumental Statue	
190	Mortuary	
191	Mortuary Temple	
192	Mud Baths	
193	Museum	
194	Nave	
195	Nightclub	
196	Observation Tower	
197	Observatory	
198	Office	
199	Opera House	
200	Opium Den	
201	Oratory	
202	Orphanage	
203	Ossuary	
204	Oubliette	
205	Outpost	
206	Pagoda	
207	Palace	
208	Parade Ground	
209	Parliament	
210	Pavilion	
211	Pet Shop	
212	Pillar	
213	Pithead	
214	Plantation	
215	Plaza	
216	Plumber's	
217	Pool	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
218	Port	
219	Power Station	
220	Priory	
221	Prison	
222	Prison Camp	
223	Pueblo	
224	Pyramid	
225	Pyramid, Conical	
226	Pyramid, Platform	
227	Refinery	
228	Reliquary	
229	Resort	
230	Restaurant	
231	Rookery	
232	Rosarium	
233	Roundhouse	
234	Ruins	
235	Sanctuary	
236	Sauna	
237	Sawmill	
238	School	
239	Secret Garden	
240	Sentry Post	
241	Sepulcher	
242	Sewer	
243	Shack	
244	Shed	
245	Ship	
246	Shipwright's	
247	Shipyard	
248	Shop	
249	Shrine	
250	Silversmith's	
251	Slaughterhouse	
252	Slave Market	
253	Slave Pits	
254	Snow Cave	
255	Soothsayer's	
256	Spa	
257	Spice Market	
258	Sports Arena	
259	Stables	
260	Stadium	

3D100	Structure	Conditions
261	Stage	
262	Staging Post	
263	Storm Cellar	
264	Studio	
265	Sty	
266	Summer Palace	
267	Swimming Pool	
268	Tannery	
269	Tattoo Shop	
270	Tavern	
271	Tax Collector's	
272	Tearoom	
273	Temple	
274	Tenement	
275	Tent	
276	Terminus	
277	Theatre	
278	Tide Mill	
279	Tomb	
280	Tower	
281	Town	
282	Townhouse	
283	Trading Post	
284	Tree House	
285	Triumphal Arch	
286	University	
287	Verandah	
288	Villa	
289	Village	
290	Wainwright's	
291	Warehouse	
292	Watchtower	
293	Watermill	
294	Well House	
295	Wheelwright's	
296	Windmill	
297	Winery	
298	Winter Palace	
299	Ziggurat	
300	Zoo	

Conditions of Structures

The contents of the Conditions Table shown earlier are repeated here for ease-of-use.

Conditions of Structures Table

D100	Condition	Details
1	Alien	
2	Brickwork	
3	Buried	
4	Busy	
5	Buttressed	
6	Camouflaged	
7	Cobbled	
8	Collapsing	
9	Corroded	
10	Decorative	
11	Demolished	
12	Derelict	
13	Domed	
14	Dusty	
15	Earthwork	
16	Enchanted	
17	Exclusive	
18	Exotic	
19	Expensive	
20	Flooded	
21	Frosted	
22	Gilded	
23	Glass	
24	Guarded	
25	Haunted	
26	Inexpensive	
27	Ironwork	
28	Irradiated	
29	Laidback	
30	Luxurious	
31	Mosaic	
32	Neglected	
33	New	
34	Opulent	
35	Organic	
36	Painted	
37	Petrified	

D100	Condition	Details
38	Plasterwork	
39	Plated	
40	Prosperous	
41	Quiet	
42	Renovated	
43	Roofed	
44	Royal Warrant	
45	Ruined	
46	Rundown	
47	Stonework	
48	Thatched	
49	Tiled	
50	Weathered	

Alien, Exotic or Enchanted Structures

Alien, Exotic or Enchanted Structures Table

D20	Structural Feature	Details
1	Adaptive Camouflage	
2	Corrosive	
3	Enchanted Hearth	
4	False Deformation	
5	Foliage	
6	Invisible Servants	
7	Magic Fountain	
8	Magnetic	
9	Parasitic	
10	Self-Destructive	
11	Self-Repairing	
12	Self-Replicating	
13	Sentient	
14	Stained Glass Structure	
15	Standing Stones	
16	Stealth Facility	
17	Symbiotic	
18	Unicorn Stables	
19	Witches' Cauldron	
20	Zero-Gravity	

Events

With campaign challenges, climates and landscapes, systems of government, political boundaries and settlements linked-up it is likely

many plots and events will arise naturally during the course of play. At this stage it is possible to simply return to the pages on designing a basic adventure to sketch-out adventures, which fit alongside the framework of the campaign.

