

How To Set Up Your Dungeons & Dragons Campaign

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Let us assume that you have shelled out the requisite number of dollars to purchase all of the materials necessary for a D&D campaign - rules, dice, reams of various kinds of paper, pencils, and so forth. Several persons have expressed a desire to play the game, so all you really need now is the game! That's right, folks. The referee of the campaign must structure the game so as to have something to play. He must decide upon these things:

1. The overall setting of the campaign;
2. The countryside of the immediate area;
3. The location of the dungeon where most adventures will take place;
4. The layout and composition of the nearest large town;
5. Eventually the entire world - and possibly other worlds, times, dimensions, and so forth must be structured, mapped and added.

This might seem to be too large a task, but it isn't really if you and your players are enjoying the game (and it is odds-on you will!). Furthermore, not all five things need not to be done before play commences. In fact, most of the fine referees I know of work continually on their campaign, adding, changing, and expanding various parts continually. A thorough discussion of each of the five areas of campaign play is necessary before considering how to go about involving players in the affair.

Step 1 is something you do in your head. Now fantasy/swords & sorcery games need not have any fixed basis for the assumptions made by its referee (my own doesn't) except those which embrace the whole of fantasy. This sort of campaign can mix any and all of the various bases which will be mentioned below - and then some. Regardless for what setting you opt, keep it secret from your players, or else they can study your sources and become immediately too knowledgeable, thus removing the charm of uncertainty. Settings based upon the limits (if one can speak of fantasy limits) can be very interesting in themselves providing the scope of the setting will allow the players relative free-reign to their imaginations. Typical settings are: Teutonic/Norse Mythology; Medieval European Folklore (including King Arthur, Holger the Dane, and so on); The "Hyborian Age" created by R E Howard; Fritz Leiber's "Nehwon" with Fafhrd and The Grey Mouser; Indian Mythology; and Lost Continents such as Atlantis or Mu. Regardless of the setting you can have it all taking place on an 'alternative earth' or a parallel world. In this way minor variations can easily be explained/justified. When the setting is decided upon some good books dealing with it should always be kept handy. The time has come to begin working on the campaign.

Step 2 requires sitting down with a large piece of hex ruled paper and drawing a large scale map. A map with a scale of 1 hex = 1 mile (or 2 kilometers for those of you who go in for recent faddish modes of measure) (yes, I often use rods, chains, furlongs, and leagues too!) will allow you to use your imagination to devise some interesting terrain and places, and it will be about right for player operations such as exploring, camping, adventuring, and eventually building their strongholds. Even such small things as a witch's hut and side entrances to the dungeon can be shown on the map. The central features of the map must be the major town and the dungeon entrance.

Step 3 involves the decision aspect already mentioned and the actual work of sitting down and drawing dungeon levels.

This is very difficult and time consuming. Each level should have a central theme and some distinguishing feature, i.e. a level with large open areas swarming with goblins, one where the basic pattern of corridors seems to repeat endlessly, one inhabited by nothing but fire-dwelling or fire-using monsters, etc.

As each level is finished the various means of getting to lower levels must be keyed and noted on the appropriate lower levels, so that if a room sinks four levels it will then be necessary to immediately show it on 4 sheets of graph paper numbered so as to indicate successively lower levels. A careful plan of what monsters and treasures will be found where on each level is also most necessary, and it can take as long to prepare as the level itself, for you may wish to include something *unusual* (a treasure, monster, and/or trick or trap not shown in D&D) on each level.