Some GMs may prefer to allow events to unfold, but others can find it useful to introduce specific events prompted by campaign challenges. Equally, they may wish to present background events and random encounters to keep adventurers guessing.

A few of the many possible events are set out below and it's straightforward to loop back into the step-by-step for building adventures and to fold together campaign challenges, the events shown here and various plots, missions and locations.

Events Table

D100	Event	Details
1	Arms Deal	
2	Avalanche	
3	Birthday Party	
4	Cannibalism	
5	Cold Snap	
6	Comrade-At-Arms	
7	Crime Wave	
8	Cult	
9	Drought	
10	Earthquake	
11	Economic Boom	
12	Extreme Weather	
13	Famine	
14	Festival	
15	Fire	
16	Flooding	
17	Gems	
18	Gold Nugget	
19	Guests	
20	Heat Wave	
21	Holiday	
22	Holy War	
23	Hurricane	
24	Jailbreak	
25	Jewels	
26	Magic Mist	
27	Mercenary	
28	Merchant	

D100	Event	Details
29	Meteor Strikes	
30	Mist	
31	Monsters	
32	Murder	
33	Plague	
34	Prisoner	
35	Raiding	
36	Rationing	
37	Rebellion	
38	Recurring Enemy	
39	Riots	
40	Rival Mages	
41	Smuggling	
42	Spying	
43	Tornado	
44	Trade War	
45	Trader	
46	Treasure Trove	
47	Uprising	
48	Vigilantes	
49	Volcanic Eruption	
50	Wedding	

Glossary

Adventure
A typical RPG adventure is a fairly self-contained mission or scenario played over one or more sessions.

Attributes
These often describe natural abilities shared by all characters, such as physical strength or wisdom.

Blue Booking
This involves players who log their characters' activities after the actual gameplay to record a continuous character history. The records are then available to support play involving actions separate from those of the rest of the group.

Build
A build usually refers to rules-heavy RPGs where hours may be spent preparing players' characters to customize and optimize the resulting character through the rule set.

Campaign
A campaign involves a whole series of inter-related adventures within a consistent game-world.

Character Creation
This is the method used to create a character. For example, points may be spent across a range of skills or a character may have a well-defined class/ set of complementary, specialist skills.

Character or PC sheet
Player characters' specializations, game statistics, and background information are summarized and brought together on a PC Sheet for easy access during play.

Character
A character or adventurer is an avatar or fictional character representing a role or characterization within a RPG.

Class
A character is typically sketched out with a cluster of related abilities and skills. One quick way to help players to adopt a basic role is to group these skills and/ or abilities into a character class. E.g. a Fighter that is strong, familiar with a wide range of weaponry and skilled in battle.

Clones or Retro-Clones

These are remakes or remixes of early RPGs made under a range of permissive license conditions. The great majority of these are revised versions of D&D, but there are clones of some other RPG systems. They fall into a number of categories including: retro-clones that emulate an earlier rules set; 'pseudo-clones' that make significant changes to the earlier rules; and, more recently, clones that emulate a rules system - but then add new content to set the gameplay of the earlier version alongside a range of extra options.

Critical (Hit)

The highest natural die rolls available within a RPG often indicate a strong outcome, which may be amplified through knock-on bonuses, e.g. a natural 20 on a D20 guarantees success or damage multiplier.

Crunch

Crunch is the mechanical side of the rules, which measure actions and outcomes during play.

Dungeon-Crawl

The classic dungeon-crawl is mainly about taking a party of 'good' adventurers into dungeons and caverns where they encounter a mix of basic traps, slay as many 'evil' monsters as possible and recover any treasure. Typical options include raiding tombs and clearing out evil temples.

Freeform

Freeform gameplay is typically a rules-light style of play that invites players to lead the narrative. This often places mechanical rules in the background and relies on players developing gameplay more through the contexts and situations they encounter than the rules set.

Fluff

Content that doesn't contribute directly to the mechanics of a system, (including descriptions, hints and tips and support for building adventures), is known as fluff.

Fumble

A fumble is usually a major error committed while trying to carry out a difficult task, e.g. a natural 1 on a D20 may be an automatic fail, regardless of the circumstances.

Game-World

The game-world is the imaginary world and the activities within that imaginary world that players explore through their characters. Some game-worlds thrive on the expectations and verisimilitude offered by a particular

genre, e.g. Western RPGs. Others may be quite alien and unfamiliar, e.g. alien Sci-Fi cultures.

GM or Gamesmaster
The GM is the player who often designs adventures, runs play role-playing and settles outcomes. Some games have their own specialized term, such as Dungeon Master.

Genre
A game may stick to a single genre or look to support a number of genres. These are the core tropes – and associated expectations – underlying imaginative gameplay. Obvious examples include fantasy, science fiction and cyberpunk.

Grimy
Grimy gameplay is run along similar lines to the gritty gameplay mentioned below, i.e. a dose of 'real world' options running through the overall RPG gameplay mix. However, rather than relying on typical 'grit' the game uses mess, deformation, disgusting local food and maybe the odd intestinal parasite to make play slightly more slapstick, earthy and/ or comic. This taps into the very realistic, and typically unapproved, history found in books or shows like CBBC's Horrible Histories.

Gritty
Play that aims to include greater 'real world' authenticity involves adding 'grit'. This can be intended to make play more realistic, e.g. wounds take a long time to heal. However, it may also be aimed at delivering improvisation and authenticity, through borrowing from real-world circumstances and situations. This may involve realism, e.g. a realistic, but flexible, consideration of the effects and knock-on effects resulting from a meteor strike and/ or adding familiar themes and expectations into play.

Hex–Crawl
A Hex-crawl offers one of the simplest approaches to forming open-ended campaign worlds. A blank or barely marked map of hexes is uncovered as players proceed from one territorial zone to the next. The crawl can be kept entirely random with players and/ or the GM rolling to find out what appears as each hex is encountered. Terrain and core political boundaries/ capital cities may be put in place to allow links and knock-on effects between hexes to present opportunities for plot or character development.

In-Character
Playing in-character is often taken as sticking to the role defined by the rules such as consistently behaving chaotically if defined as chaotic by the rules - or adopting the combative role of a fighter class at every opportunity. The idea of a consistent chaos hints at some of the problems

with RPGs that try to separate out player skill and character skill to keep players in character.

To start with, few creatures are absolutely consistent; and those that are tend to be short on individuality and novelty. In addition, if a PC is to shape a character they have to have more say in the make-up of the character than simply rolling the dice. The alternative is a contrived distinction between players and characters, which becomes obvious the moment a player gets involved in creating an individual player character.

Initiative
Initiative is often a dice roll, with modifiers, that decides who gets to go first when groups of characters first encounter one another.

Level
Level can refer to the floor levels of dungeons or complexes that characters are exploring. However, it is also commonly used to indicate the experience or advancement a player has accumulated, which then matches some of the characters' capabilities to those available to everyone of that level.

Live-Action (Roleplaying)
LARPs are a type of role-playing game delivered as a physical performance in the manner of a group of improvisational actors.

Megadungeon
These are massive, multi-leveled dungeons, which vary greatly in that some are simply sprawling traditional dungeons, while others are subterranean settings for more deeply plotted and/ or imagined worlds.

Meta-Gaming
The use of out-of-character knowledge or understandings to solve in-character problems is known as meta-gaming. Such knowledge or understanding may also be used to explain or justify actions carried out in-character.

Min-Maxer
Players who make characters based on optimization instead of characterization may be known as Min-Maxers for disregarding attributes and skills which they consider non-essential in exchange for boosting attributes and skills that gain an advantage. This often involves enhancing combat skills at the expense of areas like intelligence and diplomacy.

Munchkin
Munchkin is a term used to describe self-orientated players who like to grandstand and keep the spotlight on themselves. They are often willing to find ways of adapting, or twisting, rules to get round the limitations placed on other characters.

Natural (Roll)
The number actually on a die, such as a natural 1 or a natural 20, indicating the die's face shows a 1 or a 20.

New School
The now rather dated New School refers largely to more recent versions of Dungeons and Dragons, 3.0E – 4.0E, which generally involve multi-volume rule sets with rules-heavy combat options.