Before the rules for D&D were published *Old Greyhawk Castle* was 13 levels deep. The first level was a simple maze of rooms and corridors, for none of the participants had ever played such a game before. The second level had two unusual items, a Nixie pool and a fountain of snakes. The third featured a torture chamber and many small cells and prison rooms. The fourth was a level of crypts and undead. The fifth was centered around a strange font of black fire and gargoyles. The sixth was a repeating maze with dozens of wild hogs (3 dice) in inconvenient spots, naturally backed up by appropriate numbers of Wereboars. The seventh was centered around a circular labyrinth and a street of masses of ogres. The eighth through tenth levels were Caves and caverns featuring Trolls, giant insects, and a transporter nexus with an evil Wizard (with a number of tough associates) guarding it. The eleventh level was the home of the most powerful wizard in the castle. He had Balrogs as servants. The remainder of the level was populated by Martian White Apes, except the sub-passage system underneath the corridors which was full of poisonous critters with no treasure. Level twelve was filled with Dragons. The bottom level, number thirteen, contained an inescapable slide which took the players 'clear through to China', from whence they had to return via 'Outdoor Adventure'. It was quite possible to journey downward to the bottom level by an insidious series of slanting passages which began on the second level, but the likelihood of following such a route unknowingly didn't become too great until the seventh or eighth level. Of the dozen or so who played on a fairly regular basis, four made the lowest level and took the trip: Rob Kuntz, now a co-referee in the campaign went alone and three of his friends managed to trace part of his route and blunder along the rest, so they followed him quickly to the Land of China. Side levels included a barracks with Orcs, Hob-goblins, and, Gnolls continually warring with each other, a museum, a huge arena, an underground lake, a Giant's home, and a garden of fungi.

Step 4 should be handled concurrently with designing the first three or four dungeon levels. Here your players will find lodgings, buy equipment, hire mercenaries, seek magical and clerical aid, drink, gamble and wench. The town would do well to resemble some of those, in Howard's "Conan" series or Leiber's city of "Lankhmar", Strange towers, a thieves quarter, and temples of horrible deities add greater flavor to play. The 'Thieves Guild', a society of evil clerics, a brotherhood of lawful men, and so on bring a bit more interest also. If a few warring nobles from the surrounding territory also send large parties of men into the place occasionally some interesting brawls can occur. Honest and dishonest merchants should be indicated. Taverns which drug patrons should likewise be indicated, and so on. In any event be sure and leave room for additional things and expansion.

Step 5 is as noted something that you won't immediately have to worry about; but it is a good idea to have a general plan in mind immediately. The general geography of the 'world' should be sketch-ed out. If you plan to make it possible to visit other worlds, times or places the general outline of all such areas should also be sketched out. For example, you might wish to have the Moon an inhabitable (and inhabited) place which can be traveled to by means of a Flying Carpet. A description of this

lunar world should be located somewhere as well as a means of getting there, but only *after* you have something solid in the way of maps and the like.

Having accomplished those parts of the five steps which are immediately necessary (probably taking a week or so), you are ready to *begin to play*. Let us further assume that there are four prospects. These players should begin together and for a time at least operate as a team if possible. Each in turn rolls three dice to record the various scores for the makeup of the character they are to play and how large an initial bankroll the character begin with. This accomplished, players decide what class of character they wish to play, the type (human, elf, etc), and the alignment of the character (the latter can be secretly told the referee, with an announced alignment being false). At this stage each player locates his base in some inn or the like, and then they can set forth to explore the town and purchase their adventuring equipment. Those that are careful and/or lucky might also be able to hire a few men-at-arms to accompany them. The latter is particularly true if players pool their funds. In a short time the first dungeon expedition can be made, but that is the subject of Part III of this series, so we will return to it again later.

There is one further subject to be dealt with here, and that is *selection of character type*. It is pretty obvious that high base scores in the areas of strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, or Dexterity indicate that becoming a Fighter, Magic-User, Cleric or Thief (see the upcoming D&D Supplement "Grayhawk" to be released sometime before the Summer of this year). But what about those players who roll just average (or worse) totals? They are the ones who should take advantage of the non-human types, for these have built-in abilities despite the general handicap of being unable to work up as high as humans. If the character is poor anyway, will he ever be worked up very high? Possibly, but the odds are against it as a human, but as an Elf, Dwarf, Hobbit, Half-Elf or even some other creature some interesting possibilities exist. It is up to the referee to help his players in this area by pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of each type. What do you do if a player opts to become a Golden Dragon? Agree, of course. Allow the player to adventure only with strictly Lawful players, and normal men-at-arms would never go near even a good dragon. He would be Very Young, size being determined by the die roll. Advancement in ability should be a function of game time (the dragon would normally take about four years to grow to its next level) and accumulated treasure - let us say that for every 100 000 pieces of gold (or its equivalent) the dragon in effect gains an extra year of growth, counting magical items which go into the horde as fairly high in gold value. While the player will be quite advanced at first, those who are playing more usual roles will surpass him rather quickly, and in this way you'll not find a G.D. dominating.