NPC (Non-Player Character)
These characters are the people and personalities that player characters (PCs) encounter during their adventures. Some are likely to be hostile; but many are likely to be open to some form of negotiation or trade-off.

Old School
The OSR, (Old School Revival/ Old School Renaissance), refers to games similar to the early versions of Dungeons and Dragons, OE to 2E, which tend to offer rules-light, improvisational play based around relatively short rule sets. The appearance of clones/ re-mixed copies of older titles has made many Old School games widely available after a lengthy break.

PC (Player Character)
A player's avatar or character in a game is usually known as a PC.

Point Buy
This usually refers to making characters using a wide choice of skill and or ability options selected by the player. All players' PCs will have the same number of points to spend on skills or abilities, which they may choose to group to make a more specialist character – or to spread around to gain a wider range of skills.

Powergamer
Powergamers are focused on gaining maximum advantage from mastering the rules in great detail. Most players will make some effort to optimize a PC, but a powergamer takes this to the extent of seeking an unfair advantage or badgering the GM.

Powers
This is a term often used to describe exceptional abilities which make a character extraordinary, e.g. flight or telepathy. Powers are commonly used in superhero games.

Race
A character's genetic and cultural heritage can include anything from the standard human races through to fantasy races, mutants, robots and aliens.

Railroading

This involves the GM, the rules or the shrink-wrapped setting limiting player choice by requiring players to take certain actions and/ or channeling players towards particular choices. Railroading is often associated with GMs spelling out elaborate plots with fixed outcomes. While some measure of plot direction or railroading can be helpful in terms of providing an immersive setting, beyond a certain point railroading undermines player choice.

Reverse Dungeon

A reverse dungeon or scenario flips the standard model of adventurers 'conquering' a dungeon by placing the party in the position of defending a dungeon against intruders.

Roll-Playing

Rules-heavy RPGs that rely largely on mechanical rules typically involve lots of dice rolling. This approach tends to set aside areas like characterization, storybuilding, discovery and exploration – so the term roll-playing simply recognizes that play is focusing on game mechanics at the expense of roleplaying.

Rules Lawyer

These players try to use knowledge of a RPG's rules set to press for an unfair advantage by calling for interpretations of the rules to consistently fall in their favor. They may also be keen to insist that particular rules which are widely known for unbalancing a game have to be adhered to.

Rules-Heavy

The multi-volume hardback set is a staple for games that tend to have a mechanical rule to cover most actions and situations within the game. Such rules tend to favor simulation over verisimilitude.

Rules-Lite

These are cut-down or level limited games that are often given out as demonstrations. The term may also be applied to particularly short rule sets, such as Risus, but such games, perhaps, belong in the rules-light category, as they are able to support a series of adventures.

Rules-Light (to Medium)

Games with limited mechanics that rely on players to fill in the gaps using negotiation and their imaginations are probably the largest RPG category. They may be quite short with simplistic mechanics that leave a lot for players to fill out. Alternatively, a rules light system may contain a solid rules framework and lots of fluff aimed at helping GMs to design and deliver adventures and settings.

Sandbox

There's a certain amount of confusion over the use of the term sandbox, as the RPG definition tends vary from more general use of the term. In a RPG, placing an adventure in a sandbox often means the opposite of railroading, as adventures are driven by players' choices, which the GM reacts to on the basis of expanding upon a basic framework through improvisation.

Saving Throw

A 'save' or saving throw is a very common game mechanic in which dice are used to try to avoid some kind of negative outcome.

Scenario

The term scenario is interchangeable with the term adventure.

Session

A game session is a single meeting of a role-playing group.

Settings

These are the fictional worlds in which gameplay takes place. The term is comparable to a campaign, but a campaign is, possibly, a combination of a setting and the actions and event going on within a setting.

Skills

The results of training and learning are often described as skills, e.g. fencing or navigation skills.

Team Play

These systems allow the game to be run without a Referee/ GM by either distributing the GM's tasks or by offering options similar to solo RPGs.

TPK (Total Party Kill)

There are some games, such as horror titles, where it's part of the entertainment to kill off the players – eventually, However, in most cases killing a PC, (without some magical or technological means of recovery), isn't such a good idea, as a player may have made put time and effort into the character. A full-blown, no way back TPK against experienced characters often collapses the gameplay/ a campaign.

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